Curriculum Studies and Educational Planning

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Studies in Teaching and Learning
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The purpose of this series of short books on education is to make available readable, up-to-date views on educational issues and controversies. Its aim will be to provide teachers and students (and perhaps parents and governors) with a series of books which will introduce those educational topics which any intelligent and professional educationist ought to be familiar with. One of the criticisms levelled against 'teacher-education' is that there is so little agreement about what ground should be covered in courses at various levels; one assumption behind this series of texts is that there is a common core of knowledge and skills that all teachers need to be aware of, and the series is designed to map out this territory.

Although the major intention of the series is to provide general coverage, each volume will consist of more than a review of the relevant literature; the individual authors will be encouraged to give their own personal interpretation of the field and the way it is developing.

Preface

In 1973 *Social Change, Educational Theory and Curriculum Planning* was first published. It is now out of date in some respects, but rather than attempt to revise it, I felt it would be better to write a different book with an orientation more suited to the problems of the 1980s.

During the 1970s the curriculum was discussed in a number of countries, including the United Kingdom: the Callaghan speech at Ruskin College was followed by the 'Great Debate' on education, and curriculum was frequently mentioned. But the curriculum debate in England, as elsewhere, tended to be conducted at a very low level. Too much attention was paid to narrow utilitarian views of schooling; cuts in educational expenditure soon followed, and curriculum planning sometimes became associated with 'back to basics'.

The main purpose of this book is to look at education in a much broader way, using techniques of cultural analysis as a means of curriculum planning. The analysis highlights a number of contradictions in society and a number of defects in traditional curricula. For example, it suggests that the problems of young people growing up in a complex urban, industrial society have been seriously underestimated; schools have generally failed to take seriously the moral, social and political aspects of culture in curriculum planning.

A related concern of this book is to warn teachers against the technicist, 'efficiency' model of curriculum. The United Kingdom has not yet suffered the full horrors of 'behavioural objectives' or 'performance-based evaluation', but there are occasional danger signs, and secondary schools are dominated by external examinations to a ridiculous extent. The alternative proposed is an open curriculum planned according to methods of cultural analysis.

London, 1983   Denis Lawton

Contents

1 The Study of Curriculum: Definitions and Ideologies

Education . . . involves the initiation of others into worthwhile activities. . . . Science, mathematics, history, art, cooking and carpentry feature on the curriculum, not bingo, bridge and billiards.

R. S. Peters*

Definitions do not necessarily help understanding, but it is sometimes necessary to attempt to clarify meanings, especially where words are used in quite different ways in different contexts. There is a problem about the meaning of curriculum. Some languages do not even have a word for curriculum, and translators at international conferences are faced with a difficulty. In French, for example, 'curriculum' tends to be translated by the phrase *cours d'études* (course of studies) which often conveys quite the wrong flavour of meaning intended by the English writer. Many educationists who have 'curriculum' somewhere in their title find the word an embarrassment – more than once I have had to extricate myself from a situation in which it was assumed that I spent all of my professional life working on timetables!

That kind of misunderstanding does, in fact, illustrate, or at least get close to, one of the major ways of interpreting 'curriculum'. A narrow definition of curriculum would limit it to *content*, that is, subjects on the timetable and what is taught under each of those subject headings. At the other extreme, curriculum is used in a very wide sense to include not only what is taught, but how it is taught and why. This would include curriculum evaluation, control and classroom interaction.

Most of the standard definitions of curriculum can be placed on this continuum which at one extreme limits curriculum to the content of what is taught, and at the other extreme would seem to

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* (1966) *Ethics and Education*.

include the whole of educational studies. Elizabeth Maccia (1965) defined curriculum as 'presented instructional content'. Somewhat further along the continuum is Jack Kerr's (1968) definition: 'all the learning which is planned and guided by school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside school'. Some would regard this definition as very wide indeed, but others would still object to its narrowness; one view of the 'hidden curriculum' would be that it is precisely that part of the curriculum which is not planned and guided by the school, but simply happens.

It seems to me useful to make a distinction between curriculum which is planned and other kinds of learning which are either accidental, unplanned, or may be even quite undesirable. Jim MacDonald (1971) suggests that it is necessary to have an agreed working definition, and accuses curriculum development experts of irresponsibility in their writing when they define curriculum as anything broader than 'a plan for instruction'. I would be willing to accept that limitation (although there are difficulties about the use of the word 'instruction' which we will encounter later in this book) provided that it were understood that the term 'curriculum *studies*' is necessarily concerned with much more than plans for instruction. Curriculum studies will involve a whole range of discussions about content, justification for that content, the translation of plan into practice by teachers, the reception of those plans and so on. In order to deal with those difficult issues it will be necessary to draw upon aspects of the disciplines of philosophy, sociology, psychology and history.

