... the writing of history necessarily entails selection and interpretation ... there is inevitable distortion in the very attempt to present a coherent account of an often inchoate past ... therefore, every historical work is necessarily imperfect, tentative, and partial (in both senses of the word).

(Gertrude Himmelfarb, 1997, p. 159)

Curriculum theory should be committed, not neutral.

(James Macdonald, 1967, p. 168)

INTRODUCTION: TOWARD A “CRITICAL” READING

This article is an invited response to Peter Hlebowitsh’s stimulating revisionist article, “Generational Ideas in Curriculum: A Historical Triangulation.” In my response, I resist the seductively simple “veracity approach” of checking the facts, scrutinizing and evaluating each of the author’s arguments with the goal of declaring Hlebowitsh truthful and right (and the rest of the curriculum theory field wrong and in need or correction), or vice versa. Instead, without eschewing veracity completely, I attempt to address the related and somewhat larger issues of the purpose and significance of Hlebowitsh’s text. In other words, I concentrate on the politics of the text and attempt to answer questions such as the following: What are the politics of the author? What is the context of this exercise in historical revision (in terms of the author’s work and in terms of the backdrop of the politics of curriculum theorizing)? Is the revision meant to expand and multiply interpretations of curriculum history, or
“correct” curriculum history? What are the implications of this revision for the two supposed principal camps of curriculum theorizing, namely “traditionalist” and “(post)reconceptualist”? I address these questions and attempt to explicate and justify the strategy of meaning-making that I undertake.

Although my decision to focus on what I have broadly described as the politics of the text is primarily a reflection of my politics as a “critical” theorist—or in curriculum terms, a (post)reconceptualist—I believe that the larger set of questions I focus on is of relevance for the field of curriculum studies in general and the approach that I undertake is useful for comprehensive meaning-making of any text. This article is therefore a critical response, not so much in the sense that it is critical of Hlebowitsh’s text, as in the sense that it is written from the perspective of a critical theorist. In addition, although my work in general has been influenced by postmodernism and I draw on at least some postmodernist thought in formulating my approach to reading the text, the response is not a postmodernist one but a modernist response to a modernist text. The quote I have used as my first epigraph, which could easily be mistaken for a postmodernist statement on the nature of history, is in fact part of the decidedly modernist historian Himmelfarb’s (1997) argument that what is often put forward as a novel, postmodernist assertion about the nature of the history text (e.g., that it is subjective, partial, incomplete, interpretive, and reflective of concerns of the present and the assumptions, perspectives and sociocultural identity of the author) is in actuality “always already” part of modernist historiography.

HISTORICAL REVISION IN THE FORM OF A HISTORICAL TRIANGULATION

In the article “Generational Ideas in Curriculum: A Historical Triangulation,” Peter Hlebowitsh produces a revision of the accepted history of curriculum in general and the contributions of three principal figures—John Franklin Bobbitt, Ralph Tyler and Joseph Schwab—in particular. These three figures are widely recognized as particularly important to the history and evolution of the curriculum field: Bobbitt (1918, 1924) as the father of the field (which was born as a child of social efficiency and with a general functionalist approach); Tyler (1949) as Bobbitt’s successor who, while he continued in the father’s tradition, also refined that tradition by introducing (especially through his rationale) a new instrumentality to curriculum work by advocating the construction of behavioral objectives and testing mechanisms; and Schwab (1969) as the rebel who, principally through one specific essay, rudely interrupted the tradition by declaring that the field of curriculum was moribund and in need of radical change. Thus, each of the three figures is recognized as having made a very sig-
significant contribution to curriculum studies: Bobbitt bringing the field to life, Tyler making its work more systematic and instrumental and Schwab arguing for a new direction. Although it is widely acknowledged that Tyler follows distinctly in the tradition established by Bobbitt, it is also widely acknowledged that Schwab’s declaration of moribundity constituted a break from the relatively linear evolution of the field of curriculum studies.

