ABSTRACT

In this article, I examine the work of John Franklin Bobbitt, Ralph Tyler, and Joseph Schwab with the intention of identifying lines of continuity and change in the curriculum field. Most curriculum scholars cast this group of three in an analytical framework that puts Tyler in kinship with Bobbitt, and that puts Schwab, by virtue of his declaration of moribundity against the field, in separation from Tyler and the historical line of thinking that he represented. I argue, however, that the turbulence caused by Schwab’s 1969 criticism of the curriculum field, far from supporting an argument for some iconoclastic separation from the traditional lines of the field, could more accurately be interpreted as an endorsement (with improvements) of the historic field. I make this case by pointing to the sustenance of what I call generational ideas in the curriculum field, which are ideas that have their roots in the defining moments of the curriculum field and that have persisted (some with modification) over more than one generation of curriculum scholars. Generational ideas in the curriculum field include a focus on the development of the school experience and on the relevance of local school authority. Generational curriculum work also works out of a vision-building construct (without an a priori commitment to any type of vision) that advises key sources for curriculum decision-making (society, students, and subject matter). Schwab inherited these generational insights and then went an important step further by showing us the way toward a more participatory process in curriculum decision-making. In this sense, Schwab was as much a tool of continuity in the field as he was an innovator. Finally, I demonstrate that the six signs of crisis that Schwab outlined in his famous 1969 essay very much imply a return to many of the first principles that we find in Tyler’s work.
tion that he helped to express. Bobbitt’s (1918) idea of circumscribing the school around predetermined activities and actualizing the curriculum in a way that served a functionalist view of society has had a lasting effect on public schooling. The basic nature of his ideas could be found in later advocacy for competency-based instruction, and even in recent support for curriculum mapping strategies and test-driven curricula anchored in hyperspecified curriculum standards.

Not surprisingly, some curriculum scholars continue to see the curriculum field as a historical creature (a miscreant, even) still burdened by the ideas and principles inherited from its social efficiency derivations. Pinar and others (1995), for instance, see these vestiges in what they view as the field’s continued obsession with only procedural and prescriptive matters in the school experience, and in its accompanying failure to generate new theoretical lines of understanding. They have little hesitancy in proposing that the curriculum field’s main problems still reside at the historical door of the field, believing that the orientation of curriculum studies has been stuck in a simplistic management-style interplay between forming curriculum objectives and telling teachers how to carry them out. And they are confident enough in this view to proclaim the need for the field to repudiate its history and to reconceptualize itself along broader theoretical and less school-bound lines.

Such claims, of course, are reliant on understanding what I call the generational inheritance of the field. 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. If the historical record documents the persistence of social efficiency traditions in the generational ideas of the field, as others have claimed, then we are likely to see and ultimately approach our present-day problems in a way that differs from an interpretation that does not carry the weight of a social efficiency history. Thus, our handling of generational ideas becomes a matter of certain present-day importance.

One promising line of inquiry in this regard can be explored in the generational lines of the curriculum field defined and delineated in the works of John Franklin Bobbitt, Ralph Tyler, and Joseph Schwab. All three were education professors on faculty at the University of Chicago. Each used a different point of departure when traveling through the field of curriculum studies. Bobbitt worked in the field of educational administration, Tyler in policy and evaluation, and Schwab in philosophy. Each was also well known and well represented in the literature, and together their work encompasses a landscape of thinking about the curriculum that tells us much about the field itself.

But what makes this triangulation of curriculum thinkers especially helpful is the distinct and unusual way that it holds together. Besides the University of Chicago connection, our group of three is typically cast in an analytical web that puts Tyler in kinship with Bobbitt, and that puts Schwab,
by virtue of his declaration of moribundity against the field, in separation from Tyler (and Tyler’s presumed progenitors). Tyler is viewed, in a manner of speaking, as the inheritor of the kingdom, while Schwab is the revolutionary, seeking an overthrow and the installation of a whole new worldview. Even mainstream curriculum thinkers are taken by this implication, including Eisner (1984), whose own review of Schwab’s practical papers led to him to ask, “What are we to make of a man who tells us, if we read him as I think he wishes to be read, that we have for eighty years been barking up the wrong tree?” (p. 208).

