

## THE FUTURE (1981)

“Existing theoretical orientations may be limited in preparing students for effective functioning in an ever-changing society,” G. Barry Morris begins.<sup>1</sup> He suggests that a “rapidly changing socio-politico-economic framework may be of considerable significance in the development of future conceptualizations in education.”<sup>2</sup> His rationale is historical, referencing the 1920s and 1930s when “education reflected the needs of this era” by focusing on “the behaviour of the child,” specifically the child’s “appropriate behaviour,” something, he continues, “curriculum emphasized.”<sup>3</sup> In the 1940 and 1950s curriculum theory reflected the “value of democracy,” including “individuality” and “processes of learning,” specifically the “cognitive and intellectual nature of the individual.”<sup>4</sup> “In summary,” Morris concludes, “it seems reasonable to conclude that, historically, an interrelationship has existed among the ‘spirit of the times,’ the dominant conception of the human being, and educational goals and practice.”<sup>5</sup>

One wrinkle in these sweeping generalizations that Morris allows is what he terms “educational lag,” a phenomenon about which Brent Davis also complains to end his gloss of complexity theory.<sup>6</sup> “Moreover,” Morris allows, “there may be wide differences between professional rhetoric and practice in the schools,”<sup>7</sup> an understatement to be sure: “Teachers are frequently perceived as conservative and cautious in, first, accepting new ideas and, secondly, implementing them fully.”<sup>8</sup> “Nevertheless,” he continues, “eventually the gap is decreased and a relationship observed.”<sup>9</sup>

“In the 1920s and 1930s,” Morris continues, “due to urbanization and industrialization, the family unit had so weakened that education focussed on the development of the *child* and specifically, *behaviour*.”<sup>10</sup> “In the 1940s and 1950s,” he reports, “Western society rejected utilitarian political ideologies,” and so the “school promoted a *democratic* orientation and emphasized the *cognitive* component of the individual.”<sup>11</sup> While it’s not entirely inaccurate to say that “education’s movement toward the *liberation of human potential* reflected the self-searching society of the 1960s and 1970s,”<sup>12</sup> that followed – in the United States at least – the early 1960s national curriculum reform which was not so focused.<sup>13</sup> From “this analysis of previous trends,” Morris becomes confident that “reasoned speculations about man and society in the future could be a basis for a re-conceptualization of education,” one that “would provide, at least in part, an educational perspective for the 1980s and 1990s.”<sup>14</sup>

Given the sweeping shifts in society, economics and politics that swept the twentieth century – including two world wars - it is plausible perhaps even obvious that “speculations about the future indicate that the survival of man will be of primary

concern,”<sup>15</sup> a theme famously associated with the concept of Canada itself.<sup>16</sup> If so he suggests that “an educational perspective reflecting ‘harmonious survival’ may be appropriate,” one that would prepare “individuals with the strategies, skills, and coping mechanisms to survive in an environment of new contingencies” which require, he imagines, “cooperation with others,” enabling all “to function harmoniously in an ordered and organized society, and to attain a meaningful life.”<sup>17</sup> Somehow in service to this fantasy is shifting the emphasis of curriculum from “what” the students to learn to “how,”<sup>18</sup> an apparently progressive view that has helped usher in a future of curriculum entirely technological in nature.<sup>19</sup> Sounding like Williamson<sup>20</sup> who is writing thirty years later, Morris presciently foresees that “in the future, the delivery of the curriculum may include a variety of mechanisms: multi-materials, flexible schedules, continuous progress, social experiences, team teaching, enrichment studies, creative experiences, community relations.”<sup>21</sup>

Morris sees “change” accelerating in the future, precipitating greater “stress,” a challenge requiring “new adaptive modes and behavioural patterns.”<sup>22</sup> In fact, “preparing individuals to function effectively in an ever-changing environment will be a responsibility of the educational process,” Morris asserts, “foster[ing] adaptive personalities, attitudes, skills, and coping strategies to enhance the quality of life.”<sup>23</sup> A curriculum of change could encourage “new attitudes,” including “the attitude that there is stability in change,”<sup>24</sup> a version of today’s technological demand to update to stay the same.<sup>25</sup> In addition to “a constantly changing environment,” students in the future must “prepare for the unanticipated” and “expect the unexpected.”<sup>26</sup> Rather the self-enclosed curriculum focused on increasing competence in school subjects copied from university-based academic disciplines, the curriculum of the future, Morris suggests, will provide “a sense of reality,” “as the ‘out there’ would be an integral component of the school curriculum.”<sup>27</sup>