In his article, Hlebowitsh rejects this widely accepted—indeed by now taken-for-granted—narrative of curriculum history in general and the relationship between the three principal figures in particular. In its place he puts forward a narrative that makes very strong links between all three figures, one that acknowledges nuances and differences of emphasis and approaches but ultimately ties the three figures together as part of the same tradition. In place of the presumed (though mostly undeclared) linearity of the progression of curriculum’s history, with its significant peaks of Bobbitt and Tyler and possible break of Schwab, he introduces the much stronger metaphor of triangulation with (presumably straight) lines joining Bobbitt to Tyler, Tyler to Schwab and Schwab back to Bobbitt. His account is markedly different in that it prys Tyler away from Bobbitt and links Schwab to Tyler and Bobbitt.

Hlebowitsh does not deny the differences between the three figures’ arguments about the nature of curriculum and recommendations for undertaking curriculum work. Rather, he argues that considered in the larger scheme of things, the differences constitute interesting nuances in the development of the same tradition. Furthermore, he argues, readings that concentrate on the differences between the figures overlook or downplay the similarities and points of connection. In particular, Hlebowitsh argues that the works of the three figures are connected by what he labels “generational ideas” in the curriculum field. He employs the notion of “triangulation” to construct his arguments by drawing lines of generational ideas that link the work of the three figures as part of the same tradition.

Triangulation is an interesting and highly generative and evocative metaphor, one that suggests methodological clarity and rigor and “validity” of conclusions drawn and functions to draw firm lines around a specific narrative of the evolution of the curriculum field. In qualitative research, for example, triangulation is a strategy by which evidence from several data collection forms (e.g., interviews, observations, documents) is juxtaposed to see whether they corroborate one another and thus establish and/or underscore a particular theme or finding. Hlebowitsh’s employment of triangulation, therefore, works rhetorically to evoke methodological rigor and to strongly suggest that the arguments made possess internal and external validity. Triangulation also works to render changes in direction into lines of connection and has three very significant effects: namely, prying apart Bobbitt and Tyler rather than accepting that
the latter continues in a straight line from the former, making Schwab firmly a part of rather than a break from the Bobbitt/Tyler tradition and equally firmly drawing the lines of a neat triangle within which all of the various nuances and divergences of arguments between the three figures are contained within the same narrative about and perspective on the evolution of curriculum.

As I will illustrate later, this neat triangle of three widely acknowledged principal constructors of curriculum paradoxically serves to render Hlebowitsh’s arguments both a “correction” of the accepted history of curriculum and an endorsement of a comprehensive, singular, traditional narrative of the history of curriculum. Equally significant, it serves to “triangle the wagons” around the “traditionalist” narrative of curriculum, thus excluding and marginalizing other interpretations of these figures’ works and contributions specifically and alternative accounts of the evolution of the curriculum field in general—especially those generated by pesky “reconceptualists.”

TROUBLING TAKEN-FOR-GRANTED NARRATIVES: A BRIEF DETOUR THROUGH LIFE HISTORY

In his contribution to the second edition of the *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, William Tierney (2000) drew largely on Stephen Ambrose’s (1996) *Undaunted Courage* to discuss the relationship between the famous explorers Meriwether Lewis and George Rogers Clark and to account for Lewis’s suicide. Ambrose had depicted the relationship as a friendship forged from mutual effort and support, collaboration in heroic effort, and although the reasons for Lewis’s suicide remain elusive, Ambrose tried to guess at what Lewis’s final thoughts may have been (e.g., of his financial troubles, his alcoholism, his enemies, his heroic exploits). As a gay postmodernist theorist and reader, Tierney, drawing principally on Ambrose’s carefully researched work, came to startlingly different conclusions; he suggested that Lewis was gay, had fallen in love with the heterosexual Clark and at the end of the expedition, and after Clark got married and settled down to raise a family, Lewis killed himself because of a broken heart.