**THE TRIANGULATION**

The pivotal point in the triangulation is Ralph Tyler, who was a student at the University of Chicago during Bobbitt’s tenure there and who is typically cited as among Bobbitt’s intellectual progeny. He is especially important to the reconceptualist critique because he is viewed as the good son who modernized social efficiency schemes by continuing to put a premium on the normative, and by detailing a new instrumentality for curriculum development conceived around behavioral objectives and testing mechanisms. Reconceptualists, notably Pinar, believed that Tyler’s rationale was the quintessential social efficiency achievement—not much more than a management device designed to stifle teacher creativity and to close the discretionary space for teacher judgment in the classroom. In this sense, Bobbitt’s generational principles are viewed as succeeding seamlessly into a second generation of curriculum development commandeered and modernized by Tyler.

For those taken by this criticism against Tyler, hope nevertheless arrives, and not from afar, but from within the very intellectual home of Bobbitt and Tyler. In 1969, Joseph Schwab made his entrance, offering a trenchant criticism of the curriculum field, punctuated with a proclamation that curriculum studies, his newly adopted area of intellectual inquiry, is moribund—dead at its theoretic roots and otherwise stunted in its practice.

Schwab, however, was not content simply to criticize. He went quite a bit further and designed an alternative view that spoke directly to questions of curriculum practice: what curriculum scholars should actually do. In this way, Schwab, who was hired by Tyler at the University of Chicago, clearly tried to represent a new promise for the field.

For many, Schwab embodied an important separation, or break, from Tyler and Bobbitt. He was, in many ways, a scholar with a new orientation and even a new vocabulary. How could one, in fact, see him any other way? After all, wasn’t his frustration with the field and his confidence in declaring it moribund a clear indictment of Bobbitt and Tyler? And isn’t it obvious that Schwab’s analytical focus had little regard for the generational principles first forged by Bobbitt? In Schwab, for instance, one will not find any talk about matching objectives to experiences, and certainly no talk
about key Tylerian traditions, such as formulating evaluative mechanisms aligned to core school purposes. Schwab undoubtedly gave us a new theoretical configuration for thinking about the curriculum, and was ultimately embraced by a good share of the curriculum community as an important departure from Tyler—a radical break, some might say, of almost paradigmatic proportions.

So, one version of the triangulation between Bobbitt, Tyler, and Schwab shows us how the field has walked away from Tyler (and his social efficiency ancestors) and toward Schwab, with the implication being that Schwab’s voice stood as a separation from the historic curriculum field. This is, of course, a preferred version among those satisfied with the evidence that builds a separation between Tyler and Schwab, and among those who are inclined to see little discernible lines of separation between Bobbitt and Tyler. It is not a version I accept.

I am not the first to have my hand at analyzing these historical lines. In a 1992 essay, Philip Jackson put it to the reader directly, asking if Tyler’s ideas posed any improvement over Bobbitt’s ideas and if Schwab’s ideas posed any improvement over Tyler’s. The focus on improvement was itself revealing, because by aiming to find some new contribution in the work of the three, Jackson’s essay settled onto common ground—which is to say, the ground of curriculum development. As Jackson observed, all three (Bobbitt, Tyler, and Schwab) sought to “help practitioners who wanted to improve the curriculum of the school in which they work” (p. 30). To ask the question of improvement implied a basis for marking (comparing and contrasting) the nature of the improvement. In this way, Jackson took an epistemological position that allowed him to argue that the three voices were following a line common enough for us to be confident in noting scales of improvement. Tellingly, Jackson had no issue with comparability and never once found himself saying that the perspectives were so radically different that they could not be managed along a common analytical ground.

