

CURRICULUM AND POWER: THE STRUGGLE FOR CONTROL 1982-83

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It is fashionable to say that curriculum theory is in a state of transition or flux though it might be more accurate to use the words pressure or crisis. This is fairly evident in Australia where in recent years we have gone from the establishment of the Curriculum Development Centre in 1974 through the controversy on the banning of *Man: a Course of Study* and *S.E.M.P.* in the late 70s, the Core Curriculum Proposal of 1980 and the closing down of the Centre in 1981 and its possible resurrection in 1983. In Britain the Schools Council, while not being subject to such stark annihilation, has been divided into separate sections and most of the big curriculum programs wound down. In the United States money for educational research and curriculum development has been drastically reduced resulting in a movement of researchers back to mainline psychology and sociology. Attacks on progressive or liberal forms of education combined with the closure of many teacher education institutions have forced a spotlight on what the basic elements of education ought to be and put pressure on to bring schools into line with the so-called needs of society. The A.C.T. Schools Authority draft position paper, *Future Directions in Curriculum*¹, is a case in point, promoting in my view a return to centralized planning and control from school-based curriculum development.

This pressure is manifest in general in such movements as the 'back to basics', the call for accountability and the renewed interest in universal standards.² It is in this context of reduced expenditure on education especially at tertiary levels, of calls for more public and State control over schools and their curricula, of falling enrolments and of a switch away from egalitarian to meritocratic rhetoric that we must examine the present state of curriculum theory.³ The pressures are twofold: (1) that curriculum theory and practice should be more efficient, effective and accountable, (2) that the views that underline or are assumed in curriculum theory should be made explicit. The need to make curriculum guidelines and materials more obviously of value to society while at the same time exposing the ideological bases of such perspectives has, despite appearances to the contrary, been fruitful in that it has brought into the open the critical issues of what schools are for, what schools can do, what power, if any, teachers have, of who controls schools and through them the future.⁴

Having thus sketched in brief the educational background it is now necessary to turn to the problems of curriculum theory. At a common-sense level, it is possible to point to curriculum theory as the arrangements for the

transmission of learning in an institutional context, usually that of a school or college. A curriculum might be said to be analogous to a menu or plan for a building or the race card for a meeting. Indeed its Latin origins might support such a reading. It is possible without any difficulty to identify curricula at national, state, region, institution, and classroom level, each one more specific than the other. It is possible, too, to identify aspects or factors involved in any curriculum, some central, others less so.

Any curriculum will have some purpose or purposes, some of which will be external to it, e.g. the achievement of tertiary entrance or an apprenticeship for successful completion of the course, and others which will be internal, e.g. the establishment of coherence as between the knowledge content and the mode of evaluation. These purposes will be achieved through the successful transmission and learning of content, be it in the form of subjects, activities, skills, form of subjects, activities, skills, forms of thought and understanding, through appropriate instructional or teaching procedures or processes tested or evaluated in some way. A curriculum will involve questions relating to the use of space, time, materials and resources, as well as examinations, school organization, community and workforce connections and relationship with earlier and later stages, e.g. high school to primary and college.

So far, so good. But all these aspects involve choices or decisions about students, teachers, the structure of knowledge and the wishes of society. Values permeate curriculum activity and it is here at the ideological sphere that diverging viewpoints appear.⁸

Curriculum development is a moral and social activity in which choices about societal goods have to be made, the interests of students, parents and teachers weighed and principles of equality, freedom, fairness and justice brought to bear. What looked like a simple question, almost a purely technical and professional one turns out to be obviously and sometimes inexplicably complex. Any curriculum formulation is an artefact of human society, finely woven, subtle and of vital significance in the transmission of values and culture.⁹

That curriculum development is complex is one problem: that it is urgent is another. For despite the lack of definition, the dilemmas to do with knowledge and ideology and the disputes about external (i.e. social) constraints on curriculum planning and building, the show must go on in hundreds of thousands of schools throughout the world every day. And there can be no doubt that it does go on. If the teachers see curriculum theory as unproblematic or even useless why the commotion, why the outpourings of books and articles from curriculum theorists, philosophers, sociologists? The answer takes different forms:—

