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In a New Key: Ted T. Aoki [\[i\]](#)

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In the mid-1980s, I read an article that would influence my academic and personal life for all time. This article came to me with little fanfare. In fact, it was not given as a class handout or suggested to me by a professor. As I reviewed several monographs loaned to me, I happened upon the article entitled: *Toward Curriculum Inquiry in a New Key* by Ted T. Aoki. Little did I know then that this article, its author, and the author's lifetime body of work, would make such a profound difference to my life. I remember to this day my first reading of this article. It resonated with my very being. Suddenly, everything I had been learning came together in an elegant, yet transformative way. It offered me insights into the worldview of others, myself, and the selves I was becoming. It provided a safe space for me to take on the role of interpreter and critic. But most importantly, it legitimated for me that art education was the powerful learning force I knew it to be. For this paper was originally written for a conference entitled *Phenomenological Description: Potential for Research in Art Education* hosted by the Fine Arts Graduate Studies Program at Concordia University (April 6-8, 1973). Some time later Ted would craft the paper into published form for the *Curriculum Praxis Occasional Paper Series*, No.2 (University of Alberta). I am today, as I was then, quietly pleased to witness a curriculum scholar bridging curriculum concerns with art education, not only for those of us in art education, but for everyone interested in curriculum studies.

I did not know Ted then but I came to learn of his teaching and leadership at the University of Alberta and the University of British Columbia. As a doctoral student at UBC, I soon learned that Ted's work influenced generations of education scholars, some of whom taught me. In reading the article *Toward Curriculum Inquiry in a New Key*, I realized that Walt Werner, an important curriculum scholar at UBC, had been a doctoral student of Ted's. In time, I came to appreciate that several scholars at the University of Victoria, where I completed my master's degree, also studied

with Ted. These are only a few of the scholars Ted mentored who would in turn influence me, and many, many others. I am sure I am not exaggerating when I say that Ted's incredible ability to teach ideas through personal and theoretical inquiry has more than touched thousands of learners: his pedagogy has changed their thinking, their being, their lives. He embodies curriculum.

As I carried *Toward Curriculum Inquiry in a New Key* with me throughout my doctoral student and professorial life, I was reminded of the day when the excitement of Ted's ideas made me search out new directions for my work. The excitement was never boisterous, but then I am not boisterous. The excitement was teeming inside me, nurtured by an extraordinary human being, sharing his being, and his becoming, with others. Being in the presence of humble greatness inspires one to find one's own inner greatness. Ted's writing did that for me and I am certain that Ted's mentorship of his graduate students and his many colleagues nurtured an excitement for curriculum that has never been replicated in Canada.

Though I first read Ted's work in the mid 1980's, it would be the mid 90's before I met him. I have never been one to make myself known. I would rather do the work that needs to be done and through the context of that work, meet and work with others. As I look back, I realize that Ted and I shared several institutional homes: Lethbridge School District #51 (he also taught in Rockyford, Taber, and Foremost, Alberta) where he was a teacher and vice-principal (he taught for 19 years across these school districts); the University of British Columbia where he was the Director of the Centre for Curriculum and Instruction (3 years) and later, an adjunct professor (17 years); the University of Alberta where he obtained his Bachelor of Education degree (1949), his Master of Education degree (1963), was an Assistant, Associate, Professor and Chair of the Department of Secondary Education (18 years) and now holds professor emeritus status. One institutional home we did not share was the University of Oregon where Ted completed his Ph.D. (1969). Despite sharing some of the same institutional homes, our paths did not cross. Though I was a student, teacher, or professor in the same educational settings, I kept him on the pedestal I created for him. Then one day, following a talk we both attended, a colleague introduced us. Here was a gentle, soft-spoken man, who was shorter than me (and I am not tall). Yet his extraordinary reputation as a curriculum scholar imbued his aura: in front of me stood a great man.

In the intervening years, Ted and I have been on a number of thesis committees together and have shared tales of leading a university department. He often writes me handwritten memos in which he shares his latest thinking or the latest book he has read or the connections he has made at a recent event. And several times a year, I slip away with Ted and June for a sushi lunch at their favorite restaurant. In these moments, his

wisdom almost pours out of him. Although not the only reason, Ted's dedication for Canadian curriculum studies played a significant part in my personal re-commitment to curriculum studies, a commitment that led me to become active in the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies (CACS). Through my conversations with Ted, I knew that the next surge of scholarship in Canadian curriculum studies would only happen if curriculum scholars took up the task of (re)conceptualizing the forgotten spaces lingering within the etymology of the words we hold dear, as well as the very premises from which we understand curriculum today. Inspired and energized, I took on the role of President of CACS, a position I hold today. I do not make any claims to changing curriculum scholarship in Canada, but in the compiling of this anthology, I feel that Canadian scholars are recognizing a giant among us, a man whose career as a classroom teacher, vice-principal, scholar, teacher educator, and chair of a university department, has touched the lives of countless Canadian educators and students. His influence has not only been felt in Canada, but internationally as well, and especially in the United States.

One of the most impressive attributes Ted has is his abiding dedication to curriculum studies and curriculum inquiry. Now in his 80s, Ted has continued to teach at the University of British Columbia, give talks at national and international conferences, mentor graduate students, and perhaps most importantly, nurture inquiry in the many spaces experienced in a lived curriculum. Witnessing his passion, intellectual curiosity, and amazing pedagogical capacity even today, keeps his Canadian colleagues spellbound. In the 1970's when some considered curriculum studies to be moribund, Ted took up the challenge to reimagine what curriculum studies could become. He opened our minds to reconceptualizing curriculum, moving us away from curriculum-as-plan to the lived curriculum. He made room for curriculum to come alive in any learning opportunity. He had, and still has, the ability to move our minds and our hearts in amazing ways.

