

Power/knowledge in curriculum theory: Henry Giroux and the misinterpretation of Michel Foucault

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Introduction

Foucault's work has had great influence in different academic domains, not least in education. Several curriculum theorists have tried to employ Foucauldian concepts in their theory, focusing especially on the notion of power/knowledge. Examples include: Cleo Cherryholmes, Thomas S. Popkewitz, Peter McLaren, and Henry A. Giroux. In this paper I shall concentrate on Giroux. He devotes his attention to the understanding of the relations between power and knowledge, and integrates Foucault's concept of power/knowledge into his theory of critical pedagogy. The main aim of this article is to offer a critique of Giroux's application of power/knowledge. My paper proceeds in three parts. First, I will briefly recapitulate Giroux's use of Michel Foucault in his curriculum theory. Second, a critique on Giroux's theory will be provided, which is based on the main tenets of Foucault's position regarding power/knowledge and some of the secondary literature. I shall illustrate specifically how Giroux gets things wrong, how he grafts Foucault's idea onto a different position, and I shall try to show what the real meaning of power/knowledge is in Foucault's account. Finally, I shall try to show the ways in which Foucault is relevant to curriculum theory, focusing especially on its potential for helping us towards a rethinking of the teacher's role and of curriculum policy.

Giroux's interpretation of power/knowledge

In this section, I will sketch out the reception of Foucault's power/knowledge in Giroux's curriculum theories. Giroux attempts to construct his own theory of critical pedagogy by adopting Foucauldian stance. These ideas will be revealed below.

Power/Knowledge in the Language of Possibility in the Curriculum

To develop a language of possibility relevant to curriculum theory and practice, Aronowitz and Giroux address the idea of power/knowledge in *Education still under siege* (1993). A starting point for the account is the denial that power is treated as a negative force that works in the interests of domination. In the classical Marxist view, power relates to knowledge primarily through the ways in which it serves to distort or mystify the truth. The economic and social conditions of knowledge are examined through ideological critique. Knowledge is

always analyzed for its distortions and mystifications. Thus, school knowledge and culture are reduced to serving the interests of privileged groups. The question of how power works in schools is almost limited to recording “how it reproduces relations of domination and subordination through various school practices.” (p. 150) They argue that the notion of power must be rescued from its current usage if schools are to be seen as active sites where possibilities exist. They point out:

We believe that power is both a negative and positive force. Its character is dialectical, and its mode of operation is always more than simply repressive. In actuality, power is at the root of all forms of behaviour in which people say no, struggle, resist, use oppositional modes of discourse, and fight for a different vision of the future. (ibid)

Then, the analysis of power by Foucault is quoted to reinforce their opinion:

If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms of knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, quoted in Aronowitz and Giroux 1993, p.150)

Therefore, according to the analysis above, they claim, the concept of power is not only negative but also is positive: it is productive in a way that produces particular forms of life. For Aronowitz and Giroux, the nature of social control and its relationship with schooling need to be redefined. They consider social control not merely an instance of domination but also as a form of emancipatory practice. That is to say, a positive notion of social control is needed to establish the theoretical basis for critical learning and practice: “The notion of power that underscores this positive view of social control takes as its starting point the empowerment of teachers and students and the confirmation of their histories and possibilities.” (ibid) Social control must be seen as a form of cultural politics, if it is to serve the interests of freedom. Within this perspective, schools are regarded as sites to struggle for a qualitatively better life for all. Curriculum, as an emancipatory form, plays an important role in giving students an active and critical voice, the ability to express themselves on the basis of their daily experience.

Moreover, a further question needs to be thought in this context. That is how teachers and others can produce curricula around forms of culture and forms of school knowledge, in a

