Why North American curriculum research could enrich Swiss curriculum studies

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Abstract
Implementing American curriculum research in another country is very problematic and frequently undesired because curriculum studies are complex as there are differences in terms, history, research approaches and political and social contexts. Nevertheless, it is worthwhile to consider some North American curriculum theories as the findings lead to an enriching understanding of schools and, hence, of curricula and society.
In this article, William Pinar’s method of “currere” is explained to determine whether his research theory could improve Swiss curriculum studies. The findings in the “self”, in historical approaches and in the use of language lead to enriching possibilities. Moreover, different ideas on the Anglo-Saxon approach, the fundamental Spencerian question and curriculum as a verb point to diverse research possibilities are also addressed. By consulting the findings, Swiss studies could gain a broader view on “curriculum studies” without losing their idiosyncrasies.

Keywords: American curriculum research; Switzerland; currere.

"If living on earth as humans, experiencing being and becoming, matters in education, it behooves us to transform the language of school life such that multiple meanings of the world curriculum can prevail."
(Ted T. Aoki, Curriculum in a New Key, p. 420)

Introduction
To write an article about curriculum studies seems to be problematic: There are difficulties in defining the term as the field can be understood as very wide with many blurry zones. Especially in Swiss conditions, curriculum studies must address the terms “Curriculum” and “Lehrplan”, which leads to divergent concepts and points to different cultural backgrounds, making applications of, e.g., American ideas even more difficult. However, it is worthwhile to investigate because the topic “curriculum studies” gives deep insights regarding school and, hence, society, history and individuals. School has a history and is how it is today because of its past (Tröhler, 2011a, p. 32). Thus, the historical context of a country must be considered, and it is a challenge to employ methods in different countries but can lead to broader views and enriching results. Moritz Rosenmund, e.g., points to the interdependencies of curricular processes, contextual conditions and combinations of historical and institutional factors for comparing curriculum studies (Rosenmund, 2002, p. 299). Furthermore, Thomas S. Popkewitz (2011) emphasizes the history of the present, which he sees as “a strategy to excavate the multiple historical practices that come together to give
intelligibility to what is ‘seen’ and acted on as the objects of schooling” (p. 2). It is assumed that curricula as formal and non-formal social practices give answers to questions about which cultural goods (knowhow, methods, techniques, and norms) are important at what time in schools because school is society and how society wants to educate their children to become citizens. Furthermore, notions about nation and about values, which include (critical) thinking and knowledge, are seen as a major component of schooling.

