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CLIO and the Curriculum: History and the True Professional

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For many years the history of education had a prominent place as a subject in courses for the education and training of teachers. At least three major aspects are discernible in the history programmes in question: the ideas of the ideologues of the subject, the history of institutions nourishing them, and a narrative study of education systems with the focus on Acts and “Great Men”. One of the foci in each case was the curriculum. By the late 1960s the subject was so firmly entrenched in courses that was the curriculum. By the late 1960s the subject study of education systems with the focus on Acts was no longer acceptable. Increasingly, it was being studied and taught for a long time does not in institutions nourishing them, and a narrative study of education systems. For many years the history of education had a teacher’s future role. There is a tendency to dismiss all foundational matters. This is coupled to the assumption that the skills and techniques of teaching are readily identifiable and can be learned through apprenticeship. This implication is that all other basic problems of education are already solved or can be solved without the active participation of the classroom teacher in the continuing debate.

The contemporary trend is towards what Stanley (1968: 228) back in the late 1960s termed “the confi- mental”. Hitherto, the seeming order of priorities of teacher education courses put school experience at the bottom of the list. Now an equally unbalanced situation seems emerging with the pressure to place school experience at the top of the list. Such is the pressure to limit work in professional education largely to student teaching or even apprentice teaching that a view is gaining ground that an adequate command of subject matter and the skills and techniques of teaching is all that matters. This argument is crumbling when it is appreciated that the pressure and influence of external forces both within and without the classroom are increasing. The implication is that all other basic areas which are common to all educational work (Broudy, 1967: xii), namely, the aims of education, teaching, organisation and administration, cannot be neglected. Furthermore, consideration would have to be given to the broader environmental, social, economic and political context. In other words, the internal developments within the curriculum should be considered in their relationship to the wider world of physical and climatic conditions, population movements, technological changes, the structure of society, the economy and the philosophical and religious views of the time. This is important, of course, to highlight for students that it is not necessarily the focus of considerations, leaving the student sufficiently motivated to want to go and read wider about and around the comparative issue.

The historian must always be on the lookout for elements of continuity, for illuminating parallels and comparisons drawn between one age and another and one country and another. This approach helps to broaden and deepen one’s understanding of issues. It is within such a context that students can be introduced to the major curriculum views of significant thinkers and to curriculum developments in other societies. With careful preparation the tutor can establish points of contact between aspects of curriculum issues under consideration and the wider comparative world of curriculum thinkers and curriculum issues in other societies. The challenge is to be able to devise where appropriate, enter the wider comparative world, present the fundamentals of the comparative points to be considered and return to the major focus of considerations, leaving the student sufficiently motivated to want to go and read wider about and around the comparative issue.

Educational history is too often studied as a series of legislative enactments, with its students jumping from one Act of Parliament to the next, like mountain goats from peak to peak. The outcome was that it is now rare to find history of education, not to mention history of curriculum, being taught as a separate subject to student teachers. Indeed, thinking has changed to the extent of bringing about a situation where there is a tendency to dismiss all foundational subjects as being irrelevant to the student-teacher’s future role.

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Sutherland (1985, 226) contends that a lack of conditioning in this kind of reflective thinking about the curriculum is seriously lacking amongst teachers and is compounded by the following situation:

...there seems little impetus to serious consideration of central and general aims...fashions succeed each other, and teachers - like Pavlov's dogs - are expected to change content and methods of their work in due conformity following and climbing on each successive bandwagon as it comes along.

A study of the history of curriculum can help to rectify this deficit. It develops a way of thinking which allows one to gain a perspective on curriculum problems. This is to accept Broudy's (1967: 1) case for an "interpretive use of knowledge"; a use that enables one to conceptualise and understand an existential problem without necessarily allowing one to solve it.

2. An Introduction to Historiography

In the teaching of any aspect of the history of curriculum it is important that an open-ended approach be adopted. The incompleteness of research should be stressed, gaps in knowledge should be outlined and new historical questions should be posed. There should be opposition to the idea that history is a series of questions created by questions but questions are, in turn, generated by evidence; and to see that there are no determinate rules for asking questions and so no possibility of simply working mechanically through prescribed texts in using evidence.

