THE CURRICULUM
A Comparative Perspective

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Chapter One

Curriculum theory

"What knowledge is of most worth?" In comparative and historical perspective curriculum theory has been based on answers to this question. In practice, whether overtly stated or covertly accepted, the answers given by priests and teachers to this question have also determined the content of school education. In performing their public service they have selected for transmission from one generation to the next only that knowledge which they considered worthwhile. Definitions of knowledge, of course, themselves restrict what parts of the information accumulated by mankind can be regarded as 'knowledge'. In either case teachers, whether religious or secular, have been able to decide what should be taught. In so far as they possessed much more school knowledge than other adult members of society and their pupils, teachers have been able to say how it should be taught. The power of teachers to decide what knowledge is of most worth and how it should be taught has not yet been seriously challenged.

Until fairly recently if they performed the task of transmitting knowledge to the satisfaction of the public they served, teachers had the power to decide who should be educated. In Europe, and wherever European-type universities have been established, the power of teachers to decide what is taught, how it is taught and to whom it is taught, is best exemplified in the freedom and autonomy enjoyed by university academics. Responsibility has been associated with these privileges and the professional authority of teachers in general has depended on their willingness to perform a service approved by the public in accordance with a self-imposed code of ethics and on the basis of their special skills and knowledge acquired after a long period of training.

The professional authority of teachers was justified by psychological theories about the innate nature of men and women and by elitist theories about the nature of society. Only when these kinds of theory were challenged politically was the central role played by teachers in the organization and control of school education seriously questioned. The most significant change which affected the position of teachers after 1945 was the widespread articulation and acceptance of the view that
education should be provided for all as a human right. In 1944, for example, politicians in Britain formulated and adopted the 1944 Education Act which accepted that education should be provided for all children and young adults in accordance with their 'age, aptitude, and ability'. International support was given to these heightened aspirations when the United Nations, having been established in 1945, adopted at its General Assembly in 1948 the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Article 26 of the declaration set forth 'the right to education' as one of the rights to which all human beings are entitled. In fact, the declaration went little further than statements made at the end of the eighteenth century by French and American reformers who held that primary schooling should be freely provided for all and that secondary and higher education should be available to all those capable of benefiting from these levels of education. Theories of man and society have changed since then and the declaration stimulated demands for universal provision at all levels of education. The power of teachers to decide 'Who shall be educated?' was in effect taken from them by politicians.

The second explosion - of scientific knowledge and its applications - made the task of selecting what was worthwhile from the accumulated wisdom and knowledge of mankind much more difficult. It slowly became apparent that, on any definition of knowledge, it was impossible within existing systems to pass all of it on to all human beings. Teachers were faced with major choices. They had to choose between traditional forms of knowledge on which, for carefully selected pupils and students, a satisfactory general education had been based and 'new' knowledge created by the scientific revolution. Moreover, choices had to be faced in the light of new definitions of knowledge. Already, traditionally sharp distinctions between abstract, theoretical and practical knowledge were being eroded. Emerging curriculum theory persuaded many educators that historical distinctions between 'forms of knowledge' were erroneous. To be sure not all teachers were persuaded of this.

A third major post-1945 change affected the position of teachers, namely the emergence of world-wide acceptance of faith in education as a societal panacea. This faith was most strongly favoured by the Americans in marked contrast to Soviet educators. American views found expression in discussions which took place in London in 1945-6 among the founders of Unesco. These educators and scientists
expressed the view that teachers should and could do more than pass on knowledge. Most of them argued that, particularly through the promotion of literacy, education was capable of raising standards of living, promoting democracy and safeguarding world peace. To be sure the notion of ‘fundamental education’ discussed at these early meetings blurred the historically sharp distinction between education and training. In so doing it suggested that the public service teachers should perform is many-faceted.

In the event it has become less clear. As before, teachers have to satisfy university academics that their secondary school products are capable of studying at a university. In addition they are required to prepare students for a wide range of occupations in complex economies in order to promote national economic growth. They are charged with the task of inculcating moral, social and sometimes political values in urban and multi-cultural societies in which traditional patterns of authority are breaking down. They are held responsible for promoting social mobility and for preventing drug and other abuses and familial disharmony. Radically different answers have to be given to the question ‘What knowledge is of most worth?’ if these diverse tasks are to be undertaken by teachers.

In many parts of the world, particularly in the USA and England and Wales, teacher-training programmes, and the rhetoric of those who prepare and teach on them, suggest that many teachers have been prepared to accept many of these tasks as legitimately part of the public service they should perform. The prominent place accorded to psychology and sociology in English and US teacher-training courses suggests that teachers should know more about children than their parents and as much about society as industrialists and politicians. Since manifestly not every teacher is capable of possessing esoteric knowledge in these areas which goes far beyond the knowledge possessed by many members of the adult population, their authority to select and pass on social scientific knowledge has been questioned. In so far as teachers have attempted to do more than pass on knowledge and have claimed that they can and should improve society their traditional status has been eroded and their freedom and autonomy undermined.