Summarizing, Morris asserts the “need” – in an era of “rapid social change” – for “educators to emphasize the concept of change,” a concept incorporating “environmental” and “developmental” dimensions, preparing “the individual for the future.”<sup>28</sup> By “emphasizing the concept of change,” education would thereby “increase the individual’s ‘cope-ability,’ decrease stress, and enhance survival.”<sup>29</sup> After invoking the concept of “individual” throughout the essay,<sup>30</sup> Morris turns to “developing an individual’s conscious awareness” as “another area of concern for the future educator,” a concept he defines “as the individual’s ability to recognize, react to, and influence change.”<sup>31</sup> And after appearing to justify everything on developments in society (e.g. an era of rapid social change demands a curriculum focused on change), Morris suddenly inserts consideration for agency, asserting that: “An individual’s thinking expands, and awareness of the cultural, social, economic, and political determinants dictating the change results.”<sup>32</sup> He is confident that “consciously aware individuals would recognize the change, would react constructively to it, and could therefore attempt to influence it.”<sup>33</sup> Such “individuals would be capable of critical thinking,

problem solving and decision making in situations with ill-defined boundaries,” and a “certain stability and security would accrue to the individual, characteristics generally associated with psychological health.”<sup>34</sup> Morris concludes:

If survival in a context of rapid unpredictable change is of importance to the future, then the development of conscious awareness in individuals is of vital significance. Recognizing and reacting to change effectively, at both social and personal levels, will be necessary for successful living. Adequately prepared to meet change through an awareness of its effects on the self, individuals would be capable of significantly influencing and contributing to society.<sup>35</sup>

Despite the stakes being so high – survival itself – education can come to the rescue, provided it emphasize “the concepts of change, conscious awareness, and cooperation,” thereby “equip[ping] individuals with the necessary techniques to effectively deal with impending stress, reducing existential fears,” a curriculum focused on “social and personal change, develop[ing] new thinking strategies and implement[ing] ‘new basics,’” thereby “prepar[ing] the individual for the future.”<sup>36</sup>

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## COMMENTARY

Anton Birioukov-Brant – the research assistant for this essay – points out Morris’ reliance on reproduction theory, in Anton’s words the theory that “education has always mirrored changes in society, and in particular how educationalists conceptualized the person.” To ensure survival in society of the future, Morris argues that the curriculum of the future must emphasize three interrelated themes: change, conscious awareness, and adaptation. Anton found the concepts “interesting” if “vague,” a judgement with which I concur and would supplement by questioning the implication of reproduction theory: that curriculum mirrors (in this analysis - should mirror) society. In an era of “rapid change” I would favor a curriculum that contradicts it, one emphasizing a rhythm of adagio and topics appreciating conservation and preservation.

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## ENDNOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Morris 1982, 16.

<sup>2</sup> Morris 1982, 16. As the new millennium approached, concern over the future increased, prompting studies both popular – see Toffler 1970 – and academic, including those focused on education: see Longstreet and Shane 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Morris 1982, 17. Such a sweeping statement is bound to ignore detail. “In the 1920s,” I point out, ‘manhood’ ... was threatened, specifically the manhood of America’s (white) sons,” as many men perceived “maternal love threatened their son’s independence and mental health, reducing potentially virile young men into whining dependent mama’s boys” (Pinar 2007, 162). And while “child-centeredness” (Ravitch 2000, 169) was indeed a marker of education then, social reconstructionism (Ravitch 2000, 191) and social efficiency (Ravitch 2000, 378) also dominated curriculum conceptions, only indirectly attentive to “appropriate behaviour.”

<sup>4</sup> Morris 1982, 18. Morris must be thinking of Canada not the United States, where the pushback against progressive education’s emphasis on the individual was well underway, aggravated by Cold War anxieties (Pinar 2019, chapter 4).

<sup>5</sup> Morris 1982, 19. No doubt. The complexity comes in the term “interrelationship.” In the preceding statements Morris seems to express what would become in 1970s curriculum theory “reproduction theory,” e.g. that schools reproduced the socio-economic and political order (see Pinar et al. 1995, chapter 5). The concept of “interrelationship” could incorporate curriculum theory that contradicted the current order, for example the repudiation of the technologization of education in the theory and method of *currere*: Pinar and Grumet 2015 (1976).

