Reconstructionism is a group of related curriculum proposals that, although evolving from the social reconstructionist ideas of George Counts, Harold Rugg, and Jessie Newlon, developed a distinct rationale and proposal for advancing education as an agent for social reform. This movement differs from social reconstruction in its promotion of a rationale for a social issues curriculum, its use of psychology and sociology to inform this rationale, and in providing specific curricular and instructional guidelines. The developed proposal for reconstruction education was developed by Theodore Brameld with variants presented in the influential synoptic curriculum text, *Fundamentals of Curriculum Development* by the B. O. Smith, W. O. Stanley, and J. H. Shores, all from the University of Illinois.

Brameld developed his proposal in the 2 decades following World War II. Brameld’s philosophy of education sought to effect the transformation of economic, political, and cultural institutions through education. Presenting his philosophy as a social progression from John Dewey’s experimentalist philosophy, Brameld incorporated into Dewey’s epistemology the insights of utopian thinkers and the contributions made by 20th-century inquiry in the social sciences.

Brameld accepted Dewey’s model of deliberative scientific thinking as the means to social progress. The limitation of experiential thought, Brameld contented, was its inability to project social ends for which means can then be designed. Utopian thought, for Brameld, provided these ideal goals and motivated inquiry. Brameld expanded the experientialist understanding of human nature to include the insights of Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, as well as of sociologists such as David Reisman and W. Lloyd Warner. In his description of contemporary society, Brameld criticized the failure to meet basic human needs, with social analysis evidencing limited control of essential resources and Dewey’s scientific deliberation providing a method for social problem solving to reconstruct the social order.

Key elements of the curriculum theory Brameld developed included (1) an inductive approach to determining social values, (2) the mandate to build consensus on social policy, (3) the use of “defensible partiality” in teaching, and (4) the organizing of the curriculum around social problems or spokes of a “wheel curriculum.” The inductive approach for determining social values introduced an “unrational” or subconscious basis for determining social values, a “prehension” of basic human needs. Immediate experience provokes recognition of 12 intrinsic values or “prehensive urges” such as food, shelter, vocation, and recreation.

Gaining consensus on social policy was how Brameld interpreted Dewey’s proposal for public democratic deliberation. In education, this meant bringing before students a significant social problem, interpreted as an unmet fundamental need. Using the analogy of a jury trial, social consensus worked through stages, beginning with assembling evidence through social research in a climate of discussion and criticism. When viable hypotheses emerge, they are publicly scrutinized for possible outcomes. A course of action is decided and refinement, analysis, and dialogue continue to evaluate the solution in addressing the social problem.

The teacher is facilitator in this consensual deliberation, but also advocates for solutions he or she believes are most effective. In stating a “defensible partiality,” a teacher is welcome to promote social causes and state philosophic convictions but only if she or he is also willing to engage in critical and unrestricted debate. According to Brameld, indoctrination is avoided because the learner is free to accept or reject the explicitly stated convictions of the teacher.

Brameld considered the frame from junior year of high school to the second year of college as the optimal time for implementing a curriculum for reconstruction through a wheel curriculum. The hub of the wheel is group consideration of a social issue, based on the prehensive urges. The spokes are groups of students concentrating on different aspects of the issue, coming together periodically to share research and proposals following Brameld’s steps for gaining social consensus.
Brameld’s personal commitment to his ideas extended to efforts to develop both a collegiate and a high school course that followed a reconstructionist design while Brameld was a professor at the University of Minnesota. Brameld’s influence extended, while a professor at Boston University, to Puerto Rico, Japan, and Korea.

In their influential synoptic curriculum, *Foundations of Curriculum Development*, Smith, Stanley, and Shores arrived at the same value construct as Brameld, citing his list of human needs. Their rationale, however, was the contention that realizing these human needs are accepted goals of a democratic “cultural core,” the rules, knowledge, and skills by which a social group conducts itself and envisions its future. The task of curriculum building, they contended, was to consider simultaneously cultural elements and social realities, noting where the cultural core is dissonant from lived social experience. Students consider social problems which evidence the contradictions in the culture core and work to resolve the value conflict, refashioning democracy through direct participation. The social problems core was akin to Brameld’s wheel curriculum, although employing a time frame more practical for immediate inclusion in the U.S. secondary school.

Other scholars who contributed to elements of reconstructionist thought include John Childs, with an emphasis on the individual’s responsibility to contribute in social problem solving, and Kenneth Benne, who emphasized using a social problem solving method developed from Dewey’s social philosophy.

*Thomas P. Thomas*

**See also** Social Reconstructionism; University of Illinois Collective of Curriculum Professors

**Further Readings**


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**RELIABILITY**

Reliability refers to the consistency and repeatability of a measurement when the testing procedure is repeated on a population of individuals or groups. Knowing the reliability of particular assessments is particularly important for instructors who use standardized measures to assess the curriculum. Curriculumists should ask about the reliability of measurement tools that they are expected to use in the classroom or within the school to determine its applicability. The usefulness of this score presupposes that individuals or groups exhibit some degree of stability in their behaviors. However, behaviors among the same person are rarely the same. Scores from an instrument should be stable; a higher degree of stability indicates higher reliability because the results are repeatable. The American Psychological Association has defined reliability as the degree to which observed scores are “free from errors of measurement.” The measure of error that results limits the extent to which results are generalizable. Different types of reliability estimates can be calculated through specific methods.

Reliability is merely an estimate rather than an exact calculation; thus, it is not possible to calculate reliability exactly. Reliability estimates rank along a continuum on a scale from zero to one. A reliability estimate of zero indicates that the measure is completely unreliable. A reliability estimate of one indicates that the measure is completely reliable. The reliability estimate represents the proportion of variability of a measure that is related to the true score. For example, a reliability estimate of .7 means that the measure is about 70% true and about 30% random error.

The critical information that should be reported on reliability includes the identification of major sources of errors, the size of those errors and the degree of generalizability of scores across alternate forms, administrations, or relevant dimensions. Variance or standard deviations of measurement errors, in terms of one or more coefficients, or in terms of item response theory–based test information functions should also be reported. Generally, three types of reliability estimates are reported: test–retest, parallel forms, and internal consistency. Test–retest is used to assess the consistency of a