Curricula set parameters of practice and possibilities, and therefore, they deserve our attention (Goodson, 1997). If curricula are seen as steering instruments, then research points to weak correlations (see, e.g., Oelkers, 2006), but if curricula are taken as expressions of social norms and ideals used to fabricate the future citizens, then curricula can be seen as very valuable to investigate. In general, curriculum research uses curricula to determine which ideals and norms are important where and at what time. Those are the reasons why Swiss researchers should look to other continents occasionally: North America has a long tradition of Curriculum Studies and has contributed their studies and provoking ideas to obtain deeper understandings of schools in a broader sense for decades. Additionally, North America receives institutional support for curriculum studies, which has its own departments at universities (Tröhler, 2014, p. 61). The institutionalization of processes facilitates exchanges and supports curriculum research (Moreira, 2015, p. 214). Generally, “curriculum history in particular and curriculum studies in general have remained largely restricted to the English-speaking world” (Tröhler, 2016, in press). Thus, the insensitivity to curriculum research is very high in North America but not in Switzerland. In Switzerland, the field of curriculum research has often been marginalized and has received little academic attention, resulting in an empirical and theoretical gap in research (Horlacher & De Vincenti, 2014, p. 477). Rudolf Künzli emphasizes that in the 1980s, in Switzerland, the development of schools included broad participation of teachers, parents and local authorities responsible for compulsory school. Thus, “curriculum-making was understood as school development” (Künzli, 2002, p. 216). He goes on to argue that the focus was foremost on individual schools and terms such as effectiveness (ibid, p. 218), which is a quite narrow understanding of curriculum research. Furthermore, Westbury underlines that there are two very different traditions of didactics and curriculum research in Germany and North America because of different historical, social and cultural differences, leading to different intellectual and practical work (Westbury, 2000, p. 22). The aim of this article is not to implement American curriculum research directly in another country because that would lead to severe problems given the differences in terms, history, research approaches and political and social contexts that must be considered, as explained above. Nor is our idea to neglect didactics as explained by Hopman et al. (see, e.g., Hopmann & Riquarts, 2000). The aim of this article is to think about some ideas that could broaden Swiss curriculum research. In other words, Ian Westbury et al. (2000) emphasize in their book Teaching as a Reflective Practice: The German Didaktik Tradition that the North American tradition of curriculum research could be enriched by didactics; thus, the opposite should be possible too. In this article, I address the question of why American curriculum research could enrich Swiss
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curriculum studies or, more precisely, why additional ideas could lead to deeper and richer results in Swiss curriculum research and what such results would mean. It is of utmost research interest to take the complexity of curriculum research into account, including the idiosyncrasies of regions or countries, and it is not our goal to implement American thoughts without considering the specific contexts. José Augusto Pacheco asks in his article about Curriculum Studies “What is the field today?” and compares four theories of the well-known scholars William F. Pinar, Michael W. Apple, Ivor Goodson and Michael Young. He points to the frictions, confusions and similarities of the four approaches and concludes that some curricular scholars hold a strong conviction of curriculum as a conversation, while others stress the primacy of the social and political by rejecting the subjectivity of the curriculum (Pacheco, 2012, p. 14). In this article, William Pinar’s ideas of “currere” emphasizing curriculum as a verb and, thus, as a fluid process is the focus of the first section. Based on the method of “currere” the self, history and language are explained, which helps us to identify possibilities for applying this theory. In section II, the book “Curriculum Theorizing and Teacher Education” (Phelan, 2015) from the Canadian Prof. Dr. Anne Phelan, which is based on data extracted from a larger project (2002-2005) on the phenomenon of conflicts within the professional education of teachers, doctors, social workers and nurses, including the triad relationship of student, field monitor and faculty advisor (Phelan et al., 2002), is considered to exemplify William Pinar’s theory. She brings together curriculum theory and tangible teacher education in Canada and explores these topics through ethical, political, and aesthetical lenses, pointing to disruptions, power and places, and otherness (Phelan, 2015). In the third section, the question of why those thoughts could enrich Swiss curriculum research is explained from a broad perspective.

I argue that performing curriculum research, such as searching for the fundamental Spencerian question or handling curriculum as a verb, leads to intriguing results about curriculum in particular and school and society in general. The findings in the “self”, historical approaches and the use of language enrich possibilities in Swiss curriculum research and help us to gain broader views on “curriculum studies” without becoming alike or neglecting its own idiosyncrasies.

