ENACTING HOLOCAUST EDUCATION INITIATIVES: THE PROMISES AND CHALLENGES OF CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION IN POST-COMMUNIST SETTINGS

Thomas Misco is an Assistant Professor of Social Studies Education in the Department of Teacher Education and a member of the Adolescent and Young Adult teacher preparation team. His research efforts address controversial issues, moral education, and citizenship education in domestic and international contexts. His current projects include pre-service teacher perceptions of controversial issues, social studies instructional time, reverse chronological history instruction, and Holocaust education in post-communist countries. Professor Misco is a former high school social studies teacher and department chair (San Rafael, CA) who came to Miami in 2006.

ABSTRACT

This paper responds to a practical problem scholars and curricularists face when they confront painful and controversial histories. Any substantive historical remediation includes initiatives to change the way in which history is taught in primary and secondary education. Most of these efforts involve the creation and dissemination of new curriculum, with the expectation of changes in teaching behaviour. Yet, the implementation of new curriculum and resultant educational change is not so straightforward, especially in post-totalitarian states. Therefore, this essay explores the issue of curriculum implementation and the ways in which teachers' use of new curricular efforts provides obstacles and pathways to educational change with regard to gaps in historical knowledge and cursory coverage of topics. To accomplish this task, I situate curriculum implementation within the larger context of normative entrepreneurs and historical memory. I then complicate how we might think about implementation, unique paradigms of implementation, conditions leading to implementation, assumptions and expectations, and local context. Finally, I conclude with remarks on the pivotal role implementation plays within curricular initiatives designed to disrupt historical silences.

INTRODUCTION

Confronting a painful or controversial history, including Holocaust history, is difficult for any society, but doubly so for post-totalitarian states that incurred generational efforts to undermine "occasions for doubt" (Griffin, 1942, p. 84) and instead promote a state-sponsored, uncomplicated, and singular historical narrative. But in order to build and enhance free societies, remembrance of the past with a critical lens that invites contestation and multiple perspectives are obligatory. The main route best outfitted for this charge is the educational experience that only secondary education is obligated to offer. Outside this intellectual space, ideological, political, and sectarian influences can easily grab hold of hot topics and pervert them for their own provincial aims. Only the school offers protection from these forces in the form of rational inquiry into the past.

To that end, a surfeit of normative entrepreneurs, including foreign governments, NGOs, and foundations have sought to change the course of Holocaust history instruction in schools throughout post-totalitarian educational spaces by designing and disseminating new curricula (e.g. Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research). Given these efforts aimed at changing the public's understanding of history, state-sponsored narratives, and historical memory, this paper explores the issue of *curriculum implementation* and the ways in which teachers' use of new curricular efforts provides obstacles and pathways to educational change with regard to painful and silenced histories. As more post-Soviet and post-communist states attempt to build pluralistic, tolerant, and open-minded societies, their treatment of historical silences and the renegotiation of their past becomes a critical feature for the development of democratic citizens. The representation of these unique histories changes over time as the particular culture or society recreates different relationships with their past. Similar to most controversial issues, historical memory is situated within these cultures and societies (Simon, 2000).

Historical memory is a function of what societies choose to remember and forget (Auron, 2005), but often this is neither a conscious nor deliberate choice. For many post-communist countries, citizens had only limited choices due to the truncation and bounding of the past. Many societies have inherited and built a collective memory that is "textually mediated" (Wertsch, 2002, p. 5), whereby narratives negotiate the event and memory of the event. An instructive framework for understanding narratives in post-communist states is Simon's (2000) view of historical memory as the "commingling between present consciousness and the staging of evidentiary traces of past experiences" (p. 10). This angle is suggestive of an interaction between the past and present which becomes disrupted as more historical facts are drawn into social consciousness through education (Misco, 2008). But to what extent do our best efforts and government resources translate into breaking silences and deepening students' understandings of complicated Holocaust history? This question is one of curriculum implementation as it responds to the anecdotal problem found among many projects—that of a curriculum "gathering dust" (Cho, 1998, p. 8).

CURRICULUM IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation constitutes a substantive educational change. Educational changes of this kind are both socially complex and normative (Fullan, 2007). Understanding the nature of curriculum implementation is significant primarily because all democratic societies require citizens who can make judgments about controversial issues (Engle & Ochoa, 1988) as these judgments pay a democratic dividend by increasing civic participation, critical thinking skills, interpersonal skills, and political activity. Moreover, educational experiences that engage Holocaust history promote tolerant societies free from prejudice, racism, and bigotry, while simultaneously inclusive of others, justice-oriented, and committed to peace (Salmons, 2003). But simply providing teachers with curriculum responsive to heretofore "gaps in coverage" does not equate to change. Rather, we need to think deeply about the kinds of changes that may occur and the ways in which teachers interact with curricular interventions.

