

Presidential Address

A bridge between Chinese and North American curriculum studies

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Abstract

In this paper, the Presidential Address given to the first triennial meeting of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (IAACS) held at East China Normal University in Shanghai, China, William Pinar details certain resonances between the Chinese curriculum studies tradition and the work of the legendary Canadian curriculum theorist Ted Aoki. In so doing, Pinar hopes to contribute to the creation of “dialogue between Chinese curriculum wisdom and Western curriculum theories,” to help “form a dynamic relationship between the two” (Zhong and Zhang 2003, p. 260).

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How can we create possibilities of dialogue between Chinese curriculum wisdom and Western curriculum theories and form a dynamic relationship between the two? (Zhang Hua and Zhong Quiquan 2003, p. 260)

[O]n this bridge, we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, such bridges lure us to linger. (Ted T. Aoki, quoted in Pinar and Irwin, 2004)

To contribute to our conversation concerning the important question (quoted above) posed by Zhang Hua and Zhong Quiquan, I will discuss the life’s work of the great Canadian curriculum scholar Ted Aoki. I do so in hopes of helping create a bridge on which we might gather – and linger – in conversation during these days of the historic First World Curriculum Studies Conference. As Aoki employs this metaphor, it is a bridge enabling us to converse across culture, enabling us, perhaps, to hear curriculum in a new key.

Who is Ted Aoki? Positioned on the North American side of the Pacific Rim, Aoki is the only scholar in North American curriculum studies – or in the broader field of education for that matter – whose lifetime of scholarly and pedagogical achievement has been recognized by the awarding of honorary doctorates from four universities. The Universities of Alberta, British Columbia, Lethbridge and Western Ontario have each conferred upon Aoki honorary doctoral degrees. The Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies honored Aoki with its Distinguished Service Award in 1985; also in that year the Canadian Education Association presented him with its Whitworth Award for Research in Education, and two years later the American Educational Research Association awarded him its “Distinguished Service Award.”

On Saturday evening, April 29, 2000, in Baton Rouge, Louisiana – Professors Zhong and Zhang were present – it was my privilege and pleasure to present Aoki with yet another award. It read: “The Curriculum Theory Project of Louisiana State University honors Ted Aoki for a lifetime of achievement in the Internationalization of Curriculum Studies.” It is a



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minor trophy in Aoki's collection, but I was delighted to acknowledge him in front of colleagues assembled from around the world. Today I wish to discuss briefly that lifetime of scholarly and pedagogical achievement, as I believe Aoki's work can provide a "bridge" on which we might converse across culture, specifically, help build a bridge between North American and Chinese curriculum studies.

Aoki was deeply concerned with dialogue across cultures, dialogue in the service of supporting dynamic relationships between and among cultures and nations. "If East-West conversation in curriculum is to be authentically East-West dialogue, if North-South conversation is to be authentically North-South dialogue," Aoki wrote, then "such conversation must be guided by an interest in understanding more fully what is not said by going beyond what is said." Certainly such conversation is complicated, but it holds the possibility of hearing curriculum in a new key.

"[T]o be in quest of curriculum wisdom and curriculum theory," Zhang and Zhong (2003, p. 253) write, "is our vocation." It is significant that Zhang and Zhong link wisdom and theory with a conjunction, for in the work of Ted Aoki they are linked conjunctively as well. The wisdom that can accrue from the lived experience of professional practice tends to be expressed as "theory." For Aoki, I would suggest, "theory" is in the service of cultivating wisdom.

"Curriculum wisdom," Zhang and Zhong (2003, p. 253) write, "is an in-the-world being." In North American (and European) terms, such wisdom emphasizes "lived experience," "being" rather than "doing" in any narrow behavioral sense. Such "being" suggests "dwelling" in "place" (see Zhang and Zhong 2003, p. 253; Pinar 2004). As Zhang and Zhong (2003, p. 253) explain, "curriculum wisdom" has a "local character." They point out that in this era of globalization it is crucial to "understand the locality of curriculum wisdom." To understand "locality" Zhang and Zhong emphasize the idea of "place," suggesting a geographical – in its cultural as well as physical sense – conception of "locality." They appreciate, significantly I think, that "place" is also in "time," so that, as Zhang and Zhong observe, "the concept of historicity becomes also important" (2003, p. 253).

