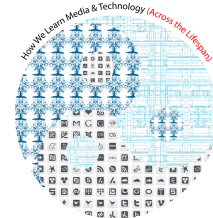




How We Learn (Media & Technology Across the Lifespan)



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HWL Tracer Bullet #60b (see #60a)

Understanding & Comprehension

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1. Working Problems

- a. What is the Purpose of Curriculum Studies?
 - i. Schubert (2002, p. 501): How does one make sense of the remarkable expansion of curriculum literature? No matter how one defines the literature, it must be concluded that unprecedented growth in scholarship has taken place from the early 1970s to the present, especially since the 1980s. The purpose of curriculum studies began to shift from the process of developing curriculum during and before the late 1960s and early 1970s toward understanding curricula as personal, cultural, and ideological phenomena in the 1980s and 1990s (see Pinar et al., 1995).
 - ii. From *Developing Curriculum* or *Designing Curriculum* to?
 1. Understanding curriculum?
 - a. Is it enough to understand curriculum?
 - b. Reconceptualizing Curriculum or Reperceptualizing Curriculum?
 - i. Hazel Henderson, "The Politics of Reconceptualization" (1979, p. 122): All our conceptual crises are rooted in perceptual crises and so the task is going to be to reperceive everything around us.
 - c. Critiquing Curriculum
 - d. Deconstructing Curriculum
 - e. Doing Curriculum
 - f. Changing Curriculum
 - g. Comprehending Curriculum
 - h. Rerouting Curriculum
 - i. Exacerbating Curriculum
 - j. Aggravating Curriculum
 - k. Undertaking Curriculum
 - l. etc.
 - m.
 - iii. Curriculum Theorists hitherto have only understood curriculum, in various ways; the point is to...
 - a. Hermeneutics and "deep understanding" (see #64a)

2. Understanding

- a. Etymology

HWL Tracer Bullets are research guides or bulletins with brief introductions to topics, resources, and general strategies for intellectual direction and tracing interpretive quests (based on the concept at the Library of Congress).

- i. Greek
 - 1. *ἐπίσταμαι, epistamai*
 - ii. German
 - 1. *Verstehen* (Understanding)
 - 2. *Verständnis* (Comprehension)
 - iii. Wood (1899, p. 129): G. *verstehen* and E. *understand* have never been semasiologically explained. And yet the explanation is not far to seek. A term denoting insight, perception, understanding may primarily mean one of several things, the most common of which are: 'sharpness, keenness, acuteness;' 'grasping, comprehension;' 'separating, distinguishing.'
 - iv. Hempl (1899, p. 233): This classification seems to me not quite satisfactory. I propose instead: 1. 'separate', '*unterschieden*', 'distinguish', or 'gather', '*intelligo*', 'understand'. 2. 'grasp', '*begreifen*', 'perceive'. 3. 'take in', 'devour', 'swallow (gullibly)'.
 - 1. In this I do not agree with Prof. Wood. German *verstehen* and English *understand* are cases of class x, not of class 2, and so is Greek *ἐπίσταμαι*. OE. *understandan* was originally simply 'to stand between,' and so 'to keep apart,' 'to separate,' and it, like Latin *distinguo*, German *unterscheiden*, etc., got the figurative meaning 'distinguish', 'make out', 'understand', 'know how (to)' (and in German, *unterstehen* passed on to 'undertake (to),' 'presume (to)'). But the same is true of German *verstehen*, OE. *forstandan*. These originally meant 'to stand in front of,' 'to keep off (from some one else),' 'to separate,' and hence 'to distinguish,' 'to make out,' 'to understand.'
 - v. Wood (1900, pp. 14, 15): Prof. Hempl's class 2. 'grasp,' '*begreifen*,' 'perceive' [why not 'comprehend' rather than 'perceive'?]
 - 1. Let us once more examine *understand*, *verstehen*, *ἐπίσταμαι*. For OE. *understandan* Prof. Hempl assumes certain meanings. Now an assumption is all right provided we have nothing better. But since any given signification may develop in innumerable ways, we can never be sure of a conclusion drawn from an assumption. I agree with Prof. Hempl— or rather he agrees with me— in seeing in E. *understand* the primary meaning 'separate'.
 - 2. *ἐπίσταμαι*, 'fix one's mind upon, believe, be confident of, know, understand,' etc. In the face of such evidence there need be no doubt as to the primary meaning of *ἐπίσταμαι*. The development of the meaning 'turn one's attention to, give heed to' to 'perceive, understand' is a common one. Compare Lat. *animadverto* 'pay attention to, attend to, regard, observe, perceive, understand;' (*animus*) *attendo* 'give heed to, consider;'
- b. Conceptual History
 - i. Dilthey
 - 1. *Verstehen*
 - a. Re-enactment of the author ("re-experiencing [*Nachfühlen*] of alien states of mind")
 - i. Dilthey, "Rise of Hermeneutics" (1900/1972, p. 232): "We must therefore call Understanding [*Verstehen*] that process by which we intuit, behind the sign given to our senses, that psychic reality of which it is the expression."

