Martyn Hammersley and Andy Hargreaves (Eds.). Curriculum Practice: Some sociological case studies (3rd edition). London and New York: Taylor and Francis, 2012. Pp. 1-280. ISBN: 978-0-415-61517-4 (Print) ISBN: 978-0-203-81617-2 (e-ISBN)

Abstract:

The book titled Curriculum Practice: Some sociological case studies brings together various contributions that pertain to all three layers of curriculum: the macro-level, i.e. the level of curriculum and society, the micro-level, i.e. the classroom universe and the meso-level of organizational processes. The volume is organised into three main sections, School Subjects, Gender and the Curriculum, and Examinations, Accountability and Assessment.

The first unit of the book, School Subjects, focuses on either the historical development or the forms that subjects take in the classroom. The papers in this section attempt an analysis of the differences between how knowledge is selected, reconstrued and transmitted in schools, looking at various subjects such as English, geography/environmental studies and art/design.

Douglas and Dorothy Barnes investigate in their contribution, Preparing to write in further education, different forms that English may take in continuous education. They attempt to provide a complete description of the different English courses taught in a number of schools and college, making comparisons, e.g. school vs college courses, English vs Communications, courses in business departments vs those in technical departments, courses for students of higher vs those for students of lower academic status.

Caroline St John-Brooks' contribution, English: A curriculum for personal development? explores the English taught in schools through a case-study in a comprehensive school. She sadly identifies differentiation between pupils according to their social class, despite the teachers' apparent commitment to egalitarianism.

The third chapter, titled A subject of privilege: English and the school curriculum, by Stephen Ball offers a factual, narrative account of the early efforts involved in establishing English as a distinct and reputable school subject. Moreover, the author tries to validate, through the narrative, a social interaction paradigm for curricular change, along with a series of relevant concepts.

Ivor Goodson's article, Defining and Defending the Subject: Geography versus Environmental Studies tackles the conflict between geography and environmental studies, the former representing an established academic subject while the latter is an aspiring subject.

Chapter five, One Spell of Ten Minutes or Five Spells of Two ...? Teacher-Pupil Encounters in Art and Design Education, by Les Tickle examines the way in which middle school teachers of this subject attempt to reconcile the gap between teaching pupils craft skills versus granting them free expression of their creativity.

David H. Hargreaves argues in The Teaching of Art and the Art of Teaching: Towards an Alternative View of Aesthetic Learning that the overwhelming emphasis on art production only wastes a crucial opportunity for schools to get involved in the dissemination of cultural capital by means of the teaching and

enhancement of art appreciation.

The second section starts with Teresa Grafton, Henry Miller, Lesley Smith, Martin Vegoda and Richard Whitfield's text, Gender and Curriculum Choice: A Case Study. They explore the different effects school subjects have on boys and girls. The authors show that girls and boys are practically channelled into differing patterns of option choice, due to both curriculum differentiation in the craft strand in the first three years of their secondary schooling and to the way in which family and courses is introduced into the option scheme, versus science and the craft subjects which are traditionally the realm of boys.

Chapter eight, Gender and the Sciences: Pupil's Gender-Based Conceptions of School Subjects, by Lynda Measor contends that girls have low levels of participation in science courses, starting from middle school, largely based on preconceptions that physical science is quite 'unfeminine'. Interesting findings revealed that boys' and girls' behaviours follow a certain 'masculine' or 'feminine' pattern and that teachers make little effort to attract girls to physics, chemistry and biology.

The third section, Examinations, Accountability and Assessment, starts with the paper The Hidden Curriculum of Examinations by Glen Turner, which tackles the issue of the 'hidden curriculum' of examinations, particularly the effects it has on the attitudes of some high achieving pupils from a large comprehensive school, who were largely interested in examination success, to the detriment of all other classroom activities.

Chapter 10, Teachers' School-Based Experiences of Examining by John Scarth explores the attitudes of teachers towards external and internal examinations. For most of the teachers, preparing for examinations represented an important part of their teaching activities. The author refutes the hypothesis that these teachers' opinions are ideology-based.

Richard Bowe and Geoff Whitty's contribution, A Question of Content and Control: Recent Conflicts over the Nature of School Examinations at 16+ analyse the results of the research on examination boards initiated by Whitty in 1973. The authors claim that none of the macro-theories available could adequately account for the way in which public policy in this respect is presently changing; moreover, they emphasise the political importance of developing a more acceptable theory. Additionally, Bowe and Whitty ascertain that there is a backward trend towards a more centralised control of education in Great Britain.

The last chapter, Assessment Constraints on Curriculum Practice: A Comparative Study, by Patricia Broadfoot continues along the the line of education centralisation in the French education system, as compared to the British one. She maintains that even if the way in which control is applied is different from one country to the other, both educational systems exert a similar degree of control over teachers' activities.

All in all, the book affords a sociologically informed empirical insight into the curriculum at classroom level, subject departments or examining bodies which might empower us to test and develop more speculative explanations of curriculum practice as opposed to what sociologists have presented so far, theories rather focusing on concepts such as ideology, hegemony or cultural capital. It is a useful tool for curriculum planners in their attempt to implement possible prescriptive models of curriculum change.

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