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There is insufficient data describing the process of implementation and implementation paradigms (Cho, 1998; Carless, 1998; Fullan, 2008) and the longitudinal studies on implementation of any sort of curriculum do not examine how curriculum projects in post-communist states fare. In addition, research is needed that illuminates how curriculum designs and teacher requirements influence the process of implementation (Penuel, Fishman, Yamaguchi, & Gallagher, 2007).

A facile approach to determining implementation might explore the extent to which teachers are *using* the new Holocaust curriculum. But implementation is not this

straightforward—it means different things to different people and this variability is compounded within different ontological eras of curriculum theory. For example, only since the 1970s have we witnessed more wide-ranging thought about what implementation might mean (Fullan, 1982). Prior to that that time, implementation primarily focused on outcomes of learning in terms of the intended curriculum instead of the *process* leading to a variety of possible realities promoting an array of educational experiences (Leithwood, 1990).

A purely utilitarian approach to implementation might look for the "actual use of an innovation or what an innovation consists of in practice" (Fullan & Pomfret, 1977, p. 336). This view was eventually criticized for its simplicity in constructing implementation as the delivery of an innovation (Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986). Some have taken a more expansive approach to implementation, thinking of it as "not an event but a change process," which is highly dependent on context (Cho, 1998, p. 29). In this sense, those features informing curricular change within a particular context include the teacher, the curriculum, the curriculum developer's intentions, strategies used, and pupil responses (Carless, 1998, p. 353). Other curricularists focused on implementation as an event where teachers learn new roles and unlearn old roles. These *events* are marked by changes in behavior, as well as attitudes and beliefs (Van Den Akker, 1988).

We might also think of implementation as getting Holocaust curriculum to do *what we want it to do* in terms of "congruence between purpose and action," which includes teachers as curricularists exercising judgment and where implementation serves as a "point of departure" (Hlebowitsh, 2005, p. 217-18). This last view embraces the idea of many possible outcomes, variables, and processes involved in implementation. If implementation is about what needs to change for an innovation to be employed, then we need to keep in mind that implementation can be nonexistent, superficial, partial, substantive, or occur in some other form (Fullan, 2007). From these diverse manifestations of implementation, the expectation for a particular kind of implementation—and really, the degree—is very much informed by three paradigms of implementation.

PARADIGMS OF IMPLEMENTATION

If we think about implementation simplistically, we might imagine curricularist *x* creating materials *y*, which are adopted by teacher *z*, culminating in the precise and exact use of the curriculum in the classroom *as envisioned by the curricularist* without modification. The *fidelity* paradigm offers this congruence of what is intended and achieved, which fits within a producer-consumer model (Aoki, 1984). In general, this view of implementation is uncomplicated and unproblematic—there is little need to describe processes of fidelity implementation for it is largely "successful" or it is not (Leithwood, 1990). Although largely discredited (Aoki, 1984), the *fidelity* paradigm is distinct from the main competing paradigm, *mutual adaptation*, which takes into account local contexts, honors the professionalism of the teacher, and assumes diverse realities, meanings and agents adapting curriculum in different ways. A third paradigm also exists called *curriculum enactment*, which is the antipode of the fidelity paradigm. This paradigm emphasizes teachers and students as the designers and implementers of a curriculum and discounts many normative concerns external to the classroom (Hlebowitsh, 2005).

I ultimately chose to use the mutual adaptation paradigm as a lens for this essay, primarily because the fidelity approach does not expect teacher modification of the curriculum, which in the context of many post-totalitarian schools that enjoy little support to teach this topic from centralized education authorities, would be a fatuous expectation or at least constitute a null curriculum. Moreover, a fidelity lens sharpens our attention to the extent the curriculum is implemented as is, rather than understanding the process of how teachers used the curriculum and what factors played into their decision making. Finally, the curriculum enactment paradigm does not encompass the full compliment of variables external to a classroom.