"Place" and "historicity" structure Aoki's pedagogy, evident by his employment of historical events in specific settings. Moreover, his emphasis upon the scholarly conference as an educational event underscores the local and the temporal. As we gather in Shanghai on this historic occasion – the first World Conference on Curriculum Studies, the first triennial conference of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (www.iaacs.org) – I hope to contribute to our conversation by offering you an introduction to the life's work of Ted T. Aoki.

First, allow me to acknowledge that there is a problem with an American doing this work. Aoki is a Canadian scholar, uniquely Canadian. To be grasped in terms of Canadian intellectual life, his work must be situated within Canadian history and culture, specifically, within Canadian curriculum studies. I lack the expertise for such a project, nor am I appropriately situated to undertake it. (I am not reiterating the view, held by some in cultural studies in the U.S., that "subject position" is a prerequisite for expertise. But, of course, it matters.) Aoki's work is extraordinarily important for American as well as Canadian curriculum studies, as I trust the attention I gave to it in *Understanding Curriculum* (Pinar et al. 1995) testifies. In that textbook, I focused on Aoki's intellectual leadership in the effort to understand curriculum phenomenologically (see chapter 8). While acknowledging there the movement in his work from phenomenology toward poststructuralism, I confess that I did not grasp the full extent of it.

Why? I attribute this lapse in judgment to the fact that, while I had access to a number of Ted's essays, I did not have access to them all. A number were in fact unpublished; and many were published in journals not readily accessible in the U.S., let alone in China. Several of the



most brilliant, I had not yet read when I composed the passages on Aoki's work for *Understanding Curriculum*. Now, thanks to Ted and to Rita L. Irwin, I have (and you will have) access to the entire body of Aoki's life work, to be published in 2004 in a book entitled *Curriculum in a New Key*.

Aoki's leadership in the effort to understand curriculum phenomenologically is legendary in North America. But after having read everything he has written, I conclude that it is only part of the story. Aoki's scholarly work cannot adequately be described as phenomenological, despite the strong and enduring influence that philosophical tradition exhibits in these collected essays. Aoki is enormously erudite; he is not only well-read in phenomenology, but in poststructuralism, critical theory and cultural criticism as well. Even these four complex intellectual traditions fail to depict the range and depth of his study and his intellectual achievement.

In my introduction to the collected essays of the man who taught us to "hear" curriculum in a "new key," I emphasize the range and depth of the work. I focus too on the deft pedagogical moves Aoki makes in these essays, most of which were speeches. I know of no other scholar who took as seriously as Aoki did the scholarly conference as an educational event. Often working from conference themes, Aoki takes these opportunities to teach, and with great savvy and subtlety. Of someone we might say that s/he is a fine scholar *and* a superb teacher. Of Aoki we must say that his brilliance as a pedagogue is inextricably interwoven with his brilliance as scholar and theoretician. It is the unique and powerful combination of the three that makes Aoki's work absolutely distinctive.

In taking seriously the conference and, thereby, construing our coming together as an educational event, Aoki acknowledges the centrality of the social in intellectual – and academic – life. In a time in which, in the U.S. at least, careerist self-interest and self-promotion animate and, for many, define professional practice, Aoki's generosity in acknowledging the presence of others is exceptional. It discloses not only his utter intellectual honesty, but his profound sense of the ethical as well. "There are new curriculum researchers," he tells his fellow conference goers in 1973, "with whose ventures I can strike a vibrant and resonant chord. Although not too long ago this chord sounded strange deep inside me, that strangeness is fading. I think it is partly because in being at a conference such as this, I feel a sense of emergent becoming." Already, in this early essay (the title essay of the collection), we hear the auditory characterization of education as "resonance." The last phrase – and its notion of "emergent becoming" – underscores the dynamic, developmental, and dialectical character of Aoki's intellectual formation.

I intend my introduction to Aoki collected essays to function in two ways. First, I hope it inaugurates a series of scholarly studies of Aoki's *oeuvre*. To situate Aoki's achievement within Canadian curriculum studies is a project I trust will be undertaken by several; to those of you listening today, please know there is at least one (but, no doubt, not only one) book series editor committed to supporting such an effort. There should be comparative studies as well, such as of the intersections (and differences) between Aoki's work and scholarship in China, for instance. As well, there need to be studies of Aoki's influence on generations of younger scholars, and not only in North America. I would like to see extended studies of Aoki's intellectual life history. And certainly there is reason for a biography of this uniquely Canadian intellectual and public pedagogue.