Section I: “Currere”, with a focus on the Self, History and Language

One of William Pinar’s seven major contributions to curriculum studies is his concept of “currere”, in which curriculum evolves from a noun to a verb and includes a “multifaceted process, involving not only official policy, prescribed textbooks, standardized examinations, but as well the “complicated conversation” of the participants” (Pinar, 2004, p. 19). The verb “currere” stresses the idea of circularity, processes and activities of the self. William Pinar’s method of “currere” comprises four steps: “the regressive, the progressive, the analytical, and the synthetical” (Pinar, 2004, p. 35). Those steps led to temporal and cognitive movements, include an autobiographical study of educational experiences and comprise ontological structures. Thus, “currere” relates academic knowledge, autobiographical educational experiences and historical, political and cultural contexts. In short, “currere” is the lived experience of curriculum” (Pinar, 2011, p. 75). The characteristics of the method are “(a) regressive, because it involves description and analysis of one’s intellectual biography or, if you prefer,
educational past" (Pinar, 1975, p. 424). Thus, history and the “self” become crucial. Both are related to step (b) and called “progressive”, because the imagined future is described, depending on the “self” and the past. The third step points to psychoanalysis and transformation of time: “(c) analytic, because it calls for a psychoanalysis of one’s phenomenologically described educational present, past, and future” (Pinar, 1975, p. 424). Therefore, the self includes not only the past, the present and the future but also psychological aspects. The final step “(d) synthetic” brings “the fragments of educational experience (that is to say the response and context of the subject)” together and integrates them into the larger political and cultural contexts (Pinar, 1975, p. 424). Thus, individual aspects are put into related and divergent contexts. Contexts comprise “intellectual histories and present circumstances” (Pinar, 2015, p. 93). Thus, by including diverse processes and circumstances, the “self”, history and conversation/language become crucial and are explained in more detail in the following paragraph.

In particular, the “self” includes the individual in the social and historical context and reconstructing the academic knowledge to its professional formation. Connections are made in historical time, considering regional, national and migrating groups. By no means does the “self” point to the “bourgeois individual” but rather to “the vortex of psychosocial and discursive relations theorized by Lacan, Freud, and Foucault” (Pinar, 2004, p. 30). Thus, the “self” encompasses self-formation through academic disciplines and self-conscious situations in society within historical moments. Self-formation also includes scepticism toward dominant culture and character (Pinar, 2011, p. 188). It emphasizes the everyday experiences of teachers and students or, as is more generally said, individual experiences and points to capacities to learn from them, which are reconstructed through thinking and discussions. In addition, with “currere”, history becomes crucial. History is thought of together with individuality, subjectivity and lived experience: “History makes clear that we are ourselves are historical” (Pinar, 2015, p. 117). To understand curriculum comprehensively, it is of the utmost importance to portray events historically (Pinar, 1995, p. 69). History and historical moments are studied within individual subjectivities and academic knowledge, which are influenced by conversation with those around us. Thereby, “language derives from culturally specific traditions and addresses nationally specific situations” (Pinar, 2015, p. 27). Language has a specific history, is addressed to specific participants with different individual and intellectual histories and must consider present circumstances. In short, “currere” is complicated conversation (Pinar, 2015, p. 110).

William Pinar’s ideas on “currere”, which include the explained topics of the “self”, history with the consulted sources and conversation/language, are explained in the next section with a curriculum study text from Canada.

Section II: Examples using Anne Phelan’s curriculum studies

Anne Phelan’s book “Curriculum Theorizing and Teacher Education” addresses the fundamental Spencerian* question: What knowledge is of most worth? (Spencer, 1884, p. 5-82) This question is addressed to society and individuals to think about what we declare to be important in a curriculum and is
fundamental. Anne Phelan addresses this question directly in her text (see, e.g., Phelan, 2015, p.7). Furthermore, she argues within Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities” (Anderson, 2006) and addresses the Anglo-Saxon approach of curriculum analyses, which includes aspects of “schooling”; theories of content; curricula theories; methodologies; and analyses of political, social and cultural circumstances of public schools and their influences, effects, expected and unexpected intentions and processes, for different and changing actors (Künzli, 2009, p. 134-148). Hence, profound similarities in ideas to other curriculum studies in America and Europe can be found. However, where could enriching ideas be found?

