

# The Taba-Tyler Rationales

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*So long as there is education, there has  
got to be a curriculum. (Ralph W. Tyler, 1990)*

## **Introduction**

December 7, 2012 marks the 110<sup>th</sup> birth anniversary of the outstanding Estonian-born American educator and curriculum specialist Hilda Taba. When preparing for the commemorative conference in Tallinn and rereading Taba's works, we discovered some aspects deserving attention as they can shed light on traditional comprehension of the roles of Hilda Taba and Ralph Tyler in the history of curriculum theory. As it often is, a piece of thought, created in its time starts to live its own life fuelled by different interpretations, which often tend to forget the time and the meaning of the book when it appeared. The aim of this essay is to provide some insights into different interpretations researchers have offered when analysing curriculum rationales and show what parts of Hilda Taba's heritage should be particularly appreciated and used in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## **Coming to America**

Hilda Taba came after studies at Tartu University to the USA already in 1926 with the aim to complete her postgraduate studies, supported by a grant from the Rockefeller Foundation. She studied at Bryn Mawr College for Women, where she grew particularly interested in progressive education and was strongly influenced by Dewey's work. In 1927 she applied for PhD studies at Columbia University, she was admitted and partially supported

## **Books Discussed**

Taba, H. (1962). *Curriculum Development. Theory and Practice*. New York: Harcourt, Brace and World.

Tyler, R. W. (1949/1969). *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. The University of Chicago Press. Chicago & London.

by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Taba's scientific supervisor was Willaim H. Kilpatrick, the initiator of the project method. Taba's doctoral dissertation, *The Dynamics of Education: A Methodology of Progressive Educational Thought*, was published as a book in 1932 by Kegan Paul, Trench, Truber & CO. LTD in London.

In 1931 Hilda Taba applied for a vacant professorship at Tartu University but despite her international experience and completed degree, she was not elected. She returned to the USA where she could work, study and develop professionally. Despite difficult beginning, she soon got the post of a German teacher in 1933, and later that of the director of curriculum at Dalton School, Ohio. Participation in the Eight-Year Study brought her together with Ralph Tyler, who was the head of the project evaluation staff, and who in 1939 hired her as the coordinator of the social studies' curriculum. In 1939 the project staff was transferred to the University of Chicago, where Hilda Taba worked as the director of the Curriculum Laboratory until 1945.

In 1945 she became the director of the The Intergroup Education Project, launched in New York City. The success of this experimental project led to the establishment of the Center of Intergroup Education at the University of Chicago, which was headed by Taba in 1948–1951. In 1951–1967 she was involved in reorganization and development of social studies curricula in Contra Costa County, in the San Francisco Bay area. At the same time she also became a full professor of education at San Francisco State University and enjoyed recognition for her expertise in the areas of curriculum design, intergroup education, and development of students' cognitive processes. Her educational ideas are reflected in about 20 books, research reports and in over fifty articles she has published in education journals and yearbooks.

Taba advocated for a flexible model of curriculum renewal based on joint efforts of practicing teachers, educational administrators and researchers. Her curriculum model covers many of the critical topics, from aims and goals of education, the selection of the content, the process of organizing learning and school development, and evaluation at different levels. Several general principles and ideas of curriculum design developed by Hilda Taba belong to the foundations of modern curriculum theories.

Her ideas were especially influential in 1960s–1970s, and are still frequently referred to by authors of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Her famous book *Curriculum Development. Theory and Practice* (1962) is still a useful reading material for those making educational policy today. Taba's general strategy for developing students' thinking through social studies curriculum have led to numerous projects for development of students critical thinking skills and learning with comprehension since 1970s up to the present days. Hilda Taba died unexpectedly on July 6, 1967 in Burlingame, CA at the peak of her academic capabilities and power.

Perhaps in 2012 it would be timely to have a fresh look at some of the messages sent over the decades by Hilda Taba, which would be of help when trying to find solutions to the problems educational systems globally are facing today.

## **Curriculum rationales**

There are two of them – that of Ralph Tyler and that of Hilda Taba. The longevity of Tyler’s rationale can be explained by 36 reprintings of his 1949 *Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. Tyler’s book was a product of the Eight-Year Study (1933–1941), a long-term research carried out during the Great Depression the purpose of which was to evaluate the effects of progressive education for university students by means of a comparison with traditional education. Tyler was hired to evaluate the study.