way that empowers students who traditionally have been excluded from the benefits of education. If curriculum is regarded as a form of cultural politics, what kinds of knowledge have to be produced? First, in their opinion, teachers require developing forms of knowledge and classroom social practices that validate the experience which students bring to their own schools. It means giving students an active voice in order to change traditional situations in which the cultural capital of students from subordinate social categories is ignored. Second, a critical interrogation of the experiences that students bring to schools is needed. It gives students an active voice for understanding what they need to learn in order to reflect on their experience, and for breaking the chains of domination and subordination. That is to “provide students with the skills and courage in order to transform the world according to their own vision.” (p. 152) Third, it is imperative to “analyze state and nonstate agencies as important sites involved in the production of dominant culture and ideologies.” (p. 154) Educators have to know how corporate influences bear down on the shaping of school policy and curricula development. Think, for example, of the growing business-school partnerships being promoted by neo-conservative ideologues in the United States. Finally, a cultural politics includes the need to rethink the nature and the role of being a teacher. In this vision, Aronowitz and Giroux assert that teachers should be transformative intellectuals who provide the moral and intellectual leadership necessary for engaging in the struggle for equality and democracy. The concept of transformative intellectuals not only suggests the political function but also offers the theoretical ground for their examination of their own histories, those connections to the past which define who they are and how they mediate and function in the world.

Power/Knowledge in Border Pedagogy

Border pedagogy is a standpoint of Giroux affected by postmodernism, which includes the ideas of counter-text, the politics of difference, and counter-memory. Democracy and difference are essential components in border pedagogy. Aronowitz and Giroux (1991) argue that the discourses of democracy and difference can be taken up as pedagogical practices through what Foucault calls counter-memory. For Foucault, counter-memory is a practice which transforms history from a judgment on the past in the name of present truth. By placing the present in a new relation to the past, this practice combats our current modes of truth and justice, and helps us change our present situation. In Foucauldian terms, Aronowitz and Giroux argue:

Counter-memory represents a critical reading of how the past informs the present and how the present reads the past. Counter-memory provides a theoretical tool to restore the connection between the language of public life and the discourse of difference. It presents an attempt to

rewrite the language of resistance in terms that connect human beings within forms of remembrance that dignify public life, while at the same time allowing people to speak from their particular histories and voices. (p. 124)

In this vision, counter-memory is an attempt to develop the language of resistance so as to substitute the subjugated history. According to counter-memory, democracy cannot be treated as merely inherited knowledge. It also needs to be linked to the notions of public life that afford empowering investments. Pedagogical practice, therefore, is the rewriting of history through the power of student voice. Democracy becomes a referent for understanding how differences are organized by public life, and for clarifying how “schools, teachers, and students define themselves as political subjects, as citizens who operate within particular configurations of power.” (p. 125)

Power/Knowledge in Emancipatory Politics

Developing a critical pedagogy consistent with the principles of emancipatory authority is a significant interest of Giroux. To achieve this, radical educators need to reconstruct the relations between knowledge, power, and desire in order to bring together two often separate struggles within schools—the changing of circumstances and the changing of subjectivities. To begin with, educators have to identify the kinds of material and ideological preconditions that need to exist for schools to become effective. For example, the concerns of active parent involvement in the schools, of adequate health care for students, of high student morale, and of adequate financial resources. “All of these factors represent resources through which power is exercised and made manifest.” (Giroux, 1997, p. 107) Power refers to the means of getting things done in this sense. As Foucault says: power “consists in guiding the possibility of conduct and putting in order the possible outcome to govern, in this sense, to structure the possible field of action of others (Foucault, quoted in Giroux, 1997, p. 107).

Giroux argues that, for teachers, the relationship between authority and power is manifested not only in the legitimate exercise of control over students, but also in influencing the conditions under which they work. By this way, teachers can teach collectively, produce alternative curricula, and engage in a form of emancipatory politics. The main issue that Giroux focuses on is that teachers can empower their students through what they teach, how they teach, as well as through the formation of school knowledge. They are all relevant to the link of power to knowledge. This kind of knowledge that educators provide for their students might empower them not merely to engage the world around them but also to act so as to change the wider social reality. That is for the purpose of real democracy. Furthermore, Giroux suggests that there is a requirement for radical educators to reconstitute the very

nature of the knowledge/power relation. This requires engaging in a consideration of that “power relations exist in correlation with forms of school knowledge that both distort the truth and produce it.” (p. 108) A curriculum for democratic empowerment must examine not merely how knowledge distorts reality, but also how knowledge can produce particular forms of life. The latter accords with what Foucault emphasizes: a productive and positive function in power/knowledge, which centres on “generating knowledge that presents concrete possibilities for empowering people.” (ibid).