The conditions under which teachers have accepted these new roles were transformed shortly after the Second World War by increases in birth-rates and
decreases in infant mortality figures. Primary schools first experienced post-1945 baby booms in the early 1950s. Towards the end of the decade secondary schools were expected rapidly to expand to accommodate all young adolescents. In the 1960s institutions of higher learning, including universities, were expected to find places not only for larger cohorts of secondary school leavers but to satisfy the heightened demand for post-secondary education from young men and women whose parents had not been to university. Governments responded to the population explosion as it worked its way through the system by increasing the number of schools and universities. Few educationists were prepared to accept that in responding to population growth pupil-teacher ratios should be allowed to rise. Indeed great efforts were made in many countries to reduce the size of classes in the belief that such reductions would improve the quality of education. The soundness of this kind of assertion is very questionable. Nevertheless systems of teacher training were expanded as quickly as possible to keep pace with the demand for teachers.

In response to heightened demands for education to be provided as a human right many governments paid more attention to the reorganization of secondary school systems than to the content of education. Movements to reorganize secondary schools along comprehensive lines were initiated by or received the support of left-wing politicians in most countries in Europe. The Japanese government was persuaded to increase the period of compulsory attendance and reorganize the school system under pressure from the Americans. To be sure, many teachers supported these moves, convinced that through increasing equality of opportunity at all stages of schooling the right of all human beings to an education would be achieved in practice. Evidence indicates that they were over-optimistic in accepting that structure was more important than content in equalizing provision.

Interest in curriculum reform was doubtless delayed by the preoccupation of teachers, social scientists and politicians with the expansion and reorganization of secondary education. At the same time, for a variety of reasons, many teachers have resisted changes in the content of school education since by training, temperament and traditional mores they see themselves as the guardians of traditional knowledge. The resistance to change of such teachers is based principally on long-established
concepts of what knowledge is of most worth. Some knowledge of historically important answers to the question is important if problems of curriculum change are to be identified and analysed in terms of the resistance of teachers. Some religious and secular answers which continue to inform present-day debates will now be briefly considered.

**Teachers as the guardians of traditional knowledge**

Many answers have been given to the question 'What knowledge is of most worth?' Not all of them are relevant to present-day curriculum debate. Those which informed the major civilizations of the ancient world are. They account for many of the cultural differences we are aware of today. They help to explain the sources of teacher resistance to major curriculum change and make it possible to anticipate some of the difficulties likely to arise when attempts are made to transfer a curriculum model from one national system of education to another.

From this perspective the most significant long-established answers have several common features. They have all been permanently recorded in some way or another so that the transmission of knowledge is not by word of mouth only and does not necessarily depend on the presence of a teacher. In the major cultures of the world a book, or books, contains what is regarded as worthwhile knowledge. Finally in most cases the answer, and the records in which it is found, have become the foundations on which groups of people have built politically powerful institutions.

In ancient China, for example, the classics of Confucius, which stressed the importance of human relationships, became the texts used by tutors preparing carefully selected students for a series of demanding examinations on the results of which successful candidates entered, as scholar-officials, the service of the emperor. These tests determined the content and methods of teaching in China for centuries. Although the imperial examination system was formally abolished in 1905 its persisting influence is apparent in the People's Republic of China, Taiwan, Hong Kong and indeed wherever Chinese people run schools. Apart from the intrinsic value of the knowledge tested by examinations, possession of it had practical value in that it conferred status and power. In China the Confucian classics acquired the status of religious texts; elsewhere, particularly in Europe, the Chinese examination system
influenced the development of competitive examinations as the most democratic method of selecting senior government officials.

In India, Brahmins protected Hindu traditions. They attracted young scholars to their households and introduced them to the sacred Hindu texts - originally collected in the voluminous three (and later four) Vedic hymns. Privileged Hindus, however, studied medicine, physiology, psychology, astrology and the principal systems of philosophy as well as the sacred texts. Thus the content of education in ancient India was designed to provide future leaders with an all-round education. As priest-teachers the Brahmins enjoyed the highest status among Hindus, although members of the Kshatriya caste possessed de facto political power. While modern India is a secular state, communal differences based on religious beliefs continue to sustain political conflict.