Especially in this time when the academic field of education is under savage attack by North American politicians (Aoki once described it as "open hunting season for education"), it is incumbent upon us to maintain our professional dignity by reasserting our commitment to the intellectual life of our field. Such a reassertion of our intellectual commitment includes, perhaps most of all, the study and teaching of curriculum theory and history. Study in neither domain can proceed far without the careful consideration of the work of Ted T. Aoki.



Second, I trust my introduction will function as both teaching aid and study guide. This ambition may seem redundant, given how brilliantly Aoki himself teaches in his essays. While that is the case, it is also true that Aoki's work is complex, nuanced, and profound, and students without backgrounds in phenomenology, poststructuralism and critical theory may well benefit from my sketching of the thematic and pedagogical movements in Aoki's work. I hope that my long and "lingering note" will stimulate students to engage Aoki's essays more actively than they otherwise might.

As students of Aoki's work know, the title of the collection derives from an early essay that was widely read, including in the U.S. But its visibility and familiarity were not the only reasons why Rita Irwin and I proposed it to Ted as the title of the entire collection. The concept of "key" is an auditory rather than visual one, and it is the primacy of the auditory in Aoki's work that constitutes one of his most important and unique contributions to the field. It is Aoki's critique of ocularcentrism in Western epistemology and his honoring of the auditory, and specifically the musical, that enable us to hear curriculum in a new key. Almost alone among curriculum theorists, Aoki appreciated that after the "linguistic turn" comes an auditory one (see Levin 1993).

In the foreword to *Voices of Teaching*, published by the British Columbia Teachers' Federation, Aoki appreciates teaching as a calling (he notes that "vocation" derives from the Latin *vocare*, to call), and he characterizes the "voices of teaching" in this collection as having "sought ways of attunement that will allow them to hear, even faintly, the call of the calling." Speaking of those who contributed to the collection, Aoki is also, it seems to me, speaking about himself when he writes: "The authors of *Voices of Teaching* offer us narratives of some moments in their experiences of teaching, thereby opening themselves to the lived meanings of teaching." Aoki's theorizing is always profoundly pedagogical, deeply grounded in concrete and specific educational events, occasions for experiencing the lived meanings of teaching.

Disengaging himself from teaching as a bureaucratized profession, Aoki opened himself to his own lived experience of teaching, at first in the Hutterite school east of Calgary (his first teaching job after "relocation" during World War II), then in the public schools of southern Alberta, nineteen years in all as teacher and assistant principal. After accepting a professorship at the University of Alberta, Aoki understood immediately (as we learn in chapter 13) that his "job" was not narrowly vocational, but profoundly theoretical, and that there was no unbridgeable divide between theory and practice.

In characterizing these "voices of teaching," Aoki describes the work of finding themes in others' work as "theming," disclosing his fondness for gerunds rather than nouns, emphasizing the *live* in lived experience. "Theming," he writes, "is understood as a lingering intimately in embedded thoughtfulness in the story – as thoughtful listening in the nearness of the calling. Such theming is, as some would say, reflective thoughtfulness." The labor of "theming," Aoki concludes, involves

what we might call a hermeneutic returning to the lived ground of human experience within the story – a place wherein inhabits a tensionality of both distance and nearing. It understands such a place as a resonant place where emerging from the silence may be heard the movement of melody and rhythm – polyphonic voices of teaching. Where might such a place be? Paradoxically, the place is where we already are – a place so near yet so far that we have forgotten its whereabouts. Reflecting theming may allow us to come to know how sufficiently as humans we inhabit where we already are as teachers.

This paragraph expresses several of the major themes of Aoki's remarkable career, among them the primacy of "lived experience," a distant but near "place" of "resonance," sounding



in unmistakable if silent rhythms the “polyphonic voices of teaching.” Where is this “lived experience,” this “place” where we can hear the call of teaching? It is where we are “already.”