Foucault's notion of resistance in curriculum theory

Giroux assumes that resistance provides an important focus for the analysis of the relationship between school and the wider society. However, a clarification of what resistance actually is and of what it is not is imperative. In this sense, he attempts to establish a more rigorous notion of resistance by drawing on Foucault's concept of power and resistance. For Foucault, power works in order to be exercised on and by people within different contexts where dominance and autonomy interact. Giroux highlights:

...power is never uni dimensional; it is exercised not only as a mode of domination, but also as an act of resistance or even as an expression of a creative mode of cultural and social production outside the immediate force of domination. (Giroux, 1983, p. 108)

Thus, in his opinion, the behaviour expressed by subordinate groups could be incorporated into cultural and creative acts of resistance in which fleeting images of freedom are to be found. It also can form a strategy which connects with students' own lived experience against structures of domination and constraint.

Towards a critique of Foucault's reception in the work of Giroux

Giroux employs power/knowledge in his curriculum theory as indicated above. But clearly some of the claims and assumptions he makes involve misinterpretations. I shall illustrate these misinterpretations in terms of four salient points in Foucault's account of power/knowledge.

The misemployment of the idea that “Power/knowledge is Positive”

Giroux draws attention to Foucault's argument that power cannot be treated merely as a negative force of domination, as found in classical Marxism; instead, with regard to the possibilities of curriculum practice, it should be conceived as a positive force that can

empower teachers and students in educational circumstances. Indeed, Foucault highlights the positive and productive nature of power. However, his notion needs to be clarified further. In *Discipline and Punish* (1991), and in the course of examining the complex social function of punishment, Foucault does not concentrate this study of the punitive mechanisms only on their repressive or punitive aspects alone, “but situates them in a whole series of their possible positive effects” (p. 23). Several techniques of power, such as hierarchical observation, normalizing judgment and examination, are shown in this book. These new techniques are “both much more efficient and much less wasteful than the techniques previously employed which were based on a mixture of more or less forced tolerances and costly ostentation” (Foucault in Gordon, 1980, p. 119).

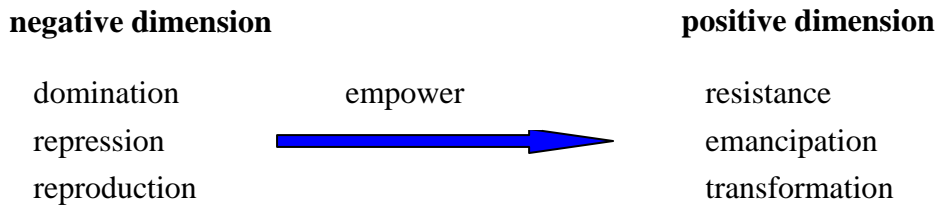
Hence, what Foucault illustrates is a new “economy” of power. Power becomes productive by way of disciplinary technology. As a result, this disciplinary power causes effective and docile bodies. The positive effect of power does not mean power is a force that can serve positive aims like empowerment or emancipation. What Foucault stresses is the multiple effects of the operation of power. Power is identified more by its productive aspects than by its repressive influence. Rather than displaying its oppressive strength, power makes use of brilliant tactics to do things effectively and efficiently. This “positive” and “productive” are aspects of the effects of power; they are not a matter of external purposes. Even if these techniques of power are invented to meet the demands of production, nevertheless, the “production” that Foucault refers to has a broader sense. It can be a matter of the production of construction; conversely, “it can be a matter of the production of destruction, as with the army” (Foucault in Gordon, 1980, p. 161).

In addition, though Foucault says power produces knowledge, this does not mean that power produces emancipatory school knowledge. For Foucault, knowledge and power are bound to each other. This “knowledge” is not a matter of content knowledge in curriculum or textbooks, as Giroux supposes, but knowledge of human science. It functions for the control and management of human beings, as, for example, in the demographic control of the population, and in the timetabling of students’ work and rest.