In Islamic countries, and between them, sectarian differences mobilize national sentiments and justify conflict. In these countries power was, and in some cases even today is, shared by religious teachers. Initially the Koran was the source of all knowledge. After Muhammad’s death, practices spelled out in the Tradition were accepted as supplementing the holy text or filling gaps that existed in it. Even today, among Shi’ite Muslims, the view that an infallible imam has the master key to the inner meaning of the Koran and the Tradition is accepted. In spite of the intellectual differences which exist among Muslims worthwhile knowledge for all of them is a blend of practical prescriptions to guide behaviour and that supremely important understanding of God which is the right of every Muslim. Theology and jurisprudence, and their handmaiden Arabic, constitute the central core of traditional studies. Today some distinguished Islamic scholars are attempting to reconcile the knowledge contained in the Koran with modern Western science and technology. At the same time wherever Muslims are found in large numbers there is pressure to ensure that the ethos of the schools attended by their children retains its religious character.

For many centuries in Europe the priest-teacher not only decided what should be taught, and to whom, but was the adviser of kings and princes. The religious content of education in Western Europe for Christians was taken from the Bible and for Jews from the Talmud. For Christians the Bible became the source of moral principles and
the basis of canon law. As a predominantly legal document, the Talmud helped to shape the daily lives of the group of people for whom it was originally intended. Sectarian differences among Christians gave rise to political conflicts and to attitudes towards the ethos of schooling, if not to the secular content of education, which are still not resolved. Even today, in some Jewish schools, the content of education is constrained in a very definite way by the holy texts.

A major difference between curricula in European schools and those established by Hindus, Muslims and Buddhists was that from an early date the former incorporated secular knowledge and the non-religious justification for it from the literature of classical Greece. The origins of the three most influential European curriculum theories and the epistemological, psychological and political/sociological theories associated with them can be found in this literature. The fourth major theory - polytechnicalism - is designed in Soviet debates less to answer the question what knowledge is worthwhile than to suggest how all knowledge should be presented in schools.

The choice of four European models as the framework of analysis is not simply ethnocentric. European answers to the questions 'What knowledge is of most worth?' and 'Who shall be educated?' are debated wherever European traders, missionaries and soldiers set up schools in countries other than their own; where educators setting up their own school system deliberately borrowed' from European prototypes; and in international forums such as those provided by Unesco, the International Bureau of Education in Geneva, OECD and regional agencies in Latin America, Asia and Africa.

Faced with heightened aspirations for education at all levels, phenomenal increases in scientific knowledge and its applications, and their willingness to accept new societal tasks, educators have done little more than adapt curriculum models, two of which, essentialism and encyclopaedism, go back to before the seventeenth century and two, pragmatism and polytechnicalism, in their modern form are products of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In many situations, traditional curriculum solutions have been offered in response to new 'problems', particularly those created by post-1945 demographic changes. Few national efforts have been made voluntarily to consider radically different curriculum theories other
than the one familiar to most teachers. Where attempts have been made to transfer curriculum models the political and psychological difficulties faced by teachers willing to introduce transferred models have been very considerable. In subsequent chapters in this book some of these difficulties are analysed.

**Major curriculum theories**

In Europe, and indeed throughout the world, changes in political theory have been more readily and widely accepted than the theories of knowledge on which curriculum theories depend. In so far as political and to a lesser extent psychological theory changes have influenced some aspects of national educational systems the retention of traditional epistemologies creates normative inconsistencies and curriculum lag in systems of education undergoing change. It is within the paradigm of political, psychological and epistemological theories advanced in the works of Plato and Aristotle that 'problem'-creating changes can best be analysed. It is at the same time the case that within the corpus of Greek literature the theories of some of Plato's precursors and contemporaries have present-day supporters. The ideas of Democritus about the natural world are remarkably similar to those held by some modern physical scientists. The political theory of Pericles that all men possessed civic virtue was central to justifications given by eighteenth-century French and American revolutionaries for the action they took against their own and foreign masters respectively and for the proposals they made to set up political democracies. It is therefore against the paradigm exemplified in Plato's Republic, in which the origins of essentialism as a curriculum theory are found, that subsequent developments will be identified.

**(1) ESSENTIALISM**

In Plato's Republic the public service that teachers were expected to perform was basically political. In this model the aim of education is to sustain a just society the main feature of which is its stability. Political leadership should be exercised by philosopher-kings, or guardians. Auxiliaries should support them and workers should be content to remain in a specific occupation. Social and political change are
antithetical to good government and great harm is done if unsuitable workers are promoted to positions of leadership.

The justness of this elitist political model is sustained by a theory of individual differences which while politically unacceptable today continues to dominate much educational thinking. At the heart of Plato's theory of individual differences is the view that men and women are intellectually different and that among men inequality is simply a biological fact. Men inherit qualities which fit them for assigned roles in society. With few exceptions clever parents beget clever children; less clever parents have less clever children. Educational provision should take account of these facts by educating potential guardians to be guardians and the sons of workers should be trained as workers. Arrangements should be made to ensure that the few exceptions to this general rule should be promoted out of their class. Plato's myth of innate individual differences justified elitist authoritarian political systems, class-structured societies and selective systems of education. By 1940 Plato's concept of the politically just society had been abandoned in most industrialized countries. Rigid social class structures were also under attack. There persisted among many European educators belief in the decisive influence of innate intellectual ability on the educability of individual children.