In *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, Tyler stated his intention to “help the student of education to understand more fully the kinds of problems involved in developing a curriculum and plan of instruction and to acquire some techniques by which these basic problems may be attacked.” (Tyler, 1949:1) He describes learning as taking place through the changed behavior of the student. Nowadays, it could be called a child- or learner-centred approach. Reminiscent of Dewey, Tyler (1949:63) writes: “It is what he does that he learns, not what the teacher does.” Tyler’s classical four principles, or questions, which have to be answered for developing a curriculum – questions about educational aims, learning experience leading to the realization of those aims, organization of instruction, and evaluation (*ibid.*:1) - were the accepted approach to curriculum development for decades. They still guide the essential questions of curriculum development today, especially in educational systems with market economy based political orientations.

The Taba Rationale is presented in her *Curriculum Development. Theory and Practice* of 1962. It consists of 7 steps:

- Step 1. Diagnosis of needs
- Step 2. Formulation of objectives
- Step 3. Selection of content
- Step 4. Organization of content
- Step 5. Selection of learning experiences
- Step 6. Organization of learning experiences (development of methods)
- Step 7. Determination of what to evaluate and how (Taba 1962:12)

At the bottom of the same page we can read: “These steps are comparable to a sequence proposed in a syllabus by Tyler (1950). A similar sequence is described by Taba” (1945). Here Taba refers to her work *General Techniques of Curriculum Planning*, published in National Society for the Study of Education *American Education in the Post-War Period: Curriculum reconstruction*. Forty Fourth Yearbook Part 1. Ch. 5. When comparing just the two rationales it is difficult to ascertain who borrowed from whom and when, but we have to admit the basic difference of the two curriculum design approaches, which has a critical meaning not only for researchers of modern times, but also for those developing curricula for current school praxis.

## **Discussion**

Tyler’s model is deductive while Taba’s is inductive. Tyler’s approach argues from the administrator approach while Taba’s reflects the teacher’s approach. In essence, Tyler believes that administration

should design the curriculum and the teachers implement it. Taba believes that the teachers are aware of the students needs; hence teachers should be the ones to develop the curriculum and implement in practice. Another name for Taba's is the *grass-roots approach*. However, her rationale does not start with objectives, as she believes that the demand for education in a particular society should be studied first (see Step 1). Taba also pays attention to the selection of the content and its organization with an aim to provide students with an opportunity to learn with comprehension. Tyler lays the main stress on aims, evaluation and control. This approach may be perfect, perhaps, for market-oriented education, but inadequate for the development of responsible and creative individuals able to meet the challenges of the constantly changing circumstances. Many educational systems today, using Tyler's model, have come to crises and require reforms based on a totally different model of curriculum development.

### **The Meaning of Tyler's Rationale**

The most detailed and analytical research on Tyler's rationale and its meaning has been presented in the voluminous study of Willaim Pinar and his colleagues (1996) entitled *Understanding Curriculum. An Introduction to the Study of Historical and Contemporary Curriculum Discourses*. Their conclusion was: the era of "curriculum development" is past. There are those who will not accept this argument. We predict than even a few of our friends will think this is "master narrative", and that *any* effort to bring together differing discourses in one book, different people in one room, is authoritarian or patriarchal in principle. (Pinar et al, 1996:5)

We live in a different time. True, in science and mathematics education, traditional curriculum development still occurs, as these privileged areas still receive significant amounts of federal and private grant monies. [---] However, the general field of curriculum, the field interested in the relationships among the school subjects as well as issues within the individual school subjects themselves and with the relationships between the curriculum and the world, that field is no longer preoccupied with development. As we shall see, the field today is preoccupied with understanding. (*ibid.*:6).

Traditional curriculum theory has developed out of an "instrumental rationality". This philosophical perspective separates means from ends to maximize efficiency and effectiveness. Tyler's rationale is an appropriate example of this approach. Tyler views curriculum theory as technical. Predetermined behavioral objectives serve as a driving force that controls the pedagogical and evaluative efforts that follow. Tyler asserts the development of objectives is necessarily the first "step" in curriculum planning "because they are the most critical criteria for guiding all the other activities of the curriculum maker." This formulation happens before the curriculum maker can "carry on all the further steps of curriculum planning" (*ibid.*:62). Tyler's rationale has been challenged, but it seems to have become stronger as a result. Indeed, its elegant simplicity is engaging.