Dual-dimensional, unidirectional power vs. Dynamic, polymorphous power

Instead of the unidimensional power (power is only exercised for repression) of Marxism, Giroux’s conception of power extends the idea to dual-dimensional power whose purpose is both reproduction and transformation. On the one hand, on Giroux’s view, curriculum is dominated by cultural reproduction or neo-conservative ideology, which is the negative dimension of power. On the other hand, power needs to be used in service of the ideals of

justice and democracy, towards a more positive function, the positive dimension of power to which he pays especial attention. Power, in this context, is distinguished by its two poles. One is for repression; the other one is for emancipation. And its direction of movement is from the repressive side to the contrary side. This unidirectional procedure might be called empowerment. Here, I attempt to generalize Giroux’s viewpoint of power as follows:



Though Giroux does not take the view that power is merely employed for repression in education, his hidden assumptions are still that teachers and students lack power and that they are oppressed by power. Otherwise, why do they need to be empowered? Therefore, he argues, rather than a dominant instrument, curriculum needs to be seen as a form of cultural politics that gives students an active voice in order to change their subordinated situation which comes from disadvantaged cultural capital. However, the purpose of Foucault’s study of power is different. He never intended to liberate prisoners or emancipate sexuality through *Discipline and Punish* and *History of Sexuality*. As Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983) point out:

...it is important to realize that he **【Foucault】** does not see sexual identity or sexual liberation as inherently free from or necessarily opposed to domination within our society. He has frequently been misunderstood on this point... (p. 169)

If Foucauldian power/knowledge is not for liberation, if it does not ensure the occurrence of empowerment, what is it for? In fact, the notion of power can better be seen in terms of a relationship rather than as a matter of substance. For Foucault, power “is not an omnipotent causal principle or shaping spirit but a perspective concept” (Gordon, 1980, p. 245). Power is inherent within social networks rather than being constituted somehow above society as a supplementary structure. Power is everywhere; it is always already there. One can never be outside power, but this does not mean one is trapped or condemned to defeat. In contrast to Giroux’s account of dual-dimensional and unidirectional power, my argument is that power, for Foucault, is dynamic and polymorphous.

First of all, Foucault asserts that “power is neither given, nor exchanged, nor recovered, but rather exercised, and that it only exists in action.” (Foucault in Gordon, p. 89) In this way, power is neither a property nor a means of maintaining and reproducing economic relations; it

is above all a relation of force. Power is exercised from innumerable points, in the interplay of nonegalitarian and mobile relations. There is no absolute and stable power. This means that we cannot say who owns power or who lacks power. Power is operated in a complicated and dynamic network in which many physical points are spread. A point may impose strength on any other point and receive strength back from it. They are interactive. For Giroux, curriculum should be struggled for empowering the subject who lacks power. But Foucault regards power as machinery that no one owns. For instance, in the mechanism of the Panopticon, no matter who stands inside the central tower, power still can be exercised and maintained the same effect. The key point is not the ownership of power, but the tactic that is used in this building. Second, rather than monotonous power, what Foucault is interested in is “the polymorphous techniques of power.” (Foucault, 1990, p. 11) Power is exercised through various strategies and tactics. It reveals not only refusal, blockage, and invalidation, but also incitement and intensification. For example, pleasure plays an important role in the production of truth in confession. Rather than the nature of power, domination, in Foucault’s view, is a matter of strategic situations (Foucault, 1983, p. 226). In my opinion, empowerment and emancipation can also be seen as strategic situations. Third, Foucault emphasizes: “power is exercised only over free subjects, and only insofar as they are free.” (p. 221) People may suppose that power is exercised over the subjugated subject, and yet Foucault denies that slavery involves a power relationship. In his vision, power is exercised where individual or collective subjects face a field of possibilities of behaviour and reactions. Power and freedom are not mutually exclusive, but a complicated interplay exists within both of them. Thus, power is exercised over the subject who already has freedom. Freedom is the premise that power can be manipulated. This contrasts with Giroux’s assumptions that power is something that can be given to the oppressed, that a disadvantaged minority can be given more freedom and more autonomy.

A different notion on “Resistance”

Giroux’s radical idea is that resistance can be inspired within students’ lived experience in such a way as to eliminate oppression in education. This can be seen as a kind of counterattack on the part of a subjugated object towards a dominant subject, whether a group, a class or an institution of power. But Foucault’s account of resistance does not accord with this. Foucault claims: “where there is power, there is resistance, and yet, or rather consequently, this resistance is never in a position of exteriority in relation to power.” (Foucault, 1990, p. 95) Resistance always happens inside relations of power. Besides, the distribution of the force of resistance is formed in an irregular fashion. We see that the points and knots of resistance are spread over different times, different spaces, with varied densities. They may occur at certain moments in life, arouse certain types of behaviour, mobilize certain

groups, or inflame certain points of the body. A multiplicity of points of resistance constitutes the relations of power. These points of resistance are present everywhere in the network of power. They are mobile and transitory; and they play the role of adversary, target, support or handle. There is no single great point of revolt or rebellion. Resistance is rooted in multiple points and has the character of plurality.