1. Educationalists who wish to innovate, change or improve the quality of schooling see curriculum change as central to such change. This implies a need on their part for a curriculum theory to justify change and a reformed curriculum operation to implement it. This, in turn, implies a necessity to overthrow or modify the theory that grounds existing practice. The Schools Commission 15/16 year old study⁷ and the C.D.C. Core Curriculum documents are examples of this.⁸
2. Agreement among philosophers, sociologists and others who study the concept of knowledge has broken down resulting in an anarchistic sort of pluralism involving many models of knowledge each requiring adaptation to curriculum terms and developing its own curriculum model. Thus those such as Hilda Taba who stress the main feature of knowledge as technological skill have a technological, skill-based model, those such as Lawton, who favour culture transmission, an intuitive model and those who have the cognitive at heart, an intellectual model. Bruner and Hirst are examples of the latter. There are also divisions between those who hold knowledge as objective, and supporters of relativism, between child-centred activists and supporters of inherited standards. The school curriculum becomes the ground over which these battles are fought, teachers' and students' loyalties often the prizes of war, and textbooks the profit.
3. Since 1970 there has been a growing debate on the ideological assumptions underlying curriculum planning and knowledge. Once the simplistic notion that the curriculum was value-free or could be reduced to value-free elements, including value-free social science, religious and moral education, had been challenged by Michael Young, Basil Bernstein, Michael Apple⁹ and others fierce conflicts arose. The emphasis switched to the study of curricular aims and outcomes, to the relationship between curriculum and society. Once the curriculum was seen as a cultural artefact the kinds of questions arose as to who designs and controls it, whether it should be managed by a central system, developed by schools independently or designed by classroom teachers.
4. Challenges to the hegemony of school inspectors, curriculum departments etc. generated a need for appeal to curriculum principles to settle disputes.
5. As Governments developed concepts of equality and pluralism there was pressure on schools to implement egalitarian or elitist curriculum arrangements. Much confusion was passed down to schools through discussion documents, and various white and green papers etc. The C.D.C. document 'Core Curriculum for Australian Schools' is an example of this.

In brief, nobody could take a common-sense view of curriculum planning anymore or appeal to a simplistic view or commonsense rationale.

One of my self-imposed tasks on study leave recently was to attempt to devise a broad framework for curriculum perspectives in the last twenty years based on (a) the literature and (b) practice in schools. While much work has been done on the former one of my main conclusions was that there was a need to examine and report on what was actually happening in schools. In order to do this a framework based on the 'literature' was necessary. This is not to imply a view that theory precedes practice but rather that for theory to be modified by practice or to be acted on it must be made explicit. My view is based on Karl Popper's notion that theory should be tested by practice and then modified by the results, thus establishing a tight logical connection of a dynamic interactive kind. Whether Popper would accept this use of his ideas of scientific development in any area of practical moral concern¹⁰ is another matter.

Curriculum Theory

It is necessary to distinguish different kinds of theoretical literature.

- (a) There is recipe-type theory, designed to guide practice in a very structured way. This theory is prescriptive in nature, not concerned particularly with generalization, explanation or justification of principles.
- (b) There is theory of a critical nature deriving from analysis of the relationship between education, curriculum and society based on disciplines such as sociology, anthropology and philosophy.
- (c) There is philosophical theory which considers the relationship between the concepts involved, for example, curriculum, knowledge power etc. and their relationship with individuals and society.

Having made this distinction I do not wish to labour it in this essay. The reason is that each kind of theory assumes the other usually covertly. The issues or problems straddle each area nor is it possible for any one perspective or discipline to advance a complete analysis. It will be shown, however, that each of the following models leans more on one kind of theory rather than another. I take educational theory then to be a consistent perspective or viewpoint designed to influence or guide practice rather than as a set of explanatory generalizations.

Where scientific theory has central to it notions of explanation and generalization, practical theory which is especially related to human activity must eschew such notions, presenting itself instead through models or viewpoints in much the same way as the artist or craftsman presents his or her work to society. This is not an unchallenged view. One model, the managerial model, does claim to be scientific at least in the technological sense of that activity. The issue as to whether curriculum design and instruction is to be considered a science or art or a craft is one which demonstrates the different viewpoints. Elliott Eisner argues that education

is an art, that teachers should be seen as performers and presenters and that curriculum designs should be judged much as architects' designs are judged. My own view is that while comparisons of the educational task with that of the scientist or the artist or the craftsman are useful analogies they can be unproductive if pushed too far. For education is quite a different activity to scientific discovery in respect of its aims, its methods, and the way its results accrue. Nor is it similar to painting or acting or composing or yet again to making furniture or Ford cars. Attempts to see it in terms of science or art or craft belittle education and do nothing to enhance the scientists or the artists who would clearly want to distinguish between their discovery roles and any educational implications. My argument is that educational activities are best seen in their own settings or contexts where transmission is the central feature. Following Wittgenstein it is possible to say that understanding education is a question of looking carefully at what forms of life or activities are marked out by that concepts, what networks and linguistic labels are used and what confusions and ambiguities result."

