

Inequalities and the Curriculum: Philosophical debates on the curriculum and social justice

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Contents

Abstract.....	2
Curriculum - entering the political agenda	3
Pursuit of social justice.....	4
Six kinds of curriculum response	7
i. Rational Curriculum Planning (RCP)	7
ii. Pursuit of knowledge in its different forms	8
iii. Enquiry based curriculum	10
iv. Development of Community and importance of social interaction.....	11
v. Taking diversity seriously	13
vi. 'Driving up' standards – assessment led curriculum	13
'What works'	14
Conclusion	15
References.....	17

Abstract

The paper provides an historical but critical context for examining the relation of the pursuit of greater equality in schooling to the development of curriculum. This requires a brief account of what one means by the principle of equality, before showing the different ways in which there have been curriculum responses underpinned by philosophical understandings which need to be examined closely. These different ways are explained in terms of:

- 'rational curriculum planning' with its detailed definition of 'aims, objectives, methods and evaluation – and thereby a 'science of teaching';
- 'forms of knowledge' or 'realms of meaning' to enable *all* pupils to have a basic understanding of the physical, social and moral worlds they inhabit;
- the pursuit of enquiry through which, for all learners, understanding is enlarged;
- provision of common curriculum experience as a basis for citizenship;
- taking diversity seriously
- equalisation of opportunities through a common system of national standards and assessments;

However, in the light of greater Government involvement in the minutiae of curriculum reform, mainly through changes in qualifications and examinations, there is clearly a need to ask what sort of evidence is relevant to 'what works'.

Curriculum - entering the political agenda

The nature and content of the school curriculum received little attention in educational thinking in Britain until the 1960s. On a broad and loose definition of curriculum (in so far as it received any public attention at all), it would refer to the programmes of learning which *in fact* prevailed in schools. Therefore, different schools would have recognisably different curricula, depending on the beliefs and designs of the teachers, except where the minority (the 'top 20% of ability') would be taking public examinations and therefore be following the syllabuses determined by university-led examination boards. 'Curriculum' and 'syllabus' would be understood as one and the same thing.

The 1944 Education Act, which for the first time in England established secondary education for all, and re-enforced a 'national system locally administered', made no reference to *what* should be learnt within that system or *how* it should be learnt. Indeed, when Dr. Marjorie Reeves was invited to join the Central Advisory Council (England) in 1947, she was told by the Permanent Secretary, John Maude, that the main duty of a member of the Committee was to be prepared to die at the first ditch as soon as politicians tried to get their hands on the curriculum. Even the Norwood Report of 1943, despite its title *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools*, devoted but half a page each to the forthcoming secondary modern schools and technical schools, but far more to what should be taught in the grammar schools. It was the role of the teacher to find ways in which a curriculum could 'relate to the immediate interests and environment of its pupils'.

Such a stand-off by Government from what is taught in school could not, it seemed, continue. There had, for example, been deep concern as far back as 1850 about the lack, or poor quality, of technical education, compared with that of France and Germany, thereby jeopardising the country's economic performance. And the raising of the school leaving age (ROSLA) to 15 as required by the 1944 Act, and then in 1974 to 16, provoked interest by Government not just in the organisation of schooling but in what happened within schools. It was the Minister of Education, David Eccles, who famously declared (in the debate in 1960 on the Crowther Report which had recommended a new form of full-time practical education in schools) his intention to try to make the Ministry's voice heard rather more often and positively and no doubt more controversially 'on what was to be taught in schools' and 'to venture into *the secret garden of the curriculum*'. (Quoted in Simon, B., 1991, p.312).

The late 1960s and early 1970s were the years of some turbulence concerning what was taught in schools. Those schools were seen to be undermined by the apparently child-centred approaches of the Plowden Report, the influence of the 'progressive' writings of John Dewey, and the example of the William Tyndale affair. The disquiet was reflected in the Black Papers (1967-1971), and finally leaked in the 'Yellow Book' – a briefing document to the then Prime Minister, James Callaghan, demanding more rigour and more systematic approach to the curriculum of the schools. The

Permanent Secretary at the time, James Hamilton, said that the DES must take 'a much closer interest in the curriculum. Indeed,

the key to the secret garden of the curriculum must be found and turned.