Interestingly, Tyler and Schwab apparently felt the same way. Tyler (1984), for his part, claimed that Schwab’s analytical focus gave him new clarity on his past curriculum development projects, noting especially that it clarified factors in his experience as director of the evaluation staff of the Eight-Year Study. Tyler even observed that he had done as Schwab might have advised, putting together some deliberative groups that included “persons with the variety of characteristics outlined by Schwab” (p. 98). And Schwab (1969), far from seeing himself as a separation from Tyler, noted in his first practical essay “that the conception of curricular method” he proposed was “immanent in the Tyler rationale” (p. 320). In fact, one of Schwab’s complaints about the rationale had to do with its commitment to the use of objectives in the curriculum. Schwab, however, did not cite a social efficiency criticism against objectives. Far from seeing objectives as hopeless impositions on teachers, Schwab feared that they ulti-
mately failed to offer *enough* concrete direction for the school. Yet Schwab, it should be said, is certainly not obvious in the work of Tyler. And if Schwab’s views were immanent in the Tyler rationale, as Schwab himself maintained, we might begin to also say that Schwab produced an analytical extension to Tyler that, in the final analysis, was less of a departure from Tyler than an improvement on Tyler.

In 1993, William Reid found the Tyler/Schwab connection to be important enough to offer a response to Jackson, in an essay that made direct reference to Jackson’s original query: “Does Schwab Improve on Tyler?” So now, for a second time, we took on a question that, by virtue of being asked, said so much about the curriculum field. But Reid flipped the analytical switch, first by articulating a frustration with Jackson’s focus on the point of improvement, which he correctly noted implied commonality, and then by directing his attention to the question of difference between Schwab and Tyler. Reid’s conclusions naturally diverged from Jackson’s account, but the paradox of Reid’s work is that the case of commonality between Tyler and Schwab became stronger because of it.

Reid sees Schwab as different enough from Tyler (as prizing a process of curriculum development completely overlooked by Tyler) that even comparability between the two is an issue. Moreover, Reid does not accept the separation drawn by Jackson between Tyler’s vision-oriented view of curriculum and Schwab’s problem-centered view (a distinction we will explore later), and he certainly does not accept Jackson’s implication that Tyler’s more dominant position in the field is more useful for curriculum thinkers. But are the differences between the two so dramatic? Or are they precisely the kind of differences that fit together nicely into a broader and more holistic puzzle?

Both Tyler and Schwab, as will be discussed, advanced curriculum approaches that gave meaning and operation to idealistic visions, but that did not predesign or hardwire any social vision from within. They went about this in different ways, and it is in these different ways that Reid is convinced that the two are not compatible, nor even of the same tradition. Schwab put down his analytical stakes in the soil of a deliberative problem-solving or decision-making process. Tyler, on the other hand, viewed this process as implied in his more procedural approach.

But is this as much a difference as it is two sides of the same coin? Do these two approaches clash in the real world of schools, or do they (or can they) work together? Schwab was probably saying something important when he observed that his work was immanent in the Tyler rationale. The statement probably meant that Schwab saw Tyler as standing quite separate from Bobbitt’s legacy (think of Bobbitt’s idealistic curriculum approach), and quite close to the kind of hard-knuckled school-based action that Schwab valorized in his essays. Obviously, Schwab didn’t focus on what concerned Tyler. Why should he? He focused on what Tyler missed, and Tyler did miss something important. The result can only be
interpreted as representing an improvement on Tyler. Because the Tyler rationale was never revised, we could only guess whether Tyler might have made any attempt to synthesize insights from Schwab. But a kind of synchronicity can be observed between the work of Tyler and the work of Schwab.

**GENERATIONAL IDEAS IN CURRICULUM**

If curriculum development is a generational idea, we could say that Bobbitt stands as its patriarch. Bobbitt is significant because he helped to formalize and legitimize curriculum development as an academic field of inquiry. His 1924 book, *How to Build a Curriculum*, is an unabashed testament to his atheoretical orientation. Bobbitt was not a philosopher and didn’t take much interest in theory, seeing his work instead along strictly practical lines—what Jackson (1992) referred to as “advice giving.”