<sup>6</sup> “Education,” Davis (2020, 43) writes, “as a domain has been slow to embrace and explore complexity, and this is telling. I know of no other domain so slow.” In that same essay, Davis does acknowledge the father of complexity theory in curriculum studies, but he references the wrong text. William Doll’s move to complexity theory is not registered in his 1993 book – there is a section on “The Cognitive Revolution” (Doll 1993, 124-132) but no mention of complexity theory (indeed, he ends that

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section on hermeneutics – but in the 2005 and 2012 collections: Doll et al. 2005, Trueit 2012.

<sup>7</sup> Morris 1982, 19.

<sup>8</sup> Morris 1982, 19. Such sweeping characterizations of educators require empirical verification. That said, certainly teachers are “perceived” to be “cautious” – school administrators and school boards often demand it – and given that children are involved, caution may be professionally advisable.

<sup>9</sup> Morris 1982, 19. Another sweeping statement requires empirical verification. Even when teachers are skeptical of theory and research, does that not imply a “relationship,” if one of resistance? A “gap” need not be “decreased” in order for a relationship to exist. If teachers adopted research recommendations uncritically, they would have no relationship – understood as something negotiable – to them; they would be compliant (as policymakers so often demand).

<sup>10</sup> Morris 1982, 19.

<sup>11</sup> Morris 1982, 19-20. Even if he limited these sweeping statements to Canada, there were differences among provinces: see Tomkins 1986.

<sup>12</sup> Morris 1982, 20.

<sup>13</sup> Pinar 2019, 55ff.

<sup>14</sup> Morris 1982, 20. There was indeed a Reconceptualization of curriculum studies in the United States (Pinar et al. 1995, chapter 4) that was reflected in and precipitated by scholarship underway in Canada, most prominently that of Ted Aoki in Alberta and Jacques Daignault and Clermont Gauthier in Quebec (Pinar and Reynolds 1992). Policy and school practice went in an entirely different direction, at least in the United States (Pinar 2019).

<sup>15</sup> Morris 1982, 22.

<sup>16</sup> Atwood 2012 (1972).

<sup>17</sup> Morris 1982, 22. If churches, mosques, synagogues, and temples – presumably with God on their side – have failed to produce such a utopia, how does Morris imagine schools can? Humanity’s utopian fantasies have focused on different institutions in different eras; this one – that schools can reform society – remains today, in Canada dedicated to erasing racist attitudes and practices toward (especially but not only) the First Peoples.

<sup>18</sup> Morris 1982, 22. This is a view against which I argue in Pinar 2019, insisting that “what” remains at least as if not more important than “how,” citing the moral imperative of studying residential schools in Canada, slavery in the United States, the Holocaust as well as the human tendency toward genocide – physical and cultural – everywhere. Those do not exhaust answers to the curriculum question – what knowledge is of most worth? – but they are first among them.

<sup>19</sup> See Williamson 2017. Of course, no one can see the future – Morris admits he is speculating – but it is curious that he fails to see the technological-economic implications of shifting from “what” to “how.” Without a canon – and the

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corresponding expertise (in knowledge, the “what” and “why” of education) teachers can claim – neoliberal policymakers annex education as entrepreneurship. Teacher bots replace embodied actually-existing teachers as computers can process “big data” in “real time” to more efficiently “facilitate learning,” the “how” of education.

<sup>20</sup> Williamson 2013.

<sup>21</sup> Morris 1982, 23.

<sup>22</sup> Morris 1982, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Morris 1982, 23.

<sup>24</sup> Morris 1982, 24.

<sup>25</sup> Chun 2016.

<sup>26</sup> Morris 1982, 24.

<sup>27</sup> Morris 1982, 24.

<sup>28</sup> Morris 1982, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Morris 1982, 24.

<sup>30</sup> For a history of the concept, see Siedentop 2014.

<sup>31</sup> Morris 1982, 24-25. I should have thought “conscious awareness” would include, even underline, inner awareness. Here it seems an instrumental capacity to capitalize on “change.”

<sup>32</sup> Morris 1982, 25.

<sup>33</sup> Morris 1982, 25.

<sup>34</sup> Morris 1982, 25.

<sup>35</sup> Morris 1982, 26.

<sup>36</sup> Morris 1982, 28-29.