- ii. “Such understanding ranges from the comprehension of the babblings of children to *Hamlet* or the *Critique of Pure Reason*. From stones and marble, musical notes, gestures, words and letters, from actions, economic decrees and constitutions, the same human spirit addresses us and demands interpretation.”
 - iii. Tapper (1925, p. 347): Dilthey's definition of *verstehen* is little illuminating. *Verstehen* is the process in which we recognize in concrete symbols given from without something inward, something psychic. What is more essential, is the statement that we can analyze the process of understanding only in the process of production. In other words, to understand the author of any literary document we must know how he [she or they] produced it. This was Schleiermacher's position and Dilthey accepts it.
 - b. “Deep understanding” (van Manen, 1975, p. 6)
 - c. “capacity to grasp the inner realities of the human world... the operation in which the mind grasps the mind (*Geist*) of the other person.”
 - i. van Manen (1977, pp. 214-215): Understanding involves the capacity to grasp the inner realities of the human world—empathy. In ordinary English, we speak of an "understanding look" which suggests more than mere objective knowledge. In Dilthey's terms, we understand ourselves and others only in re-experiencing, by inserting our own experienced life into every form of expression of our own and others' lives. Understanding is reserved to designate the operation in which the mind grasps the mind (*Geist*) of the other person. It is not a purely cognitive operation of the mind at all, but that special moment when life understands life. We explain by means of purely intellectual processes, but we understand by means of the combined activity of all the mental powers in apprehending. Practical understanding, in Dilthey's sense, is situated in the study of three types of human expressions: linguistic expressions, nonverbal expressions such as gesticulations, and actions
- ii. Piaget, *To Understand is to Invent* (1948/1974):
 - 1. to understand is to discover, or reconstruct by rediscovery, and such conditions must be complied with if in the future individuals are to be formed who are capable of production and creativity and not simply repetition. (p. 20)
- iii. What does understanding mean?
 - 1. Figuring out
 - 2. Grasping meaning
 - 3. Grasping together (see Comprehension)

- a. Putting together
 - 4. Taking apart
 - iv. Figuring out
 - 1. Watson-Franke et al., (1975, p. 258): Gadamer's (1972:246) illuminating discussion of this situation makes use of the German *verstehen* and derived and related expressions. In English the expression "to figure out" seems best suited to bringing out this meaning of understanding. One can "figure out" the meaning of a text or the way to assemble a machine. The term itself tells us what is happening: we attempt to bring the figure (*Figur*, *Gestalt*) out of the context in which it has been hidden from us. We look for its form, and we could go so far as to say that we are looking for its formula. We reflect upon our activity, and the relationship we are thus building up between the phenomenon (the text, the machine) and ourselves finds expression in the questions we ask about this process.
 - v. Cooper (1994, p. 5): Understanding involves grasping together (comprehending) and seeing together ('syn-optic') the state of affairs or the truth or whatever in all its significant connections.
- 3. Signification**
- a. Signification refers to "production of meaning" or "meaning already produced"
- 4. Meaning**
- a. This "means that"
 - i. Extensionality (to things, other words, etc.)
 - ii. Intensionality (to exclude substitution of other meanings)
 - 1. Different meanings infer or refer to different things
 - b. What does meaning mean? What is meaning?
 - i. Definition
 - 1. "ostensive definition" or "consensual definition" i.e., demonstration
 - ii. Relations
 - 1. "relation between the image and the object"
 - 2. "relation of the symbol to other symbols"
 - 3. "stable relationships between the maker and the object made"
 - 4. "fixation in language of the reflection of objective reality"
 - 5. "representational mediation"
 - iii. Reference
 - iv. Possibility
 - 1. the "possibility or verification" (e.g., demonstration, exemplification, test, etc.) or possibility of intersubjectivity or possibility of resonance
 - c. **Representation**
 - i. Conveying something about the object, actors, action, culture, phenomena, or data, etc.
 - ii. TBA
- 5. Self-Interpretation & Self-Understanding**
- a. Mink (1972, pp. 742, 743): Can we understand a text better than its author did? Can a text contain more than its author intended?... Texts belong to discourse and are subject to "direct" interpretation; actions (other than utterances) are identifiable only under descriptions and are therefore only indirectly interpretable. Essentially historical descriptions are unavailable in principle to agents as such. In this respect an agent's self-interpretation is significantly unlike