Here is a generational line in the field of curriculum that ties Bobbitt to Tyler for sure, but it also implicates Schwab. Although Schwab was clearly a theoretician par excellence, certainly in a way that Bobbitt and Tyler were not, Schwab’s work is markedly advice-giving in its implications. In *The Practical: Translation Into Curriculum*, Schwab (1973) itemized the kinds of participants needed in the deliberative process (their titles, the education they require, and the roles they fulfill), the size of the planning group, and “the five bodies of experience that must be represented in a group undertaking curriculum revision” (p. 365). He also argued for the centrality of the commonplaces in the process of curriculum revision.

Reid (1993) assessed Schwab’s advice-giving capacity as “falling short,” largely because of the complexity of his language and the nuances of his ideas. But Schwab himself made it clear that to be a scholar in the field of curriculum studies meant to work the ground of local practice. One should recall that Schwab’s (1969) main complaint about the curriculum field was its “inveterate, unexamined and mistaken reliance on theory” (p. 287). Schwab did not want the field to be atheoretical, but he did want it to recognize itself along the lines of its practice and the practical skills needed to help improve school learning environments. His four landmark essays written over the course of four years all contained the word “practical” in the title. His fourth essay was subtitled “Something for Curriculum Professors to Do.” A concern for practice does not necessarily translate into advice, but in Schwab, it certainly comes close to the mark of advice-giving.

Another generational principle emerging from the work of Bobbitt has to do with the attention he placed on the local management of the school. Bobbitt was circumspect about forming activities in the school experience that were relevant to the life of the local community. He took this very seriously, so much so that one could find very detailed job analysis reports that he and his students conducted in city school districts, including Los Angeles (Bobbitt, 1922) and San Antonio (Bobbitt, 1915). In fact, Bobbitt
was so attached to the idea of linking specific activity to the present local condition that other progressives accused him of designing a curriculum doomed to become an anachronism. Bode (1927), for instance, contended that Bobbitt’s job analysis represented little more than training for adjustment to existing social conditions. In a democracy, Bode observed, society is best served when education proceeds from the level of general training, in areas such as problem-solving and communication skills. The school needs to be responsive to local conditions, Bode explained, but it cannot be trapped by them. Because specific activities change over time, the idea of specificity in the curriculum runs the risk of promoting outdated training that would likely not have much currency beyond the present.

Tyler, of course, also had a high regard for the local, starting his career as an advice-giver to faculty at the Ohio State University, offering them ideas on how to design evaluation devices attuned to their course purposes, and later playing a front and center role in the Eight-Year Study, where he first formulated his famous rationale. Tyler undoubtedly embraced the local authority of the school, making it clear even in his rationale that the formation of school purposes needs to be screened through local community values and concerns, as well as local knowledge of the learner. But Tyler must have read Bode’s criticism of Bobbitt, because his advice for local schools contained an important difference from Bobbitt. Where Bobbitt concerned himself with the development of specific activities that he believed contributed to the adjustment of the individual to society, Tyler’s focus was diametrically opposed to the specificity that Bobbitt sought. Tyler made repeated efforts to draw attention to the need for the school to retain a strong sense of generalizability in its design of purposes, thus keeping the school experience open to important changes and leaving more discretionary space for teacher judgment. This was Tyler’s way of operationalizing Dewey’s conception of present-as-future, meaning that Tyler wanted to use the curriculum to cultivate general skills and values that had currency beyond the present (problem-solving skills, communication skills, inquiry skills, study skills, appreciation toward learning, and so forth). Bobbitt’s focus on the specific activities of the present could only secure a better present, not necessarily a better future. In this way, Tyler extended Bobbitt’s idea, improved on it, and showed the way to a generational idea that still honors the local management of schools.