It may also be useful at this stage to make a distinction between curriculum studies and curriculum development or curriculum reform. If the terms are used synonymously, then the field of curriculum studies is being restricted to a very narrow range of issues, and also assumptions are being made about the desirability of change which ought to be examined rather than taken for granted. At a later stage I would also want to suggest that a very useful way of looking at the curriculum and at curriculum studies is to define curriculum as 'a selection from a culture'. If curriculum is a plan for instruction, then defining curriculum as a selection from a culture widens the range of curriculum studies to include justification as well as evaluation.

More important perhaps than questions about whether curriculum is used in a wide or a narrow sense, is the ideology behind any definition of curriculum. It is impossible to discuss curriculum in

a meaningful way without first establishing some kind of 'philosophy' of education including discussion of the values involved. The content of education is necessarily dependent on what we think education is for as well as for whom it is intended. I will eventually make my own 'value' position clear, but first we should establish certain basic premises.

I have already pointed out that there is a difference between curriculum studies and curriculum development, although they are often used as if they were synonymous; similarly, curriculum theory and curriculum planning overlap but are by no means the same process. Curriculum is also an interesting example of an area where theory does not necessarily precede practice. Curriculum development takes place, for a variety of motives, when individuals or groups – especially teachers and others concerned with the planning of curricula – are dissatisfied with what is being taught or with the methods employed in classrooms. The science curricula in the USA and UK in the 1950s provided some good examples of this kind of change. Educationists looked at the results obtained by existing curricula and indicated their dissatisfaction – perhaps because the programmes were inefficient or out of date – and proceeded to set to work on improving them. The result in the USA, for example, was a series of science curriculum projects funded by a federal agency which became known as the 'National Science Foundation'.[1] In the UK, Nuffield Science Projects followed similar directions, but on a much more modest scale. When teachers or professional curriculum developers attempted to improve the curriculum (or sections of the curriculum), they came up against a number of difficult questions. In the case of science, for example:

'Why teach science anyway?'
'Should all children learn science? If so, why?'
'If so, what kind of science?'
'What is science?'
'What is school science?'

These kinds of questions do not necessarily all arise at the same time, but those concerned with curriculum development in any subject area sooner or later find themselves asking questions which are 'theoretical' issues. Curriculum studies is, therefore, different from curriculum development which is only part of a much wider set of curriculum issues that are partly historical, partly philosophical, sociological and psychological. In this sense, curriculum studies is parasitic upon what are often regarded as the

foundation disciplines in education,[2] but in other respects, curriculum studies asks different kinds of questions or at least approaches the questions from a different point of view. It is not always helpful to begin curriculum studies by assuming that development or reform is the first priority. It may be much more important to establish the total context of the curriculum by asking fundamental questions about it rather than taking it for granted, or trying to improve the teaching of it.

Similarly, it might be argued that curriculum theory should precede curriculum planning, but in practice this is not usually what happens. If we distinguish curriculum planning from curriculum development by saying that curriculum planning is concerned with the whole curriculum (rather than just a part as, for example, with a curriculum development project in science), then it would seem to be sensible to base a plan on some kind of theory – just as a plan for a bridge might be based on certain principles of engineering and physics – but even here we should perhaps remember that bridges were built long before engineers and physicists got involved. In education, what often happens is that someone is given the task of planning or replanning a curriculum, who may be not even fully aware of his or her own educational 'theory'. If asked, that person might even deny having a theory, preferring to be seen – like so many practitioners – as a sound practical teacher. But just as any teacher has a theory whether or not he or she realises it, so an educational planner faces choices and takes decisions on the basis of some kind of value or set of values which are the basis of a theoretical position. Every statement that a teacher makes in a classroom is value-laden, connected with ideas about the purpose of education, perhaps even the purpose of life. And so it is for educational planners and curriculum developers.

Those curriculum developers in the 1950s who were concerned with revising science curricula occasionally claimed that they were 'value-free'. But they soon had to face questions about the purpose of school science: was the major purpose really to provide enough scientists for industry and particularly war-time industry? Or was the purpose of school science to equip *all* young people with an understanding of one very significant aspect of their social and physical environment? It is impossible to answer that kind of question without bringing values into play.

