



Revisiting the Functions of Curriculum Theory: A Foundational Ground for the Development of Procedural Model to Determine the Null Curriculum

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Abstrak

Diskusi mengenai fungsi teori kurikulum tampak lebih banyak diperhatikan di dalam dunia akademik yang berupaya mengembangkan model-model dalam bidang-bidang kurikulum tertentu. Artikel ini bertujuan untuk meninjau kembali fungsi dari teori kurikulum sebagai dasar yang sifatnya fondasional dalam pengembangan model prosedural untuk memastikan rumusan Null Curriculum. Pertama saya mendiskusikan mengenai fungsi teori kurikulum, misalnya fungsi mendeskripsikan, menjelaskan, memprediksi, dan membimbing. Kemudian secara lebih spesifik mengacu pada fungsi pembimbingan dari kurikulum saya menelusuri tugas model pengembangan dalam Kajian Kurikulum. Terakhir, saya mengaitkannya dengan kebutuhan untuk mengembangkan model prosedural untuk memantapkan rumusan Null Curriculum.

Abstract

A discussion of the functions of curriculum theory appears to be mostly overlooked in the scholarly works that endeavor to develop models in certain curriculum areas. This essay article revisits the functions of curriculum theory as a foundational ground for the development of a procedural model to determine the null curriculum. I first discuss in this article the functions of curriculum theory such as description, explanation, prediction, and guidance. Then, specifically under the guidance function, I trace the task of model development in Curriculum Studies. Finally, I relate towards the end of this article the current need to develop a procedural model to determine the null curriculum.

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INTRODUCTION

One of the goals of research in curriculum studies is to model a phenomenon so that scholars know its features, thus enabling them to explain, predict, and guide its theory and practice (Schubert, 1986). The phenomenon of the null curriculum, however, is a case of either absent, parochial, or contested view of its features. This condition deters scholars to explain, predict, and guide its theory and practice. Taking this problem into account, the significance of the present research is to contribute knowledge by developing a procedural model that can be used to uncover the null curriculum in a field, thus enabling scholars to explain, predict, and guide its theory and practice.

Eisner (1979) was the first scholar to coin the term "null curriculum." According to his seminal text on the sociology of curriculum, there are three types of curriculum that schools offer: overt curriculum which is taught and learned; hidden curriculum which is not taught but learned; and null curriculum which is not taught and not learned. He described the null curriculum as composed of two dimensions: the intellectual processes and content or subject areas. He further taxonomized the intellectual processes as involving three domains that exhaust the parameters of the mind: cognitive, psychomotor, and affective. It was his thesis that gained widespread citation that ignorance is not a neutral void; it has powerful consequences. These original ideas appear to remain as the most accepted fundamental knowledge in the discourse of the null curriculum.

Since the inception of the null curriculum in the literature, it has been studied by scholars in two ways: as a theoretical tool and as a practical concept. As a theoretical tool, the null curriculum has been used to foster the purpose of sociological theory perspective to politically emancipate the marginalized elements of a curriculum. This is expanded in the critical theory perspective that intends to bring the forces that drive such marginalized elements into the center of discourse (e.g. Freire, 1974; Giroux, 1983; Apple, 1990). On the other hand, the null curriculum has been applied as a practical concept in the process of observing, describing, and interpreting latent events of curriculum exclusion in the field. It has been assumed in many works to represent a thing or object that underlies the practice of curriculum exclusion (e.g. Lee, 2006; Wakeland, 2010; Kian, 2016).

However, conflicts arise between these scholars who espouse the null curriculum as a theoretical tool and practical concept respectively. It appears that scholars such as Quinn and Christodoulou (2010) who consider the null curriculum as a theoretical tool are exactly the ones who resist the objectification of the null curriculum in practice. They assert that the null curriculum cannot be exhibited as an object underlying an event; the void it suggests is subjectively established. This criticism, according to Flinders et al. (1986), has otherwise been the source of struggle that plagued other scholars who consider the null curriculum as a practical concept. They argued that if a phenomenon like the null curriculum should be considered theoretically valid, then it must take reference; it must be posited as an entity that stands behind things in the real world.