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In contrast to the fidelity and curriculum enactment paradigms, mutual adaptation emphasizes the "complexity of the context in which change takes place" (Cho, 1998, p. 3) and the reduction of space between 'what is' and 'what should be' through a series of tradeoffs. Within this paradigm, we cannot explore the teacher's role as "resisting" curricular changes—resistance is really a part of the fidelity lexicon. Nor can we think of materials as "teacher proof." Instead, within a mutual adaptation framework, we view practitioners as having authority and autonomy as curricularists with full decision making capacities and expertise. Part and parcel of this paradigm is relying on the "'the wisdom of the practice' that is situational and implicit within the context in which a pedagogical judgment should be made by the teacher" (Cho, 1998, p. 20).

For example, in a recent study (Misco, 2009), the context of one Baltic country's Holocaust education is one of post-communism, nascent democratic government, little instructional time in history, and a lack of a social studies tradition that leverages history to meet citizenship aims and goals. Found in these classrooms are what Guba and Lincoln (1994) called "modified dualism" (p. 109) whereby the user (teacher) needs to transform curriculum into a unique context. Honoring of the local context, which is inherent in mutual adaptation, dovetails with the design theory that guided the curriculum-making process. Both design and implementation were predicated on a "dialectical relationship" among teachers, students, and curriculum (Aoki, 1984, p. 114)

Mutual adaptation takes into account the "slippages" that occur as teachers in all national educational systems deviate from "official" curricular policies, including time and topic allocations (Benavot & Resh, 2003, p. 172). Because implementation in this paradigm is not about compliance, but rather about balancing the normative and emergent while being responsive to the needs of children and society within the judgment of the teacher (Hlebowitsh, 2005), curriculum becomes filtered, rendered, and owned *by* the teacher, *for* the students, and *within* a local context. When designing Holocaust curriculum with mutual adaptation in mind, it does not necessarily mean that the materials should be entirely open and devoid of structure. In addition, it would seem that offering "procedural specification" in the curriculum might seem to be more closely related to fidelity expectations. Yet, offering some structure and specifications of how it might unfold acts as a point of departure for the "internal dialogue" teachers need to have concerning the what, when, how, and why of their teaching role in relation to the innovation (Van Den Akker, 1988).

CONDITIONS LEADING TO IMPLEMENTATION

Implementation of a new curriculum requires support for teachers, identification of facilitation responsibility, and an understanding that it takes time, sometimes years, before any change is registered in instructional behavior (Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986). By examining the kinds of instructional change and different forms of evidence suggesting change (Fullan, 2008), any factor might influence implementation, including the three categories and nine critical factors Fullan (2007) advanced:

1. Characteristics of change (need, clarity, complexity, quality);
2. Local characteristics (district, community, principal, teacher);
3. External factors (government and other agencies).

Each of these factors should inform the membership of the curriculum writing team, the design of the curriculum, and the expectations for success.

In terms of a priori expectations, the literature suggests that implementation is strengthened by developing materials locally, providing a regimen of ongoing training, and regular staff meetings dedicated to the curricular change (McLaughlin, 1976). Yet, the key feature for implementation is the teacher (Cho, 1998) and having collaborative colleagues at a school site helps to facilitate implementation through momentum and generativity (Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986; Penuel, et al., 2007). Most curriculum reforms that fail, do so because they have ignored local context and culture. They are rather incomplete by placing too much emphasis on planning and not enough action, or they are not open to multiple realities that exist (Fullan, 2007).

The particular problem of curriculum implementation of controversial Holocaust history naturally entails the problem of changing teaching behaviour. In this case, a finding of weak or limited implementation may very well be more an issue of planning and coordinating of the curriculum project and less an issue of dogmatic resistance (Fullan, 2007) due to teacher time constraints and limited endorsement from central education authorities. Sometimes the critical obstacle hinges on the "social and political winds" that blow through the school and "grab hold of the curriculum in a way that limits the range of expression that can emerge" (Hlebowitsh, 2005, p. 222). This challenge and others can ultimately be diluted by supportive school administrators and principals (Benavot & Resh, 2003), as well as teachers and community members.

Generally, it is difficult for teachers to change their roles, especially with new instructional strategies and lack of background knowledge on the topic (Van Den Akker, 1988). In addition, time becomes an expensive price to pay for implementation (Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986). Trainings and support are important to mitigate these challenges (Carless, 1998), but single trainings are not as effective as those that try to anticipate all problems at the outset, as these often miss their mark (McLaughlin, 1976). Ideally, there is monitoring, coaching, and professional development that dovetail with what teachers currently do in order to release the potential of adaptive work (Penuel, et al., 2007).