It is a misunderstanding to say that people are entrapped by power and that they need resistance in order to break away from this situation. It would also be wrong to say that resistance is only a rebound with respect to domination or that it stands in a passive position, without influence or effect. For Giroux, resistance is action that needs to be pushed for contributing to democracy and social justice. It works passively and intentionally in order to pursue self-emancipation and social emancipation. The positions of the subjects of domination and resistance are fixed individually and cannot be changed. However, for Foucault, resistance is the irreducible opposite in relations of power. And “both power and resistance are synonymous with sociality; their respective forms may change.” (Smart, 2002, p. 133) That is to say, resistance is a fundamental element that coexists with power. It exists inevitably within power relations. In these relations, the role of power and resistance may be exchangeable. Following the dynamic characteristic of power, the nature of resistance is on-going and changing as well. I shall give an example to explain it further.

Foucault employs the term “agonism” to express the nature of power relations. Agonism implies “a relationship which is at the same time reciprocal incitation and struggle.” (Foucault, 1983, p. 222) Rather than a face-to-face confrontation that paralyzes both sides, the real situation of agonism is one of permanent provocation, similar to the competition of the joust. One is on the offensive; the other is on the defensive. The roles of offence and defence can be exchanged during the process of the struggle. The relationship of power and resistance is an agonism. They act reciprocally such that their respective forms are exchangeable. This situation is on-going and ceaseless until the game is over.

On Foucault’s account, the aim of resistance is not to attack a group, a class, or an educational system, but to fight for a technique, a form of power. Or we may say that it is against the bio-power¹ or pastoral power² in the modern state, against the normalizing mechanisms that shape “what we are” in our current society. As he puts this:

...the political, ethical, social, philosophical problem of our days is not to try to liberate the individual from the state, and from the state’s institutions, but to liberate us both from the state and from the type of individualization which is linked to the state. We have to promote new forms of subjectivity through the refusal of this kind of individuality which has been imposed on

us for several centuries. (p. 216)

Foucault's main concern is the subjectivity of human beings. In this sense, resistance has little to do with Giroux's concern of social justice and democracy, but relates more to questions regarding the submission of subjectivity and the normalizing modern rationality that operates in the process of individualisation.

Different Perspective on History

In the assertion of "counter-memory", Giroux intends to rewrite the subjugated history of oppressed students on the strength of their real experience and the authentic voice of their daily lives. However, Foucault does not aim to help disadvantaged minorities to voice their situation, to improve their life through rewriting a biased history. Nor does he try to move the position of the vanquished, of a history of the oppressed, from a marginal to a central status. It is true that Foucault invites peripheral subjects such as psychiatric patients, ill persons and delinquents to be main characters in his historical study. But this does not mean that his purpose is to emancipate these marginal others. In reality, the task of "counter-memory" that Foucault engages in is "an insurrection of subjugated knowledges" (Foucault in Gordon, 1980, p. 81). Subjugated knowledges are those blocs of historical knowledge that were present but disguised within the body of functionalist and systematising theory. Foucault's genealogy is a painstaking rediscovery of struggles in order to entertain claims to attention of local, discontinuous, disqualified, illegitimate knowledges and against the tyranny of globalising discourses, a unitary body of theory that filters and orders the subjugated knowledge in the name of some true knowledge and of an arbitrary body of ideas. This is a reaction against totalising theories and certain kinds of scientific discourse. It is opposed not to the contents, methods or concepts of a science, but to the effects that are linked to the institution and functioning of an organized scientific discourse within our society. In sum, Foucault denies that the analysis of power can be carried out in any one way – he rejects "an economism in the theory of power" (p. 88) Rather than the kind of economic functionality of power that comes from Marxist thinking, Foucault's idea of "counter-memory" is an attempt to conduct a non-economic analysis of power, to emancipate historical knowledges from the coercions of a theoretical, unitary, and scientific discourse.

