Comment and Response

Ideologies and the Curriculum of Teacher Education: A Comment on Wilson*

Donald Power
Lakehead University

It was with considerable interest that I read Wilson's article. In general, I agree with Wilson that there are three distinct views of curriculum to be considered when developing or revising a program of teacher education, and that they are, namely, the traditionalist, the conceptual-empiricist, and the reconceptualist curriculum perspectives. With respect to Wilson's suggestion that there is a need for greater dialogue concerning the beliefs and academic interests of teacher education, my main comments are that Wilson's analysis can be further understood with reference to a seminal article by Kohlberg and Mayer (1972) which is not included in his references, that the work of extending the outline (i.e., Figure 1 (p. 57)) would give more clarification to the analysis, and that the three curriculum views discussed can be more clearly understood, when interpreted in relation to conservative, liberal, and socialist political philosophies.

It is not in criticism of Wilson that I say that the significant Kohlberg and Mayer article (1972) was omitted from the references, for it frequently happens that authors coincidentally arrive at similar conclusions. It should be noted as well that Wilson does not use the same terminological categories as Kohlberg and Mayer to describe the main educational perspectives, yet the central concepts are clearly congruent in that the traditionalist, the conceptual-empiricist, and the reconceptualist terms in Wilson's article are respectively consistent with the cultural transmission, cognitive-developmental, and radical-romantic models used by Kohlberg and Mayer.

There is ample evidence to prove the compatibility of the two accounts. For example, Wilson says that a teacher education program, based on the traditionalist view, stresses the importance of "knowledge steeped in beliefs and preferences of academic areas of study," and emphasizes the necessity of having the student teacher develop "a strong

* This comment is made on a previously published article by Donald C. Wilson, "A Critical Examination of Teacher Education from the Perspective of Curriculum," *Canadian Journal of Education*, 1981, *6*(1), 55-64.

subject area specialization" (p. 58). In comparison, Kohlberg and Mayer say that "the origins of cultural transmission ideology are rooted in the classical academic tradition of Western education. Traditional educators believe that their primary task is the transmission to the present generation of bodies of information and rules or values collected from the past" (pp. 452-453). Thus, a conclusion can be drawn that the traditionalist view of a teacher education curriculum falls within the framework of cultural transmission ideology.

Secondly, when referring to the conceptualist-empiricist view, Wilson says that the most successful efforts in creating a practicum from this perspective "have been projects stressing problem-solving inquiry skills and hierarchical stages of human development, such as those advocated by Jean Piaget and Lawrence Kohlberg" (p. 60). In turn, Kohlberg and Mayer use the term "cognitive-development" to describe that progressive educational ideology which "holds that education should nourish the child's interaction with a developing society," and that this view "developed as part of the pragmatic-functional-genetic philosophies of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries" (p. 454). A close reading of the psychological, epistemological, and ethical value positions of cognitive-developmentalism, as presented by Kohlberg and Mayer, gives added depth of understanding to the conceptualist-empiricist view presented by Wilson.

Thirdly, the reconceptualist perspective of the curriculum, according to Wilson, "has meant the inclusion of thinking from philosophy of social science, phenomenology, and certain areas of the humanities," so that a teacher education program based on it "emphasizes knowledge self-reflective in nature, rather than knowledge emphasizing the structure of disciplines or the knowledge dependent on how children learn" (p. 61). Here again there is complementarity between that view and the romantic educational ideology which, according to Kohlberg and Mayer, "springs not only from a maturational psychology, but from an existential or phenomenological epistemology, defining knowledge and reality as referring to the immediate inner experience of the self. Knowledge or truth in the romantic epistemology is self-awareness or self-insight, a form of truth with emotional as well as intellectual components" (p. 460).

Having established the broad outlines for the two analyses compared, and having shown that there is a high degree of similarity between them, it now needs to be noted that Wilson does not agree with Kohlberg and Mayer as to which of the three perspectives should serve as the foundation of teacher education. For the latter, the objectives of progressive ideology are to be preferred. They say, "The romantic tends to define educational objectives in terms of a 'bag of virtues'. . . . Such definitions of objectives are justified by a psychiatric theory of a spontaneous, creative or self-confident personality. . . . The cultural transmission ideology . . . defines the long range objective as eventual power and status in the

social system. . . . The progressive believes that a liberal conception of education pursuing intrinsically worthy aims or states is the best one for everyone" (pp. 476-477). Wilson, it seems, is more sympathetic to the romantic-radical perspective insofar as he advocates approaches derived from the existential-phenomenological traditions. He says that "there is a need to conduct more inquiry into the significance teachers give to instructional planning," and "using a variety of ethnographic approaches would appear to be an appropriate means of gaining understanding of what happens in classrooms" (p. 63). Clearly, there is the persistent problem, then, of developing a defensible educational ideology.

REFERENCE

Kohlberg, L., & Mayer, R. Development as the aim of education. *Harvard Educational Review*, 1972, *42*(4), 449-496.

Donald Power is an Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Lakehead University, Thunder Bay, Ontario P7B 5E1.