Deeper insights can be gained by considering the “self”. Anne Phelan argues that the “self” can be used to explain differences as part of responsibility and relation of the self to the “unknowability of the other that is, the otherness of the other” (Phelan, 2015, p. 113). Pointing to the process of self-formation, which is “imbricated in the social and historical”, educationally profound questions, such as “what knowledge is of most worth, to what purposes, and in whose interests?” (Phelan, 2015, p. 7), become crucial. In a case study where a student teacher behaved aggressively during a lesson and, thus, was not reacting as expected, inviting us to explore powers in institutions, she stresses that incorporating mentor teachers’ ideas goes hand in hand with eliminating differences. In teacher education, a culture of understanding is promoted, and smooth functioning is desired. “Thus, the space of difference is effectively wiped out of pedagogical relations” (Phelan, 2015, p. 105). Included in the standard are the goals of the teacher students themselves and of the mentor teacher and the teacher administration. Hence, the “self” is shaped by individuals themselves, experienced professionals, academic knowledge, and history and society. The aim is to harmonize and avoid differences. Anne Phelan explores this using an approach through the “self’s” ruptures and discontinuities and hidden power structures and hegemonial ideologies. These ideas go above the “self” in Swiss studies, where the “self” exists mainly in the authors’ freedom to choose their own topics in the wide range of curriculum studies, where they explore the same fundamental question about what knowledge is of most worth, whereas in the texts themselves, the “self” is not explicitly considered. Although the texts seek to detect power structures or explaining ruptures and hegemonial thinking, the “self” is hidden behind the topic and is not at all important (see, e.g., Boser and Brühwiler (in press) or Manz, 2015). Thus, the “self” as explained in William F. Pinar’s “currere” and exemplified with Anne Phelan’s book helps to broaden the view on a topic and deepens the focuses on discontinuities, ruptures and problems.

Regarding history and including the consulted sources William Pinar’s “currere” points to its intrinsic importance as arguments are driven from it and only with it can relevant results be explained. In Anne Phelan’s studies, they are used to address ruptures. She studies the present period addressing contemporary problems without forgetting the past. History is taken to explain current problems, as demonstrated in the example above.

Seeing curriculum as “complicated conversation” (Pinar, 2004, p. 19) leads to ideas about language. Against the background of William Pinar’s “currere” language derives from culturally specific traditions. Anne Phelan argues that
language is not a transparent or objective medium for the communication of eternal truths. Truth then becomes a production within groups or society (Phelan, 2015, p. 97). Additionally, she uses the expression “at the edge of language” (Phelan, 2015, p. 95) and stresses that the student teacher, speaking the same language as the mother, was failed by language the mother refused to understand and concludes that “to refuse understanding is to attend to the alterity of the person” (Phelan, 2015, p. 112). Therefore, language is important to foster unity despite lingual differences (Boser and Brühwiler, in press). Thus, language is directly used to explain school in a historic dimension on a political level.

Second, the power structures of language are mentioned: She points to different authors to explain the structures: “The political provokes a concern with the power dynamics of such encounters. …In calling on interlocutors as diverse as Aristotle, Agamben, Schütz, Herbart, Nussbaum, Arendt, Lyotard, Nietzsche, Kristeva, and Foucault, I have found languages provocative and informative for my project” (Phelan, 2015, p. 7). Hence, language is used in Phelan’s study to address the topic and draw the appropriate conclusions in relation to function, thoughts about language and power structures.

The explanations of this section serve to answer the question in the next section about enriching possibilities with curriculum theories in other countries.

Section III: Enriching results?

In the beginning of section II, we mention that Anne Phelan argued with Benedict Anderson’s “imagined communities”. Thereby, in Phelan’s paper, Anderson is taken to “imaging teaching”, which is a citizen in a nation, but the latter is mentioned indirectly and points to the different language used to shape a teacher:

“A profession, not unlike a nation, is a manufactured product, a cultural artifact, a matter of shared imaginings (Anderson, 1991). A large part of our imaging teaching … is its realist narratives of understanding / misunderstanding, getting it / not getting it, fitting / not fitting” (Phelan, 2015, p. 112-113).

Anderson’s idea is well known in curriculum research in Switzerland as well. However, different genealogies can be identified in the two countries: In the Swiss approach, the “imagined nation” arises with links through language in largely unselfconscious processes resulting from interactions between different actors to form a nation. Phelan points to new thoughts about “imaging” teacher and teaching. Hence, she goes beyond the original idea of Anderson and adds her own very free thoughts on it, leading to interesting results.

