

Creating Curricula: Aims,
Knowledge and Control

Edited by
Dominic Wyse

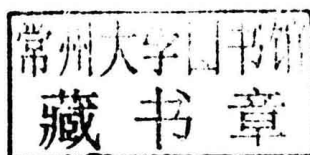


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Creating Curricula: Aims, Knowledge and Control

Knowledge has been a defining focus for the curriculum studies field. In the early part of the 21st century convincing arguments were mounted that knowledge needed to be ‘brought back in’, both to the curriculum of schools and to the attention of curriculum researchers. This book is a result of these arguments, and what some regarded as a ‘crisis’ in curriculum study related to the growing emphasis on international comparisons between education systems.

The book’s most important contribution is to build on seminal work in the sociology and philosophy of education in order to develop new foundations for curriculum study, using the importance of ‘transactions’ as the context for understanding knowledge in the curriculum.

This book was originally published as a special issue of *The Curriculum Journal*.

Dominic Wyse is Professor of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and Head of the Department of Learning and Leadership at the Institute of Education, University College London, UK. The main focus of his research is curriculum and pedagogy, and key areas of his work include the teaching of writing, reading, and creativity. He is the lead editor of the *SAGE Handbook of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment* (2015), and the co-author of *Teaching English, Language and Literacy – 3rd Edition* (2013). His most recent book is *A Guide to Early Years and Primary Teaching* (2015). He is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and a fellow of the RSA.

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Editorial

Creating curricula: aims, knowledge, and control

Dominic Wyse, Louise Hayward, Kay Livingston and Steve Higgins

The Curriculum Journal, volume 25, issue 1 (March 2014), pp. 2–6

Chapter 1

What is a curriculum and what can it do?

Michael Young

The Curriculum Journal, volume 25, issue 1 (March 2014), pp. 7–13

Chapter 2

Knowledge and the curriculum

David Scott

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Chapter 3

Pragmatising the curriculum: bringing knowledge back into the curriculum conversation, but via pragmatism

Gert Biesta

The Curriculum Journal, volume 25, issue 1 (March 2014), pp. 29–49

Chapter 4

Downgraded curriculum? An analysis of knowledge in new curricula in Scotland and New Zealand

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An aims-based curriculum illustrated by the teaching of science in schools

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Two contrasting Australian Curriculum responses to globalisation: what students should learn or become

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Dysfunctional dichotomies? Deflating bipolar constructions of curriculum and pedagogy through case studies from music and history

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Curriculum and assessment reform gone wrong: the perfect storm of GCSE English

Tina Isaacs

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mind of the learner and in interrelationships among educational aims and applications to school curricula. Recent books include the following: *Education and the End of Work* (1997); *Do Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences Add Up?* (1998); *Will the New National Curriculum Live up to its Aims?* (with Steve Bramall, 2000); *The Child's Mind* (2002); *Rethinking the School Curriculum* (ed., 2004); *The Curriculum and the Child* (2005); *Intelligence, Destiny and Education: The Ideological Origins of Intelligence Testing* (2006); *What Schools are For and Why* (2007); *Exploring Well-being in Schools* (2011); and *The Invention of the Secondary Curriculum* (2011).

Dominic Wyse is Professor of Early Childhood and Primary Education, and Head of the Department of Learning and Leadership at the Institute of Education, University College London, UK. The main focus of his research is curriculum and pedagogy, and key areas of his work include the teaching of writing, reading, and creativity. He is the lead editor of the *SAGE Handbook of Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment* (2015), and the co-author of *Teaching English, Language and Literacy – 3rd Edition* (2013). His most recent book is *A Guide to Early Years and Primary Education* (2015). He is a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences and a fellow of the RSA.

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in the twenty-first century is a phenomenon in need of continued critical attention, and insights into more appropriate future directions.

It was in the context of these intersections between international performativity and curriculum studies that the idea for this special issue arose following some early meetings of a new curriculum, pedagogy and assessment special interest group (SIG) of the *British Educational Research Association*. The inaugural seminar of the SIG, held at the *Institute of Education, University of London*, examined what kinds of aims might be appropriate to frame curricula. This was followed by a second seminar, held in Glasgow, that examined synergies for better learning, including reflections by academics, policy makers and practitioners on the OECD report of the same name (OECD, 2013b). Speakers from both these seminars (and other curriculum specialists) were invited to propose papers for the special issue.

