### The Social Role of Education in Contemporary Society

In responding to this week's readings, one need only refer to the titles of my previous write-ups for this course – *Forms of Knowledge: Understanding the Intangible* and *Curriculum-Making: Finding the Balance* – for a general understanding of my thoughts regarding the process of defining educational objectives within curriculum construction. Many of the comments and questions I noted while reading Tyler's *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949) and Franklin's "Education for an Urban America: Ralph Tyler and the Curriculum Field (1987) were reinforced once I finally got to Eisner's "Educational Objectives – Help or Hindrance?" (1967). Eisner defines several limitations to curriculum theory regarding the functions that educational objectives are said to perform and he questions the degree to which objectives can be predicted and specified. Similar to what I wrote in response to Brian Fay's *Contemporary Philosophy of Social Sciences*, Eisner addresses the difficulty, rather the impossibility, of "measuring" certain forms of knowledge. He states that not all outcomes of curriculum and instruction lend themselves to measurement and rather than applying a "socially defined standard," evaluation requires a "human qualitative judgement." Although Eisner's views can be traced to his background in the arts like myself, I believe not all of his statements are dependant on the experience of teaching art. Throughout his article, Eisner not only challenges Tyler's thoughts about the construction of evaluation instruments, he successfully argues that specific educational objectives can hinder instruction.

Rather than continue to fill a page with praise for Eliot Eisner, I'd like to discuss a theory of my own, which stems from one of Tyler's "sources of information" in defining educational objectives. While responding to Tyler's pivotal role in curriculum theory, Franklin suggests that of equal importance to Tyler's views on the importance of curriculum evaluation procedures is his understanding of the role of educators in urban, industrialized society. Tyler outlined a need to investigate contemporary life outside of school, amongst other sources necessary in determining the purposes of education programs. Due to the amount of knowledge available after the Industrial Revolution, Tyler saw a crucial need to derive educational objectives from contemporary daily life partially due to the fact that students learn better when they apply learning to situations in real life. Franklin also highlights the fact that Tyler valued the teaching of cooperation within urban society, to remove aspects of isolation and to retain the sense of community that existed in rural areas prior to urban development. Franklin's article not only provides a more comprehensive account of Tyler's personal philosophy, it also emphasizes Tyler's understanding of the social role of education. Although modern society continues to change in levels of complexity, recent advances with digital technology seem to have propelled us into a new stage of contemporary life and I can't help but wonder if we need to reevaluate Tyler's views in response to the current digital age of communication.

If we are to study contemporary life outside of schools today in order to determine objectives for learning, we will find a steady increase in user-friendly digital technology with the internet now functioning as a more accessible tool for interconnectivity and interactivity, for all ages. Tyler's view of "cooperation" could now be updated to groups of individuals communicating through social-networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter. In a recent New York Times article "Brave New World of Digital Intimacy," (September 7, 2008) Clive Thompson states that social networking websites are allowing for a new form of intimacy, which can be described as an acute form of self-reflection. The contemporary life for students today requires the ability to convey personal feelings and ideas via digital technologies without being misinterpreted. Online technologies are already being incorporated into some forms of curriculum, however, more research needs to be done to properly evaluate not only the impact on the learning experience and the curriculum goals, but more importantly *how* the students are learning within these new environments.

How quickly should educators respond to this "need" within contemporary life? What do students need to know about digital technology in order to become part of a "cooperative" virtual society? The impact of digital culture on contemporary life is critical to the development of current and future understandings of curriculum and pedagogy.