In *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault claims, instead of writing a history of the past in terms of the present, he aims at "writing the history of the present." (p. 31) What does this mean? For Dreyfus and Rabinow (1983), the approach of "writing the history of the present" starts from a diagnosis of the current situation. It is located in the acute manifestations of a "meticulous ritual of power" or "political technology of the body"; it looks at what it arises from and how

it takes place. It is neither a simple unity of meaning nor something of changeless significance that Foucault seeks. Instead, he intends to “construct a mode of analysis of those cultural practices in our culture which have been instrumental in forming the modern individual as both object and subject.” (p. 120) With regard to the practice of confession for example, Foucault does not try to give us the historical fact of confession in different epochs. Rather, he isolates the central components of political technology nowadays and traces them back in time. He wants to say that confession is a vital component of modern power. This is for the purpose of writing “a history of present.” The topics that he chooses are all peripheral and relatively minor in earlier epochs, because they are all enmeshed with forms of power to some degree. Thus, Foucault concentrates on those cultural practices in which power and knowledge cross and human sciences are fabricated.

How to conceive of curriculum in terms of power/knowledge?

Since Foucault’s power/knowledge is not as it is imagined to be in Giroux’s work, how can we consider the implications of power/knowledge in curriculum? In my view, power/knowledge has implications for a rethinking of the teacher’s role and of curriculum policy. I shall elaborate on both of these points in what follows.

The role of the teacher

Giroux suggests that teachers should be transformative intellectuals whose position is like that of social reformers, taking on a very heavy responsibility for social reconstruction. How may we think of teachers’ role by drawing on a Foucauldian perspective? In an interview with Deleuze, Foucault illustrates what he takes to be the intellectual’s role in the following terms:

The intellectual’s role is no longer to place himself “somewhat ahead and to the side” in order to express the stifled truth of the collectivity; rather, it is to struggle against the forms of power that transform him into its object and instrument in the sphere of “knowledge,” “truth,” “consciousness,” and “discourse.” (Foucault in Bouchard, 1977, p. 208)

Unlike Giroux, in my opinion, Foucault’s intention is by no means one of sketching the contours of what a teacher should be. He does not attempt to look for a universal value or universal rationality, as might be found in Kant and Habermas. Nor does he claim that “there is a common form of morality which is acceptable by everyone, and everyone has to submit to it.” (Dreyfus and Rabinow, 1986, p. 118) On the contrary, as teachers and active subjects, rather than passive followers of established knowledge and truth, we ourselves have responsibility for pondering “what makes us what we are?”, and for deciding “what kind of

teacher we intend to be?”

Through power/knowledge, we can come to realize how the image of a standard teacher has been embedded deeply in our minds. There is a binary distinction between good teachers and bad teachers. Power shapes the characteristics of what is acknowledged as an excellent teacher, and it forms the discourses determining the specific role of teachers. By means of a pervasive strategy based on disciplinary power, involving surveillance and hierarchical observation, teachers normalize themselves in such a way as to be come accepted and to be objectified. By the perpetual spirals of power and pleasure (this pleasure could be caused by praise or compliments), this normalizing procedure has been stabilized. And finally, teachers govern themselves automatically to fit in with this principle of normalization. However, it would be arbitrary to regard these disciplinary procedures as mechanisms of subjugation. These discourses of the role of teachers derive from power/knowledge; they come from the collective rationality of human beings. They could be right or, more probably, could be wrong. Foucaudian thinking arouses our consciousness to reflect on this modern rationality and on our subjectivity. It reveals the danger of our dependence on this effect of normalization and, in contrast, the possibility of our practice going beyond this. If this effect is tolerable, there need be no problem in following it continuously. Yet, if it is intolerable³ and causes the distortion of our subjectivity, we have unceasingly to search for other alternatives so as to establish a new subject and to avoid being objectified and instrumentalized. In this sense, the role of teachers is not fixed. It is always to be found in the course of teachers' comportment of themselves as free beings.