Plato's sole interest was in the education of future political leaders. His psychology of learning is in keeping with his theory of individual differences. He divides the soul into three parts: reason, energy and animal instincts possessed respectively by guardians, auxiliaries and workers. Education should cultivate reason; training should develop the animal instincts appropriate to workers. Today few such crudely stated views are openly admitted even by the most conservative teachers. The importance in education of cultivating qualities of reason, wisdom, the vision of truth and love of beauty in present-day educational debates cannot be dismissed. These two Platonic theories continue to receive support long after his political and sociological theories have been rejected.

Central to the achievement of his educational aims is Plato's somewhat general theory of knowledge. It was Aristotle who, within the same tradition, spelled out how knowledge could be acquired either inductively or by logical deduction. For all Greeks, however, what was knowable among ceaselessly changing experiences was
that which is permanent. Materialists hold that atoms are permanent; idealists that
ideas which transcend or are immanent in individual objects are permanent and
therefore knowable. For Plato, beauty in the abstract is knowable but material things
are not beautiful because pure ideas are imperfectly realized in practice and as they
change become less perfect. Things which can be touched, smelled, seen, or heard
are the objects of opinion not knowledge. This view of knowledge has had an
important bearing on debates between the relative merits of the natural sciences
and the humanities in the education of the future leaders of society. It excludes from
the sphere of education the vocational training of future workers.

Plato’s suggested curriculum for guardians dominated European practice for
centuries. Generously interpreted, music and gymnastics should constitute the
content of education. The former should be taken to mean virtually everything
connected with high culture. The study of arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and
harmony should develop reason and prepare the mind for a vision of eternal things.
This non-utilitarian purpose of mathematics has been a feature of the education of
political leaders in Europe with the exception of Britain. It may also have persuaded
teachers that only those subjects whose content can be arranged to satisfy the
logical criteria of mathematics should be taught at school. The essentialist curriculum
therefore consists of a few carefully selected subjects whose internal logic and
coherence are self-evident. Such subjects, presented in logical sequences, provide
learners with the intellectual skills, and presumably the moral fibre, expected of a
societal leader.

In line with this theory, the Seven Liberal Arts curriculum dominated the content
of education in the Middle Ages. The quadrivium - music, astronomy, geometry and
arithmetic - made for a sound general education. The subjects of the "trivium -
grammar, rhetoric and philosophy or logic - provided methods by which essential
knowledge should be studied. The status of the Seven Liberal Arts curriculum owed
much to the support it received from leading figures - particularly Aquinas - in the
Roman Catholic Church. It might be said that the power of the Christian Church
made it possible to incorporate secular knowledge into European curricula and to
justify this inclusion by reference to Platonic and Aristotelian theories.
Indeed, it was only when the power of the established church was seriously challenged that an alternative to the essentialist curriculum was proposed. The persecution of Galileo and other natural scientists during the seventeenth century was a response to the liberating expansion of scientific knowledge. The political climate, however, changed sufficiently for Protestant educators to formulate new answers to questions about worthwhile knowledge. To Comenius, a renowned and widely travelled Czech educator, can be given credit for a curriculum theory - identified here as encyclopaedism - which is the antithesis of essentialism and which profoundly affected European curricula except those in England.

(2) ENCYCLOPAEDISM

Encyclopaedism is based on the premiss that the content of education should include all human knowledge. Comenius pioneered the theory by first criticizing systems of education which did not follow nature. His own scheme of universal learning was based on the observation of nature and an examination of its laws. Since learning takes place first through the senses Comenius's curriculum was designed to develop these first. This assertion justifies the view that instead of first learning from books pupils should learn from the 'book of nature'. In an encyclopaedic curriculum a knowledge of things and words should go together.

Comenius proposed that in vernacular schools children should learn to read and write grammatically in their mother tongue in order to learn about things. They should learn how to add, weigh, measure and how to sing and say sacred passages by heart. Moral values, economics, politics and the history of the world, the position and make-up of the earth, the motion of the planets and stars, physics, geography and a general knowledge of the arts and handicrafts should be included in a comprehensive curriculum.