These are deeply evocative themes, recalling phenomenology’s critique of contemporary life in the West as estranged from its ground, lost in the chimera of the mundane everyday world. Nowhere is that inauthentic social world more “suffocating” (to use another gerund of Aoki’s) than in those classrooms regulated by proliferating bureaucratic protocols, institutionalizations of Western (mis)conceptions of “individualism” and “competence.” It is Aoki’s voice – no unitary sound, indeed, polyphonic – that sounds the call of our vocation, that calls us back to its lived ground where we are already, if muffled by the distractions and obsessions of the maelstrom that structures inauthenticity. There, where we are already, we can dwell in a conjunctive space, not one splintered by binaries, a lived space marked by generative tensions which we can incorporate, embody, and personify in our dialogical encounters with students and colleagues.

This “third space” within which we can dwell both incorporates and leads us to the world outside. It is the space between political and bureaucratic stipulation and the classroom re-enactment of those contractual obligations, the space between what Aoki so usefully characterizes as “curriculum-as-plan” and “curriculum-as-lived.” It is the space where we work (and play) to understand the educational meaning of our being together, in classrooms, at conferences, in seminars, engaged in improvisation, that disciplined and creative reconstitution of the past in anticipation of a future waiting to be heard in the present. “It is,” Aoki explains, “a space of doubling, where we slip into the language of ‘both this and that, but neither this nor that.’ ... The space moves and is alive.”

It is to this profoundly spatial, temporal and vibrant character of curriculum to which Aoki’s work testifies. Significantly, it is not temporality severed from history. Aoki’s narratives of his own schooling (the story of Mr. McNab in chapter 7), the family’s “evacuation” during World War II and his encounters with ignorance and prejudice,¹ his mention of specific events (such as the Challenger disaster and the Columbine murders²) keep “time” grounded in “history,” but never collapsing the two. There is always in Aoki’s work an attunement to time that exceeds historicity, an attunement that renders Aoki not only a philosopher, but a historian, an autobiographer, always the sophisticated theoretician, in each instance answering the call of pedagogy, speaking in the voice(s) of teaching.

Ted is *always* teaching. Nearly all of these essays are speeches; they are, in a profound sense of the word, “lessons.” And even though the lessons he teaches are complex, never does he seem distracted by that complexity. Indeed, he is always attentive to the concreteness and singularity of the situation at hand. Invariably he acknowledges (respectfully) the occasion on which he is speaking, often referring to the conference title or theme, and organizing his lesson around those signifiers. He proceeds with the sophistication and savvy of the veteran classroom teacher he is, sometimes disarming his listeners with a folksy story, sometimes taking on their own incomprehension as his own, embodying in himself their struggles to understand the lesson he is presenting, to bridge the distance between where they are and where he invites them to visit. Aoki’s pedagogical movements from the concrete to the abstract and back again, and into the spaces among and between them, dazzles me, enables me to linger longer, listening to this master “musician” play.

¹ Like Japanese Americans, Japanese Canadians were forcibly relocated from their homes to “camps” in the nations’ interior, an abridgement of fundamental civil rights fueled by (unfounded) fears of their complicity with Japanese military aggression in World War II.

² The Challenger disaster occurred on January 28, 1986; seven crew members perished in the accident. The Columbine murders were committed by students in Littleton, Colorado on April 20, 1999 (see Webber 2003).



In that “music” we hear echoes of pieces he has played before, but there is never simple repetition. As in jazz (in chapter 23 a visiting trumpeter makes this point explicit), the narratives Aoki reiterates sound differently each time he speaks them, each time in a new context, serving a different purpose, while reconceptualizing an enduring theme. There is in Aoki’s *oeuvre* a robust recursive movement, as Aoki returns to lessons past in making points present, anticipating ideas yet to come. It is this temporal enactment of his pedagogy – organizing these speeches into “moments” and “echoes” – that enables listeners to understand the lessons he has to teach.

I had suggested to Ted that he organize these essays chronologically so students could see how his thought evolved over time. Too linear, I could hear him say in that familiar twinkling of his eye. After rereading the foreword to the *Voices of Teaching* I know why; he was “theming,” reflecting the gatherings that stimulated his thought, the clustering of concepts, the reconfiguring of melodies, creating new sounds of dissonance and difference out of juxtapositions a simple chronology would have silenced. I am grateful that he declined my suggestions and stayed his course, a course, like the one he taught in Montreal, without foundations, in this instance, temporal foundations.