Schwab inherited the generational idea of local authority and embraced it as a key ingredient in his thinking. Schwab, in fact, sanctified the local ground of school decision-making in a way that went beyond even Bobbitt or Tyler, emphasizing the need for the curriculum to be moved by a participatory and communal process. He made it clear that decisions made away from the classroom and the school could not capture local conditions, and tended instead to rely on theory for guidance, something that theory was not equipped to provide. Abstractions about the curriculum were to be avoided largely because, as Schwab (1969) put it, “real acts, real teachers, real children are richer than and different from their theoretical
representations” (p. 310). To Schwab, teachers, children, and curriculum decisions were essentially “unreal” in theory. However, it should be remembered that Schwab came to this conclusion only after his involvement in the National Science Foundation (NSF)-sponsored Biological Sciences Curriculum Study (BSCS) curriculum, a science education curriculum designed by scientists far removed from local school conditions, and far removed from any understanding of the nature of the learner. BSCS was a national curriculum project exported to the local schools, designed by participants not only outside of the local community, but also outside of the institution of precollege schooling altogether. Schwab (1983) might have acknowledged this when he made a reference to the fact that he was opposed to a centralized command curriculum “decided in Moscow and telegraphed to the provinces” (p. 240)—a reference perhaps to the Washingtonian (NSF) curriculum prescriptions of which he was a part. But the point is that when Schwab was wrong about the curriculum, he was outside of a generational principle established by Bobbitt and Tyler, and when was right and most prized for his writing about the curriculum, he settled into a generational principle that clearly ties him to Bobbitt and Tyler. One could also argue that Schwab indeed provided some improvement on this legacy by highlighting a feature of local thinking (the deliberative process) that was never contemplated by Bobbitt and Tyler.

Another generational principle founded by Bobbitt had to do with tying the work of the curricularist to the procedural features of the curriculum. To be a curriculum worker to Bobbitt meant to help atomize or to particularize the activities of the curriculum. To Tyler, the action of the curriculum moved along a continuum, starting not (as Bobbitt preferred) with activities, but with purposes, and moving along to the formation of learning experiences, and finally, to the fashioning of an evaluative strategy allegiance to the purposes. The issue of evaluation is critical because Tyler conveyed a message that no one else had previously understood. Tyler showed us that evaluation, a term that he claims to have originally coined in the context of schooling, need not be a prefashioned pencil-and-paper-testing affair, but could instead be approached as an evidence collection process requiring creative and innovative thinking about finding ways to demonstrate whether certain core purposes in the curriculum have been fulfilled. One cannot find much talk of evaluation from Bobbitt, but plenty from Tyler. In fact, Tyler could be (and should be) considered the father of portfolio assessment, although no one seems to want to give him credit for this. So, we have a generational line of thought that targets curriculum processes (a sense of what is meant to organize a curriculum) between Bobbitt and Tyler, which ultimately shows signs of improvement and change. The very idea of testing and evaluation was changed by Tyler because of its residency in the curriculum process.

So, where does Schwab fit here? Clearly, he does not have as much concern for the elements of curriculum development that we see in Tyler
and Bobbitt. But Schwab’s work is ultimately tested against the effects that it has on the curriculum development process. Schwab is, in effect, saying that what we teach, and how we teach it, is undeniably important, but that the best way of nurturing such processes is to look to the participants in the curriculum. Schwab (1973) injected himself into the processes of the curriculum by putting his stock into the participants of the curriculum and the vital processes of the deliberative engagement.

At one point, Schwab even designed the elements of a problem-solving team that could undertake the act of curriculum revision. He outlined the responsibilities of the members on the team but didn’t get into the business of advising a particular problem-solving method, although he did outline what he called the commonplaces of the curriculum (the main sources of evidence for deliberative engagements). These commonplaces involve four elements: teachers, subject matters, students, and milieu. Schwab’s notion of deliberation in the curriculum speaks to who teaches, what gets taught, who gets taught, and the cultural climate in which it is taught.

Tyler, of course, adumbrated his curriculum questions with what he called screens, insisting that all curriculum procedures be filtered through three screens: a regard for the nature of the learner, for the values of society and community, and for the contributions of specialized subject matter. One can see the isomorphism between three of the commonplaces (students, subject matter, and milieu) and Tyler’s three screens. Schwab added the teacher (the key participant) to the conceptual framework, again showing Schwab’s proclivity to put analytical focus on the actual participants in the curriculum design project.