With persuasive and well-supported arguments, Tierney put forward his novel reading of Lewis’s life not as a correction but as an alternative plausible reading. His purpose in putting forward this (re)reading of Lewis life was not to “correct history”—not, in other words, to suggest that he holds “the truth” to Lewis’s life and that all previous readings had simply been wrong. Rather, his purpose was to make a point about texts and meaning-making. Meaning resides not simply in the author’s intention, nor in the text produced, nor even in the reader’s interpretation but in various possible manifestations of the complex interactions between all
three. “Facts” and the texts produced from them are never neutral. As Tierney (2000) pointed out, “As one undertakes a life history, one needs to consider (a) the purpose of the text (What is the author trying to do and why?), (b) the veracity of the text (How does one deal with the truth of what is presented?), and (c) the author of the text (Who pens the story?)” (p. 550).

This brief detour into life history is both relevant and important for at least two reasons. First, I hold that in order to get at the meaning and implications of any text, including a rereading of curriculum history such as the one produced by Hlebowitsh, one must consider a set of points similar to Tierney’s. Second, Tierney’s rereading is illustrative of an alternative rationale for and approach to undertaking revisionist history, one that contrasts with readings that seek to “correct” history.

READING HISTORICAL TEXTS, READING HLEBOWITSH: MULTIPLYING READINGS OR CORRECTING CURRICULUM HISTORY?

A seductively simple approach to reading Hlebowitsh’s text would be to concentrate exclusively on a version of Tierney’s point b: namely, attempting to determine the veracity of the text. In other words, the central task of my response would be to determine whether Hlebowitsh’s reading of Bobbitt, Tyler and Schwab is accurate and truthful and to pronounce him right or wrong. Are the quotes accurately reflective of the context of the works? Are the dates and facts cited accurate and true to the material? Is the representation of the figures’ works in general true and factual? Although the answers to these small-picture questions of accuracy are important in and of themselves, they are even more important for the conclusions that they presumably enable one to draw. What is supposedly at stake in the answers to such questions is the very history of curriculum; presumably, if Hlebowitsh is right in his (re)reading, then previous readings have been wrong. Through an accumulation of checked details, Hlebowitsh is either to be proved wrong, hence maintaining the status quo, or right, hence revising the history of curriculum. Because Hlebowitsh’s arguments go against the grain of widely accepted—indeed, taken-for-granted—readings of curriculum history, the burden of proof rests with him and the bar is to be set very high indeed. Each fact referenced, assumption made, argument put forward and conclusion drawn should be closely scrutinized and evaluated.

I hold that to take this road is to march confidently down a trail of details that prevents us from seeing the forest while paying overly close attention to the trees. Indeed, some historians and history educators (e.g., Bain, 2000) have roundly critiqued the “accumulation of facts and details” approach to history. Furthermore, this approach principally involves
“sourcing,” which as Wineburg (1991) observed, is only one of the three strategies (sourcing, corroboration and contextualizing) that historians should apply in reading an account. I am not convinced that this well-worn trail of details can lead us to the truth of the relationship between the works of Bobbitt, Tyler and Schwab. As Jenkins (2003) has pointed out, historical truth is simply unachievable. Even if, to suspend disbelief for a moment, this trail of details were to lead us to the truth of the relationship between the three figures, I would consider that point only a halfway mark that could all too easily be mistaken for the final destination. It should not be assumed that we can take a short stroll from that point and quickly arrive at the ultimate destination of what this means for curriculum history. That ultimate destination is to be arrived at, I believe, only if we allow ourselves to wander off the beaten path to explore points similar to those raised by Tierney, including the author of the text (or more specifically, the text taken in the context of the author’s work, concerns and politics), the intended audience of the text and the purpose of the text (why the text was written, who its intended audience is, how persuasive the arguments are, what purpose and whose interests it is meant to serve and what effect it is meant to have).