“Foundations” would be too reductionistic, too binary. Aoki is, by his own admission, a “bridge,” both a noun and a verb. This theme shows up in the chapters on “conversation” on the Pacific Rim. He is “a person,” as he puts it, who is “both self and other.” “It is my wish,” Aoki offers in 1988, “to serve as a bridge over the Pacific Ocean.” Aoki lives on the Pacific Rim, he is Japanese and Canadian (as he makes clear, a slippery set of signifiers), he is well aware of Western individualism (the limitations of which he has insistently pointed out), well aware of the Eastern side of the Rim (specifically Japan). At one point Aoki quotes Roshin, a Taoist teacher, to make his point: “Humanity’s greatest delusion is that I am here and you are there.” There is no American-style narcissism here, in which the “other” disappears into the “self.” Aoki invokes Levinas (1969) to ensure that Western listeners and readers do not mistake the profoundly ethical, relational, indeed, ecological character of “self *and* other.”

It is Aoki’s enduring sense of the ethical that enables him to occupy a space between history and time, between continents, between the public school classroom and the university seminar room, between a North American field in collapse in the 1960s and a field experiencing intellectual rejuvenation today. Aoki’s career started in the Tylerian past, but he never seems to have been seduced by the apparently commonsensical purposes to which Tyler’s work was put, namely the conversion of the school into a factory.³ Over and over again Aoki points out that education is not a business, that a school principal is not an administrative manager (but, rather, a principal teacher). Somehow Aoki knew that we needed not to see a new curriculum model, but to hear curriculum in a new key. And the new key he has composed is breathtaking beautiful in its sonorous poeicity, powerfully and provocatively multiplying in its concepts.

Because the concept is central in the U.S., I would like to focus on Aoki’s use of the notion of “conversation.” In the collection it shows up first in Chapter 4, where Aoki revisits his experience during the 1970s evaluating the British Columbia Social Studies curriculum. In what he characterizes as the “Situational Interpretative Evaluation Orientation,” the primary interests are those meanings ascribed to the situation by those engaged in teaching and studying the curriculum. In order to represent those meanings, Aoki and his B.C. Social Studies Assessment team employed “conversational analysis.” In contrast to many evaluation schemes that test the match between curriculum as planned and curriculum as lived, Aoki has

³ Ralph Tyler’s four principles of curriculum and instruction have (to some extent inadvertently) been employed to reduce if not eradicate academic, i.e. intellectual, freedom in the U.S. school. For a description of Tyler’s principles, see Tyler (1949) and Pinar et al. (1995), chapters 1 and 3.

shifted the meaning of evaluation by pointing away from bureaucrats' preconceived ideas to teachers and students experience of the curriculum in the classroom, disclosed in Aoki's analysis of their conversation.

Disclosing the primacy of phenomenology in his thinking even at this early stage, Aoki notes that the conversation he has in mind is not "chit-chat," nor is it the simple exchange of messages or only the communication of information. None of these, he suggests, requires "true human presence." Nor is language only a tool by means of which thoughts are recoded into words. Curriculum as conversation, in this formulation, is no conveyor belt of "representational knowledge." It is a matter of attunement, an auditory rather than visual conception.

Later (in chapter 10), Aoki brings this phenomenological critique of "conversation" to bear on issues of intercultural education, specifically as these surfaced in the internationally-attended graduate program in curriculum studies at the University of Alberta. Revealing his characteristic pedagogical movement from the abstract to the concrete, from the theoretical to the anecdotal, here from the local to the global, Aoki conceives of graduate study as "a conversation of mankind" in a "trans-national situation."

Speaking with students who have come to Alberta from beyond North America, Aoki is reminded of the instrumentality of his assignment as an administrator and of the centrality of conversation in the process of education. In this intercultural educational experience, Aoki worries about the erasure of originary identities: "to remind ourselves of who we are in conversation," he suggests to these students, "I ask that we turn the conversation to ourselves." He poses to them what might be the central curriculum question in an era of globalization: "How will you know that what we consider 'good' here is 'good' in your homeland'?"