With William Pinar’s idea of “currere”, the “self”, history and language become crucial. Curriculum researchers in Switzerland frequently emphasize the sources in a historical perspective. The focus is on the sources, and everyone tries to stay as close to them as possible. The approaches are different as some emphasize actors, while others stress a macro- or micro-perspective or prefer discursive analyses, but the sources always stimulate the approach and determine how research will be done. The “self”, as mentioned before, is in the background and often not considered. It is important to remember that William Pinar’s “currere” means that, in the Swiss context, the historical dimension is
emphasized much more than in the Canadian approach. Moreover, it reveals a different disciplinary thinking, as mentioned in the introduction, with departments at universities, leading to more studies, greater variety and different approaches. For example: William Pinar writes of verticality and horizontality. Verticality is defined as the intellectual history of the field, including “external circumstances in which those ideas are generated” (Pinar, 2015, p. 38), and horizontality refers to the set of present intellectual circumstances encompassing the social and political milieu that influences and structures this set. Horizontality and verticality are intertwined disciplinary structures and exemplary forms of curriculum design (Pinar, 2015, p. 38-42). Thus, curriculum research could be enriched by consulting other disciplinary thinking or alterity in intellectual history.

Daniel Tröhler, a Swiss curriculum scholar, states: “I see no other way than to historize not only a topic but the construer of the topic as well. … Doing history is essentially the self-discovering of one’s own standpoint” (Tröhler, 2011b, p. 193). This statement reveals two essential findings: First, “the self” is or should be included in the Swiss historical perspective of curriculum research, and secondly, and of the utmost interest for this article, it points to the different applications of the “self”, meaning that Tröhler’s statement discloses a Swiss understanding of “currere” that is different from the Canadian one. Thus, the “Canadian self” points to an active thinker who tries to take responsibility for the ongoing educational processes, whereas the “Swiss self” emphasizes historical sources. Increasing the “self” in Swiss curriculum studies would mean declaring the “subjectivity” of the findings but also facilitate discovering deeper insights regarding disciplinary thinking and future possibilities. Therefore, researchers must be aware of the “self” and the relationship between the topic and “self” but do not have to note this directly in each paper. The analyses reveal that in the Swiss condition, the “self” is more hidden behind the historical dimensions because psychological elements are very often undesired in historical research. However, rethinking the “self” in a more dynamic and broader sense could enrich not only individual research on curriculum studies but also promote rethinking the organizational structures of curriculum research in general. Trying to bring more aspects of the “self” in future curriculum studies would enrich research and researchers and allow more alterity and openness. The “self” consists of different times, divergent contexts, reconstructed knowledge, psychological and pedagogical aspects. Thomas S. Popkewitz (2005) defines the “modern self” as “a particular historic invention of one who plans and orders actions in a rational way to bring about progress in a world of uncertainty” (p.5). He specifies that the “modern self” must be thought of as plural “selves and multiple modernities” (p. 6). Therefore, researchers in Switzerland should consider the foremost ideas of high relevance about the pluralities of the “modern selves” when investigating the long 19th century and the idea of rationality of self-responsible individuals, where struggles of church and lay powers about school issues dominate and have created certain narratives of the history of schooling. The findings of this article could help to begin closing the gap, as mentioned in the introduction, in Swiss curriculum research, which is represented on an empirical and theoretical level, and therefore, the transformation of knowledge in relation to history could play an important role.
Another possibility is to foster engagement in current Swiss debates about “Lehrplan 21”, which is a project of 21 Swiss cantons to harmonize schools (see, e.g., Lehrplan 21, http://www.lehrplan.ch/) as the responsibility for schools remains with the cantons. They deal foremost with “skills” and the “knowledge based economy”, forgetting that school has a past. Linking historical and social views on how citizens can be seen could contribute important ideas to current school discussions and could demonstrate that school has a history and is how it is today because of its past (Tröhler, 2011a, p. 11-33). In rethinking the “self” politicians, teachers, parents, and scholars could discuss the essential question, “What knowledge is of most worth?” This could lead to other reforms with different aims, such as the ones of “Lehrplan 21”.

