Explorations in Curriculum Studies: The "Why" of Curriculum Inquiry, The "What" of Curriculum Inquiry, The Current State of Curriculum Inquiry and the 'Curricular' in Curriculum Inquiry

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Abstract
In this paper we discussed comprehensively, the; "why" of curriculum inquiry, "what" of curriculum inquiry, current state of curriculum inquiry and the "curricular" in curriculum inquiry. When discussing the question of the "why", the next best alternative that comes to mind is the "rationale". In another breath, we are referring to the very foundations of the curriculum. In this direction the "why" of curriculum inquiry relates unswervingly to the coming together of ideas that seek to provide comprehensive answers to the intent of the curriculum. Paying attention to the "what" of curriculum inquiry, we referred to the curriculum domains or processes such as policy making, development of the curriculum, evaluation, change in the curriculum, decision making, activities or fields of study, and forms and language of inquiry to be the subject matter of curriculum inquiry. In the same light, we discussed the two main types of curriculum inquiry namely; the guided inquiry and the open inquiry. Following that we discussed the "current state of curriculum inquiry. It was realized that the three categories constitute the broad fields of curriculum inquiry; however, they are curricular in differing ways. Curriculum inquiry is therefore a practical research centrally concerned with the inner work or real-world practice of schooling within the societal, institutional and instructional context in which schools are situated and function. It is a prescriptive undertaking whose ultimate purpose is centered on the advancement of schooling. Therefore, curriculum subject matters, curriculum development, curriculum evaluation, curriculum implementation, curriculum policy development and analysis are always the key topics and pre-occupations of curriculum inquiry.
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1.0 Introduction

Conceptually, the definitions of curriculum have been grouped into three categories and these are the narrow, midway and the broad definitions (Louis, Thompson, Sulak, Harvill & Moore, 2021). However, these definitions of the curriculum in different categories do not form part of the main aims of this write-up, but a cursory look at some of them would be worthwhile. With reference to the narrow definition of the curriculum, Bray, Kobakhidze, Zhang and Liu (2018), defined curriculum as the courses or the subjects specified by the Ministry of Education that are to be taught at each grade level as well as the amount of time to be devoted to each. In a similar narrow sense, Bovill and Woolmer (2019) defined the curriculum as a course of study to be taught to students in educational institutions. They added that when considering the curriculum, its purpose, content, method, organization and evaluation must be included. For the midway definition of the word curriculum, Drake and Reid (2018) defined curriculum as a series of events that are intended to have educational consequences for one or more students. From another midway perspective, Gul and Khilji (2021) defined the term curriculum as all the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside and outside the school. Lastly in giving a broad definition, Young and Hordern (2022), defined the curriculum as what happens in schools and other training institutions. Contextualising the definition by Young and Hordern in the Ghanaian society, it can be deduced that all the teaching and learning activities that go on in the educational institutions, such as; senior high schools, technical and vocational institutes, technical universities, nursing and midwifery training colleges, colleges of education and universities can be termed as the curriculum.

Inquiry is an intellectual activity in which we seek to find out something not yet known or clearly understood (Pritchard, 2021). This portrays that inquiry is provoked by the need to have reliable answers to certain perplexing questions. For Yang, Lin, Shec and Huang (2015), inquiry is an activity which produces

knowledge. Curriculum inquiry is a species of educational research that addresses particular kinds of educational research questions related to formulating curriculum policies, developing curriculum programmes and enacting these policies and programmes (Remillard & Heck, 2014). From the above definition, it can be pointed out emphatically that curriculum inquiry involves identifying those curriculum questions that are open to investigation, knowing what form of investigation to use in attempting to answer those particular questions and carrying out the appropriate processes of investigations to obtain those answers. They are the debates about the educational issues happening in the classrooms, the school environment and even the policies that surrounds a particular action for development of the curriculum field. It is also defined as the or an intellectual activity in which some formerly justified logic of procedure is employed to obtain answers to researchable curriculum questions (Fuertes-Camacho, Graell-Martín, Fuentes-Loss & Balaguer-Fàbregas, 2019). From the fore goings, curriculum inquiry can be explained as a systematic approach because it involves step-by-step activities to find out something that is concrete or reasonable or find out something not yet known or clearly understood. This write-up is geared towards discussing comprehensively, the; "why" of curriculum inquiry, "what" of curriculum inquiry, current state of curriculum inquiry and the "curricular" in curriculum inquiry.