These radically different curriculum proposals found expression in proposals made by French revolutionary governments towards the end of the eighteenth century. They were part of a comprehensive pattern of policies designed to transform the French political and social systems. Among the most significant of these was the reiteration of some of the ideas expressed by Pericles. Fundamental to the new curriculum paradigm was the theory, shared, for example, by Condorcet
(1743-94), that all men are capable of reason and the acquisition of moral ideas, from men according to Pericles, made it possible for citizens in a democratic society, if not to formulate policies, to pass judgment on those of their leaders. The political tasks ascribed to the schools by Condorcet were to appraise all citizens of their rights and make them aware of their civic duties and responsibilities. Secondly a national school system should select out and educate an aristocracy of talent to provide national leadership.

The curriculum proposed included mathematics, the classical languages, modern languages, the physical and biological sciences, geography, history, the fine arts and mechanical drawing. Throughout the nineteenth century, following the creation under Napoleon of a national system of education, a curriculum including more than ten compulsory subjects typified the content of education in secondary schools whose task was to prepare young people for national leadership. It was a model disseminated throughout the whole of Europe with the exception of Britain where, in spite of its well-established democratic political system, specialized curricula were retained in the secondary schools which were established to satisfy the demand for commercial and political leaders and administrators.

While the encyclopaedic model survives in all continental European national systems of education, national specific theories about the nature of knowledge and how it can be acquired make it possible to compare and contrast the way universal knowledge is presented in the schools of France, Spain, Italy, Germany, Poland, the Scandinavian countries and the Soviet Union where, until recently, all the academically respectable subjects were included in school curricula. Distinctions should be made, however, between the influence on French curricula of the epistemological assumptions of Descartes whose effect is clearly visible, and philosophers like Hegel whose theories inform the way knowledge is treated in some other European countries. The kernel of Descartes' theory lies in his well-known statement that 'I think. Therefore I am' which justifies an intellectual, rational approach to the acquisition of knowledge which is reflected in the way French teachers spend a great deal of time critically analysing written texts.
(3) POLYTECHNICALISM

The most obvious alternative to the French approach to knowledge is expressed by Soviet educators who accept Lenin's assertion that the whole socioeconomic and historical experience of mankind should be included in school curricula. In this they differ little from their Western European counterparts. What sets polytechnicalism apart as a curriculum theory is found in the comments made by Karl Marx on the factory school run by Robert Owen in Lanarkshire, Scotland, in the early nineteenth century. The fundamental premiss on which it is based is that the content of education should be deliberately interpreted in terms of the productive life of society. The political theories of Marx have been readily accepted and there is little doubt that the few remarks he made about the treatment of knowledge have given credence in socialist countries to the argument that school education should be brought nearer to productive life in societies in which the capitalist class system has been eliminated. It is not a theory which can be put into practice while a class system similar to that advocated by Plato continues to determine the attitudes and consciousness of individuals. The political task of a polytechnical curriculum is to eliminate, once workers have been freed from exploitation by the private owners of the means of production, the false consciousness they have inherited from a capitalist society.

The polytechnical curriculum is designed to prepare good communists who as the most resolute members of society offer leadership in the inevitable progress of society from capitalism through socialism to communism. Teaching must take account of the fact that the behavior of individuals is conditioned by biologically inherited factors and external stimuli and a consciousness based on the accumulated experience of mankind seen principally as a series of conflicts between the classes. Among Marxists, psychological theory is materialistic and has its basis in physiology. There are no intrinsic reasons, therefore, why all children, other than those with brain damage, should not follow and complete the same encyclopaedic curriculum.

There is no doubt that this alternative approach to a broadly based subject curriculum has been accepted in theory by educationists in countries in which communist governments are responsible for educational policy. At the same time it must be said that the principles of polytechnicalism are extremely difficult to
internalize by teachers. To relate theory to practice and education to the productive life of society requires a fundamentally different approach to the concepts of worthwhile knowledge proposed by Plato and re-enforced by generations of teachers. Even teachers committed in theory to the polytechnical treatment of knowledge find it difficult systematically to illustrate general principles, in whatever subject they occur, by reference to their social implications and economic applications.

Nevertheless, Soviet curriculum theory and the physiologically based theories of learning associated with it offer a more realistic approach to the provision of education as a human right under conditions characterized by advances in scientific knowledge on which industrialization depends whatever the ideological commitment of governments, than theories inherited from Plato who rejected change as a process of degeneration, and knowledge of other than permanent ideas as impossible. It is hardly surprising that in the USA, which changed more rapidly than most countries in response to the application of science and technology to industrial processes, a viable alternative to polytechnicalism was developed towards the end of the nineteenth century.

(4) PRAGMATISM

The American pragmatists shared many of Marx's concerns. They were aware of the impact of industrialization, commercialism and urbanization on American life. Collectively they set out to develop an alternative rationale for American democracy in which the institutions established at the time of the war of independence had been created by Jefferson and his colleagues to serve an agrarian slave-owning democracy. The civil war and the emancipation of women had transformed the political bases of American society. The application of science was transforming its economic base. The pragmatists recognized that theoretical changes in law, psychology, mathematics, medicine and education were needed if American institutions were to respond adequately to societal change.