Because I am not convinced that it is possible to definitively and completely ascertain the veracity of any text, I do not believe that findings on veracity should lead directly either to simply maintaining the status quo or revising history, and Hlebowitsh’s arguments and conclusions are based largely on rhetorical persuasion and (re)interpretation of known information rather than the presentation of new facts, I prefer to set the bar of veracity considerably lower. I think that it is more appropriate to incorporate a looser and more comprehensive notion of veracity involving questions such as the following: Are the arguments well supported and generally credible? Are the conclusions drawn reasonable given the sourcing and arguments? Are the rhetorical devices employed useful and effective? Is the central thesis persuasively made? To each of these questions, my answer is a qualified and tentative Yes. I say a qualified and tentative Yes primarily because as I point out later in this article, Hlebowitsh’s conclusions rest on two central arguments that are difficult to sustain simultaneously: an invitation to see quite significant differences between Bobbitt and Tyler where others have seen continuity on the one hand and to see Schwab as part of the same tradition as Bobbitt and Tyler where others have seen an argument for a break with tradition on the other. However, I do not intend to pursue the conventional route by listing examples of where I believe Hlebowitsh is right and where he is wrong because I believe that this approach merely leads back to a fetishization of fact-checking. My preference is to move on to discuss the other issues related to Tierney’s list of questions and to touch upon the strengths, weaknesses, symmetry and contradictions of Hlebowitsh’s text in the context of attempting to address those issues.
What, in terms of the general history of curriculum studies, is the purpose of Hlebowitsh’s text? Is it produced as a viable alternative account, one that troubles the taken-for-granted singular narrative and draws our attention to the constructedness and partiality of both text and meaning-making and the possible multiplicity of meaning of texts? Or is it produced as a correction, as a text that puts forward a supposedly more accurate and truthful account of the relationship between the three figures and therefore “corrects” curriculum history, producing a new, true meaning that supplants the older, false meaning that the field had come to accept?

Both the text itself and Hlebowitsh’s previous work strongly indicate that this text is put forward as a correction. In order for it to be an alternative account, Hlebowitsh would have needed to contextualize the arguments to inform the reader that the argument is made with tongue partly in cheek, or at least indicate clearly that the rereading is being put forward in an effort to multiply readings and shake history loose from its uncomfortably secure and singular mooring. There is no indication of any of these points in the article. Rather, Hlebowitsh clearly outlines the taken-for-granted history in an attempt to correct it. For example, after laying out the taken-for-granted perception that Bobbitt and Tyler’s work has few discernible lines of separation between them, Hlebowitsh forcefully declares, with italics for emphasis, “It is not a version I accept.” In addition, Hlebowitsh does not put forward any of his arguments and conclusions simply as possible alternatives, but decidedly as corrections. For example, he concludes that “the turbulence caused by Schwab’s criticism of the field, far from supporting an argument for some iconoclastic separation from the generational lines, could more accurately have been interpreted as an endorsement (with improvements) of the generational field of curriculum development” (p. 73). Finally, Hlebowitsh has undertaken similar “corrective” exercises in the past and “Generational Ideas” therefore adds to his previous work that attempts to “correct” curriculum work. In the early 1990s alone, for example, Hlebowitsh produced several historical corrective pieces, including an essay that reappraises the appraisal of the Tyler rationale (Hlebowitsh, 1991), a conference paper that reconsiders the dialogue on Dewey (Hlebowitsh, 1992) and a book that reconsiders radical curriculum theory (Hlebowitsh, 1993).

In “Generational Ideas,” as in his previous corrective work, Hlebowitsh addresses the entire curriculum theory field. In each of these pieces, he does not openly discuss his own political ideology in relation to the field of curriculum (i.e., whether he considers himself a traditionalist or a reconceptualist). However, a strong pointer to his political orientation is the fact that critical theory-driven work and “reconceptualization” in general and a specific figure, Bill Pinar, in particular are favorite recurrent targets for correction. In some of this earlier corrective work and indeed in “Generational Ideas,” the entire field of curriculum is rendered subject to correction.
THE GENERATIVE POTENTIAL OF GENERATIONAL IDEAS
IN CURRICULUM

How persuasive are Hlebowitsh’s arguments and the conclusions that he draws? Because his rereading of Bobbitt, Tyler and Schwab runs contrary to the previous reading that has become taken for granted in the field in general (indeed by both “traditionalists” and “reconceptualists”), he obviously faces an uphill task in terms of persuading his very broad audience. Because his reading is essentially a new interpretation of the works of the three figures, his rhetoric and the figures of speech he uses are particularly important elements of his strategy of persuasion.

