

CURRICULUM, KNOWLEDGE AND ACTION: A DIALOGUE.

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HT1 Implicit in 'education' is the possibility of both initiation and liberation through knowledge. But at present the traditional curriculum message is essentially initiatory: knowledge is a possession of teachers which students must respect while mastering it.

LS1 Curricula are media in which statements about the nature of knowledge are enacted as learning and teaching. When the inquiring eye of curriculum research treats these enactments of knowledge as problematic and open to question - not to be made unquestionable by teachers and school boards - it reveals that all classrooms can be seen as laboratories, all teaching as experiment, all children either as guinea pigs or as partners in the curriculum research enterprise.

HT2 Curriculum theory as talk about curriculum behind closed doors raises questions about the problems of knowledge out of the earshot of students and teachers. In the world of action which students and teachers inhabit these questions are resolved within a control ideology, the resolution at the same moment redefining and reproducing that ideology. This takes place in the face of the threat which disorganisation presents to teaching and learning. To

challenge claims to knowledge is to challenge control. Students and teachers come to be on the receiving end of that-which-is (on the authority of others)-worth-knowing. Currently then the authority of knowledge is invoked to justify and maintain control. What are needed are pedagogies in which control is not synonymous with, and dependent on, the possession of reified knowledge.

LS2 In its work in curriculum and teaching CARE has been much concerned to develop pedagogies and styles of classroom research which will help teachers and students to see clearly the sense in which knowledge is questionable. The Humanities Project explored the teaching of controversial issues because the recognition of controversiality forbade the teacher to define - or to accept others definitions of knowledge. After that experience it was natural for us to try to disseminate MAN: a course of study as a medium for developing the capacity to criticize social science, to work with teachers studying their own attempts to implement learning through inquiry and discussion and to investigate problems of teaching about race relations.

HT3 A key assumption for us to question, one which derives from Anglo-American social science, is that those who practice teaching and learning will operate parochially unless instructed by theory; theory constructed by other individuals out of their supposedly more leisurely but also more rigorous observations, and subsequent generalisations. Given this assumption, individuals once instructed, only practice, that is, repeat theory. Any deviation of practice from prior theory is interpreted in terms of mistaken implementation or non-mastery, rather than as grounded data for reflexive theorising.

- LS3 Curriculum research can feed on such positivist theory. For example, the specification of behavioural objectives can forbid students and teachers to raise the questions through which they would learn about the nature of knowledge. Prespecified objectives and the idea that generalisations can prescribe practice serve to prevent students and teachers from using knowledge expressed as curriculum as a medium for speculation. We assess conformity to expectations or predictions.
- HT4 Such assessment has no interest in the educative process and denies the legitimacy of (and does not collect) precisely that data which can generate insights into learning and the nature of knowledge, and which through its very collection can act as a catalyst to self-knowledge.
- LS4 Curriculum is to be tested by students and teachers, not students and teachers by curriculum. And, when we say this, we are talking not of a 'student-centred' curriculum, but of a 'knowledge-based' curriculum. Not a curriculum of skills and information with the knowledge boiled off. A knowledge-based curriculum teaches the problematic nature of knowledge - including knowledge about teaching - in some honest form accessible to its enactors. The medium is the message. The message is a question.
- HT5 That question is concerned with how knowledge is produced and valued. Schools often constrain intellectual development and the possibility of free and equal participation in democratic debate by ignoring and hence obscuring the process of knowledge production. Our aspiration is for schooling to facilitate an understanding of knowledge as socially generated. In this context a fruitful move might be to elevate everyday reflection and

learning to equal status with the academic. We all know a great deal about the world, about our social world, and a formal opportunity to reflect upon one's own process of coming to know things might offer us a purchase on those offerings of authoritative others termed knowledge.

LS5 The function of curriculum is to give everyday reflection about and learning from practice a form in which to work. What plays are for actors and directors - media through which to learn by their everyday activity about the nature of life and their art - curricula are for students and teachers. They are media through which we learn about both knowledge and pedagogy because they invite teachers and pupils to test ideas about both in practice.

HT6 If curriculum calls knowledge and pedagogy into question that message must be quite explicit to students as well as teachers. Students' critical responses, insecurities, uncertainties, are generally defined as 'not knowledge', in the same way as teachers' responses have been in many curriculum development projects. Educational researchers then, exist to improve education and have responsibilities to produce work. But in this they should be accountable to students and teachers by virtue of their ideas being made available to critique through that same work - curriculum. Similarly teachers occupy the same privileged but responsible position vis-a-vis students. An educational idea must be self-consciously speculative in its attempt to introduce subject matter for consideration.

LS6 Teachers and pupils are in classrooms and hence in possession of the laboratories of educational research. Curriculum is specification of the experimental procedure of action research in classrooms and schools. The curriculum is a hypothesis or conjecture and its adoption

should be a sympathetic attempt to refute it. Teachers and students are the crucial evaluators and, if they can evaluate the ideas carried in the curriculum rather than their curricular embodiment, then they can transcend evaluation and reach research. What emerges from a curriculum conjecture that evokes a refutation is a curriculum whose ideas are explicit and whose limitations are manifest.

HT7 Again we must insist that the invitation to research classrooms is addressed to students as well as teachers albeit via teachers; not to teachers who then concede, or do not concede, the right to research to students. However this possibility exists independently of the intentions of specific individuals since the teachers' relationship to curriculum can parallel that of the students', both are active practitioners in the classroom.

LS7 We are not constructing a manifesto for a conference. We are describing the tendency of twelve years' work in curriculum in CARE. But we are not claiming an easy success. In our view the improvement of schooling proceeds by learning from intelligent failures - or, if that word offends you, shortfalls. We are claiming that our shortfalls have been better than most, because we have tried to make teachers and students perceptive partners in the curriculum enterprise and thus to enable them to learn to improve education. 'No curriculum development without teacher development' was our early slogan. But the idea of curriculum as the basis of in-service professional education has to be extended to students as professionals in learning.

- HT8 So neither success nor failure are to be accepted unequivocally. We ask: 'How do students and teachers learn about knowledge and the process of schooling from success or failure?' If enterprises are conceived out of their earshot, failure will invite cynicism rather than learning; success will invite complacency and instrumentalism without understanding.
- LS8 CARE has been involved in some twenty sponsored projects over its ten years of life - many of them in research or evaluation rather than in curriculum research and development. But our curricular origins have exerted a pull on our research urging it towards the vernacular and practical rather than towards the technical and theoretical, keeping the dialogue with practitioners as strong as the dialogue with researchers.