As part of the discussions which took place among the early pragmatists John Dewey gave credence to a radically new curriculum theory. It was similar to that advanced by Herbert Spencer in his book Education in which he asked the question
"What knowledge is of most worth?" His answer was: that knowledge which enables young people to tackle problems and prepares them to solve the problems they are likely to meet as adults in a democratic society. In the light of this theory curriculum debate turns on the identification and analysis of 'worthwhile problems'. Spencer stated that the problems associated with healthy living, earning a living, family life, civil participation, the enjoyment of leisure and the making of moral decisions were the most important. Dewey and other pragmatists accepted this classification of problems as the basis of a sound curriculum not based on sharp distinctions between general education and vocational training.

Dewey located the problems which should be used to select the content of school education in the urban environment. His most influential early essays on education were prepared when he was at the University of Chicago in a city which had grown at an unprecedented rate. Like Marx, he was aware that industrialization had created problems for which radical solutions were needed. Unlike Marx, he did not see them as arising exclusively from the struggle between workers and capitalists. On the contrary, while not satisfied that a constitution drawn up more than a hundred years earlier was a satisfactory basis on which to run a rapidly changing society, he wished to retain the American frontier values which he had learned during his childhood in Vermont. Dewey recognized that in urban Chicago it was impossible to re-create the kind of small educative community he so admired. He therefore proposed that primary schools should become, vicariously, small communities with curricula which would provide children with the problem-solving learning activities they would have experienced in a small frontier town. The school was to become the community.

For Dewey, as for Marx, productive work was the most educative activity. Both, therefore, assigned to teachers the task of inculcating moral values through vocational activities. The former located these desirable activities in the occupations with which he had become familiar in Burlington and accepted the values associated with nineteenth-century agrarian democracy. Marx analysed modes of production in capitalist factories, took as his educative activities those which would be developed in the productive life of a socialist society and stressed the values associated with such a society. From these politically different perspectives both philosophers proposed that vocational activities should form the core of a sound general
Aspects of productive life should be central features of the school curriculum. The dichotomy drawn by Plato between education and training was for Marx and Dewey as false as that between intellectual endeavor and productive activities. Failure to recognize that for both of them vocational activities should constitute the core of a sound curriculum perpetuates the dichotomies which lie at the center of traditional European curriculum theory.

While Dewey’s theory was designed for primary schools, his followers later adopted it when they established the main principles of secondary school curriculum development. Pragmatic curriculum theory therefore offers a radical alternative to earlier European models. It has been implicitly accepted by many, if not most, English primary school teachers and in so far as it is a process rather than a fixed content model, has had an influence on the higher levels of education in Britain. Two trends, however, should be identified in pragmatic 'progressive' curriculum theory. One stresses child-centred aims which make the needs of the developing child the criteria for selecting curriculum content. Society-centred progressive educators, who also take Dewey as their intellectual leader, consider that the main purpose of the schools should be to reconstruct society. The two views can be reconciled only if the needs of individual children are analysed in the context of present-day societal problems. As stated earlier, Dewey's curriculum solution was to make the urban primary school an educative community. The extent to which rural, small town values can successfully be perpetuated in urban schools is problematical. Nevertheless the pragmatic paradigm and the curriculum theory developed by Dewey were designed to accommodate the kind of societal change which has taken place since 1945 in many countries.

Indeed of the four curriculum models briefly described in this chapter only pragmatism and polytechnicalism offer in theory viable curriculum solutions to the problems created after 1945 in countries where European-type selective second-level academic schools and distinctions between education and training and different forms of knowledge have survived. However, the emergence of the USA and USSR as superpowers espousing antithetical political ideologies polarized the commitment of teachers throughout the world and re-enforced the parochialism of their curriculum debates and their responses to change.
The politics of curriculum non-reform

Nevertheless, from time to time anxiety about the content of education has been articulated since 1945. In 1945-6 the founders of Unesco proposed that the elimination of illiteracy could best be achieved through curricula designed in accordance with Dewey's pragmatic principles. Over the years under different names the notion incorporated in 'Fundamental Education' has informed the initiatives taken by Unesco to tackle world illiteracy. The principle behind all of them is that children learn best through participating in activities which are relevant to life in their community. Few of these internationally inspired non-formal approaches have been significantly more successful than attempts to introduce systems of universal primary education based on early European prototype curricula.

In some cases international pressure was more direct. In Japan members of the American Mission proposed changes in school curricula immediately after the Second World War. They considered that morals education (Shushiri) in prewar schools had promoted ultra-nationalism. American advisers recommended that courses in morals education should be removed from the curriculum and replaced by social studies. They also recommended that a Deweyian process curriculum model should replace a subject-centred approach.