Tyler’s work clearly did not analytically reach into the act of deliberation. Tyler’s original rationale, for instance, was formed in response to a call for help and guidance from the participating teachers in the experimental schools of the Eight-Year Study. The rationale came to the teachers in the context of the practical problems associated with managing expressly experimental schools. Tyler gave the teachers guidance via the rationale, but failed to offer much to them in the way of deliberative engagements that might have helped with the interpretation and use of the guiding principles of the rationale. Little attention went in the direction of the deliberative body. Tyler’s inattention to this matter was emblematic of a wider prejudice in the field.

The problem was pervasive enough that, in later years, the curriculum field would identify something known as the implementation problem, which was a direct reference to the fact that curriculum knowledge simply was not making its way into the implementation of the school, or into the working consciousness of school leaders, including teachers. Schwab, of course, had an answer to this problem because of the investment he made in attempting to localize decision-making so that teachers might have ownership in what and how they teach. Today, much of what Schwab taught us
is ignored at our cost. For instance, many still believe that a focus on an institutional matter, such as reducing class size, will necessarily yield positive effects for children, without thinking that, in the absence of deliberation, teachers might continue to teach—reduced class size or not—as they always taught. The effect, of course, is that nothing necessarily positive comes from the reduction.

Schwab, as indicated earlier, is simply not the idealist or vision-builder that we clearly see in Bobbitt, and less intensively, in Tyler. Schwab embraced the idea of principle more than the idea of planning, and hence is more inclined to advance problem-solving rather than vision-building as the main end of curriculum development. Contrast this to Bobbitt, whose work was embodied in the idea of using the school curriculum as a grand society-building plan—a desire to socialize children into their social stations for the purpose of keeping the social harmony. Tyler almost straddles the line between Bobbitt and Schwab. He did indeed focus on the construction of purpose as the main engine for the operation of the curriculum, but he did so without imposing the kind of worldview implied in Bobbitt. At the same time, Tyler was also not neutral or strictly procedural about the school experience either. He did make a case for the three screens (learner, society, and subject matter) and the exercise of a philosophy. But like Schwab (and unlike Bobbitt), Tyler did not exercise any particular vision in the development of the school experience. In fact, it should be recalled once more that Tyler was criticized on this count by Schwab (1969) himself, who judged Tyler’s commitment to curriculum objectives as largely bringing forth ambiguity and equivocation in the curriculum, a point repeated in Kliebard’s (1970) well-known criticism of the rationale. In fact, I’ve heard it said often that part of the problem with the Tyler rationale is that any low or narrow-minded cultural tradition could find a helpful curriculum procedure in the rationale. It seems that the lesson against using the curriculum as a hegemonic cultural device, as an instrument for the installation of a predesigned social plan, was learned well by Tyler and embraced equally by Schwab.

**THE BELLS TOLL**

But how could we put Schwab into the same line of thinking as Tyler when he is precisely the person who tolled the bells, as it were, whose declaration of moribundity must have targeted so much of what Tyler stood for? The primary implication of what Schwab said was, after all, similar to the main implication of the later reconceptualist critique, which is that curriculum professors can no longer do what they’ve been doing in order for their field to thrive, and that a change (even maybe a reconceptualization) needs to occur to resurrect the profession.
What exactly was Schwab saying when he declared the field moribund? His was not a specific attack on any line of thinking in the field (he mentioned no names), but an attack on what Schwab believed to be a settled tradition in the field. Was this tradition a generational idea that moved from Bobbitt’s hand to Tyler’s?

The declaration of moribundity in the curriculum, as Schwab originally pronounced it, had to do with a perceived overzealous commitment in the field to the prescriptive powers of theory. According to Schwab (1969), the role of theory had achieved an exaggerated status in the context of the practical, leading to the pursuit of overreaching principles and procedures of curriculum development. The problem was in the way that these theoretical formulations overwhelmed and overlooked the emergent quality of the situational or practical context. Schwab believed that curriculum theory had to be diverted from the kind of theoretical pursuits that led to the formulation of universal rules and other invariant instructional elements (such as fixed taxonomies and plug-in teaching models). Such pursuits, he claimed, although guided by the banner of “theory into practice,” were actually ill-fitting to practice.