The method of “currere” and the self, history and language approaches point to enriching results, but “currere” is not a panacea. The mentioned examples point to a general problem of curriculum research, which is the analysis of hidden social orders and economical thinking, which aren’t visible at first glimpse. Hegemonic ideologies are legitimated knowledge in schools and support specific norms (see for more details: Apple, 2004), which are partly visible in sources but must also be somehow interpreted without constructing the past. These problems are faced in “currere” by rethinking one’s own experience in a broad social and cultural context, to which academic knowledge belongs as well. Anne Phelan calls them “second thoughts”:

“The idea of second thoughts conjures images of returning, as if for the first time, to review and rearticulate meanings long taken for granted. Second thoughts are about freeing ourselves from memories that entangle us so that they can be reconsidered” (Phelan, 2015, p. 5).

Hegemonial thinking is questioned in general, but so does one’s own knowledge; consequently, subjectivity goes far beyond individuality and psychological thinking. Considering curriculum as a process helps us to keep our thinking flexible and fluid and to detect hegemonial thinking, but it has its weaknesses: Not all processes can be detected, and they may differ, even within a single region. If one is aware of such problems, processes allow insights and point to transforming effects that could not be detected without the notion of “currere”. International application must address these different processes rooted in different genealogies, which were mentioned in the beginning of this article. Specifically, the application of “currere” in Switzerland faces such problems, but the findings stress that research does not have to be similar to obtain bountiful results; indeed, considering another research approach can enrich one’s own investigations.

Another risk of focusing too much on the “self” relates to the “individualizing” of problems, which means educationalizing social problems on an individual level and, thus, making an individual responsible for everything that goes wrong. To limit this danger, the notion of a type of “system-world” can be highlighted. Peter Grimmett et al. (2010) enriches curriculum studies by “curriculum re-design.” Supporting William Pinar’s idea of “currere”, they endorse a co-evolution of the system-world with the re-conceptualized curriculum. It is not that curriculum design doesn’t exist in the re-conceptualized curriculum; instead,
it is “in the shadow of the re-conceptualists; it is not touched by contemporary discourses and functions largely as a parallel but unconnected activity” (Grimmett et al., 2010, p. 242). They continue, taking curriculum as text and concluding that it represents “a linguistic system-world” (Grimmett et al., 2010, p. 255), which designs and inscribes the life-worlds of learners (Grimmett et al., 2010, p. 250) and should be more closely connected. Hence, the subjective must be strengthened in the social and the fields of curriculum studies brought into open discussions with each other. This could help to diminish the gap between different academic fields or, as mentioned above, to rethink the horizontality and verticality of the present discipline of curriculum research.

Notes
1. The terms “Lehrplan” and “curriculum” both have a common core meaning, which generally includes what should be taught at school; however, both derive from different histories and cultures. The Anglo-Saxon term “curriculum” encompasses more topics about schools than the German term “Lehrplan” (Künzli, 2009).
2. The terms “Lehrplan” and “curriculum” both have a common core meaning, which generally includes what should be taught at school; however, both derive from different histories and cultures. The Anglo-Saxon term “curriculum” encompasses more topics about schools than the German term “Lehrplan” (Künzli, 2009).
3. William Pinar writes of his seven contributions to curriculum studies: currere, reconceptualization, queer theory, anti-racist education, re-conceptualizing of curriculum development, conception of place, and internationalization of curriculum studies (Pinar, 2015, pp. 1-2).
4. In his 1859 essay, Herbert Spencer points to the question “What knowledge is of most worth?” and made it famous, but pedagogues have addressed this question since the beginning of formal education (Broudy, 1982, pp. 574-578).

References
Lehrplan 21, URL: [http://www.lehrplan.ch/](http://www.lehrplan.ch/)