(quoted by Brian Simon, *op.cit.*, p.448)

Finally, therefore, the Government began the intervention which has increased massively since the mid-1970s. At Ruskin College in October 1976, 40 years ago, Prime Minister Callaghan gave what was possibly the first public speech ever by a Prime Minister on curriculum aims, in response to public concerns about education. Thus began what came to be called the 'Great Debate'. In particular he raised (a) the complaints from industry that new recruits 'sometimes do not have the basic tools to do the job required'; (b) a good case for a 'basic curriculum' with 'universal standards'; (c) greater controls over (or at least accountability of) teachers and teaching. The changing relation of Government to schools is reflected in the speech given by James Hamilton (the new Permanent Secretary) to the Association of Education Committees, 2nd July. The role of the DES

must mean more than seeing that teachers, buildings and other resources are available on whatever scale the country can afford. It must mean, I believe, a much closer interest by the Department in the curriculum in its widest sense, the assessment of performance, and even the relation of teaching method to performance.

Pursuit of social justice

Therefore, 'curriculum' rarely got a mention in the pre- and immediately post-1944 Act. But *how* schooling was organised did determine the sort of curriculum which the pupils would receive. It was this which became increasingly the object of criticism, especially from the social scientists. The tripartite structure, which emerged after 1944 (following the recommendations of the 1943 Norwood Report, though not embodied in the Act), aimed to match the three types of secondary school (grammar, technical and modern) to the so-called three types of child, namely, a few (the top 20%) who were 'capable of abstract thought and interested in learning for its own sake', those who were more adept at the application of ideas in technology, and those (the majority) who were concerned with practical activities and the immediate environment. Three types of school, which corresponded to the three types of child, clearly had implications for the manner and the content of learning within the respective secondary schools, and indeed within many primary schools which streamed their year groups in preparation for the 11+ entry tests for the grammar schools.

This increasingly led to charges of injustice, in terms of

- (a) different schools, curriculums, resources and thus opportunities for different pupils (as against the egalitarian argument according to which all children should be treated the same);
- (b) differentiation on questionable grounds (namely, the idea of inherited intelligence, and thus future academic potential, which could be accurately measured at age 11), thereby denying to many the opportunities and progression to universities and better jobs;
- (c) lack of respect for, and value attached to, the different educational provisions, the learning programmes therein, and therefore the pupils. 'Parity of esteem' between the different types of school (and therefore types of children) was not (and could not be) attained, as was forcefully argued by Olive Banks in her influential book, published in 1955, *Parity and Prestige in English Secondary Education*.

The concern was re-enforced by Philip Vernon's (1957) devastating critique of the intelligence tests by which children were despatched along different educational routes at age 11. He demonstrated that the tests which purported to show the fixed and innate intelligence of the child could in fact be raised by as much as 15 points through systematic coaching. Many, therefore, argued against discrimination at age 11 (which in effect reflected social and racial discrimination). Social justice demanded equal treatment for all within the common school with a common curriculum.

What followed, therefore, in the next two decades, was the pursuit of greater equality of treatment of young people through schooling, even though it was strongly argued by Basil Bernstein and others that 'schooling cannot compensate for society'. But this pursuit of greater equality took several forms:

- first, through not differentiating in the provision of education – thus, through comprehensive schools, providing a common school experience and a common curriculum for all;
- second, (at variance with the call for a totally common curriculum) through enabling pupils to follow different curricula (e.g. more practical and vocational), *which would be given equal value and respect*, according to what suits them best – as argued in the 1963 Newsam Report, *Half Our Future* ;
- third, through the provision of extra resources to compensate for social disadvantages which affected educational performance – as in the case of the Educational Priority Areas arising from A.H.Halsey's influential research.

It is important, therefore, to examine the principle of equality which underpinned these appeals to social justice, their curriculum implications, and the difficulties which philosophically lie in their implementation.

In asking how we should organise our social and public institutions which affect profoundly the welfare of people, the challenge is to justify why some should be treated differently from others. The underlying principle would be that one ought not to treat everyone differently or unequally unless good grounds can be given for so doing. The burden of proof lies on the shoulders of those who want to discriminate, rather than on the shoulders of those who want to pursue equal treatment for all. In the case, for example, of those who wish to provide a different sort of schooling and curriculum for different pupils, the need is to show how the differences in pupils themselves require differences in schooling and in the curriculum. In other words, the principle is: do not make distinctions which affect persons' welfare, unless grounds can be given why some rather than others should have the special treatment. And that is particularly significant where that special treatment (for example, the grammar school) is the route to higher paid jobs.