### **Taba's contribution**

Hilda Taba's principles for curriculum development can be traced back to her doctoral thesis *The Dynamics of Education. A Methodology of Progressive Educational Thought* (1932), in which the Taba distinguishes between *being* and *becoming* in the development of a learner, his/her possible

creation of self and the dynamics in this lifelong process. The following ideas deserved particular attention then and still today:

- The task of education, as understood at present, is to lead growing individuals to more and more intelligent, wide, well-organized, and rich forms of experience through guidance, through selection of subject matter, and by providing an environment which is stimulating to self-direction. (Taba, 1932:218)
- The idea that the conscious guidance of education must consider the all-round development of the individual has been an item of the educationist's credo since Herbart. (*ibid.*:221)
- Habit formation, the acquisition of some fundamental vocational skills, education for citizenship, and other similar functions today demand the serious attention of education. But while the tasks of the school have thus multiplied, the principle governing the development of the curriculum has remained inherently unchanged, namely, the expansive addition of the subjects and materials according to the growing needs of society. As every new objective forces a new subject into the school curriculum, an extreme overcrowding has naturally resulted, followed by a disintegration and atomization of old and new fields of knowledge. (*ibid.*:235)
- The passive mastery of finished products of thought, in fact, drags the creative and constructive abilities of the learner. (*ibid.*:237)
- Education has done its best when it has been able to sensitize the minds of learners to the variety of ways in which knowledge can be made productive, to the variety of methods for the treatment of facts, to the various interpretations events may be given; and, finally, when it has set the challenge for inquiry. (*ibid.*:238)
- Both subject matter and the process of education have to be so organized that within every specific task every student can apply his own method, can use different materials, and still be able to master or achieve what are regarded to be the common essentials in the objectives. (*ibid.*:241)
- There is a fundamental difference between major objectivities devoid of any specific qualitative content, which serve only as a guide in dealing with the formation of specific qualitatively positive attitudes, ways of thinking, and modes of conduct, and those that definitely prescribe certain ways of behaviour, a certain content of learning, and certain processes of learning. (*ibid.*: 247)
- The curriculum cannot be regarded as a dead and summative body of all the materials, experiences and activities contained in the educational process. It is a living whole, comprised of experience actually going on in school. As such it is what it becomes in practice. (*ibid.*:243)
- It is the task of progressive curriculum planning to extract from our heritage of knowledge,

ideas, and thought, those elements that are fundamental in various types of experience and which can serve as consistent guides for learning without delimiting its results in advance. (ibid.:259)

Taba's ideas on curriculum design can be considered as a further elaboration of Tyler's rather psychological principles of curriculum development: attributing to them a more pedagogical and practical nature. In her version, Taba introduced notions of multiple educational objectives and four distinct categories of objectives (basic knowledge, thinking skills, attitudes and academic skills). This approach allowed Taba to relate specific teaching/learning strategies to each category of objectives. In this sense, her classification of educational objectives has some similarities with Gagné's system of learning outcomes and the conditions of learning which explain the ways for reaching desired outcomes. Also, the sophisticated classification of educational objectives allowed Taba to give to Tyler's notion of learning experiences a more specific and practical meaning by considering separately the selection and organization of instructional content and strategies of learning. The above mentioned 7 steps for curriculum design and implementation were considerably better suited for school practice than those presented by Tyler.

The development of reasoning was one of Hilda Taba's most important concerns, which is clearest expressed and explained in her classical *Curriculum Development. Theory and Practice* (1962). She understood that teaching was not limited to a mere transfer of facts, but was, rather, the means of developing students' thinking skills, which she understood to be active and reciprocal between the child and subject matter. She perceived the primary role of the teacher as asking thought-provoking and stimulating questions. Hilda Taba stressed the importance of taking the direct life experience of children as the basis for acquiring the elements of social experience. Her activities were always oriented toward both children and teachers, and the society at large; she also followed closely everything happening globally and influencing education in America. Taba's particular contribution to development of cohesion in society was - could be today - of great significance again.

### **Concerning Taba**

There are many academic papers in English and in Estonian describing Hilda Taba's ideas and research on specific areas of education. But there are fewer writings on Taba's general principles and beliefs regarding research and education that made her work unique, inventive and original. (Krull, 2003:48)

Many of the ideas that made Taba world-famous she continued to develop throughout her career. A preliminary, and therefore incomplete, analysis of her scientific heritage suggests at least four principles that seem to govern her vision of curriculum theory and curriculum development (Krull & Kurm, 1996:11–12):

1. Social processes, including the socialization of human beings, are not linear, and they cannot be modelled through linear planning. In other words, learning and development of personality cannot be considered as one-way processes of establishing educational aims and deriving



specific objectives from an ideal of education proclaimed or imagined by some authority.