Schooling is supposed to challenge local traditions (Hlebowitsh, 2005), but this is often easier said than done. Even those ebullient about change can be disillusioned if there is not sufficient support (Carless, 1988). In order to have change occur, teachers need to have a good understanding of the proposed curricular change, as people will "always misinterpret and misunderstand some aspect of the purpose or practice of something that is new to them" (Fullan, 1991, p. 355).

Another key undermining element is the lack of time to plan for implementation (Penuel, et al., 2007). Because the intention of a curriculum is to unleash a more substantive treatment of the topic, we hope that not only will students

have the opportunity to ask questions and engage in protracted discussions and essential forms of inquiry, but also that teachers will become more confident and comfortable with the topic (Penuel, et al., 2007). If being confident comes about through greater knowledge of the Holocaust, this depends on teachers having the time to explore the curriculum. Again, a central issue guiding the way implementation could unfold is the issue of teacher planning time.

Another key issue is that teachers do not exist *sui generis* in implementation. The essence of change relies upon the development of meaning – meaning in terms of people working together and of ideas and individuals enjoying connections (Fullan, 2007). Given the importance context plays in implementation, the post-totalitarian residue very much informs the reality when "teachers transform curriculum materials into learning experiences available to the students by means of teachers' personal knowledge, shaped by pervious experiences and their belief systems" (Cho, 1998, p. 25). Historical and intellectual heritage are part of the meaning that teachers make about education, curricular expectations, and the role of history.

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ASSUMPTIONS AND EXPECTATIONS

A great deal of sagacious advice from implementation theory and practice scholars helps to frame the assumptions and expectations. Chief among the tocsins are to not "be seduced into looking for the silver bullet" (Fullan, 2007, p. 125) and to be skeptical of the "façade of change," whereby some form of implementation appears to have occurred, but with very little actual impact (Carless, 1998, p. 353). In addition, Fullan (2007) offered the following assumptions to consider:

1. Don't assume your version of change should be the one that is implemented – engage others in their realities;
2. Assume that any innovation requires implementers to make their own meaning as implementation is really a "process of clarification" (p. 123);
3. Assume conflict is inevitable and part of successful change;
4. Assume people need pressure to change but this depends on other factors too;
5. Assume effective change takes time—it may take 2-3 years;
6. Do not assume the reason for lack of implementation is a rejection of the values of the change—there are many possible reasons for lack of implementation;
7. Do not expect all or most people to change;
8. Assume you will need a plan based on these assumptions;
9. Assume that change depends not only on knowledge, but politics, context, intuition, etc.;
10. Assume that changing the culture is the real agenda, not implementing single innovations.

Given what we know about a nuanced view of implementation within the paradigm of mutual adaptation, just what might we consider to be successful implementation? Clearly this will depend on who is making the judgment and deciding on the parameters of success. Because gauging success is such a normative and slippery affair, success through the lens constructed here may very well be different from success for others given the great variability of what is elevated as desirable and important (Hord & Huling-Austin, 1986).

For example, we could look at the conditions leading to implementation, the problems teachers faced, strategies for resolution, feasibility, capabilities, policy changes needed, or other factors (Leithwood, 1990). Instead, we might favor understanding the processes taking place within multiple realities with the primary purpose of informing future curriculum projects dealing with controversial issues in newly minted democracies. Therefore, the curriculum projects do not attempt to judge teachers or community contexts. Rather, it attempts to better understand the practices and phenomena that are desirable for leading to implementation that releases the full and ready use of the curriculum to prepare democratic citizens and identifying what needs to be done to make implementation realized, as well as describing teacher practices in relation to the stages of implementation (Leithwood, 1990). This approach moves beyond the exactness of the teachers' implementation, which would fit more closely within a fidelity paradigm study (Cho, 1998), and instead squarely focuses on the generative value for future projects.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Too often, students learn history in cursory ways that do not include a full compliment of reflective thinking accorded to silenced and controversial historical topics. The beliefs and "supposed form of knowledge" (Dewey, 1933, p. 9) in every democracy require persistent subjection to reason and reflection. It is this ultimate aim that keen attention to implementation hopefully strengthens and one that future projects are obligated to consider. It is easy to promote increased remembrance of the past that invites contestation

and multiple perspectives, but this requires difficult and exceedingly practical work with schools and educational agencies. Consciously and deliberately attending to implementation within a context of history-based curricular initiatives complicates our assumptions of change and sharpens our goals and objectives for reform.

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