John Rawls (1972), in the section referred to as 'the original position', approaches the notion of 'justice as fairness' by asking one to imagine the hypothetical position that ('from behind a veil of ignorance') one did not know one's social or economic position in society or one's talents in the selection of, say, a school system. What sort of education or schooling would one argue for? In the case, for example, of differentiated schooling at the age of 11, if one did not know what the measured IQ of one's child would be and thus whether or not he or she would be joining the other 80% in the secondary modern schools, would one choose a grammar / secondary modern school system?

It was in the pursuit of such a principle of justice that the reform of schooling into a mainly comprehensive system took place in the 1960s and 1970s.

But further questions needed to be raised about the aims of education which affected the content and nature of the common schooling. Education concerned not simply the initiation into different forms of knowledge reflected in the traditional subjects, or into more practical forms of learning, but also into the nurturing of citizenship – and thus the development of mutual respect and of attitudes and social skills which enabled young people to relate constructively together. As A.H. Halsey argued in the 1978 Reith Lectures,

We have still to provide a common experience of citizenship in childhood and in old-age, in work and play, and to replace the divided culture of class and status.

In what follows, the paper points to six kinds of curriculum response to this pursuit of equality, each of which has an underlying philosophical background needing to be made explicit.

Six kinds of curriculum response

i. Rational Curriculum Planning (RCP)

Hovering in the wings, whether explicitly or not, have been the exponents of a 'scientific approach' to learning and thence to the curriculum. If so many students fail, then it is due to lack of systematic approach to closely defined objectives. There is a need therefore, in pursuit of greater equality, to analyse precisely what is to be learnt, and thereby to define the curriculum in terms of very precise objectives and of the methods which can be shown empirically to attain those objectives.

In this way, the curriculum became the focus of academic study and research several decades ago, albeit with a questionable philosophical set of assumptions about the 'science of teaching'. A key book, widely read in education courses, was that of Ralph Tyler, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, which set out the principles of 'rational curriculum planning' (RCP). To be rational, one needs to set out the intended learning outcomes or targets with such precision that one can 'measure' whether or not they have been attained. One needs, secondly, to choose the 'content' and 'teaching methods' which will ensure the attainment of these 'outcomes'. Third, one measures the success rate of content and teaching method to attain the outcomes – the relation of 'input' to 'output'. Following such measurement, one evaluates the whole process, deciding what, if anything, needs to be changed – precision of outcomes, content, or teaching methods. Given the 'ends' to be reached, what can be shown empirically to be the appropriate 'means' for reaching those 'ends'?

The 'science of teaching', as the recipe for a more just 'delivery' of education for everyone, was enhanced in the 1960s by such curriculum experts as Mager (*Preparing Objectives or Programmed Instruction*, 1962) and Popham (*Instructional Objectives*, 1969). It had, and continues to have, a deep-seated attraction. Denis Lawton reminded his readers that

By the early 1970s there was a powerful movement amongst US curriculum theorists demanding that the only meaningful interpretation of objectives was to emphasise behavioural objectives. Numbers of educationalists appeared at curriculum conferences with lapel badges and car stickers with slogans such as 'Help stamp out non-behavioural objectives. (Lawton, 1989, p.11)

A prime example of its influence in England would be the work of Jessop, 1981, whose book, *Outcomes: NVQs and the Emerging Model of Education and Training*, set out the detailed 'units of competence' or the 'can dos', expressed in precise behavioural terms, required of people pursuing vocational qualifications.

There are two erroneous, though related, assumptions in RCP.

The first lies in the mistaken means/end theory of action – that the relation of ‘means’ to ‘outcome’ is a contingent one such that it is an empirical matter (one open to scientific investigation) as to what action leads to what behaviour. It is, for example, a purely empirical matter that Bus 14 goes to the JR Hospital. There is nothing in the *meaning* of Bus 14 which realises the goal to be reached. By contrast, in many aspects of educational, and thus curriculum, improvement, the relation of ‘means’ to ‘the ‘end’ is not an empirical matter. The end to be pursued in teaching someone to be virtuous is embodied in the means by which one becomes virtuous, as Aristotle argued. Or, again, going through a particular mathematical routine as the *means* for profounder mathematical understanding, is not a purely empirical matter. The ‘end’ is to some extent embodied in the ‘means’ of reaching the ‘end’.