Teachers and educational administrators as well as politicians all operate with some kind of 'social theory' in the sense of sets of assumptions, value positions, and ideas about the purpose of

society. These views may, however, lack coherence, and some assumptions may contradict others. One important purpose of curriculum studies is to clarify issues and questions, to relate points of view to more general ideologies and to make clear what the theoretical choices are. Curriculum studies is therefore concerned with theories rather than with a curriculum theory. In this sense curriculum studies might have some similarity to studying politics. No one would expect a university course in political science to conclude by telling the graduates how to vote at the next election; this book will not have a final chapter saying exactly what the curriculum should include, but it is hoped that in both cases the choices will be clearer and the basis of decision-making established according to rational principles.[3]

My colleague Malcolm Skilbeck (1976) has suggested that there are at least three basic educational ideologies each of which generates a different type of curriculum theory:

1 classical humanism;
2 progressivism;
3 reconstructionism.

These ideologies are, of course, 'ideal types' in the sense that they rarely, if ever, exist in a pure form – most individual teachers might easily find themselves in at least two of the camps. But this may be where the danger of incoherence lies – some aspects of one ideology may be quite incompatible with beliefs appropriate to one of the other ideologies.

One of the interesting, perhaps distressing, features of schools is how similar they are in all societies despite differences in ideology.[4] This may be connected with a fourth ideology: what Skilbeck refers to as the 'technocratic-bureaucratic ideology' that lies behind a good deal of contemporary discussion of education, including ideas about assessment, testing and evaluation.

Classical Humanism

Classical humanism is probably the oldest educational ideology, originating in Greece in the fourth century BC when Plato developed the idea of cultural heritage, whose custodians were a class of 'guardians'. The ideology survived the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, and was put forward again in modified forms by

Matthew Arnold (1869) and by T. S. Eliot (1948). An essential feature of classical humanist ideology is that it associates traditional culture and values with a small minority group – 'the elite'.[5] This elite was referred to by Plato as the 'men of gold' who were to receive a quite different education from the other two 'lesser metal' groups. A clearly outlined twentieth century version of this view is that of Professor Geoffrey Bantock, who has written frequently about two types of education for two quite different classes of the community: he refers to a literary education for a small minority and the need to have a quite different 'popular culture' education for the masses based on an oral tradition.[6]

According to Plato, only a very small elite was to have the freedom to pursue enquiry and even for them only after a commitment to the values of the state had been thoroughly inculcated. Much of what Plato advocated in *The Republic* and *The Laws* might now be regarded as indoctrination rather than education. This charge could not, however, be levelled against Professor Bantock. Bantock advocates two forms of schooling which would accept the irreconcilable differences between 'high culture' and mass culture. Bantock's motive would appear to be social and cultural rather than, as with Plato, mainly political. Bantock is less concerned with the stability of the state than with providing each section of society with a worthwhile education. He thus advocates for the masses – not very carefully defined, but presumably including the working classes and the lower middle classes – a wide range of activities based on folk culture rather than high culture. His reason for this recommendation is not that a high culture education would be dangerous for the masses, but simply that they would not or could not benefit from it. Their traditional culture is so different, according to Bantock, that it is impossible to make high culture or literary culture available to them. What must be done, therefore, is to devise a combination of movement studies and moral education which they can understand and benefit from, and which would also be in some sense 'worthwhile'. It will be necessary for us to return to this theme of the Bantock view of an alternative education to classical humanism. At this stage, however, we are more concerned with the characteristics of classical humanist curriculum.

A classical humanist curriculum would concentrate on cultural heritage; those kinds of knowledge which have been worked out over hundreds of years as giving access to the best in terms of literature, music, history and more recently, science. The de-

velopment of the classical humanist curriculum could be traced historically through the medieval trivium and quadrivium to the idea of the Renaissance man, and then to the nineteenth century public school and Oxford or Cambridge educated Christian gentleman. Certain subjects which were regarded as high status and character training were the curricular goals.

The main reason why classical humanism can no longer be acceptable as an ideology in most societies is that it runs directly counter to democratic ideals of social justice and equality of opportunity. In most democratic societies education is regarded both as a means of encouraging greater equality, and as a 'good end' in its own right which ought to be available to all rather than confined to a small elite. An additional reason for its non-acceptability is more practical: the relevance of what has traditionally been regarded as the high status forms of cultural heritage is increasingly questionable. The kind of subject-matter suitable as a 'badge of rank' for a nineteenth century gentleman even when modified to some extent and brought up to date, is hardly likely to have general educational appeal.