The models which follow are attempts to articulate some major manifestations of those forms of life and language we call curriculum theories. There are two dominant models, that is models which at least at the rhetorical level are accepted as defining orthodoxy, what the thoughtful teacher is expected to do. These are the managerial model in the United States (and to a large extent in Australia) and the cultural model endemic to the U.K. (and to some extent in Australia). Both have been referred to as traditional curriculum theory.

Both orthodoxies were challenged by a humanist progressive model or set of models in the U.S.A. and the U.K. in the late fifties, the sixties and the early seventies. While the humanist/progressive approach did make severe inroads into primary education most people I spoke to seem to think that its oppositional force is spent, that some of its main ideas have been taken over by the dominant models and its radical elements discarded.

Reasons for the decline are various:—

1. the failure of education to solve problems to do with inequality despite massive expenditure
2. a changed economic climate that made 'back to basics' movements powerful
3. the failure of humanist/progressive movements to define themselves in clear terms. Much of the movement was a reaction against the orthodoxy. There was no agreement on positive criteria for, say, 'open' education.
4. the capacity for dominant orthodoxies to adjust to opposition by incorporating it, or by deflection of its main thrusts, by strangulation through institutional procedures etc.
5. the failure of the movement's theorists to provide a good set of

justifications for the new practices.

The fourth model which is still very much emerging is critical both of the dominant orthodoxies and the humanist/progressive alternative. It is difficult at this stage to predict its development or success. It is important, however, that we should be aware of it as I found its adherents the only people who were prepared to put much energy into thinking about curriculum issues. Most of the recent books come from this group and almost all of the lively ones.

The characteristics of the four models which follow are drawn from recent publications in curriculum theory listed in the references at the end of this essay.¹²

FOUR MODELS OF CURRICULUM THEORY

Model I: The Managerial Curriculum

William Pinar in his recent article in *Rethinking Curriculum Studies*¹³ has sketched the historical origins and main functions of this model. My recent paper in *Discourse*¹⁴ makes similar points from a different perspective. Saylor, Alexander and Lewis' book *Curriculum Planning for Better Teaching and Learning*¹⁵ provides an account of the model in practice while Eisner's *The Educational Imagination*¹⁶ points to some of its shortcomings. This model originated in the United States where it remains dominant though somewhat in decline, having been attacked successfully by Eisner because of its distorting effects on aspects of curriculum such as the arts and literature, by Michael Apple and others because of its (exploded) claim to neutrality and its failure to face the social and political basis of education. New perspectives in epistemology which abandon the fact-value dichotomy and point out the errors of logical positivism make its position as having a claim to be the one and only 'scientific method' untenable in logic — though a weaker claim, that it is a valuable model in situations requiring training rather than education can still be seen to be viable. Thus it might be said to be apt for training computer programmers or soldiers or mechanics, any area which was skill-specific and where objectives could be set accurately in advance. In literature or other areas where the achievement of the objectives could take many unexpected forms it would be a handicap. But training is only one mode of education, an important one, some would say. Nor can the curriculum be reduced easily to a list of skills to be learned. There is always the question of why this training is valuable, a question with moral, social and political undertones.

The main features that dominate the managerial or systems model (sometimes called 'rational') are as follows:—

- (i) Curriculum development and control to manage learning.
- (ii) Curriculum as fact, neutral and non-political.

- (iii) Practical in orientation.
- (iv) Technological in character: teachers as technicians.
- (v) Grand design at central point necessary.
- (vi) Neglect of curriculum purposes and social role of education or at least a failure to tackle such issues honestly.
- (vii) Use of sequences and the atomisation of understanding.
- (viii) Mechanical evaluation on statistical base.
- (ix) Reduction of the subject matter into 'scientific' framework and all activity into manifest behaviour.
- (x) Reduction of knowledge to (a) information (b) skills.
- (xi) Main principle: Efficient control through skill-based programs designed outside classroom by central systems or publishers.

Model II Cultural Transmission

Richard Peters and Paul Hirst provide us with a liberal account of this model in the *Logic of Education*¹⁷ while Bantock's recent book *Dilemmas of the Curriculum*¹⁸ provides us with a conservative version of it. The model has an impeccable history stemming at least from Plato with versions by Cardinal Newman, Matthew Arnold, T.S. Eliot and Michael Oakeshott whose article 'The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind'¹⁹ provides the genesis of a contemporary justification of great force. Whereas the American dominant model stresses skill training this model places importance on intuitive interactions, transmitted values, and the constructs of culture assigned by Popper to World III, laws, theories, works of art and artefacts which we inherit and re-endow each generation. The model shares with the managerial one a concern for standards and the specification and achievement of objectives. External accountability, though of differing forms, is built into both through tests or exams. The teacher is seen as the keeper of important cultural knowledge and it is through him/her that control is mediated. In the managerial model experts outside of the school, superintendents, evaluators, testers, package constructors operate control. In this model the universities rule.