The second erroneous assumption lies in the logical confusion between the objective and the criteria by which that objective is known to have been achieved. Thus, the objective may be to make children happy. The test of ‘being happy’ could be the smile which the inspector of happiness receives whenever he or she visits the class. ‘Obviously happy’, he must think, whereas in fact the children have been trained to smile as soon as the inspector enters, even though they may be as miserable as sin. There is confusion between the ends to be attained and the criteria by which such ends are judged to have been achieved.

However, such a curriculum theory, intended to create greater equality by its scientific approach to learning, failed in its purpose. First, the pursuit of measurable targets leads to ‘gaming’ – training to attain these targets irrespective of the quality of learning. Second, RCP rests on a failure to examine what one means by educating all young people; knowledge and understanding, central aims of education, cannot be logically reduced to specific observable behaviours.

ii. Pursuit of knowledge in its different forms

The traditional grammar school curriculum, as outlined, say, in the 1943 Norwood Report, *Curriculum and Examinations in Secondary Schools*, was divided into a range of subjects which sought to distil the different forms of knowledge which we have inherited (what the philosopher Michael Oakeshott, 1962, referred to as ‘the different voices in the conversation between the generations of mankind’) and which constitute our understanding of the world. The aim of education was to initiate the neophytes into these forms of knowledge, defined in terms of their distinctive concepts, methods of enquiry and modes of verification. Much work was devoted by philosophers of education both to justify and to detail these forms of knowledge (or ‘realms of meaning’) as the aim of education for all – and indeed to fend off the claims by the ‘new sociology of knowledge’ which argued that all such knowledge was but the social construct of those who were in positions of power and control.

It was in pursuit of such an egalitarian view of the curriculum, whose primary purpose was the pursuit of knowledge in its different forms, that a National Curriculum was created by the 1988 Education Reform Act (ERM), not only listing the range of subjects which *all* pupils should study up to the age of 16 but also detailing what exactly should be learnt within those different subjects. All pupils would follow the same programmes of study leading to the same forms of assessment at the different key stages.

However, in pursuit of such an ideal (in the acquisition of what Michael Young refers to as 'powerful knowledge') those areas of human excellence so well described by Richard Sennett in *The Craftsman* and by the American philosopher turned motor mechanic, Matthew Crawford in *The Case for Working with your Hands* ('the disappearance of tools from our common education is the first step towards a wider ignorance of the world of artefacts we inhabit') are devalued and with them the learners whose pursuit of excellence lay in the intelligent development of such practical yet profound knowledge.

There were inevitably therefore, disagreements over the pursuit of equality through what was decried as a 'grammar school education for all' where differences between pupils' interests and abilities warranted a more practice-based and vocationally relevant curriculum for some. Indeed, this was but a continuation of debate and disagreement which emerged with the extension of secondary education for all up to the age of 16. The Newsom Report of 1964 was entitled *Half Our Future*, concerned with the sort of educational experience appropriate for those ill-motivated by the academic curriculum inherited from the grammar schools.

Therefore, various initiatives emerged in the 1970s – the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) and the Pre-Vocational Curriculum encouraged by the Further Education Unit (FEU) within the Department of Education. The hall-marks of both were the motivational recognition of an occupation-focused curriculum, the practical engagement with tasks which required enquiry pursued to theoretical levels, and co-operation within teams and between institutions. Schools would benefit from the craft and technician expertise within further education colleges. In pursuit of equal respect, a different kind of curriculum was pursued for those who were motivated by different interests and modes of learning, and yet (most important) to be under the same qualification umbrella (National Qualifications Framework, and later Qualifications and Credit Framework) which would guarantee equality of respect. Several attempts were made (for example, by the Chief Inspector, Mike Tomlinson, 2004) to create a coherent and integrated 14-18 curriculum into which, at different levels of achievement, all would fit.

Reference became increasingly made to such philosophers as John Dewey, who exalted the pursuit of practical interests as a route into the deeper theoretical grasp of the principles. Lord Kenneth Baker, formerly Secretary of State for Education,

developed initially City Technology Colleges and latterly the University Technical Colleges intended to integrate the theoretical and the practical, and bemoaning the absence of Design and Technology in the new EBacc qualification. The neglect of the practical and vocational had reflected poor theoretical understanding of knowledge – its nature, its growth and its value. It also discriminated against those whose intellectual and social development arose through such curriculum interests

However, what was seen as a ‘culture of inequality’ between the so-called academic curriculum and the more vocational and practical curriculum eventually killed off the range of initiatives constantly created up to and including the 14-19 Diplomas introduced in the fading days of the last Labour Government and ended by the new Conservative government in 2010.