Amidst this unsettled debate in the discourse of the null curriculum, there is an implied need that has been either ignored or overlooked by scholars. Whether in the theoretical purpose of emancipating the marginalized elements driven by forces or in the practical function of portraying a latent event of curriculum exclusion, a task of first order is to determine the null curriculum, which entails a procedure. Keat and Urry (1975) espoused a realist view of curriculum theory that supports the formulation of a procedure to generate any curriculum phenomenon of interest. A procedure does not intend to trivialize the concept of the null curriculum in the present study but rather provides a structure to uncover such a phenomenon that is not immediately manifested. However, as a result of the continued provincialism of scholars, studies (e.g. see Watson et al., 2005) in some ways are devoid of the goal to intentionally formulate a procedure to determine the null curriculum.

A fundamental need to the attainment of this goal to develop a procedural model to determine the null curriculum is the need to ground such a goal from the functions of curriculum theory. It is observed that a discussion of the functions of curriculum theory is often overlooked in the scholarly works that endeavor to develop models in particular curriculum areas. As such, a discussion of the functions of curriculum theory is significant, so that a foundation to the goal of developing a procedural model to determine the null curriculum may be further established. It will equip the researcher with the fundamental knowledge to which this goal is hinged. Thus, the purpose of this essay article

is to revisit the functions of curriculum theory so that a research goal to develop a procedural model to determine the null curriculum may be firmly grounded. Therefore, for the sake of the development of Curriculum Studies, this article is important.

THE FUNCTIONS OF CURRICULUM THEORY

The development of a model in curriculum studies is a work that belongs to curriculum theory (Beauchamp, 1972; Vallance, 1982). Thus, in research that intends to develop a model, it is important to draw foundational knowledge from curriculum theory. However, unlike the status of theory in other fields, theory in curriculum studies is an area of unsettled concepts, propositions, and principles.

Despite that grey area, it is important to observe that the basic functions attributed to general theories appear to remain fundamentally the same across different fields of study. These basic functions of the theory are description, explanation, prediction, and guidance. These same functions were advocated by Beauchamp (1961, 1972, 1981) in the particular field of curriculum theory. Thus, he ascribed the basic functions of curriculum theory as follow:

1. Description: Curriculum theory establishes definitions of key terms that belong to curriculum studies. The terms are the blocks of curriculum theory and an agreement on these terms is an essential component in the work of curriculum theorists.
2. Explanation: Curriculum theory explains the curriculum phenomenon that demands explanation in the judgment of the theorists. It may involve definition, description, and prediction. Thus, it functions as a device to organize curriculum knowledge.
3. Prediction: Curriculum theory attempts to look for relationships among the events in the curriculum field. Making predictions is one of the highest orders in the work of curriculum theorists, thus highest in the function of curriculum theory.
4. Guidance: Curriculum theory practically functions as a guide. The disciplined guides implied by the processes involved in the definition, descrip-

tion, and prediction employs cogent analysis of the events in the curriculum field.

THE TASK OF MODEL DEVELOPMENT IN CURRICULUM STUDIES

Specifically, under the guidance function of curriculum theory, Beauchamp (1981) suggested in particular that one of the scholarly works for curriculum researchers is the development of models that serve as a guide in the field. Schubert (1986) added that a fundamental goal of curriculum theory, after all, is to model a phenomenon that belongs to curriculum studies, so that scholars may be guided in practice.

Moreover, Vallance (1982) concurred that applications of models to particular situations can help practitioners notice the patterns that operate within the curriculum field. She added that such order created in models themselves serves the same function: it streamlines and constructs tentative descriptions of the relationships among various categories. It also has immediate use; it identifies variables that may be manipulated and constants that may be immutable. Considering these ideas, the present study is anchored on the same function to develop a model that may be a useful guide in the curriculum field.

Beauchamp (1981) further illustrated that models are used, for example, to represent a curriculum evaluation system, to demonstrate a particular position on certain curriculum design, and to show underlying relationships among different curriculum concepts. The models in these situations are typically conceptual, hence known as conceptual models. He added that models can also be applied to describe the procedures used in the curriculum field. The models in this instance depict procedures, thus called procedural models. This present study is particularly anchored on the development of a model that shows how to determine the null curriculum. This desire entails procedures.