2.0 The "Why" of Curriculum Inquiry
The question of "why" in every area of life is a question that points itself to the direction of purpose (Paul & Elder, 2019). When discussing the question of the "why", the next best alternative that comes to mind is the "rationale". In another breath, we are making reference to the very foundations of the curriculum. This portrays that the "why" of curriculum inquiry relates directly to the coming together of ideas that seek to provide comprehensive answers to the intent of the curriculum. In practice, the question of the "why" of curriculum inquiry automatically creates the subdivision that looks at the reasons for a curriculum inquiry. We can deduce that such a department finds out the issues in a curriculum, both the known and unknown problems and solves them. For example, experts trying to understand the "why" of curriculum inquiry will ask questions in the following format. (a). Why should the curriculum have national goals at each of the levels of education? (b). Why should the curriculum have certain stated learning objectives at each of the levels of education? (c). Why should the curriculum have selected teaching and learning resources at each of the levels of education? (d). Why should the curriculum have selected teaching and learning content at each of the levels of education? (e). Why should the curriculum be evaluated at each of the levels of education? This is done through the formal methods thus, using the qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods paradigms to arrive at these unknown answers (Dahler-Larsen, 2022). The instruments include formal and informal interviews, document analysis, historical review, questionnaire and many more. The department seeks to rationalize the curriculum. This brings to bear that the department seeks to be a problem-solving hub as far as a curriculum and its holistic development is concerned. It also establishes all the necessary procedures that one would follow to make sure issues are resolved.

3.0 The "What" of Curriculum Inquiry
Short listed curriculum domains or processes such as policy making, development of the curriculum, evaluation, change in the curriculum, decision making, activities or fields of study, and forms and language of inquiry to be the subject matter of curriculum inquiry (Short, 1991). These are what curriculum inquiry is all about. In view of these domains or processes, the subject matter for curriculum inquiry were outlined and he established and used his researched seventeen strategies on what a curriculum inquiry is supposed be in the following ways: the conceptual analysis, ampliative criticism, speculative essay, historical review where real stories are told, scientific enquiry which are used to explain and limit findings, ethnography inquiry which gives birth to understanding people's culture and experiences, narrative inquiry which is also like storytelling, phenomenology inquiry, aesthetic inquiry, hermeneutic inquiry geared towards making interpretation out of literature; theoretical inquiry, normative inquiry which is also based on the customs of people's lives; critical inquiry, evaluative inquiry, deliberative inquiry, integrative inquiry and action research.

In agreement to the question of "what", scholars such as Dewasiri, Weerakoon and Azeez (2018) are of the view that, discussions that use the word "what" are directing them to the "types". In that regard, we went further to discuss the types of curriculum inquiry. According to Fisowich (2017), there are two main types of curriculum inquiry namely; the guided inquiry and the open inquiry. Fisowich explained that in the guided inquiry, the curriculum experts investigate a lot of "what" questions through prescribed procedures. In this type, they answer questions using already designed procedures. With regards to the open inquiry, Fisowich explained that there is a curriculum leader who defines the knowledge framework where the examination is conducted but leaves it with a wide variety of possible analytical questions. In the course of open inquiry, the curriculum experts investigate topic-related questions through their own designed or selected procedures. It is important to take note of the main difference between the two. Whereas, decision-making is experienced throughout each stage of the open inquiry process, there is no decision-making experienced in the former.