The principal rhetorical tool that Hlebowitsh employs is a number of variations of the image and notion of generations: generational ideas, generational curriculum, generational insights, generational inheritance, generations of curriculum work. Employed in conjunction with the notion of triangulation (which I have discussed briefly earlier), the notion of generations as Hlebowitsh constructs it is both a metaphor and a specific representation of the unfolding of curriculum history (Bobbitt as father of curriculum, Tyler as son and inheritor of the Bobbitt approach and Schwab as the misunderstood third generation carrying on in the same tradition but widely mistaken for a rebel). As Hlebowitsh explains it, “By generational, I mean the main ideas and principles that have endured and evolved over at least two generations of curriculum work—ideas and principles that have given the field some coherence and sense of identification” (p. 74). Some of the generational ideas that Hlebowitsh identifies as flowing from Bobbitt to Tyler to Schwab include approaching curriculum work as “advice giving,” the championing of local management of schools and “tying the work of the curricularist to the procedural features of the curriculum” (p. 80).

Whether one agrees or disagrees with Hlebowitsh’s specific characterization of the work of the three figures and the relationship between them, the notion of generations as a way of conceptualizing curriculum work is a simple, very apt and productive notion that is not only rhetorically persuasive but also deserving of appropriation by the entire field as a principal means of historicizing curriculum. Although, as I point out later, traditionalists might conclude from Hlebowitsh’s article that their current work represents yet another generation in curriculum work with a long history marked by interesting nuances of difference, “(post) reconceptualists” can also appropriate the notion to mark the current era as the third generation of their tradition of work in curriculum theorizing.

AN “APOLITICAL” ENDORSEMENT OF TRADITION?

What are the implications of Hlebowitsh’s text in relation to the politics of curriculum theorizing? Clearly it sends a different message to and has a
different effect on each of the two principal factions of the field. Hlebowitsh is uncomfortable with the label “traditional,” which he identifies as a critical curriculum theorist’s designation (Hlebowitsh, 1992) of what he clearly sees simply as the mainstream of the field. For traditional or mainstream curriculum theorists, Hlebowitsh arguments initially appear to go against the grain of accepted wisdom because they challenge the taken-for-granted history of curriculum in general and the relationship between the three figures of Bobbitt, Tyler and Schwab in particular. For traditionalists, Tyler follows closely in the footsteps of Bobbitt and the two establish the nature and contours of curriculum work. In contrast, Schwab’s declaration of moribundity of the field was an uncomfortable intervention, a call for a reexamination of curriculum work. Schwab’s declaration constitutes a moment of discomfort at the very least if not a challenge to undertake a paradigmatic shift. Clearly, even though critical theorists supposedly seized on Schwab to call for and undertake a reconceptualization of the field, tradition has survived this awkward moment and continues to do the work of theorizing curriculum in relation to schools and the best purposes of education. This clear focus on the development and continued evolution of the school curriculum has rendered Schwab’s intervention an awkward but quite temporary break in a neat straight line that was later continued.

“Generational Ideas” is not the first instance in which Hlebowitsh has troubles the accepted relationship between Bobbitt and Tyler (Hlebowitsh, 1991, 1992). In an essay on Dewey, Hlebowitsh (1992) declared that “Bobbitt and Tyler, who are frequently portrayed as kindred traditionalists, are simply not in harmony over the purpose and operation of the school curriculum; they are, in fact, more dissimilar than not, and Tyler’s relationship with the work of Dewey accounts for a large share of this difference” (p. 71). Why would Hlebowitsh trouble the assumed relationship between Bobbitt and Tyler if this appears to undermine the unity and continuity of the traditionalist history of curriculum? Similarly, why bring up Schwab and his declaration of moribundity of the field at all if this is so obviously awkward for traditionalists? If Hlebowitsh is not a “reconceptualist,” and his constant criticism of “reconceptualization” and “reconceptualists” makes it clear that he is not, does his willingness to question these issues indicate an “apolitical” stance, a willingness to be neutral, to stand back from the political fray and if necessary “correct” both sides in the name of “truth”?