Theory, by its very character, does not and cannot take account of all the matters which are crucial to questions of what, who, and how to teach; that is, theories cannot be applied, as principles, to the solutions of problems concerning what to do for real individuals, small groups, or real institutions located in time and space—the subjects and clients of schooling and schools. (Schwab, 1969, p. 287)

Schwab called for a more careful consideration of the practical in the interests of understanding and honoring situational and local conditions. Theory could not act alone in the schooling context; it had to be supplemented by practical arts that kept the real or concrete in focus.

If, then, theory is to be used well in the determination of curricular practice, it requires a supplement. It requires arts which bring a theory to its application; first, arts which identify the disparities between real thing and theoretic representation; second, arts which modify the theory in the course of its application, in light of the discrepancies; and, third, arts which devise ways for taking account of the many aspects of the real thing which the theory does not take into account. (Schwab, 1969, p. 310)

Is there an indictment of Tyler somewhere in this? Certainly Tyler’s work had become an instrument for many of the universal instructional models that prevailed in the school, including dubious interpretations of the rationale that reduced it to a purely instructional affair. The role of behavioral objectives, which Tyler highlighted in his rationale, had also wreaked its share of damage as various performance-based or competency-based curricula had found their ways into schools, promising mastery rates of achievement. But Tyler was as much a critic of these actions as Schwab.
A better place to go to answer the question of whether Tyler stands indicted by Schwab is to the six signs of crisis that Schwab identified in the curriculum field in 1969. If we could accuse Tyler of helping to fortify any of the signs of crisis detailed by Schwab (1969), we could simultaneously say something about a separation, or even the grander notion of reconceptualization. The six signs are (1) “a translocation of its problems and the solving of them from the practitioners of the field to other men” (p. 301); (2) “a flight from use of principles and methods to talk about them” (p. 301); (3) “an attempt by practitioners to return to the subject matter in a state of innocence, shorn not only of current principles but of all principles” (p. 301); (4) “a flight to the sidelines, to the role of observer, commentator, historian and critic of the contributions of others to the field” (p. 301); (5) “a repetition of old and familiar knowledge in new languages which add little or nothing to the old meanings as embodied in the older and familiar language” (p. 301); and (6) “a marked increase in eristic, contentious and ad hominem debate” (p. 302). Let us take each and see if we can show that Schwab was indicting (directly or otherwise) the generational lines of thinking brought to us by Tyler and Bobbitt.

The translocation of the field’s “problems from the practitioners of the field to other men” might be construed as an argument against Tyler, depending on what we mean by the problems of the field. If we take it to mean problems in the school curriculum, some scholars might claim that Tyler’s rationale represents exactly the type of curriculum thinking that has allowed so much of today’s school curriculum to be influenced by outside forces, most notably test makers. Certainly, Educational Testing Service (ETS) and Iowa Testing Programs (ITP) have more influence on the school curriculum today than any curriculum professors do. But Tyler’s rationale never offered a word of support for a test-driven curriculum. And Tyler, who was an expert in educational measurement, made it very clear that tests entail only some part of the evaluation process, and that the design or form of all evaluation should follow the function or the purposes of the school. The effect of translocating authority away from curriculum practitioners through the use of the Tyler rationale was, if real, unintended and certainly unwanted. The fact of the matter is that Schwab’s fears about translocating the solving of the field’s problems “to other men” is not a very compelling fear from the standpoint of Tyler’s or Bobbitt’s influence. In fact, the primary criticism emerging from reconceptualist thinking against Tyler constructs him as a hegemonist, far from anyone who might produce or otherwise accept any translocation of authority.