In short, then, though the American and British dominant models seem dissimilar I would argue that this is a superficial difference only to be accounted for by different cultural emphases. Both are well suited to the cultural and social conditions which dominate in both countries, both reflect, as Basil Bernstein argues, the forms of social control in each country and pay a large part in establishing and reinforcing that control. Both are well fitted to incorporate oppositional or alternative models as a study of the several editions of Saylor and Alexander's book will reveal. Each edition manages to incorporate any new ideas that have arisen but without any alteration of the basic framework. A study of Hirst and Peters, too, showed a capacity to include almost any other theory so wide is the net spread. How

does this incorporation work? Each theory has a structural and a substantive element. The structure lays down the basic demarcatory concepts, e.g. Tyler's five questions²⁰ or Hirst's four criteria²¹ for knowledge. The substantive element covers such features as control and method which are held to be flexible and polymorphous. When Model A (dominant) incorporates Model B (oppositional) if does so by accepting its basic structures as substance and thus malleable. Thus it is fashionable to say that humanistic progressive education is weak on aims but strong on methods. The point is that considered as a set of methods only any model can be incorporated without threat, its context and processes being added to a long list of other processes while its structural elements disappear without trace to the frustration and bewilderment of its adherents. Oppositional models striving for definition and purity have not an appetite for swallowing the structures of their opponents. Indeed that is exactly what they object to — those very structures. Conflicts for control too are at the structure level: who operates the structures is master, who concentrates on content and processes the servant.

The Cultural Transmission Model can be characterised thus.

- (i) The importance of the cultural heritage and transmitted values.
- (ii) The forms of knowledge and understanding.
- (iii) Initiation into worthwhile activities.
- (iv) A common curriculum core of intrinsically valuable knowledge.
- (v) The value of texts and scholarly standards.
- (vi) The importance of assessment as a means of selection and social control.
- (vii) Main principle: initiation of students into patterns and traditions of dominant culture with a view to conserving that culture and the classes that sustain it.

Model III The Progressive/Humanist Child-Centred Model

The writings of John Dewey and Bertrand Russell among other philosophers, the new discoveries in psychology about motivation and learning, and the critiques of orthodox and dominant educational practices combined in the first half of the 20th century and particularly in 1950's and 1960's to produce an alternative model of curriculum to challenge the dominant models in the United States and in the United Kingdom. Though the movement took slightly different forms in both countries, and in different states and authorities within the countries, there was a very substantial amount of cross-fertilization and shared characteristics. At one point in the 1960's it looked as if progressive education would oust the dominant model. It became the basis of teacher education ideology especially for primary teachers and was enshrined in Britain in the Plowden Report, *Children and Their Primary Schools*.²² The attack on this model came from three main sources:

- (a) Philosophers such as Peters and Hirst who argued that the approach lacked clarity and rigour and was particularly confused about aims though steady on methods. Much of this criticism was expressed in *Perspectives on Plowden*²³ a reply to the Plowden report.
- (b) The conservative critics such as G.H. Bantock accused supporters of the model of neglecting basic skills.
- (c) Sociologists such as Bernstein²⁴ argued that the model was not truly oppositional but rather was composed of devious controls at least as severe as the model it replaced, that there was no adequate theory of society and that there were dangerous contradictions involved in its conceptualization. It aimed at changing aims and processes of education but failed to develop an effective ideological base.

The attacks on these three grounds have continued with a crippling effect on the validity of the model. At the same time many of its substantive characteristics have been taken over by the dominant model in both countries. The main features of the Progressive Education (Child-centred) Growth Model are:

- (i) Experience and activity the basis of learning.
- (ii) Discovery learning the main process.
- (iii) Restructuring of knowledge: interdisciplinary enquiry.
- (iv) Emphasis on integration and the whole person.
- (v) Break down boundaries between school and community.
- (vi) Team teaching and student initiated learning.
- (vii) Main principle: individual autonomy and freedom through growth.