Indeed, according to the House of Lords Select Committee, ‘a culture of inequality’ between vocational and academic education ‘pervades the system’ which does not reflect values elsewhere (Wilby, P. in *The Guardian*, June 2016). Figures given by OECD show that across developed countries 50% young people follow vocational routes to work - in Germany as many as 75%, to be contrasted with the UK where the figure is but 30% and as reflected in the absence of Design and Technology from the EBacc. In England, the ‘vocational’ is identified with low status, perpetuating the perception of inequality of those who take them. But it need not be. Such a status for such a curriculum reflects wider social values which affect the public’s perception of the aims of education.

iii. Enquiry based curriculum

The 1967 Plowden Report, *Children and their Primary Schools*, came to be seen by many (for example, the writers of the Black Papers between 1967 and 1972) as cause of low standards in many schools through spreading the ideology of ‘child-centred education’. It was argued that in the early years learning should, under the guidance of the teacher certainly, arise much more from the interests and the consequent enquiries of the children. And this principle came to be extended to some secondary schools – witness the ‘Interdisciplinary Enquiry’ (IDE) pioneered by Goldsmiths Curriculum Laboratory in the schools around South East London in the 1960s. Such enquiry and pursuit of interests would show respect for the concerns of the young people who were too often isolated from main stream schooling through lack of motivation and with no sense of relevance. No common curriculum in pursuit of equality, therefore, is needed but rather respect for the interests and modes of enquiring of the young people themselves, and the growth of knowledge through enquiry.

Several were the past philosophers appealed to in the justification of this more child-centred approach to the curriculum, one inevitably the American philosopher, John Dewey, whose *Democracy and Education* (the centenary of which was celebrated in

1916) criticised 'traditional education' as being disconnected from the experiences which the pupils brought with them into school, disconnected from practical and manual activity, ignored the interests which motivated learning, treated knowledge as something purely symbolic without connection to experience or to existing ways of understanding. A curriculum which paid equal respect to all young people, irrespective of social class or measured intelligence, would lead from where the learners are – their modes of understanding and valuing.

Such child-centred criticism of the 'traditional curriculum' inevitably created (and still does) a back-lash. Mortimer Adler referred to Dewey as 'worse than Hitler' in the damage he did to American education. The pursuit of interest would fail to provide the learner with the opportunity for acquiring the deep knowledge and understanding of the physical, social and moral worlds we have inherited. But Dewey's response, rarely acknowledged, lay in the interaction between the learner pursuing the interested enquiry and the teacher, immersed in the inherited forms of knowledge, and making the connections between inherited knowledge, on the one hand, and learners' culture and interests, on the other. In *The Child and the Curriculum*, Dewey argues that the task of the teacher is to make the connection between these two worlds:

first, the narrow but personal world of the child against the impersonal but infinitely extended world of space and time; second the unity, the single whole heartedness of the child's life, and the specialisations and divisions of the curriculum; third, the practical and emotional bonds of child life and an abstract principle of logical classification and arrangement. (Dewey, J., 1902, p.126-7)

Far from neglecting the traditional forms of knowledge, Dewey argued for the curriculum as the stage in which the teacher mediates the cultural achievements we have inherited to the particular modes of thinking of the learners.

iv. Development of Community and importance of social interaction

Thinking about the curriculum cannot, explicitly or implicitly, ignore the further consideration of the aims of education which affect profoundly the debates on equality. Such aims are concerned not only with the development of knowledge in its different forms through which we have come to understand the physical, social and moral worlds we inhabit, but also with wider social and moral virtues for living in community. Citizenship has from 1988 been seen as an element in the curriculum of English and Welsh schools. Crucial to such a sense of community is the development of respect for others whatever their social, religious or ethnic background. But that needs to be nurtured, so it is argued, through common experiences and through the social interaction made possible in the common school. For, as Dewey argued,

[M]en live in a community in virtue of the things which they have in common. What they must have in common in order to form a community or society are aims beliefs, aspirations, knowledge – a common understanding – likemindedness as the sociologists say. (Dewey, 1916, p.4)

Such community, which needs to be fostered through educational formation, is based on a respect for each other irrespective of background – taking seriously the opinions of others, even where they are seen to be mistaken. There may not be equality of intelligence, knowledge or talent, perhaps, but equality in human dignity and personal respect becomes the educational aim. It is through the deliberate and systematically led social interaction that such respect and deeper understanding are achieved. One is reminded here of Tawney's statement in his book *Equality*.