Well, not quite. These rereadings are undertaken as a distinctly traditionalist exercise meant to buttress the traditionalist story of curriculum history and current traditionalist work. Paradoxically, Hlebowitsh troubles tradition with the goal of strengthening tradition. Prying Bobbitt and Tyler apart is necessary to create one of the angles of what becomes a unified and unifying traditionalist triangle. It also creates more complexity and nuance in the traditionalist history. Instead of an overly simplistic linear history, we get more nuance and difference in the notion of a triangle. This
makes somewhat more palatable the argument that in spite of his differences with Tyler and his declaration of moribundity of the field, Schwab can be seen as part of the same tradition.

Thus the traditionalist is invited to accept an argument that goes against the traditionally accepted history of curriculum in order to see traditionalism strengthened. In order to accept Hlebowitsh’s overall conclusions, the traditionalist has to accept two arguments that appear to pull history in two different directions. On the one hand, the traditionalist has to accept the argument not only that there are differences between Bobbitt and Tyler’s conceptions of curriculum but also that those differences are much greater than has ever been previously asserted. On the other hand, the traditionalist has to be persuaded that contrary to all previous readings and even in the face of Schwab’s declaration that the field was moribund, there is a close connection between the work of Schwab and Tyler and between Schwab and Bobbitt. In Hlebowitsh’s reading, what are widely acknowledged as small nuances become significant differences between Bobbitt and Tyler and what is widely acknowledged as a call for a paradigmatic shift from Schwab becomes nothing more than a nuance within the same tradition.

The reward for accepting this contradiction, for being persuaded by Hlebowitsh’s rereading of the works of Bobbitt, Tyler and Schwab is a strengthening of traditionalist interpretation of the history of curriculum and inheritance of that well-triangulated and secure history. One need no longer feel uncomfortable let alone embarrassed about Schwab’s declaration of moribundity and rather than a simple linear traditionalist history, one can see comprehensiveness and lots of nuances and differences within the same tradition. In the end, “Generational Ideas” claims three of the most significant figures in curriculum history for tradition. By implication, what is outside of this neat historical triangle, namely reconceptualization, cannot draw on any of these figures as contributory to an alternative history of curriculum and is in effect rendered invalid.

**STILL SLAYING RECONCEPTUALIZATION (AND BILL PINAR)?**

What are the implications of Hlebowitsh’s rereading of Bobbitt, Tyler and Schwab for (post)reconceptualization? No one who has read examples of Hlebowitsh’s work could mistake him for a fan of critical theory in general and “reconceptualist” curriculum theorizing in particular. His book, *Radical Curriculum Theory Reconsidered*, would have been a curious undertaking for someone who does not do radical curriculum theorizing. However, the rationale for undertaking it is revealed upon reading it and discovering that it is not at all a reconsideration of radical curriculum theory but rather a sustained attack on critical curriculum work, which is described in the introduction as “a form of tyranny” (Hlebowitsh, 1993,
p. xvii) and accused in one chapter as engaging in “the slaying of the traditionalists” (p. 21). In numerous other writings Hlebowitsh has attacked reconceptualization and critical curriculum theorists in general and for some reason, the work of Bill Pinar in particular. The implications for (post)reconceptualization in Hlebowitsh’s latest article should therefore be considered in light of this pattern. Though it has been some 12 years since the publication of Radical Curriculum Theory Reconsidered and though the attacks are infrequent and made almost in passing this time, Hlebowitsh, it would appear, is still slaying reconceptualization and still slaying Bill Pinar as his designated poster boy of “reconceptualist” curriculum theorizing.