Curriculum policy

On Foucault's account, curriculum might be seen as a cultural practice within the influence of power/knowledge. Our thinking is then no longer focused on how to empower subordinated people, in order to improve to use the curriculum as a means of improving their disadvantageous situation in the educational process. Rather than the repressive forces of social class or the economy, they are social requirement and economic, political development those shapes the formation of curriculum policy. Hence, Michael Apple's question, "Whose knowledge is of most worth?" (Apple, 1990, p. vii), which reflects the sovereign notion of power, can be seen as less pertinent. It is not so much as a result of ideology, control and oppression, but rather through more complex situations and via polymorphous tactics that curriculum policy is formed.

For example, in the 1950s, an event that was a special focus of attention for people in America was the Soviet launch of Sputnik, which brought to light a torrent of information

about education. National policymakers translated their growing unease about security threats into a concern over the public school's role in producing scientists, mathematicians, and engineers. The motivation for this was military and scientific competition between United States and Soviet Russia. Here, the security gap was linked to deficiencies in the nation's technical and scientific schooling (Cuban, pp. 226-227). Curriculum policy, thus, is guided by this concern to develop scientific and mathematic projects for resolving national crises. This example more or less reflects Herbert Spencer's question, "What knowledge is of most worth?" But the Foucauldian question would perhaps rather be phrased: "How does power/knowledge determine what knowledge is of most worth?"⁴ We might conceive of this historical event in terms of bio-power. "Power" in curriculum policy was operated to guarantee national security. "Knowledge" became a matter of strategy geared towards military competition, and involving the tactics of organizing the science and mathematics curriculum in different levels of school education. "Truth" within this curriculum discourse is shaped by the maxim: catch up with Soviet Russia as soon as possible. The Soviet Russia has now disintegrated. However, some things might have not been changed. Martial competition has been substituted by on-going global economic competition; and the main role could be changed from America into my country--Taiwan. The prominence of the science and mathematics curriculum has already been displaced by the importance attached to certain subjects or skills that are deemed helpful in getting a good job and in earning much money. Therefore, regarding the choice of study, students prefer certain practical subjects like computer science or business administration to some fundamental subjects such as: philosophy or physics. As we see, our curriculum policy has still been inevitably influenced by bio-power. Foucault warns us that it is not the unchangeable truth we should rely on perpetually. Bio-power decides what teachers teach, what students learn, and what schools function for. On the one hand, it may enhance national economic development. On the other hand, the subjectivity of teachers and students may be distorted unconsciously through this process. For instance, the conflicts and paradoxes among economic benefits, administrative efficiency and educational ideals have been put on the stage constantly. In these circumstances, we may need a kind of Foucauldian reflection on our current situation in order to understand how a certain normalization become embedded in curriculum policy, how it determines what education can be, and how it makes us what we are.

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Notes

¹ Foucault brings up this idea in *History of Sexuality vol.1*. Since the classical age, the mechanisms of power have undergone a profound transformation. Rather than hindrance, destruction and submission, power has become a force for organization, control, incitement, monitor and growth. The right of the sovereign is manifested as the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain, invest or develop its life.

Historically, this bio-power was an indispensable element in the development of capitalism. Because there was the need to insert the human bodies into the machinery of production and adjust the phenomena of population to economic processes. The accumulation of man to that of capital, the expansion of productive force, and the differential allocation of profit, were made possible by the exercise of bio-power.

² This form of power is salvation oriented and oblativistic which is different from the sovereign power. For Foucault, the state can be seen as a modern matrix of individualization, or a new form of pastoral power that is transferred from the traditional form of pastoral power. In this sense, power was no longer a matter to salvage people in the next world. It raised the effect to make sure the health, well-being or security to people in this current world. See Foucault (1983).

³ In the Introduction of *The Cambridge Companion to Foucault* (p. 10), Gary Gutting refers to this idea which comes from André Flucksmann who considers that Foucault's motive for embarking on a history is his judgment that certain current social circumstances—an institution, a discipline, and a social practice—are “intolerable.”

⁴ Popkewitz etc. consider this Spencerian question further. In their view, it relates to the thinking of how people tell the truth about society, themselves and their routes of salvation. Instead of asking what knowledge is of most worth, we may ask: how that worth is produced as a cultural field of practices (Popkewitz, T. S., Pereyra, M. A. & Franklin, B. M., 2001, pp. 28-29).