

## When Does the Synoptic Text Become a Form of Appropriation?

Within *The Synoptic Text Today and other essays: Curriculum Development and the Reconceptualization*, (2006) William Pinar begins by acknowledging the difficulty of writing about curriculum development today stating, “If the post-Reconceptualization era is defined by the postmodern project of understanding (Slattery, 1995; Doll, 1993), in what sense can there be “curriculum development” that is simultaneously a form of understanding curriculum?” (p. ix) In other words, how can the *form* or method of curriculum development *function* to engage students and teachers in deepening their understanding of the curriculum itself? Pinar finds the answer in what he defines as the new synoptic text. The author proposes that scholarly summaries be provided to classroom teachers containing glimpses of recent research in the arts, humanities, social and natural sciences, as well as research in interdisciplinary areas, and that these summaries also include topics that “plague the present” such as sexual abuse and drugs. The synoptic texts should reconfigure the intellectual content of the curriculum by acknowledging “throughlines” along which subjectivity, society, and intellectual content run across the academic disciplines (p. 2). Pinar states that the composition of the new synoptic texts would become “a conceptual montage enabling teachers to complicate the conversations they themselves will lead in their own classrooms” (p. 2). As someone who favours interdisciplinary approaches to curriculum development and forms of curriculum, I do feel it important to encourage students to understand a text’s relation to social experience and subjective reconstruction. I also understand the pedagogical benefits in combining popular culture with academic content. However, I question at what point the collaged form of the synoptic experience becomes a form of appropriation, altering the meaning of the original text too far.

Postmodern forms are described with terms like collage, montage, juxtaposition, recontextualization, metaphorical, etc. Pinar’s description of the new synoptical text for curriculum seems to align itself with this understanding of postmodernism. The danger associated with these forms/approaches, however, is that they risk being misunderstood and unless the nature of the *form* is recognized in the translation of meaning, the ideas within the form can be lost. And the flipside is that when one focuses too much on explaining the form in a didactic pedagogical approach, the experience of this form is not the same anymore. This can be demonstrated through the art of appropriation. Appropriation is defined as borrowing or stealing something for one’s own use. In the visual arts, the term appropriation often refers to the use of borrowed elements in the creation of new work – images, forms or styles from art history or popular culture, or materials and techniques from non-art contexts – which may or may not alter the original work. Detournement is understood to occur when an artist specifically reuses elements of well-known media to create a new work with a different message, often one opposed to the original. Artists who use methods of detournement risk creating works that are misunderstood and perceived as the subject of which the artwork is critiquing. For instance, if an artist appropriates a stylistic device commonly used within advertising to convey a message against capitalism, depending on the media used and multiple other factors, there is the possibility that the artwork will be perceived as a form of advertisement of which the artist opposes.

Upon contemplating the nature of the synoptic text that Pinar describes, I began to draw connections to artistic methods of appropriation and detournement, particularly when Pinar uses words such as “collage” and “juxtaposition”. If the synoptic texts produced by curriculum researchers are provided to teachers who are then encouraged to “complicate the conversation” in the classroom, does this not risk translation of meaning and understanding in the process? Referring back to Pinar’s quest for the understanding of curriculum in postmodern times, if techniques are used that reflect the experience of postmodernism (the synoptic text) there is the possibility of the content being lost amidst the experience itself. Thus, although Pinar would like there to be less emphasis on pedagogy within the field of curriculum studies, the form of the synoptic text calls for teachers to be taught *how* to present the form to achieve true understanding of the content.