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What Is Curriculum Theory? (Studies in Curriculum Theory Series)

William F. Pinar

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This primer for teachers (prospective and practicing) asks students to question the historical present and their relation to it, and in so doing, to construct their own understandings of what it means to teach, to study, to become "educated." Curriculum theory is presented as the interdisciplinary study of educational experience. The mentral concept of curriculum studies as a "complicated conversation" is explored.

Within this framework, Pinar offers a compelling interpretation of contemporary "school reform" policies and practices, and an explication of curriculum theory's power to bring forth understanding, resistance, and change. His argument is this: Public education today is dominated by a conservative agenda based on a business model of education focused on the "bottom line" (test scores). The origins of this agenda go back to the 1950s, when gendered anxieties over the Cold War and racialized anxieties over school desegregation coded public education (not for the first time) as "feminized" and "black." The nature of many politicians' and some parents' criticisms of public education is intelligible only as a recoding of these gendered and racialized anxieties, deferred and displaced from their originating events onto "school reform." This has rendered the classroom a privatized and racialized domestic sphere which politicians--mostly (white) men--endeavor to control, disguised by apparently commonsense claims of "accountability." What is dangerously at stake is academic freedom and control of the curriculum--what teachers are permitted to teach, what children are permitted to study.

This text offers both an understanding of the problem and a way to address it. Pinar uses the concept of *currere*--the Latin infinitive of curriculum--to describe an autobiographical method that provides a strategy for self-study, a way for both individuals and groups to understand their situations, leading to action. Through *currere*, it is possible for educators to begin to reconstruct the public sphere--now a "shopping mall" in which citizens and students have been reduced to consumers--by connecting academic knowledge to their students (and their own) subjectivities, to society, and to the historical moment. In doing so, they can take back (relative) intellectual freedom and rebuild schooling to speak to persisting problems of race, class, and gender. It is this link, this promise of education for our private-and-public lives as Americans, that curriculum theory enables.

Comprehensive and ground-breaking, *What Is Curriculum Theory?* is indispensable for scholars and students worldwide across the fields of curriculum studies, foundations of education, educational policy, school reform, and teacher education.

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