an author's intention, and a historical interpretation is significantly unlike an agent's self-interpretation.

6. Signification & Designification

- a. Signification refers to "production of meaning" or "meaning already produced"
- b. TBA

7. Meaning & Semantics

- a. This “means that”
 - i. Extensionality (to things, other words, etc.)
 - ii. Intensionality (to exclude substitution of other meanings)
 1. Different meanings infer or refer to different things
- b. What does meaning mean? What is meaning?
 - i. Definition
 1. “ostensive definition” or “consensual definition” i.e., demonstration
 - ii. Relations
 1. “relation between the image and the object”
 2. “relation of the symbol to other symbols”
 3. “stable relationships between the maker and the object made”
 4. “fixation in language of the reflection of objective reality”
 5. “representational mediation”
 - iii. Reference
 - iv. Possibility
 1. the “possibility or verification” (e.g., demonstration, exemplification, test, etc.) or possibility of intersubjectivity or possibility of resonance
- c. Meaning-making
- d. Sense-making
- e. Truth-making
- f. **Semantics**
 - i. Breal (1893, p. 27): Semantics, or the science of meanings.
 1. (p. 17): the history of words, the development of meanings.
 2. Bryant (1945, p. 564): When the term semantics was introduced in 1897 [1893] by Michel Bréal, the author of that significant work *Essai de Semantique*, a comprehensive treatment of the subject of word meanings (at that time limited to historical etymology), he could have had no knowledge of the many and varied interpretations and applications it would assume today.
 - ii. Linman (1894): the doctrine of the principles that underlie the processes of development of the meanings of words may be called semantics or semasiology.
 - iii. Wheeler (1902, p. 513): The doctrine of historical word-meanings; the systematic discussion of the history and development of changes in the meanings of words.
 - iv. Hayakawa (1945, p. 116): (1) The branch of historical linguistic study that deals systematically with the changes in the meanings of words, as the lexicographer understands 'meaning'; semasiology. (2) The study of human responses to linguistic (and other) symbols; the study of human behavior with, and under the stimulus of, symbols, including the linguistic; signifiés.
 - v. Hayakawa (1947-1953, p. 367): The study of the relation between words and things, later extended into the study of the relations between language, thought and behavior, that is, how human action is influenced by words, whether spoken by others or to oneself in thought; signifiés.

The word was originally used to mean (2) in philology, the historical study of changes in the meaning of words; semasiology.

- vi. Koebner (1953, p. 131): The word semantics is said to have three important meanings. It denotes first, 'the study of the laws and conditions under which signs and symbols including words may be said to be meaningful.'
- vii.

1. Comprehending and Comprehension

a. Etymology and Semasiology

i. Latin

1. *Comprehendere*
2. Clausson (2007, p. 113): *comprehend* derives from the Latin *comprehendere*, to grasp mentally, from *com*, together in mind, mentally + *prehendere*, to seize, to grasp. That which is comprehensible is that which can be seized or grasped (touched) immediately as one would grasp an object with one's hand. For Lawrence, true understanding is not mental, which is a mediated understanding, but is as immediate as the touch of a grasped object to the hand, the object and the hand in direct contact, with no middle term, no mediation, between them.
3. Robinson (2004, p. 391): when an English-speaking person decides whether to say "I grasp your meaning" or "I comprehend your meaning," he or she will probably weigh the greater vividness and figurative force of grasp against the more abstract, formal tone of *comprehend*. To a Roman, however, *comprehend* would have been just as vivid and metaphorical, for the base verb *hendere* meant "seize, grasp," while *pre-* meant "from in front" and *com-* meant "all around". The Latin verb *comprehendere* (whence we get *comprehend*) meant "to seize from in front and all around."