The special issue has been designed to contribute to the renaissance in curriculum studies (Priestly & Biesta, 2013). In particular, it examines foundational conceptions that might now inform curriculum study and curricula. At the start of this editorial, we have already alluded to control, in particular the control politicians exert in the context of international comparison. Another foundational curriculum conception is knowledge and its place in curricula. Michael Young has been at the forefront of *Bringing Knowledge Back In* (Young, 2008). In England, his theoretical work has also seen practical application, for example informing the national curriculum of the Conservative-Liberal Democrat government to be implemented by schools in 2014. For this reason, we were delighted by his agreement to provide a commentary on the papers in the special issue.

John Dewey was clear that the best knowledge available to society was the appropriate material for children's learning, but only through teaching that made a connection with children's experiences and thoughts. Dewey argued that good teaching is built on the educator's understanding that there should be an *interaction* between the child's experiences and ideas, and the school's aim to inculcate learning. Less effective learning would take place if, instead of interaction, opposition is built between experience and learning. Dewey also identified what he called the three 'evils' of inappropriate curriculum material: (a) the material is not organic to the child; (b) the connecting links of need and aim are conspicuous by their absence and (c) there is a lack of logical value (Dewey, 1902, p. 24). Logical value to Dewey was curriculum organisation that represented the best knowledge in society organised through authentic hands-on experiences for the child. The teacher's role, however, was vital: 'Guidance [i.e. by the teacher] is not external imposition. *It is freeing the life-process for its own most adequate fulfilment*' [*op. cit.* p. 17 Italics in original].

However, rather than seeing a greater place for Dewian philosophy informing national curriculum thinking in England from 2010 onwards, it

was Matthew Arnold who was selected by Education Secretary Michael Gove, in particular Arnold's essay advocating the importance of culture as a remedy for the problems with society, in which he said that we should focus on 'the best which has been thought and said in the world, and, through this knowledge, turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits, which we now follow staunchly but mechanically, vainly imagining that there is a virtue in following them staunchly which makes up for the mischief of following them mechanically' (Arnold, 1869, p. 5). The appeal to this kind of theory by the Secretary of State for Education in England was notable, but his early attention to 'the best that has been thought and written' [sic], consistent with the extreme reduction of attention to language in the national curriculum in favour of literacy, rather than an appeal to 'turning a stream of fresh and free thought upon our stock notions and habits' proved to be prescient in relation to the final version of England's national curriculum.

One way of structuring knowledge in the school curriculum is through traditional school subjects. However, Basil Bernstein's attention to *classification* and *framing*, in the context of the structures of power and the principles of social control, included identifying 'some reasons for a movement towards the institutionalising of integrated codes of *the weak classification and framing (teacher and taught)*' (Bernstein, 1971, p. 66). These reasons included recognition that higher levels of thinking were increasingly differentiated; more flexibility was required in the labour force; the need for more egalitarian education; and the need to make sense of major societal problems related to power and control. Bernstein's thinking also focused on ways to 'declassify and so alter power structures and principles of control; in so doing to unfreeze the structuring of knowledge and to change the boundaries of consciousness' (Bernstein, 1971, p. 67). He theorised that only a select few pupils/students are normally allowed access to 'relaxed frames', in other words a state of empowerment for these pupils to 'create endless new realities' as part of the understanding that knowledge is permeable and provisional. Bernstein's chapter was published in the book entitled *Knowledge and Control: New Direction for the Sociology of Education* edited by Michael Young.

Although there is perhaps consensus on the idea that the key role of teaching and learning is communication of knowledge from teacher to learner (but less consensus about knowledge from learner to teacher), there is a need to make progress on what are the most appropriate ways to understand knowledge, and to represent knowledge, in national curricula. The aim of the proposed special issue is to explore theoretical and empirical arguments for the construction of national curricula in order to articulate some parameters around which effective curricula might be built.

We will not introduce the papers individually in this editorial, as Michael Young's commentary serves to do this, instead we briefly address