Walker (1982) acknowledged that many early curriculum writers in the field have developed models that depict procedures. He noted that many of these models with detailed procedures are devoted to every aspect of curriculum theory and practice. Some procedures have been created to guide the analysis of the nature of curriculum such as the procedures offered by Steiner (1972) and Zimmerman (1982) in curricu-

lum theory. On the other hand, most procedures were significantly developed as prescriptions in the construction of a curriculum such as the procedures devised by Tyler (1949) and Taba (1962) in curriculum practice.

THE NEED TO DEVELOP A PROCEDURAL MODEL TO DETERMINE THE NULL CURRICULUM

The procedures that are particularly devoted to the purpose of determining a complex curriculum phenomenon such as the null curriculum, however, has not been given much attention in curriculum theory and practice. This inadequacy can be traced to the discords among scholars who divide themselves in views about the null curriculum as a theoretical tool and as a practical concept. As a theoretical tool, works by Pinar (1979), Giroux (1983) and Apple (1990) underlie the concept of the null curriculum by sociological theory perspective that has a political emancipatory intent of putting into the center the marginalized knowledge. This argument is expanded in the critical theory perspective of the reconceptualist paradigm that such other knowledge types of the null curriculum should be considered into the critical discourse of curriculum. Much of the works of reconceptualists underpin the concept of a null curriculum whether subliminally assumed or directly stated.

On the other hand, contemporary researchers such as Joubert (2008), Kridel (2010), and Moore (2014) acknowledge the concept of the null curriculum as an object that underlies curriculum events of exclusion derived through processes. These studies portray the null curriculum as playing an exhortative function in curriculum deliberations; it provides thorough consideration of relevant options for the selection of curriculum elements. Beyond this rather direct application, there is another importance served by what schools do not teach; it offers an interpretive impetus for imagining the effect or impact of such neglect.

However, as noted in the background of this study, conflicts arise between scholars who espouse the null curriculum as a theoretical tool and practical concept respectively. It appears that scholars who consider the null curriculum as a theoretical tool are exactly the ones who resist the objectification of the null curriculum in practice. They assert that the null curriculum cannot be exhibited as an observable object un-

derlying a curriculum event; the void it suggests is personally established. This theoretical criticism has otherwise been the source of struggle that plagued other scholars who consider the null curriculum as a practical concept. They argue that if the null curriculum should be considered theoretically valid, then it must take reference; it must be posited as an entity that stands in the real world (Flinders et al., 1986).

Amidst this unsettled debate in the discourse of the null curriculum, the primary task to develop a procedure to determine the null curriculum has been either ignored or overlooked. A task of first order is to determine the null curriculum, which entails a procedure. The task of developing a procedure to determine the null curriculum is anchored on the realist view of curriculum theory that intends to formulate a procedure that works to generate the curriculum phenomenon under study (Keat and Urry, 1975). A procedure in this study is not intended to trivialize the phenomenon of the null curriculum, but rather provide a structure that enables scholars and practitioners to determine it.

The inadequacy in the knowledge focusing on procedures leading to the development of a procedural model to determine the null curriculum indicates an implied gap requiring more focused research. My earlier review has found that, to develop a procedural model to determine the null curriculum, two themes of essential considerations need to be addressed, (1) the frames of reference from which the null curriculum can be drawn out and (2) tools to use in the process of drawing out the null curriculum. I shall focus on these themes in the other daunting task of developing a procedural model to determine the null curriculum.

CONCLUSION

This essay article briefly revisited the functions of curriculum theory for the purpose of grounding the research goal to develop a procedural model to determine the null curriculum. Though surrounded by ambiguities, the functions attributed to general theories appear to be the same functions of curriculum theory. These functions include description, explanation, prediction, and guidance. Under specifically the guidance function, it can be traced that one of the tasks for researchers in curriculum studies is the development of models that serve as a guide in the field. It is within these foundational

underpinnings that the bigger goal of the researcher to develop a procedural model to determine the null curriculum is grounded. As past scholarly works in model development in curriculum studies appear to be devoid of a foundational discussion of the functions of curriculum theory, this essay article provides an essential contribution to future scholarly works to keep their research aims grounded.

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