ii. *Dictionary of Untranslatables* (2014, p. 90):

1. *begreifen* has to be reserved for *comprehendere*, that is, for a mode of knowledge that makes use of an intuition "*per apprehensionem*" (Wiener Logik, in RT: Ak., 24:845). The detour through Latin is revealing: the idea of *apprehensio*—that is, grasping or capturing—naturally leads Kant to *begreifen*, which contains this idea in its etymology (*greifen*). To be sure, *konzipieren*, which is derived from the Latin *capere*, also includes the idea of capture, but the etymology is blurred, and the determination of *begreifen* passes precisely through a new translation or a new Latin equivalent, *comprehendere*, in which the meaning of prehension, of taking in hand, is more clearly heard.
2. (p. 91): The act of prehension and grasping expressed by the verb *comprehendere* (and the noun *comprehensio*) is discernible in all uses of the term that include sensorial apprehension (e.g., Cicero, *De legibus*, 1.30) and all of the levels of taking possession intellectually: thus discourse is imprinted on the mind of the orator because he has first "grasped" the ideas that he will develop by means of images that remind him of them (Cicero, *De oratore*,

2.359). The words themselves “enclose” the thought that they have “grasped” (*De oratore*, 1.70), just as the oratorical period “includes” and “circumscribes” the thought (*Brutus*, 34). All of these possible translations of *comprehendere* allow us to glimpse the richness of the term that Cicero chose to render the Stoic *katalêpsis*: other terms were acceptable, which the Stoic in the dialogue *De finibus* (3.17) gives as equivalents of *katalêpsis*: *cognitio* and *perceptio*.

b. Conceptual History

- i. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* (1816/1892, p. xvi): Denn bei Gedanken, besonders bei spekulativen, heißt Verstehen ganz etwas anderes als nur den grammatischen Sinn der Worte fassen und sie in sich zwar hinein-, aber nur bis in die Region des Vorstellens aufnehmen.
 1. For in thought, and particularly in speculative thought, comprehension means something quite different from understanding the grammatical sense of the words alone, and also from understanding them in the region of ordinary conception only.
- ii. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (1953/1999, p. 70, sec. 525-533) (Trans. W. H. Brenner):
 1. Our word *understanding* covers a family of cases. We speak of understanding not only sentences, but also pictures, diagrams, themes in music, people, and cultures. And there is variety within each case as well. For example:
 - a. We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which, says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.) (sec. 531)
 2. Then shall we say that "understanding" has two different meanings here? No. For we want to apply the word to both, want to say that these diverse uses make up and characterize the concept of understanding (sec. 532). "But in the second case, how can one explain the expression, transmit one's comprehension?" (sec. 533). Ask yourself how one leads anyone to comprehend a poem or a musical theme. The answer to this [i.e., comprehension as a movement of thought] tells us how meaning is explained here.
 3. (1986) (Trans. G. E. M. Anscombe)
 - a. 531. We speak of understanding a sentence in the sense in which it can be replaced by another which says the same; but also in the sense in which it cannot be replaced by any other. (Any more than one musical theme can be replaced by another.) In the one case the thought in the sentence is something common to different sentences; in the other, something that is expressed only by these words in these positions. 5 (Understanding a poem.)
 - b. 532. Then has "understanding" two different meanings here?— I would rather say that these kinds of use of "understanding" make up its meaning, make up my concept of understanding. For I want to apply the word "understanding" to all this.
 - c. 533. But in the second case how can one explain the expression, transmit one's comprehension? Ask yourself: How does one lead anyone to comprehension of a poem or of a theme? The answer to this tells us how meaning is explained here.

- iii. Sartre (1960/1963, pp. 152-153): To grasp the meaning of any human conduct, it is necessary to have at our disposal what German psychiatrists and historians have called “comprehension.” But what is involved here is neither a particular talent nor a nor a special faculty of intuition; is the dialectical movement which explains the act by its terminal signification in terms of its starting conditions. It is originally progressive.
- iv. Cooper (1994, p. 5): Understanding involves grasping together (com-prehending) and seeing together ('syn-optic') the state of affairs or the truth or whatever in all its significant connections.
- v.