

Ivor Goodson, *The Changing Curriculum. Studies in Social Construction*, New York, Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 211 pp., 1997, ISBN 0-8204-2609-1.

The book comprises ten chapters and a long introduction (30 pages) by Joe L. Kincheloe. All ten chapters are papers authored by Goodson (three in cooperation with others) which appeared in various journals and publications from 1988 to 1997. This is why we find a repetition of ideas, arguments and examples in the book.

The first chapter "By way of Introduction" is an interview by Ivor Goodson with Don Santor which sets the *leit-motif* of the book, that the curriculum is not the product of a detached exercise and "*a dispassionate and rational decision*" but "*an eminently political exercise.*"

In the second chapter, "Investigating Schooling : From the Personal to the Programmatic", the author explains the personal experience which urged him to study the origins of the social construction of curriculum and schooling. In the third chapter, "Chariots of Fire. Etymologies, Epistemologies and the Emergence of Curriculum", he expresses his disagreement with philosophers (mainly Phenix and Hirst) whose understanding of knowledge as "*fait accompli*" leads to a prescriptive curriculum. He also stresses the need for the study of the social context in which knowledge is conceived and produced and the manner in which it is translated for use.

In the fourth chapter, "Basil Bernstein and Aspects of the Sociology of the Curriculum", he refers to the influence Brian Davies, Michael Young and Basil Bernstein had on his understanding of knowledge during his graduate studies at the University of London's Institute of Education (circa 1969). He rejects the Thatcherite view that the "*national curriculum is a new and compelling revolution in educational provision*" and he underlines the need for the study of the historical facts which led to the national curriculum.

In the fifth chapter, "Curriculum History, Professionalization, and the Social Organization of knowledge: An Extended Paradigm for the History of Education", he points out, from the histories of the secondary school subjects of biology and western psychiatry, a tendency of the professions to move beyond utilitarian and practical aims toward an academic and scholarly form that reflects a high-status and hegemonic definition of knowledge.

In the sixth chapter, "Docile Bodies: Commonalities in the History of Psychiatry and Schooling", he concludes, following a comparison of the development of knowledge in the case of French psychiatry with that of Geography as a secondary school subject, that both passed through three stages:

- a) concern with clients / pupils,
- b) a period where a body of professional / curricula knowledge is developed which substantially influences the nature of professional relationships with clients / pupils, and
- c) a period where the knowledge becomes abstract and the subject institutionalized.

In the seventh chapter, "Curriculum Contests: Environmental Studies versus Geography", he analyses the "border war" between Geography and Environmental Studies and the failure of the latter to acquire the university base which would ensure it the high-status as an academic subject and the accompanying advantages (departmental territories, graded posts, capitation allowances).

In the eighth chapter, "Beyond the Subject Monolith: Traditions and Subcultures", he distinguishes three knowledge traditions: the academic, the utilitarian and the pedagogic, and he explains how knowledge shapes not only the pupils and clients but also the professionals themselves.

In the ninth chapter, "Distinction and Destiny: The Importance of Curriculum Form in Elite American Private Schools", he exposes the falsity of the argument of those who think of the classical curriculum as something "*above social conflict and historically inevitable*" and he explains in some detail how the "*super elaborated code*" of this curriculum shapes the social consciousness of the socially elite students attending prestigious private schools in the USA.

Finally, in the tenth chapter, "On Curriculum Form: Notes Toward a Theory of Curriculum", he refers to the three long existing dichotomies of "mentalities" between the people of lower and higher orders (sensual against abstract, simplicity against complexity and sophistication, and passive against active) and explains how these polarised mentalities were built into the deep structures of the curriculum.

The whole book is a concerted effort to answer the central question which the author asked himself when serving as a teacher in a comprehensive school in Leicestershire. Utterly frustrated by the irrelevance and pedantry of the examination curriculum, he asked himself again and again: "*where the hell, where on earth did this thing come from?*" (p.10). To answer this question, he authored the book *School Subjects and Curriculum Change* in 1983 and since then many other publications.

The conclusion of the book, which recurs throughout, is that the curriculum is not "*a timeless given*", as is usually considered by those who are only interested in curriculum development, but a social construction which, in many cases, serves not the interests of the students but those of the teachers. The secondary school

teachers struggle to attain a university base for their subject in order to ensure for themselves the relevant advantages. This, however, results in an abstract form of knowledge which alienates lower social class students and undermines their chances for success at school.

The book is a penetrating and fascinating analysis of the evolution of secondary school subjects. The author's style of writing is consonant with his view about knowledge. Not only does he not hesitate to use personal notes twice and provide his own biographical background, but when he has to move the personal 'I' to the more conventional style, he calls it "*the disembodied voice of scholasticism*" (p.47).

The book is very useful and challenging for teachers, administrators and university professors of curriculum and pedagogy, especially in countries where the curriculum is "*enshrined*" by parliamentary legislation and what is to be learnt is presented as "*a sacred body of knowledge*". It not only makes possible a new understanding of curriculum and knowledge but it also opens up extensive possibilities for new research. One presumes that politics played a much more important role in these countries than the one played in U.K.

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