Secondly, students can be given an introduction to the major archives which exist, the standard bibliographies and catalogues for locating sources, and the major local, national and international journals publishing scholarly articles in the history of curriculum. Thirdly students should engage in a piece of private research on a curriculum area chosen by themselves in consultation with their lecturer. Finally, students should be made aware of some of the major areas of on-going research in the field.

3. A Study of the Historical Dimensions of a Number of Current Curriculum Issues

It is arguable that by introducing students both to the major trends in the history of curriculum in their own state within the context of national and international trends and to historiography that they will develop a necessary historical framework within which contemporary curriculum issues can be located. The importance of such a framework should not be underestimated. History has a crucial role to play because it is hardly possible to understand a present-day curriculum issue without a sound knowledge of its background development. As Marwick (1971: 18) puts it in relation to history in general:

...a full understanding of human behaviour in the past makes it possible to find familiar elements in present problems and makes it possible to solve them more intelligently.

In the same way, "any reflection on the present time, any attempt to analyse a current educational situation, implies some reference to the past" (Simon, 1969: 65).

Arising from considerations so far it is arguable that the third element of a course in the history of curriculum should consist of a study of the historical dimension of a series of current curriculum issues. It is not to present the student with a historical background to all contemporary issues of an international, national or regional dimension in the realm of curriculum. Rather, by focusing on a number of issues the student should eventually become sensitised to both the need for, and the usefulness of placing contemporary issues in their historical context as well as become conditioned to asking historical questions about each issue. Such an exercise should also facilitate the development within students of a detector system which enables them to "pierce smoke-screens and refute false information regarding some event in the past" (Leon, 1985: 100).

In the contemporary curriculum debate there is always the possibility that in the absence of an appropriate historical and conceptual perspective the past may be misused, raided, distorted or condemned. Ravitch (1974: xi), for example, has pointed to the trend in American educational history up to the late 1960s to ignore injustice to minorities and to distort the past in order to present:

...one-sided, over-idealised histories which viewed the development of American education as an unfolding series of triumphs, symbolising the victory of democracy and modernity over aristocracy and error.

Also, as Wardle (1970: viii) points out, there must be in any historical judgement and element of interpretation and "this is affected by the bases we utilise...as part of the process." Studying the history of curriculum helps students to question their own assumptions as well as those which influenced curriculum decisions in the past.

While the historical dimension to contemporary issues can be dealt with in a series of lectures, students can also be encouraged in seminar-style tutorials to discuss the issues and to identify other issues for discussion in subsequent weeks. In respect to the latter, they should be encouraged to draw upon their own school experiences (Rutschky, 1983: 499-517), their teaching experiences and their knowledge of contemporary developments in order to identify areas for discussion. Furthermore, they should write short essays on these areas and discuss them in their tutorials.

4. Case Studies

The seminar-style tutorial also provides a suitable setting for dealing with the fourth and final element of a course in the history of curriculum, namely, a consideration of a variety of case-studies - resources for suggestion and creativity latent in the educational thought and practice of other times or other lands (Stanley, 1968: 233). Leon (1985: 102), in dealing with the same point, argues that former practices can be the subject of critical analysis aimed at identifying mistakes to be avoided in future or to keep educational fashions in perspective. He argues that this approach can lead to a better understanding of the degree of uncertainty which surrounds the development of any action. A study of former practices can also be useful in heightening one's awareness of the need to be alert to the gap which often exists between what is said and what is achieved in educational matters. At the same time, however, "it can remind us that the change is humanly possible given the will and the opportunity for change" (Curtin, 1968: 75). The tutor, of course, will bring to the attention of students that to go beyond this perspective and to attempt to build theory and principles of practice from one's historical studies would bring one beyond the history of curriculum into the world of curriculum design, development, innovation and implementation.

At the same time, it is heartening to observe that educational theorists, in particular, are increasingly taking cognisance of the historical perspective. To a certain extent this development has grown out of a disenchantment with the view of the early 1960s that the problem of curriculum change was largely a technical one, requiring good management and planning. The assumption was that new ideas competently produced and thoroughly implemented would succeed in overhauling school curricula very quickly. Experience, however, proved otherwise and, as Marsden (1979) has demonstrated, has shown:

...that sophisticated theoretical frameworks are not enough, and have shifted the emphasis to the consideration of situational, historical and political factors...the conflict of personality and group interest.