Although I was never fortunate enough to take a class from Ted, I know the power of his teaching. Over the years I have sent many students to his classes and lectures. In every case, students came back to me saying they had been in the presence of a profoundly amazing teacher. Ted's greatest gift was, and remains today, his ability to call out of each of us deeply felt teaching and learning concerns that are transformed through penetrating inquiry. He is a pedagogue of pedagogues and because his pedagogy is so profound, it lingers with us as we go forward and teach. The genealogy of his powerful pedagogy is the legacy that Ted leaves in the minds and hearts of countless curriculum scholars, particularly in Canada.

In celebration of his legacy, Ted has been recognized for his achievements, influence and impact in a variety of ways. Ted holds Honorary Doctor of Laws degrees from the University of Lethbridge (1988), the University of British Columbia (1991), the University of Alberta (1992), and the

University of Western Ontario (1999). He is particularly proud of being given Honorary Elder status from the Four Band Council, in Hobbema, Alberta (1975). Ted has been given a "Certificate of Appreciation" by the Korean Educational Development Institute (1984), the "Distinguished Service Award" from the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies (1985), the "Phi Delta Kappa of the Year Award" by the University of Alberta Chapter of the Phi Delta Kappa (1985), the "CEA Whitworth Award for Research in Education" presented by the Canadian Education Association (1985), the "Distinguished Service Award" from the American Educational Research Association (1987), the "Curriculum Theory Project Award" presented by the Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, Louisiana (2000), and the "Mentoring Award" from the International Institute for Qualitative Methodology (2001).

In addition to these awards, he holds Honorary Memberships in the International Honor Society in Education (1994) and the Social Studies Council of the Alberta Teachers' Association (2001), and was inducted into "The Professors of Curriculum Circle" (limited to 125 members) through the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (1988). One other award Ted received, "The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing Award," deserves special attention (1985). On this award may be found the following citation: "The Journal of Curriculum Theorizing honors Professor Ted T. Aoki for distinguished contributions to curriculum studies in the United States and Canada by establishing the Annual Aoki Award." This citation states what virtually all of the other awards seek to celebrate: the lifetime work of a distinguished and exceptional scholar whose practice has changed the landscape of curriculum studies. These accolades are particularly poignant when one considers that after Ted completed his first degree (Bachelor of Commerce, UBC) in 1941, he was subjected to the federal government's policy to evacuate Japanese Canadians from the west coast of British Columbia to southern Alberta immediately following the Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbour (1942).

Ted's ideas came into my life with little fanfare. Today, as a friend and colleague, I know that Ted never wants fanfare. It is his pedagogy that matters, his interactions with individuals, and his pursuit of new ideas. Even so, there is a community of scholars who would benefit tremendously from reading Ted's body of work. Though it took some time to convince Ted of this, it is with his blessing that we bring to you his contributions to the field of curriculum inquiry. Though his scholarship is his own, he would be the first to acknowledge the love and support of his wife June, his sons Doug and Edward, their wives and children.

The collected works of Ted T. Aoki has given me the chance to work with two of the greatest curriculum giants in our field, William Pinar and Ted Aoki, and for that I am truly grateful. Through their generous spirits and intellectual rigour, we have found profound professional respect and a

lasting affectionate friendship. I could not have asked for more. I was also lucky enough to discover the best editorial assistance one can find. I want to thank Nicole McClelland, Labhir Bains, and Sara Hambleton for their generous contributions to the success of this volume. Together, we learned a great deal!

In closing, the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies stands as a national organization to which Ted's commitment to curriculum change was often directed. His national pride is very strong. Through him, and alongside him, Canadian curriculum studies became a field of study. In the past, Canadians often denied the power of their own ideas. Today, that has changed. We want to celebrate those who have made a difference and we want to conceptualize, perhaps reconceptualize, Canadian curriculum studies. What better way to do this than to celebrate the life's work of Canada's own Ted Aoki. Through this volume we pay tribute to Ted Aoki and his achievements. In the act of doing this, readers will witness the development of Ted's ideas over time. This could be the greatest contribution of all; to see firsthand how ideas developed, lingered and found depth in the cracks within words most of us never knew existed. In his lingering notes, he nurtures continuous inquiry through the passions that ground our dedication and curiosity.

Ted, on behalf of countless teachers, administrators, and scholars in Canada, the United States, and a host of other countries, allow me to express our deepest gratitude, admiration, and affection.

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Vancouver, British Columbia
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[i] Preface for Pinar, William F. and Irwin, Rita L. (Eds.) (in press). *The collected works of Ted T. Aoki*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

About the Author

Rita L. Irwin, Ed.D. is a Professor and Head of the Department of Curriculum Studies at the University of British Columbia. She is an art education and curriculum scholar interested in acts of inquiry bringing together the roles and practices of artists, teachers and researchers. As such she is a practicing artist, teacher and researcher engaged in projects attempting to create and understand meaning within and between these roles. She is widely published nationally and internationally, and has exhibited her art work in British Columbia and Alberta. She is an active

leader within the arts and education having held numerous positions provincially, nationally and internationally. In regard to her work in this issue, her soon to be published edited book with William F. Pinar entitled *Curriculum in a New Key: The Collected Works of Ted T. Aoki* (Lawrence Erlbaum) is the stimulus for her article. It is on this note she is quick to say Ted has influenced her work beyond measure and creating this anthology has been an act of deep affection for a great curriculum scholar.

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