2. Social institutions, among them school curricula and programmes, are more likely to be effectively rearranged if, instead of the common way of administrative reorganization – from top to bottom – a well-founded and co-ordinated system of development from bottom to top can be used.
3. The development of new curricula and programmes is more effective if it is based on the principles of democratic guidance and on the well-founded distribution of work. The emphasis is on the partnership based on competence, and not on administration.
4. The renovation of curricula and programmes is not a short-term effort but a long process, lasting for years.

The principle of considering social processes as non-linear is the most important one, and it probably governs all of Hilda Taba's educational work. Taba pointed out already in her doctoral dissertation that "ends and aims, as they are in actual life, seldom present themselves as simple and easily comprehensible units (Taba 1932:142) and, therefore, a purposive act must be regarded primarily as an outgrowth of previous activity and not as an independent unit starting and activating because of some end or purpose clamoring for actualization (*ibid.*:143). Applying the principle to curriculum design, this means that it is unreal and impossible to set up rigid general goals of education from which more specified objectives would be derived for a concrete plan. The general goals are also subject to modification in order to become adapted to the real circumstances, whereby they are dependent more or less on the content and character of the educational step planned. (*ibid.*:16)

The second principle of the efficiency of the bottom-up approach suggests the most convenient way to help individuals and human social organizations to accept and to adapt to new situations and ideas. Taba's view can be well interpreted in the light of Donald Schön's concept of *dynamic conservatism*, which expresses the tendency of individuals and social organizations to oppose energetically changes that derange or offend their convictions and understandings by building up structures and mechanisms that will interfere with these changes. The expected changes in the individual or social consciousness will take place only if individuals or groups, under pressure to introduce these changes, conserve or acquire the ability to learn. So, the changes and learning underlying it take place more easily, and meet less opposition if they are not imposed by the central institutions but are initiated in the periphery, and gradually spread all over the structure.

The third and fourth principles underline the necessity for the democratic guidance of curriculum development and the long-term nature of this process, and are essentially derived from the first two principles. They are explicitly spelled out in the description of the organization for social studies curriculum development used in Contra Costa county (see Taba, 1962:482–489).

Probably the most characteristic feature of Hilda Taba's educational thinking was the ability to see the forest for the trees, pointing to her capability to discriminate between the essential and the

non-essential or the important and the unimportant. She was never misled by the outside lustre of an idea even when facing the most advanced educational innovations of the day, and she always scrutinized them for their educational purpose or value. (Krull, 2003:488–489)

### **Heritage to be studied and rediscovered**

Hilda Taba's *Curriculum Development: Theory and Practice* (1962) was a widely read synoptic text which proposed a theoretical base for curriculum development. Taba was disturbed by the lack of "systematic thinking about curriculum planning: (Taba, 1962:3). She modified the Tyler Rationale from a strictly linear process moving from objectives through learning experiences to evaluation. Taba conceived of the process as more nearly circular with the emergence of new purposes and goals during the process (Pinar et al, 1996:175). The Tyler Rationale, conceived first as a rational scheme for curriculum development, had become a rationale for narrow, behavioristic conceptions which reduced curriculum to objectives and outcomes. (*ibid.*:177). In 1979 Pinar (1979: 95) wrote:

The Tyler Rationale dictates an operationalized sequence of linear steps leading from the formulation of goals and specification of outcomes, identification of classroom experiences presumed to yield desired outcomes, and precise articulation of evaluation procedures to measure achievement or non-achievement of specified goals.

Despite widespread criticism of Tyler, his principles were widely accepted. Why? P. Kreitzberg (1993: 97) suggests: "Tyler seems to have integrated into one whole the most widely accepted educational paradigm of today, at least in theorizing over curriculum planning. Our interest in Tyler's Rationale does not lie in the technology of curriculum planning but rather in the main paradigm of legitimation of institutional education that reflects the mainstream, accepted, approach to the aims of education.

Probably the strongest objection to Tyler's approach, and the cause of its demise in the 1970's as the central idea in the U.S. field was its perceived mechanistic orientation to curriculum. Especially as the rationale had been implemented in the 1950's and 60's, behavioral objectives provided the underpinnings of its design, and the success or failure of the curriculum was predicated on pre-defined changes in student behavior. The assumption was that student outcomes could and should be measured. "The result was," as Howard (2007:2) notes, "that in order to measure the behaviors, tasks were broken down into smaller and smaller parts, resulting in tasks that lost their authenticity or meaningfulness."