It may be important, however, to make a distinction between rejecting the classical humanist ideology because it is essentially anti-democratic, and rejecting either the idea of cultural heritage or the importance of subjects and subject-matter. It will be a part of my later argument to establish the importance of 'cultural heritage', somewhat differently defined, for all young people, not simply for the future leaders of societies.

Progressivism

Progressivism, or child-centred education, also has a long history. The 'bible' of progressivist ideology is Jean-Jacques Rousseau's *Emile* (1762). Whereas classical humanism is 'knowledge-centred', progressivism is child-centred and represents a romantic rejection of traditional approaches to education. More important than transmitting a cultural heritage is the need for the child to discover for himself and follow his own impulses. An essential aspect of Rousseau's ideology was that childhood is an important period in its own right and should not be regarded as preparation for adulthood. Freedom was more important than social order.

The tradition was made into a more specific educational programme by such figures as Pestalozzi and Froebel, whose influence

is by no means without importance today in teacher education. The tradition has also survived in the twentieth century in a variety of forms: one extreme form was advocated by A. S. Neill;[7] a somewhat less extreme version was put forward by R. F. MacKenzie;[8] and a modified progressivism at one point seemed to become the accepted official view of primary education in the UK on the appearance of the Plowden Report with the child-centred title *Children and their Primary Schools*.[9]

A curriculum based on progressivism would be concerned not with subjects, but with experiences, topics chosen by the pupils and 'discovery'. Knowledge in the form of facts would be regarded as of very little importance, although acquisition of important concepts and generalisations might be given priority. Children's own writing and painting would be seen as of much greater value than appreciation of cultural heritage. In its most extreme form the curriculum would be that of the romantic individualists, rejecting traditional knowledge and values completely, in favour of the young discovering their own way of life.

The difficulty about accepting 'progressivism' in its entirety as an ideology is that it is based on an over-optimistic view of human nature. Rousseau and his followers assumed that individual human beings were 'naturally good' but tended to be corrupted by an evil society. Hence the doctrine of allowing children to choose a curriculum (or perhaps no curriculum) for themselves, and the importance of allowing children to develop without the harmful influence of society. But it is now very difficult to accept the notion of children being naturally virtuous; there is a good deal of evidence to demonstrate 'natural' selfishness which is only made tolerable by the influence of adults insisting on social conventions. A more acceptable view of the child-society relationship is that they are not in conflict: a child only becomes truly human by developing socially as well as individually. Children and society are complex mixtures of good and evil, and education consists to some extent of encouraging the good and trying to eliminate the evil in both.

Once again, however, to reject the ideology as a whole is not to dismiss all the beliefs and practices of progressive education. The child-centred ideology was, in many respects, a healthy reaction against the almost inhuman treatment of children practised in Rousseau's day and in the nineteenth century. In addition the stages of development approach, hinted at by Rousseau and others, has been advanced by Piaget as the basis of a much more

scientific approach to children's learning. Finally, the motivational advantages of allowing children *some* choice is now clearly established.

Reconstructionism

If classical humanism is knowledge-centred, and progressivism is child-centred, reconstructionism might be regarded as society-centred. This would, however, be to over-simplify, since an essential aspect of reconstructionism would be to see the individual and society as harmoniously integrated rather than necessarily in opposition.

The essence of social reconstructionism is that education is seen as a way of improving society (and thus giving a better opportunity to the individual members of that society). In the USA, reconstructionism is often associated with John Dewey, for whom the experimental methods of science provided the most appropriate approach to social questions. This 'experimentalism', combined with his view of democracy, underlay much of Dewey's thinking about the relation between education and society. For Dewey democracy was not simply a form of government but a way of life which provided maximum opportunities for experimentation and growth. Education for all was, therefore, both a desirable aspect of democratic society as well as a means of achieving a better democracy. Above all, education was concerned with opportunities for the 'growth' of individuals within the modern industrial world. In this way the quality of life of individuals, and hence the quality of society itself, would continuously improve.

In the UK, reconstructionism might be associated with H. G. Wells and Bertrand Russell and, in the field of education, with Karl Mannheim.

Skilbeck (1976) summarises reconstructionist ideology as follows:

1. the claim that education can be one of the major forces for planned change in society;
2. the principle that educational processes should be distinguished from certain other social processes, such as political propaganda, commercial advertising, or mass entertainment, and that the former should, if necessary, enter into conflict with the latter in pursuit of worthwhile ends or goals;