In this same essay, Aoki employs "conversation" to think about what might comprise an "authentic dialogue" among scholars worldwide, a topic most apropos to us assembling in Shanghai. "If East-West conversation in curriculum is to be authentically East-West dialogue, if North-South conversation is to be authentically North-South dialogue," he suggests, then "such conversation must be guided by an interest in understanding more fully what is not said by going beyond what is said."

Here Aoki is using a phenomenology of language – and specifically its depth imagery – to remind us that the social surface of speech is precisely that. Authentic conversation requires "going beyond" the surface to take into account "unspoken" and "taken-for-granted" assumptions, including "ideology," what Aoki characterizes as "the cultural crucible and context that make possible what is said by each in the conversational situation." With the inclusion of the concept of "ideology," Aoki is disclosing a complication of his initial phenomenological formulation, here by critical theory, specifically the work of Habermas.

Aoki reminds us that "authentic conversation is open conversation," never "empty," always one in which the participants engage in a "reciprocity of perspectives." Invoking one of his favorite metaphors, he tells us: "I understand conversation as a bridging of two worlds by a bridge, which is not a bridge." Conversation is a passage from here to there and elsewhere, but it is not "here" or "there" or "elsewhere," but in the conjunctive spaces in-between.

Aoki employs "bridge" in both literal and metaphoric senses; the idea seems to foreshadow the bridging movements in his own work. That movement is evident in a 1992 speech to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD; see chapter 9). It is, in my judgment, a most remarkable paper in which Aoki moves deftly between high abstraction and amusing anecdote. Among the abstractions he introduces to this audience of school personnel is interdisciplinarity, specifically, the teaching of science as one of the humanities.



Lest he run off his audience of administrators by such talk, Aoki creates a scenario on Bourbon Street (given that this conference was being held in New Orleans, he is enabling his audience to “run off” while remaining seated). In this scenario, a scientist and a novelist are engaged in conversation, yes, about science taught as one of the humanities. Here he seems to be using “conversation” commonsensically, but this seems to me strategic, and it doesn’t last long. Quickly this concrete sense of conversation becomes abstract “under the influence,” not of drink (as one might suspect, being on Bourbon Street), but of the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze.⁴

For in this encounter between the scientist and novelist, Aoki imagines, as he puts it, “improvised lines of movement growing from the middle of their conversation.” Such improvisation in conversation requires, he says, “a new language,” still a phenomenological theme, but now emitting a decidedly poststructuralist sound. The language Aoki hears in this interdisciplinary conversation on Bourbon Street has, he tells us, “a grammar in which a noun is not always a noun, in which conjoining words like *between* and *and* are no mere joining words, a new language that might allow a transformative resonance of the words *paradigms*, *practices*, and *possibilities*” (a reference to the subtitle of William Schubert’s widely-read 1986 study). “If that be so,” he concludes, returning us from the abstract to the concrete with humor, “we should all move to the French Quarter, so that we can not only listen, but also join them right in the middle of their conversation.”

Conversation understood as authentic attunement to “true human presence” was, let us remember, a radical idea in the 1970s; for many trapped in the school-as-a-business it remains so today. By characterizing the exchange of “information” as “chit-chat,” Aoki was, in the 1973 essay, calling to us to rethink not only what we mean by “evaluation,” but, as we reflect on his later (in chapter 5) questionings of technology, to rethink the so-called Age of Information in which we presumably live. In 1992, not blocks from Bourbon Street, he is employing poststructuralism to disperse disciplinary identities and to create interdisciplinary spaces between the humanities and the sciences, spaces that include both sets of disciplines.

Twenty years after his initial and important formulation of the concept of “conversation” as evocative of and attuned to “true human presence,” Aoki (presumably retired, mind you) is speaking of conversation in less somber tones. By the early 1990s Aoki is speaking of conversation as a version of jazz, a notion which first shows up in the 1991 Bobby Shew anecdote (see chapter 23) and a discussion of improvisation, although the language he employs in the New Orleans speech to ASCD is Deleuzian. Rather than returning to something lost or at least in jeopardy (“true human presence”), Aoki now focuses on something futural, something to be created, a “new language,” and through improvisation.

There is no question for Aoki of working from *either* phenomenology *or* from poststructuralism. The interest in language and, more specifically, the analysis of the conjunctions of apparently mutually exclusive binaries through deconstruction is present in Heidegger (if in the service of retrieving “true human presence”), as John Caputo (1987) and others have made clear (see Pinar et al. 1995, chapter 8). Aoki never abandons phenomenology, but he follows it to its edge where conversation as hermeneutics becomes conversation as “improvisation.”