Others, including Taylor (1979: 117) and Lawn and Barton (1983: 14) have stressed the need to consider historical and contextual factors while Lawton (1980: 306) has argued that it is difficult, if
not impossible to discuss curriculum issues in a meaningful way without looking at them in a social, cultural and historical context.

CONCLUSION

An attempt has been made in this paper to outline the major areas of study in the history of curriculum appropriate especially for students involved in post-graduate programmes like the M.Ed. It has been argued that there are four major areas of study, namely, a general study of the basic issues in the history of curriculum in one's own State, a basic course in the nature and methodology of history with particular reference to the history of curriculum, a study of the historical dimension of a selection of current curriculum issues, and a consideration of a variety of case studies as resources for suggestion and creativity latent in the thoughts and practices of other times and other lands. It is to be hoped that the major issues which have been raised will provide food for thought and discussion amongst those who are responsible for constructing courses in curriculum studies and provide directions for those with particular responsibility for the history of curriculum within such courses.

REFERENCES


BOOK REVUES


This book examines the manner in which the University of Melbourne "created, maintained and controlled the system of public examinations" (1992, p.5) in Victoria from 1856 to 1964. Musgrave's major contention is that the debate over public examinations reflected a broader ideological struggle between the humanitarian and utilitarian traditions of education. He emphasises the role of public opinion in influencing the education system to respond to the realities of changing economic and political circumstances. In the process, he accentuates the hegemonic influence of the university's examinations on the whole education system of Victoria.

The book operates at three distinct levels. It sets out to explain the relationship between social structure and human agency. As a consequence, Musgrave devotes considerable space to the historical, economic and political context of the public examination debate. Within these broader constraints, he explains the manner in which various interest groups struggled to control the nature, content and process of education. Finally, at the school level, he examines the implications of the broader ideological struggle in relation to the organisation of the school curriculum in the private and public school systems.

Chapter one briefly outlines the major conceptual ideas that illuminate the book. Musgrave alludes to some important theoretical ideas to order his data and expose the interests that stimulated public examination reforms in Victoria between 1856 and 1964. The ideas of structure and culture provide the major 'organising principles' for this rather ambitious task.

Chapter two analyses the early power struggle between the proponents of the classics and the modern subjects. Musgrave demonstrates that in the period 1856 to 1880 the governing elite sought to impose a particular set of cultural arrangements on the Victorian education system. From the beginning, a strong relationship between the elite private schools and Melbourne University effectively limited any attempt to establish alternate parameters of a worthwhile education.

Chapter three traces some of the early pressures to reform the public examination system. Under the influence of broader economic, political and social changes pressure to broaden the range of examination courses mounted. Melbourne University came under increasing pressure to offer a curriculum more relevant to the contemporary world. Thus in the 1890s utilitarianism became increasingly influential as the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie demanded courses in engineering, agriculture, forestry and the sciences.

Chapter four charts the move toward 'adaptation and modernity' in the period 1905 to 1916. In the first decade of the twentieth century Federation, industrial growth, economic prosperity and social mobility created a mood of optimism in Australia. After Federation there was a general consensus between the ruling elite and working class about the desirability of social peace. In this context schools adapted their curriculum to the modern era and moved in an utilitarian direction. At this moment the Education Department started to mediate in the debate over the role of secondary education and public examinations.

Chapter five examines the role of Theodore Fink and Frank Tate in engineering the establishment of the Schools Board in place of the Board of Public Examinations. In the context of Musgrave's argument, the balance of power shifted to the self interest of the industrial bourgeoisie under the impact of technological progress. Reformers like Tate and Fink were able to affirm the values of national efficiency to appeal to the ruling elite.

In chapter six Musgrave explains how Melbourne University's desire for a distinct university entry examination allowed the Professorial Board "to reclaim the function of policing the standards of matriculation while allowing the School Board to run the Leaving Certificate" (p.236).