Model IV The Reconceptualisation of Curriculum Theory

Sociologists such as Michael Young²⁵, Michael Apple²⁶, William Pinar²⁷ and others have argued that nothing short of a reconceptualization of curriculum theory is necessary. This would be in three stages:

- (a) the examination of the influences and constraints which bear on the curriculum and on schools as well as a scrutiny of rhetoric and a process of myth and assumption hunting which would reveal the real nature of schooling and the real limits on the power of children, parents and teachers.
- (b) the criticism of existing theories, frameworks and models of curriculum development especially their claims to truth or validity.
- (c) the reconstruction of curriculum theory in the light of the analyses above and of the economic, political and moral contexts in which schooling operates.

The 'new sociology' critics, as they were called in the U.K., have concentrated on testing out the relationships between knowledge and power, authority and social control etc. as indicated through such curriculum aspects as assessment, timetabling and grading. Calls for

critical analysis of curriculum theories and attempts to probe underneath the rhetoric of aims, statements, and prescriptive frameworks of the managerial, culture, or progressive models do not come so much from one movement as from a variety of groups with very different concerns. Elliott Eisner at Stanford is concerned to broaden the scope of curriculum theory to include the arts, William Pinar at Rochester, New York, is interested in exploring the weaknesses of curriculum theory from an existential point of view, Michael Young and his colleagues in London are interested in the mechanisms of social control exercised through curriculum structure while Lawn, Barton and their friends at Norwich and Birmingham are concerned to account for the way children are indoctrinated into dominant values of society. At the ideological level the critics range from traditional marxists, neo-marxists, progressives, and liberals. What they share is the socratic thirst for criticism and explication and a concern for rigorous educational dialogue, scrutiny and debate.

In Australia new work by Connell et al²⁸, Rachael Sharp²⁹, and Michael Middleton³⁰ has made major contributions. The main effect so far has been to bring schooling and curriculum under far more rigorous criticisms than it has ever been subjected to before.

The main features of the Reconceptual Model are:

- (i) Curriculum as a social construct
- (ii) Purpose to distribute power and status
- (iii) Other three models means of social control
- (iv) Educational institutions reproduce the imbalances in society
- (v) Knowledge used to grade and class
- (vi) The 'hidden curriculum' pervasive influence
- (vii) Curriculum aims statements manifestation of false consciousness
- viii) Different from the others as anti-positivist.
- (ix) Participation by students, parents and classroom teachers vital.
- (x) Main principle: social reconstruction through justice and equality.

New Directions in Curriculum Theory

At this point it is not possible to predict future developments. The 'new critics' may succeed in changing the accepted wisdom about curriculum or their insights may be incorporated in the traditional or dominant model according to the process outlined above. I doubt if the claim to a value free, neutral, objective theory of curriculum can ever be made again, however. It is likely that the critical approach will extend and continue with further discussion of such issues as time-tabling, examinations and the use of technology.

In conclusion I would like to sketch a scenario for the next five years. It is clear that educational systems will attempt to grapple back what control

they have lost due to the upsurge of the progressive alternative. The A.C.T. is an excellent example of this. In the recent Green Paper on Curriculum (Future Directions in Curriculum) there are four main moves:

1. The incorporation of progressive educational aims at the rhetorical level as a pot pourri without justification or explication. This should keep those who rather liked the progressive ideology happy, as all their slogans are there, creativity, autonomy, etc.
2. The re-introduction of the managerial model by conceptualizing education in terms of objectives and skills within a core or common curriculum framework.
3. The re-establishment of central control over curriculum by the expedient of making the schools responsible for short term goals only, then removing power from teachers and their communication to the system.
4. The failure of the Authority to discuss, let alone defend, the ideological basis of their recommendations or to reveal any of the structures that would support the new arrangements or define participatory processes for students, classroom teachers or the community.

Those who take as a foundation the view that all educational issues should be constantly proved and debated in public have a problem — how to respond. The response to be effective should challenge the proposal at four levels.

- (a) *Rhetoric*: The slogans and myths of education which masquerade as aims.
- (b) *Substance*: The selection of knowledge recommended and the basis for this selection.
- (c) *Structure*: The authority, power and interest relationships which establish the system and protect it.
- (d) *Ideology*: The particular values and beliefs which underpin all curriculum planning.

This is what I call deconstruction, an excavation to reveal as much as possible of the system. It may be argued that this is a negative activity. I would not agree. Until we can see what the skeleton of a system looks like we cannot begin to reconstitute or replace it. In demarcating the models above I have begun such a deconstruction. The next stage is to see what beliefs in practice guide curriculum decision making in the A.C.T. and elsewhere. Who uses the power to make decisions, on what grounds are they made, and how are they justified and implemented? Or do we refuse entirely to face these issues?

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