The establishment of a communist government in China after a long armed struggle initiated curriculum debate. The leaders of the People's Republic found in the ideology of Marx, Lenin and Stalin policies which they hoped would bring the knowledge of the west to their people. Such knowledge, it was maintained, was necessary if a modern industrial state under the leadership of the Communist Party was to be created. The uneasy relationship between the USSR and the government of the People's Republic of China shows how difficult it is freely to transfer curriculum practices from one nation to another and how difficult it is for teachers of any political persuasion to put the principles of polytechnicalism into practice.

The failure of international illiteracy programmes and the effective resistance of teachers and officials in Japan to proposals supported by politically motivated leaders of the Teachers' Union to promote curriculum change illustrate the difficulties associated with the reform of curricula through international action. The parochialism of educational debate in general and about the content of education in
particular is well illustrated in the omission of education from the terms of reference of the Treaty of Rome, on which the European Community was founded. Over the years community agencies have collected and disseminated information about education. In 1976 a resolution of 9 February provided a specific basis for community-level action in education by making it possible for ministers of education, voluntarily, to discuss educational matters of mutual concern. In the event the community has restricted itself to discussing problems and policies which in the European context do not have long histories to which national solutions have been offered. It is unlikely that a common European curriculum will be proposed although if qualifications are to be harmonized and the free movement of labour facilitated such a curriculum is badly needed. Parochial national views are bound to prevent agreement if any such proposal was made.

Unesco's International Bureau of Education in Geneva provides a forum for the discussion of curricula. It has no power to influence national policies although at its international conferences agreement among delegates is frequently reached on some very general statements of intent. OECD reviews of national systems of education have had little direct influence on curriculum reform in those countries on which reports have been made. In short the provision by these and other international organizations like the Organization of American States (OAS) in Washington and the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) agencies in Bangkok of forums in which curriculum issues can be debated has had little effect on national curriculum debates. It is unlikely that the long-term influence of international debates will in practice be profound - the most they may achieve is to organize and mobilize opinion in highly charged political atmospheres which do little to encourage consideration of alternative curriculum theories on their merits.

Concern about the content of education has been articulated in several major countries. It is not surprising that expressions of concern occurred first in the USA and the USSR where selective second-level schools had been replaced under different circumstances before 1945. During the 1950s American high schools came under severe criticism from scholars and laymen who compared school curricula unfavourably with those in the schools of Europe. Criticism of progressive - pragmatic - curriculum theory came to a head when Soviet engineers launched the
first earth satellite in 1957. The protagonists in this acrimonious battle were on the one side teachers and professors of education and on the other university academics in subjects other than education, industrialists and politicians. In spite of the formidable political pressure brought to bear on teachers the appearance in 1983 of *A Nation at Risk* and other critical reports in which the appalling weaknesses of American high school curricula were exposed by American scholars suggests that, in spite of internal concern, school curricula in the USA did not change significantly between 1958 and 1983.

The Khrushchev reforms of 1958 designed to bring education nearer to life through the polytechnicalization of the curricula failed in spite of the fact that they were approved by members of the Communist Party and had the support of leading members of the Academy of Pedagogical Sciences. It is apparent from the internal debates which took place at that time that historically significant differences of interpretation of the term 'polytechnicalization' gave rise to conflict within the educational establishment. It is also apparent that deeply held European educational traditions made it difficult for teachers, many of whom had little or no knowledge of modern technology, to internalize principles which would have made it possible for them to relate the principles of their subject to the productive life of Soviet society. If the internal debate was less publicized than the debate in the USA there can be little doubt that teachers were able successfully to prevent the introduction in practice of a curriculum theory which had been accepted from the early 1920s.

As in the USA and the USSR, in France, Britain and other Western European countries curriculum change has been slow and undertaken almost exclusively within traditional curriculum theories - essentialism and encyclopaedism. Regardless of the power of the central administration to formulate and adopt curriculum policies the real protagonists have been teacher-guardians of worthwhile knowledge and radical educationists who have advocated pragmatic or polytechnical curriculum theories. In some cases the motivation of the radicals has been based on a political ideology. In few cases has a direct appeal been made by the reformers to foreign curriculum models and theories. In most cases admission requirements established and controlled by university academics have effectively prevented change in the
curriculum of second-stage schools in spite of the difficulties associated with the retention of university preparation courses in comprehensive or unified schools.