4.0 The Current State of Curriculum Inquiry

In describing the current state of curriculum inquiry, Schwab (1978) identified the symptoms of crisis in terms of six flights:

1. Flight off the field: it is the translocation of curriculum problems and solutions from curriculum specialists to experts of other fields or disciplines such as economics and politics;
2. Flight upward: it is a flight from the discourse about curriculum to talk about curriculum;
3. Flight downward: it is also a return to the subject matter in a state of innocence, shown not only of current principles but of all principles.
4. Flight to the side-line: this is a retreat of curriculum specialists to "the role of observer, commentator, historian, and critic of the contribution of others to the field.
5. Flight to perseveration: this is also a repetition of the old and familiar knowledge in a new language.
6. Flight to hot, caustic debates: this is the rise in the frequency and intensity of the controversialist, argumentative and ad hominem debates.

All the flights except the third one can be seen in the curriculum fields in China (Deng, 2013). With regard to the first flight, unlike the United States where curriculum issues and solutions at the policy level have been largely transferred to and handled by politicians and corporate business leaders, curriculum scholars in China play an important role in curriculum policymaking and implementation. However, the evidence of a flight of the field exists. In China, curriculum scholars have long been interested in borrowing theories and models from other disciplines such as philosophy (in particular Marxism), politics and psychology for the discussion of curriculum issues and solutions.

In the late 20th century, cybernetics, systems theory, and information theory constituted the so-called three basic theories employed for constructing theories of curriculum and instruction (Cha, 2016). The beginning of the 21st century saw many scholars argue that the Marxist theory of dialectical materialism remains as the theoretical foundation for the current curriculum reform in China (Jin & Ai, 2015). This seems to suggest that, at least at the theoretical level, what ought to be done about curriculum is the business of some other experts, be they philosophers, politicians or psychologists. Curriculum or educational scholars mainly work from a theoretical framework or model, that is philosophical, political or psychological to deduce or formulate concepts and principles pertaining to instructional processes (Liu & Lin, 2018).

Over the last two decades, the first fight seems to have been replaced by the second flight. There are indicators of a flight upward, as a variety of contemporary theories and discourse including the complexity theory, post-structuralism, post-modernism, and so forth have become increasingly popular among many curriculum scholars in China. Following the reconceptualist movement in American curriculum studies, Chinese curriculum scholars have actively borrowed and employed those theories and discourses to discuss curriculum issues and phenomena in China (Zhang & Zhong, 2013; Zhang, 2017). In the words of Schwab (1978), there exists a tendency towards an "exploitation of the exotic and fashionable among forms and models of theory and meta theory" (p. 303) rather than an understanding of the specific issues and problems facing real curriculum practice in schools or classrooms.

Associated with the first two flights is the fourth flight (to the side-line), the evidence of which can be seen in the proliferation of commentaries, criticisms, policy explanations, and personal reflections in academic literature written by curriculum scholars. This is indeed a general pattern in the entire academic field of education in China (Cheng, 2011; Yang, 2015). Recently, Zhao et al. (2018) examined one leading research journal in China, educational research, to understand the nature of educational research in China. It was shown that the majority of papers are so-called "conceptual papers," including philosophical discussions, personal opinions, and policy explanations. In general, curriculum scholars have a strong tendency to take on the role of an observer, a commentator, or a critic rather than to be engaged in the real practical curriculum work.

There are also indicators of the fifth flight (to perseveration). Curriculum principles or models like the Tyler rationale and the Bloom's taxonomy are continuously restated in journal articles (Guo & Rao, 2016) and curriculum texts (Huang, 2016; Zhong & Zhang, 2019). In the didactics circle, scholars have long been engaged in restating and reinterpreting the two basic concepts of "teaching" and the "teaching process" from different perspectives and with different emphases (Yu, 2019). Those restatements and reinterpretations, in the words of Schwab (1978), "add little or nothing to the old meanings embodied in the older and more familiar language" (p. 301). They tend to keep curriculum scholars further away from actual school/classroom practices (Yu, 2019).