In spite of their varying character and capacities, men possess in their common humanity a quality which is worth cultivating and a community is most likely to make the most of that quality if it takes it into account in planning its economic organisation and social institutions – if it stresses lightly differences of wealth and birth and social position, and establishes on firm foundations institutions which meet common needs, and are a source of common enlightenment and common enjoyment. (Tawney, 1938)

Pursuit of such equality – common enlightenment and common enjoyment – required common institutions but, more than that, also common experience in addressing, through the curriculum, matters of personal and social concern. Indeed, it was in pursuit of such equality that Lawrence Stenhouse and team developed the Humanities Curriculum Project whereby, in the light of evidence provided by the Humanities and the Sciences, pupils might together systematically address those issues of personal and social concern which divide society – issues to do with going to war, racial and gender discrimination, sexual relations, social justice, inequalities of wealth, treatment of the poor. The role of the teacher in such a curriculum was to ensure respect for each person's considered view, relating opinion to evidence, encouraging each to articulate their respective viewpoints, drawing on their different cultural and religious perspectives. In taking that role, the teacher would adopt a neutral stance (much debated and criticised at a conference of the Royal Philosophy Society), but providing evidence (from history, literature, religion, etc) deemed relevant to the discussion. The inherited knowledge from the past – what Arnold referred to as 'the best that had been thought and said' – was more than the basis of an 'academic curriculum'; it was the source of evidence based argument and judgment engaged in by all the learners irrespective of academic ability or social background.

v. Taking diversity seriously

Subsequently, changes in the wider society have required educational responses both in curriculum and organisation. In particular, these relate to race and ethnicity, but also to the changing understanding of gender. There is a danger of disadvantage and inequality in terms of lack of respect, of educational achievement and of economic prosperity, even leading to riots and racism, as detailed in a series of reports – Ouseley in 2003, in *Community Pride, Not Prejudice*, Cattle in 2001 on community cohesion, and David Lammy on the August riots of 2011. Clearly such issues need to be exposed and explored through the curriculum, and indeed are so in periods dedicated to ‘personal, moral and social development’ – but also through the humanities, especially literature and history.

However, regarding issues of race and ethnicity, the problems of inequality need to be addressed on a structural level, especially where minority groups in inner-city areas live within self-segregated communities having little interaction with the indigenous community. But the solution to this issue lies beyond the powers of the education authorities

vi. ‘Driving up’ standards – assessment led curriculum

The ghost of RCP, as explained above, hangs on in the ‘management speak’ of targets, performance indicators and measurement of attainment whereby standards are said to be raised for all young people, and inequalities gradually eroded. But here, as in the case of RCP there is a need to heed the warnings of Campbell’s law which states

The more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor. Campbell warned us of the inevitable problems associated with undue weight and emphasis on a single indicator for monitoring complex social phenomena. (Campbell, 1979)

Such a behaviourist understanding of curriculum shapes the definitions of standards in the National Curriculum at the different Key Stages, thereby leading to ‘teaching to the test’, as so well illustrate by Warwick Mansell (2007) in his book *Teaching by Numbers*. It has taken on an acute form as the objectives (behaviourally defined as they are logically confused with criteria) permeate a testing regime by which schools’ and teachers’ performances are regularly assessed, and reflected in public league tables. Standards are defined in terms of specific targets and are said to go up or down. But, of course, standards ‘x’ can only go up by reference to other standards ‘y’, according to which the standards ‘x’ can be judged to go up or down. However,

'standards' do not go up or down, only the performance in relation to standards. And standards need to be defined in relation to the nature of the activity – in this case the aims of education. Unfortunately, those aims are rarely, if ever, explained or defined. Therefore, there prevails a continuing and confusing redefinition of standards through the examination and testing system

Such constant redefining of standards is reflected in the bewildering and continuous 'reform' of qualifications and of the 'equivalences' between different qualifications, which inevitably require changes in the curriculum aimed at obtaining such qualifications. Thus, the system, which (through the National Qualifications Framework (NQF) in the 1990s and the Qualifications and Credit Framework (QCF) in the next millennium) had endeavoured to show 'equivalences in standard' between vocational, prevocational, GCSE and A Level qualifications, changed almost annually. According to Ed Balls, when Secretary of State for Education, a new 14-19 Diploma 'could become the qualification of choice for young people'. Millions of young people were persuaded to take it rather than other routes through the 14-19 jungle of qualifications. Yet within three years, after a change of Government, that qualification was dead – hardly marketable by those who had been persuaded to take them.