Considered in the context of his work in general, the principal implication of the arguments of Hlebowitsh’s latest article is the delegitimation of (post)reconceptualization curriculum theorizing. By arguing that Schwab’s work is closely aligned with Bobbitt’s and Schwab’s and that his declaration that the field was moribund was an argument made within the same tradition rather than an accusation that called for a paradigm shift in the field, Hlebowitsh firmly claims Schwab for traditionalist curriculum work. This in effect presumably denies reconceptualization Schwab’s charge of moribundity as a watershed and impetus for reconceptualizing the field. Hlebowitsh has previously argued that critical theory stands in irreconcilable contrast with curriculum theory in general and Dewey’s work specifically cannot legitimately be claimed for the ideology of reconceptualist history (Hlebowitsh, 1992), and has now neatly triangulated reconceptualization out of the works of three other principal historical figures. If reconceptualization cannot legitimately draw on a principal historical figure’s work as its basis it would appear to be historically groundless. Because Hlebowitsh has made arguments for not taking up Dewey as aligned with reconceptualist thought, for prying Bobbitt and Tyler apart and now for considering Schwab firmly part of traditionalist thought, one can imagine a future article in which a “traditionalist square” involving the work of Bobbitt, Tyler, Dewey and Schwab will be put forward to firmly box out reconceptualization once and for all from the legitimate lineage and narrative of curriculum history.

“(Post)reconceptualists” of course are unlikely to be persuaded by Hlebowitsh’s revisionist arguments, especially because accepting them apparently means acknowledging their own illegitimacy. It would be a mistake, however, for (post)reconceptualists to dismiss Hlebowitsh’s article out of hand for several reasons. First, it introduces a simple, effective, exciting and generative metaphor and strategy for historicizing the field (which I have discussed above); second, it calls for a response that explains (yet again) the origins of reconceptualization and characterizes the current state of affairs of critical curriculum theorizing; third, it reiterates the notion that history is not given but contested and political; and fourth, it touches upon reconceptualization and therefore invites
discussion of the past, present and future of curriculum work in general.

It bears pointing out that reconceptualization did not originate with Schwab. Rather, it had its origins in the work of several figures: James Macdonald, Ross Mooney, Elsie Alberthy, Dwayne Huebner, Maxine Greene, Herbert Kliebard, Paul Klohr, Eliot Eisner, Michael Apple, John Steven Mann, Francine Shuchat Shaw and indeed Joseph Schwab and William Pinar, to cul the baker’s dozen (Pinar, 2000; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, & Taubman, 1995). In addition, although Schwab’s declaration that the field was moribund was quite dramatic, influential and generative, it did not launch reconceptualization. Rather, reconceptualization evolved from publications and especially presentations at several conferences in the 1970s (e.g., “Heightened Consciousness, Cultural Revolution, and Curriculum Theory” at the 1973 University of Rochester conference. See Kridel, 1999, for a list and discussion).

The period from about 1969 to 1979 was the most formative and generative decade of reconceptualization. However, reconceptualization was a process involving a variety of issues and approaches rather than a cohesive movement and this makes the label “reconceptualists” a rather awkward and somewhat misleading one for those involved. This point is clearly reflected in Pinar’s decision to change the title of his edited collection from Curriculum Theorizing: The Reconceptualists in the original 1975 publication to Curriculum Studies: The Reconceptualization for the 2000 edition.

I have used the terms “reconceptualists” and “(post)reconceptualists” with quotes around them throughout this article for several reasons. First, it is a means of indicating that the specific period of self-conscious reconceptualization of the field is in the past, specifically in the 1970s. As Pinar and colleagues (1995) bluntly asserted, “the reconceptualization has occurred” (p. 65). Second, I use the term to indicate that “reconceptualists” should be placed “under erasure” as an ill-fitting label for an initial very loose group that was not a united movement but whose collective work paved the way for a variety of contemporary critical approaches to curriculum theorizing. Finally, I identify current, very varied and widespread critical work in curriculum theorizing, therefore (rather awkwardly) as “(post)reconceptualist” curriculum work.

Even from this briefest of indications of the history of “reconceptualization,” it should be clear that even if one accepts Hlebowitsh’s arguments claiming Schwab for tradition and downplaying the significance of Schwab’s declaration that the field was moribund, this does not deny “reconceptualization” its origin. Similarly, attacking the specific figure of Pinar does little to undermine historical “reconceptualization” work and contemporary “(post)reconceptualization” work. Finally, triangulating Bobbitt, Tyler and Schwab does not place the comprehensive and varied early work of reconceptualization outside of legitimate curriculum history.
CONCLUSION: DOES HLEBOWITSH IMPROVE ON CURRICULUM HISTORY?