Schwab (1969) also saw crisis in “a flight from the use and principles of methods to talk about them” and its variants, “a retreat to the role of observer, commentator, historian and critic of the contributions of others to the field,” as well as “a marked increase in contentious and ad hominem debate” (pp. 301–302). Bobbitt and Tyler really were not “critics” at all, and they certainly did not quality as theoretical thinkers. They were largely cur-
riculum developers who were in and of the schools. One will not find either of them in the middle of any weighty epistemological debates. Tyler, in fact, never even offered a response to Kliebard’s (1970) popular and still widely received criticism of his rationale. He did what Schwab must have admired: he openly said that he would not respond to criticism of the rationale that did not offer a practical alternative. Tyler did involve himself in some national educational policy concerns, but this too was practical advice-giving work, which included giving counsel to several U.S. presidents and helping to construct and formulate national testing programs, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Similarly, Schwab’s (1969) third reference to crisis, which he described as “an attempt by practitioners to return to the subject matter in a state of innocence, shorn not only of current principles but of all principles” (p. 301), has no target in Tyler or Bobbitt. Being shorn of all principles implies a failure to build on earlier ideas and precedential work. Tyler’s work, as discussed, is embedded in generational ideas that live by precedent and sustained attention, a condition that flies in the face of Schwab’s violation. Tyler surely improved on Bobbitt and Schwab arguably improved on Tyler, and the overall effect is an evolving framework of thinking about the school curriculum that is time-proven and avoids careless reinvention.

Finally, the idea of “repeating old and familiar knowledge in new languages which adds little or nothing to the old meanings” (Schwab, 1969, p. 301) is a sign of crisis that Tyler’s critics are keen to level against him. Tyler, they say, is old wine, produced and aged from the social efficiency vineyards, in a new bottle. But as I indicated earlier, the differences between Tyler and Bobbitt are equal to their commonalities. To look past these vital differences is to completely misunderstand Tyler. Much of the old knowledge is still there, as it should be, but as demonstrated, new meanings and new insights prevail too.

CONCLUSIONS

The history of the curriculum field has had its share of dark episodes, but it has nevertheless given us a heritage of thought and insight that speaks directly to school improvements. These generational lines of insight, some of which are rooted in social efficiency, are the basic building blocks of the field. They are at the core of all who have been thinking about the school curriculum. The turbulence caused by Schwab’s criticism of 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. The focus on the development of the school experience, the belief in the local management of the school, the tendency to approach the curriculum without a priori ideological commitments, and
the references to key sources for decision-making (society, students, and subject matter) were generational ideas that Schwab used to the benefit of his own essays. Schwab’s “new look” at the curriculum inherited these insights and then went an important step further by showing us the way toward a more participatory process in curriculum decision-making that kept the school close to the hands of the people and the practitioners, and that produced better teacher ownership of and investment in school reform.

Schwab, in this sense, was as much a tool of continuity in the field as he was an innovator. The six signs of crisis he outlined very much imply a return to many of the first principles we find in Tyler’s work. To avoid a crisis, Schwab says, we (curriculum professors) should work in schools rather than talk about them; we should take charge of the school rather than allow others do it; we should build on past knowledge and not reinvent the wheel; we should focus more on the practical than the theoretical and avoid the entanglements of ad hominem debate. Tyler and Bobbitt would agree because this undeniably describes the kind of orientation toward the school curriculum that they favored and nurtured throughout their professional careers.

NOTES

1. This break from Bobbitt makes sense in other ways too. Tyler’s critics often forget that one of Tyler’s mentors at the University of Chicago was Charles Judd, a psychologist whose research focused on the role of generalization in the transfer of learning.

2. William Wraga first saw the value of using the six signs as a way to evaluate the present-day conditions of the curriculum field. Recently we used them to demonstrate what needs to be done to bring new synthesis and understanding to the divisions in the curriculum field; see Wraga, W., and P. S. Hlebowitsh. 2003. Toward a renaissance in curriculum theory and development in the USA. Journal of Curriculum Studies 35 (4): 425–37.

REFERENCES