This is, I submit, a powerful notion that allows us to emphasize not only the creativity of teaching, but an idea that enables us to “hear” the relation between theory and practice. As Aoki notes in the title essay (if in visual terms): “Rather than seeing theory as leading into practice, we need now more than ever to see it as a reflective moment in praxis.” In the

⁴ Deleuze has become increasingly important in North American curriculum studies: see especially the work of Jacques Daignault, whose Deleuzian elements are explicated in Hwu (1993), Pinar et al. (1995), Roy (2003), and Reynolds (2003).

sounds of our conversation we honor the past by self-reflectively reformulating it in the present, animated by our own and others' self-reflexive and "true human presence." That is the jazz of praxis.

If we focus on the auditory character of Aoki's metaphors, we see continuity as well as change in the essays. From the beginning, Aoki is critical of scientific observation (and its uncritical privileging of the visual), emphasizing instead the sound of conversation (and its privileging of the auditory). He makes this critique explicit in a 1991 speech to the British Columbia Music Educators' Association, where he points out that conversation is primarily an auditory experience. In this important paper, Aoki quotes Derrida, Kierkegaard, and Heidegger to emphasize the significance of the ear and of listening in educational experience. He writes:

I pause [a musical term as well] to reflect. Lingering in the reflection, I confess that, over the years of schooling and teaching, I have become beholden to the metaphor of the I/eye – the I that sees.... For myself, I too had become enamored of the metaphor of *videre* (to see, thinking and speaking of what eyes can see).

This formulation represents a major theoretical advance in our understanding of curriculum as conversation. In creating a "new language" in which *sonare* becomes as least as important as *videre*, Aoki has changed everything. Gone are decades of behaviorism and its residues in observational analysis. Questioned is the very subject-object binary in Western epistemology, imprinted as that is throughout the school curriculum and mainstream educational research. Questioned is the relegation of classroom teaching to "implementation," a bureaucratic bridge between objectives and assessment.

Present are the sounds of complicated conversation in which teachers are bridges between curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-lived, between the state and the multitude, between history and culture: "conversation," Aoki explains, "is a bridging of two worlds by a bridge, which is not a bridge." "Bridge" here is both noun and verb; it is both literal and metaphoric. It is both spatial and temporal. As Webster's Dictionary points out, "bridge" is defined as "time, place, or means of connection or transition." Aoki himself performs, indeed personifies, such temporal and spatial connections and transitions: between the traditional and reconceptualized fields, between phenomenology and poststructuralism, between theory and pedagogy, between the West coast and the prairies, between Canada and the United States, between East and West.

To bridge East and West, Aoki moves away from a focus on the separate identities of the binary and into the spaces between them. As he puts it, he is "trying to undo the instrumental sense of 'bridge'." Such a nuanced sense of "bridge" is implied by the conjunction "and" in the binary. By focusing on the conjunctive space *between* "East and West," and by understanding "and" as "both 'and' and 'not-and'," Aoki proposes a bridging space of "both conjunction and disjunction." This is, Aoki explains, a space of tension, both "and/not-and," a space "of conjoining and disrupting, indeed, a generative space of possibilities, a space wherein in tensioned ambiguity newness emerges."

That last phrase describes, I think, the space Aoki created in his own work, wherein we can now listen as if with new ears to conversation across terrains of difference, a complicated conversation in which both separation and belonging together exist in generative tension. The latter phrase is explicated in a 1990 paper, beautifully entitled "The Sound of Pedagogy in the Silence of the Morning Calm" (chapter 25), in which he privileges the gerund "belonging" over the noun "together": "belonging" takes precedence over "together," he explains, thereby revealing the "being" of "belonging." In his subtle and sophisticated conceptualization,



“being” vibrates like a violin string, and in its sound, honors the complexity and integrity of individual identity and social relationality.

“Bridge” is a musical term as well, defined by Webster’s Dictionary as “an arch serving to raise the strings of a musical instrument.” I submit that Ted Aoki has raised us, the individual strings of the field, attuning us to our calling as educators. He has ennobled us by his labor, he has enabled us to “be” in our belonging together, engaged in creative and disciplined “improvisation” as we traverse the terrain of our lived differences as educators.