Tyler was a product of his time, and his ideas were written and interpreted in the then current educational perspective, which was behavioural in nature. His theory of curriculum development was simple, logical, and rational, but it fell out of favor as U.S. scholars began to view learning experiences more holistically and assess outcomes that are not so easily measured. Accordingly, then and today, Taba's approach, was wider, both in the sense of educational policy making as well as organising learning at the level of educational practice.

***Audiatur et altera pars!***



In 1990 an interview with Tyler was conducted, and the following questions were asked. In the interview he expresses reservations about behavioural objectives and the centrality of curriculum in education.

*What do you think about defining behavioral objectives in curriculum?*

Objectives ought to be large enough to understand. The ability of the human being is to generalize, so that when you have some specific thing, it does help you to generalize the principle behind it as something new. Otherwise it becomes like training a person to do a job, little things that they don't commonly understand. So don't get behavioral objectives that are so tiny that there is no generalization. That's not human. Human beings generalize from their experience.

*What do you think about the future in curriculum development?*

Education is more important every generation, as society gets more complex. The child born into today couldn't possibly live very long without an education. They have to learn many things. So as long there is education, there has got to be a curriculum. You have to teach them something. The future of the curriculum is – if we're going to have a curriculum, people ought to study it and learn about it. I think the answer is how to accomplish it.

Tyler's views seem to be acceptable also to the modern market-oriented society and one cannot help but agree with Hlebovitch that his rationale still can offer some political solutions to logical problems and this fact could probably be one of the reasons of the longevity of his rationale (Hlebovitch, 1992). The rationale was acceptable to Margaret Thatcher as it still is in the countries heavily debating on educational budgets and attempts to develop educational economics as a discipline. However, it is difficult to underestimate the dangers of the marketization of education – what it could mean to an individual and a society at large, as Autio (2006:152–153) shows. As individuals will be more and more subjected to combating educational ideologies, values and curriculum policies, Taba's ideas seem to regain an important meaning again. The conception of self and its development has already become rather limited by the dominating market-oriented approaches, which clearly contradict the humanistic ideals of education. Schools as institutions have become corrupt and the subjectivity of an individual is disappearing. However, aspirations to establish an individual self have not. As Autio (2006:160) concludes:

The intensified individualization is tied to globalization, both of them marking the constitutive features of postmodernity, or in Ulrich Beck's terms, "the second modernity". Globalization has by the outsourcing of the functions of the institutions of "the first modernity" affected a radical shift in the relationship between individuals and institutions.

## **Conclusion**

National curricula for any country have always been objects of heavy debates as they have a crucial meaning for self-determination of a statehood and survival of ethnic cultures. There is no other more discussed document. When compiling curricula ideas and visions of human development, visions

of social developments, essence of knowledge become integrated (Kreitzberg 2006). Presciently, in 1962. Hilda Taba wrote:

One scarcely needs to emphasize the importance of critical thinking as a desirable ingredient in human beings in a democratic society. No matter what views people hold of the chief function of education, they at least agree that people need to learn to think. In a society in which changes come fast, individuals cannot depend on routinized behavior or tradition in making decisions, whether on practical everyday or professional matters, moral values, or political issues. In such a society, there is a natural concern that individuals be capable of intelligent and independent thought (Taba 1962:49).

Curriculum design is an art of its kind never subjected to different theories in full. The knowledge of education, upbringing of the young, socialization has been researched and analysed by scholars and practitioners of different educational schools. Diverse political ideologies and power positions of different pressure groups globally as well as locally have become decisive factors in decision making about educational issues. nevertheless, especially national curricula for general comprehensive schools as basic documents for organising school networks and education at large cannot be changed every few years considering the change of political power and government favouring particular theories or ideologies. Theories must be studied as they can help when trying to make informed decisions about serious and moral choices affecting the whole population.

Fluctuations between the extremes are never good in educational developments. There is no need to confront child centred and subject centred approaches when designing a curriculum as it happened in the USA about a hundred years ago. There is no need to demonstrate in the streets with a slogan: we do not teach a subject, we instruct a child. It sounds great, but does not make sense. John Dewey, one of those innocently causing this confrontation came to a nice conclusion towards the end of his long life: curriculum is a bridge between the child and the culture. But this bridge has a different construction, length and duration for different societies and times. This bridge primarily means concentration on organising learning and not on control and testing. And perhaps it is time to reanalyse and rediscover Hilda Taba's heritage as a invaluable material for those educationists trying to build this bridge as the educational landscapes in different parts of the world allow.

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