We are currently in a postreconceptualization era. By this I mean to acknowledge not only that reconceptualization has already occurred (in the 1970s) but also that even the second generation (e.g., Janet Miller, Henry Giroux, Cameron McCarthy, Patti Lather, Joe Kincheloe, Elizabeth Ellsworth) is now overlapping with a third generation of critical curriculum theorists (Lisa Weems, Zeus Leonardo, Greg Dimitriadis). As I pointed out in an earlier publication, many second- and third-generation critical theorists feel no obligation to justify a reconceptualist approach, or even to identify themselves explicitly with reconceptualization (Wright, 2000). Critical work in curriculum theorizing or “(post)reconceptualist” work has proliferated beyond early work of say phenomenologists to include postmodernists, poststructuralists and postcolonialists, feminists and queer theorists and is being conducted not only in the United States but also internationally. In Canada alone it includes figures such as Ted Aoki, John Willinsky, Deborah Britzman, Roger Simon, Jane Gaskell and Peter Seixas.

I do not point to these developments to endorse the idea that “reconceptualization” has won a resounding victory over tradition. Traditional curriculum theorizing still thrives and includes very stimulating work on the nature of the school curriculum and without necessarily endorsing all of Hlebowitsh’s arguments, I acknowledge that “tradition” is much more complex and nuanced than the label would suggest. Like depictions of Canadian society as composed of two solitudes (French and English), depictions of curriculum theorizing as composed of two solitudes (traditionalists and reconceptualists) constitute an anachronistic conceptualization that fails to represent the complexity of individual political “ethnicities” (e.g., conservatives, liberals, neo-Marxists) and “multiethnicities” (e.g., feminist-poststructuralists) that are uncomfortably lumped into each solitude. In the polarization of the field that has emerged since reconceptualization (and to which we collectively continue to contribute), we appear to work with blinkers, seeing nuance and complexity only in our own and closely allied work.

What does this seductive reductionist polarization mean for the reception of Hlebowitsh’s text? Does Hlebowitsh text improve on curriculum history? In the end reception of Hlebowitsh text will probably reflect areas of expertise and ideology. By this I mean that curriculum historians in general will find it of interest while nonhistorians might not consider it particularly important (which would be regrettable). In addition, traditionalists might well be persuaded by his arguments if only because they endorse tradition while “(post)reconceptualists” might not be persuaded by those same arguments if only because they appear to undermine critical work.
If nothing else, “Generational Ideas in Curriculum” serves as a reminder of the importance of the history of the field. It is all too easy for the history of curriculum to pass into a passive set of facts to be learned and even readily forgotten in the often overly presentist and future-oriented work in curriculum theorizing. My discussion of the article in terms of the politics of the history and present state of play of the field of curriculum is intended to indicate that what is at stake is not merely the facts and interpretations of the work of historical figures (as important as those are, especially for historians) but the nature of contemporary work and the trajectories of future work in curriculum as a field and consequently our conceptualization of education and society. As Daniel Tanner (1993) rightly pointed out in his foreword to Hlebowitsh’s *Radical Curriculum Theory*, “The issues examined by Peter Hlebowitsh are not merely ‘academic’; they have far-reaching implications for school and society” (p. x).

Whether we agree or disagree with Hlebowitsh’s revisionist reading of the relationship between Bobbitt, Tyler and Schwab, his article reiterates for us (even, or perhaps especially, the nonhistorian such as myself) the basic notions that history is political and contested and the historical account reflects the personal politics of the historian and the issues at stake in the present. If I have eschewed a close reading, fact-checking approach to reading Hlebowitsh’s rereading of history, it is because I am convinced that it is more important to focus on the bigger picture of what it means for the entire field of curriculum and for both the history and present state of play of how we conceptualize and theorize curriculum.

REFERENCES