To be sure, American progressive theory has made some headway particularly in English schools. It has enjoyed less success in other European systems. In France, for example, advocates of les classes nouvelles attempted after 1945 to introduce the kind of content and methods of teaching favoured by American and British progressive educationists. Les classes nouvelles had a short-lived vogue among some teachers but failed to gain universal acceptance among the profession. Staunch opponents of change were members of the Societe des Agreges who as teachers in the lycées opposed bureaucrats in the ministry who favoured reform. The curriculum remains encyclopaedic. By the same token curricula in English secondary schools remain highly specialized in spite of attempts made to broaden the content of sixth form studies. The protagonists in this debate have been university academics and educational administrators particularly at the national level whose influence on the formulation, adoption and implementation of curriculum policies has been notoriously weak. Attempts by the Thatcher government in the late 1980s to introduce a more broadly based national curriculum may be fiercely opposed by teachers' organizations and Labour Party politicians on the ground that teacher control over the curriculum in individuals schools is in the best interests of the system.

The demise of colonialism has made curriculum reform in recently independent nations no less difficult. In these countries government leaders and educationists have wished to revive indigenous values by replacing European colonial curricula with those more consistent with national aspirations. Among these aspirations the replacement of an imperial language (French, English, Spanish) as the medium of instruction by a local language (or languages) has given rise to political problems created by internal linguistic diversity. In addition the introduction of a local language frequently is not in accordance with the wishes of parents who want their children to benefit from the acquisition of a world language. Within this framework of competing interests curriculum reform becomes highly charged politically and less restricted to protagonists within the educational establishment than in most countries with long histories of independence.
In summary, international influences on curriculum theory and practice are inhibited by the sovereignty of national governments and the conservatism of many teachers. International statements are usually pious expressions of intent which have little practical effect. Bilateral pressures are not much more effective. The examples of Japan and Germany illustrate the fact that the attempts of educators from one country to shape curricula in another have little lasting effect unless maintained for many years as they were in former European colonies because of the power of teachers, as the guardians of worthwhile knowledge, to resist change. The victorious allies divided Germany into American, British, French and Soviet spheres of influence. Each tried to reform the German system in its own image. Over more than forty years German traditions have reasserted themselves and continue to inform the content of education and maintain distinctions between academic education and vocational training.

Proposed curriculum changes legitimized by theories generated by educationists in their own country are effectively disseminated very slowly. Not until novel theories have been fully internalized by a majority of teachers is it possible to guarantee that curriculum innovations will be put into practice effectively. Even in the USA, where pragmatic philosophies have been in vogue for nearly a century, prescribed textbooks differ little in content from European school textbooks. Indeed in view of the conservatism that can be observed in American education the number of vehement attacks that have been made from time to time on progressive curriculum proposals to meet the needs of 'all American youth' seem misplaced.

Comparative evidence, therefore, demonstrates how difficult it is to formulate adequate curriculum responses to societal change. Changes brought about in Europe after 1945 when party politicians initiated structural changes increased the need for radical curriculum change. It has not been forthcoming in Western Europe. Curriculum reform has been limited to (1) reordering subject priorities for specific groups of pupils, e.g. downgrading Latin and Greek in schools preparing students for admission to a university, (2) reducing the syllabuses of individual subjects by selecting from the historical development of each of them only that knowledge regarded as most worthwhile, e.g. selecting from the history of physics those principles which inform a whole range of phenomena, and (3) increasing the choices
open to students by creating optional subjects from the whole range of acceptable subjects.

This failure is serious and probably accounts for the disenchantment expressed by previously firm supporters of comprehensive schools, like Torsten Husen, with an educational experiment which it was hoped would equalize the provision of education as a human right. Whether in the Western European context the American pragmatic response would be adequate and accepted by European educationists is a moot point. Equally problematical is the prospect that governments in non-socialist countries might accept and develop a Soviet polytechnical curriculum. If they were to do so how many teachers in any school system would be able so to internalize the theory that it could be put successfully into practice in their schools?

The dilemma is equally serious in school systems influenced by European models and where teachers cling to traditional concepts of what knowledge is of most worth. Educationists face the task of developing curriculum theories which can be successfully adapted to their attempts to create modern industrialized societies without destroying traditional values - the problem Dewey faced. This analysis is designed to show that no real alternatives to the four curriculum models described in this chapter have yet been formulated. At best minor modifications have been proposed.

Even these modest attempts to introduce new curriculum theories have been resisted. Yet it is unlikely that a return, as is often advocated, to traditional theories will make it possible adequately to solve present-day educational problems. In the absence in the literature of a curriculum model which is fundamentally different from essentialism, encyclopaedism, poly-technicalism and pragmatism it is instructive to examine how each of them have been debated and modified in its country of origin and how attempts have been made to transfer pragmatic and polytechnical theories from one system to another.

**Further reading**

• Adamson, J. W., The Educational Writings of John Locke (New York: Longmans Green, 1912).
• Archer, R. L, Rousseau on Education (London: Edward Arnold, 1912).
• Locke, John, Some Thoughts Concerning Education (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1889).
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