The sixth flight can be seen in some heated academic debates characterized by competing, incommensurable paradigms or traditions. This is exemplified in the famous debate over the theoretical base of the new curriculum reform between Zhong Qiquan and Wang Cesan and between their disciples (Wang, 2018; Zhong & You, 2014), as well as the academic disputes over the relationship between curriculum theory and didactics (Huang, 2016). No signs of reconciliation or rapprochement have been seen so far.

The evidences of these signs together indicate that the field of curriculum studies in China is in a state of crisis. Curriculum inquiry in particular (and educational research in general) is currently under strong criticism;

it has been attacked for its tendency to separate theory from practice and from the reality of the school and classroom (Li & Zhao, 2019). It does not seem to have contributed significantly to the advancement and improvement of curriculum practices in China. What could be the root cause? What could be the alternative that can lead curriculum inquiry in China out of the crisis? In his first "practical" paper, Schwab (1978) presented a diagnosis and a prescription which, while aiming at the curriculum field in the 1960s and 1970s, hold true about the curriculum field in the U.S. today (Connelly, 2019; Westbury, 2017). Schwab's diagnosis and prescription, as will be shown, is helpful for understanding the current crisis in the curriculum field in China and for coming up with a meaningful resolution.

5.0 The 'Curricular' in Curriculum Inquiry
One would say that curriculum inquiry is inquiry into a curriculum, thus, it is the subject of the curriculum that distinguishes curriculum inquiry from other kinds of inquiry, for example psychological inquiry is different from sociological inquiries. However, there are variety of approaches or methods such us, philosophical, historical, scientific, narrative, critical and evaluative, among others, all of which claim to constitute forms of curriculum inquiry (Short, 1991).

Three broad categories of curriculum inquiry can be identified. Under each of the categories are several distinct research programs. One category concerns itself with the ideal and abstract curriculum. For example, what schooling is for with respect to society and culture? What knowledge is of most worth? How should teaching be conducted? These are normative and ideological questions. Addressing questions of this kind calls for the philosophical, normative, historical, and ideological inquiries, among others. In curriculum literature, answers to these questions can be represented by an assemblage of curriculum conceptions or ideologies, such as academic rationalism, social efficiency, humanism, and social reconstructionism. These conceptions are ideas about the curriculum rather than the practices of schooling.

Another broad group of curriculum research centers its focus on the institutional curriculum. One essential issue of concern is the formation of a school subject, program, or course of study for a school or school system. The third big category of curriculum inquiry is concerned with the nature and character of curriculum making or pedagogical practice within the setting of a school or classroom. What is common across these three broad categories is a concern about schooling and/or the work that schools do. That is whether at the societal, institutional, or school level. It is the focus on the work of schooling in context that gives curriculum inquiry a discernible identity.

The three categories constitute the broad fields of curriculum inquiry; however, they are curricular in differing ways. Inquiries under the first category fall within the domain of general curriculum theory/theorizing. They are curricular in the sense that they address or carry implications for the curriculum questions of the "what" and "why" of schooling with respect to the society and culture.

Under the second and third categories, there are large bodies of inquiries directly concerned with the making of curricular (i.e., planning, developing, and evaluating), the doing of curricular (i.e., teaching, enacting, or implementing), as well as the socio-political nature of such making or doing within the societal, institutional and instructional context of schooling. All these studies or inquiries are curricular because they are directly concerned with the real-world practice or inner work of schooling in its broad immediate and surrounding context.

Conclusion
In a nutshell, curriculum inquiry is therefore a practical research centrally concerned with the inner work or real-world practice of schooling within the societal, institutional and instructional context in which schools are situated and function. It is a prescriptive undertaking whose ultimate purpose is centered on the advancement of schooling. Therefore, curriculum subject matters, curriculum development, curriculum evaluation, curriculum implementation, curriculum policy development and analysis are always the key topics and pre-occupations of curriculum inquiry.

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