Subsequently there has been the introduction of the EBacc (having a profound and controversial effect on the curriculum), the redefining of the measurement of standards at GCSE from A to E to 1 to 9, the controversial revision of GCSE and A Level syllabuses in 2015. Assessment is not a reflection of curriculum based on the deliberations about the aims of education; rather is 'curriculum' increasingly defined in terms of assessment, which in turn needs to comply with the language of 'quantitative social indicators' referred to in Campbell's Law.

The narrow form of measurement, leading to published league tables of schools, together with the promotion of 'choice and diversity' in a 'market of schools', inevitably leads to inequality between schools, thereby creating poorer opportunities for those in the so-called failing schools

'What works'

Government looks to the research community to say 'what works'. And it is often critical of such research for not being able to provide clear answers. Lord Skidelski reflects that frustration in a speech in the House of Lords.

Many of the fruits of that research I would describe as an uncontrolled growth of theory, an excessive emphasis on what is called the context in which

teaching takes place, *which is code for class, gender and ethnic issues* (author's italics), and an extreme paucity of testable hypotheses of what works and what does not work. (quoted in Bassey, 1995, p.33).

Note here the implicit reference to issues of equality. However, with reference to the questions raised in this paper, we need to ask how the different pursuits of greater equality (through the changes out-lined above) have worked. Certainly, where the separation of pupils at age 11 has been abandoned, a much greater number of pupils have shown they can achieve higher standards than was predicted in the tri-partite system. And in the few areas where 11-plus selection continues it would seem that the achievement of the overall school community is lower on the national tests.

Constant failure, however, to achieve greater equality lies much deeper than is reflected in test results. What counts as achievement depends on the aims of education. Evaluation of the success or failure of the curriculum in terms of its promotion of greater equality requires first an answer to the question, 'What counts as an educated person in this day and age?' The answers to such philosophical questioning (rarely pursued) will require different sorts of evidence. We have seen, for instance, the very influential Rational Curriculum Planning, through its measurement of outcomes, provide evidence of whether the curriculum was 'working', but it had a very limited understanding of what constituted 'success'. What constitutes 'evidence' depends on what one means by an educated person, and thereby an equality of respect.

Conclusion

The paper provides a brief historical context for examining critically the relation of the pursuit of greater equality in schooling to the development of curriculum. This requires a brief account of what one means by the principle of equality, before showing the different ways in which there have been curriculum responses underpinned by philosophical understandings. These ways are explained in terms of:

- 'rational curriculum planning' with its detailed definition of '*standards for all*', and 'a science of deliverology', but assuming a questionable behaviourist philosophy;
- systematic pursuit of knowledge in its different forms ('powerful knowledge') but which, in ignoring 'practical knowledge', creates an indefensible and unequal divide between academic and vocational studies;
- emphasis on enquiry through which understanding is supposedly enlarged, but which, in failing to see the essential role of the teacher in mediating the knowledge we have inherited to the learners' interests, often failed its educational aims;
- a reminder of the importance of common curriculum experiences in developing the sense of communal equality and civic responsibility;

- the need to take diversity more seriously;
- accountability of schools and teachers through a constantly changing examination and testing system.

Such different conceptions of the curriculum and its determination in terms of government initiatives clearly affect both what counts as evidence for 'what works' and thus the relevance of different kinds of research for assessing impact. Perhaps it is important no longer to confuse 'curriculum' with 'syllabus' or with tightly controlled pursuit of targets (frequently confused with standards), but rather to see it as a tentative programme of learning which embodies, first, those values which embody what it means to be human, second, the suggested content to which the learners should be exposed in the pursuit of those values; third, the pedagogical approaches which respect those values and lead to their attainment; finally, the critical examination, in the light of evidence of different kinds, as to the achievement of those values. The curriculum, therefore, should be rather like an hypothesis, which is tested out in practice and open to revision in the light of criticism of the ends or values in question or of the manner in which it has been pursued.

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