“There are other bridges,” Aoki notes, such as those found in Japanese gardens, including Nitobe’s Garden on the University of British Columbia campus (where Aoki also taught). In his bridging movements from the abstract to the concrete, from the metaphoric to the literal, from history to culture, Aoki has advanced, as he has complicated, our understanding of our pedagogical and scholarly calling as curriculum theorists. His work is a bridge, and like the bridge he describes in chapter 18, “we are in no hurry to cross over; in fact, such bridges lure us to linger.” This metaphoric bridge is “a site or clearing in which earth, sky, mortals and divine, long to be together, belong together.” Aoki’s work has created that clearing.

Conclusion

A “Great Connection” (quoted in Zhang and Zhong 2003, p. 254)

By discussing here the work of the great North American scholar Ted Aoki, I hope to contribute to the creation of “dialogue between Chinese curriculum wisdom and Western curriculum theories,” to help “form a dynamic relationship between the two” (Zhang and Zhong 2003, p. 260). Like Aoki, Zhang and Zhong (2003, p. 253) employ “hermeneutics, not positivism” to understand curriculum. They point out that curriculum (*ke-cheng*) “originally pointed to temple, signifying ‘great cause,’ ‘great connection’” (Zhang and Zhong 2003, p. 254). During the Tang Dynasty, they report, “curriculum was not limited to school curriculum; it included all the great undertakings in society” (Zhang and Zhong 2003, p. 254). Can there be a greater undertaking than the education of the young?

Professors Zhang and Zhong explain succinctly how the three great Chinese cultural traditions – Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism – inform Chinese “curriculum wisdom” (2003, p. 253): “according to Confucianism,” Zhang and Zhong (2003, p. 256) report, “curriculum is a moral event.” They suggest that it is also a “sociopolitical text” (p. 255) but, “finally,” it is a moral one: “Confucianism understands the educated man as a moral man” (p. 260). “[W]hat Taoist curriculum wisdom provides for us,” they continue, “is a teleological meaning of nature.... The educated man, according to Taoist curriculum wisdom, is authentic mean (natural man)” (Zhang and Zhong 2003, p. 258).

The Third great Chinese cultural tradition is Buddhism: “In the view of Buddhist curriculum wisdom,” Zhang and Zhong (2003, p. 259) explain, “the educated man is the enlightened man.” In language deeply resonant with Aoki’s, they point out:

The enlightened man is not a knowledge cabinet, but a man of spirituality. Wonder, awe, reverence, imagination, transcendence, quietude, empathy and caring are essential elements of spirituality. Can we find them in our curriculum? Our curriculum is so disenchanting. Both curriculum theory and curriculum practice need to be re-enchanted if we do not want to produce one-dimensional persons and dull souls. (Zhang and Zhong 2003, p. 259)



This powerful statement of Chinese curriculum wisdom intersects with Aoki's to "bridge" North American and Chinese curriculum traditions and to make possible "a great connection" between the two.

The notion of "wisdom" is quite strong in Chinese culture, Hongyu Wang (2003; 2004) reports, and "it is indeed related to the sense of both place and time," two themes prominent in the work of Aoki, Zhang and Zhong. Not only a matter of meditation and insight but also of spontaneity and playfulness, Wang (2003) points out that such wisdom "can be a practical wisdom," but "not procedural or behaviorist." "It is much more than intellect or intelligence," she adds, "definitely more than activity-oriented worksheet way of teaching." Indeed, Wang continues, "doing" is not a major concept in Chinese education, as it tends to be in North American schools. In this regard, as for Aoki, teaching is more a mode of being than a matter of "doing," in which "complicated conversation" can create bridges across place and time.

On behalf of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies, I wish to thank Professors Zhong and Zhang and their colleagues serving on the Preparatory Committee for hosting this first World Conference on Curriculum Studies. It is on behalf of a "great cause," and it has been, I trust, for many of you in attendance, a "great connection" with curriculum scholarship worldwide. Inspired by Canadian and Chinese curriculum wisdom, may our conference become, above all, a profoundly educational event. May the "complicated conversation" that is the emerging worldwide field of curriculum be advanced by this important and historical event. Thank you very much.

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