GEOGRAPHY - A VESTED INTEREST IN EDUCATION

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By John Huckle

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In the last five years there has been a fundamental change in educational sociology which may be viewed as the emergence of a new paradigm. This new interpretive paradigm stresses the problematic meaning of social events and educational categories. It suggests that society is socially constructed, sustained, and changed through the ongoing interaction of men. In that there is a dynamic, two-way interaction between man and society, the sociologist must adopt a methodology which employs participant observation and recognises that research itself is a social act. Within the new sociology of education the sociology of knowledge occupies a central position. Young and others hold that there is no absolute knowledge; all knowledge is socially constructed and ideological. A curriculum based on a structure of knowledge, such as that proposed by Phenix or Hirst, would be regarded as an ideological statement. Similarly educational categories such as pupil, intelligence, and subject, are socially constructed.

In this article I intend to discuss the development of geography within the secondary school curriculum by adopting the perspective provided by the new sociology of education. I will examine the problems which had to be overcome before geography could enter the curriculum, and those which currently attend its evolution as the curriculum changes its character.

Young argues that the curriculum is an intersubjective reality given meaning within an institutional context. He draws on several writers, including Marx, in attempting to show that curriculum change is related to the relative power of different groups within society. That those in power define what counts as knowledge and govern its accessibility is the central idea in Young's paper. He also views the relationships between knowledge areas and the various social groups having access to them. Such an analysis is highly relevant in that geographers may be regarded as a pressure group attempting to establish and maintain the position of their subject within the curriculum.

The academic curriculum common in secondary schools during the early part of this century displayed rigid stratification in that its component subjects were isolated from one another. They were afforded prestige and regarded as the property of teachers who gained reward by putting knowledge to use. A high degree of specialization, on the part of pupils and teachers, was possible. The subjects which gained most status were those which were formally assessed, taught to the ablest pupils, and taught to homogeneous groups of successful children. In attempting to establish a place within such a curriculum geography had to establish its right to be considered as high status knowledge. We shall see that it therefore stressed the literary form of expression, became more abstract and divorced from everyday experience, and promoted individualism and competition.

Bernstein suggests that formal educational knowledge is realised through three message systems of which one, the curriculum, defines what counts as knowledge. The three systems, curriculum, pedagogy, and evaluation, are contained within an educational knowledge code which is socially determined. Codes are of two broad types, collection or integrated, depending on whether the contents or subjects are in closed or open relation. The academic curriculum referred to by Young is of a specialized collection type, its contents being strongly classified or differentiated. Strong classification is the result of subject specialists acting as boundary maintainers. In doing so they develop a sense of identity and membership, or what Esland refers to as a subject perspective. The rise in geography in schools is accompanied by several developments which ensure access to such a perspective for a growing number of teachers. A collection code ensures socialization of both teachers and pupils in that it develops subject loyalty. The key concept in such a code is discipline. The pupil must learn to work within a received framework, and the knowledge he handles is abstract and divorced from reality. The able pupil will gain order, identity, and commitment, while the less able will become confused and apathetic.

The academic curriculum had its origins in the middle ages. Designed around the needs of the church it was dominated by Latin and stressed the classical tradition. It was a difficult curriculum and it dominated the grammar schools and universities. Subjects such as geometry which did find a place in this curriculum had to provide discipline, and great faith was placed on what we now term the transfer of training. Williams writes of the pressures which finally resulted in alternative curricula being provided in new types of school. These pressures came from the public educators demanding education for all, and from the industrial trainers who required a skilled labour force. Robinson writes of one group of schools, the dissenting academies, which broke the educational monopoly and provided a realistic and relevant education. In the 17th and 18th centuries these schools met a demand from the increasing merchant classes, and were prepared to implement the ideas and writings of progressive Renaissance thinkers. By relaxing the degree of classification, or differentiation between subjects, these schools developed a code which allowed for the introduction of 'modern' subjects. At Sherrifhales in Shropshire, between 1663 and 1697 the curriculum included mathematics, anatomy, history, natural science, and geography. Practical exercises, including surveying and the making of sundials, were carried out. By 1800 geography was well established in such schools and was based on compendious works of general geography. The subject matter was chiefly astronomical, physical, and chorographical, with an emphasis on social and topographical detail.

The first way in which geography gained status in its attempt to be recognised as academic knowledge was by gaining a foothold in the universities. Physical geography, a more abstract scientific study linked to geology, was recognised by the universities as early as 1850. This separatism hindered the development of a unified geography. The work of enlightened pioneers such as Mackinder gradually earned recognition, the school of geography at Oxford dating from 1899. In 1916 chairs were established at Liverpool and Aberystwyth, and the period 1917 to 1933 saw great expansion of geography

in the university sector. This was responsible both for an increasing supply of graduate teachers, and the development of public examinations in the subject. Around 1900 geography began to gain ground in the schools. The Code of 1871 to 1897 made provision for geography and set standards whereby its teaching could be assessed. In 1905 the Board of Education issued regulations and regulations, but acknowledged that geography was still a low status subject taught largely by verbal methods. There were few headmasters or inspectors with geographical training, although the utility of geography as a form of vocational training for commerce and administration was being realised.

It was the work of individuals and professional bodies which finally led to a breakthrough. Of particular importance was the work of Herbertson and Mackinder who largely created the new subject perspective for the geography teacher. By their writings and inservice education they converted the subject from largely uncritical descriptive writing about the world into a discipline that emphasized an analytical and deductive approach. They provided new integrative frameworks, such as the natural region, about which the geography syllabus could be structured. In 1893 the Geographical Association was founded. It had grown out of an earlier initiative by teachers who wished to exchange lantern slides. In the first thirty years of its existence its main concern was examinations. The Association published a journal and represented the interests of the subject to examining bodies and other groups concerned with education. By 1911 its membership had grown to 1,000, and by 1920 geography had entered the sixth form curriculum and was being given specialised provision by local authorities.

Geography therefore entered the academic curriculum by proving its worth as a discipline, by transforming its teaching techniques, and by developing formal modes of assessment. Although no longer 'capes and bays' the knowledge was abstract and unrelated to the child's reality. Textbook writers, teacher trainers, and the professional associations combined to offer a new subject perspective. This lessened the teacher's conceptual precariousness, and was to prove an obstacle to those who wished to relax classification, and at the same time develop a more open pedagogy.

Bernstein recognises that integrated codes represent a shift in the balance of power which shapes the curriculum. Due to social change there is increased demand for a relevant curriculum which stresses relational ideas and general principles. In such a code the subjects would be in open relationship and the pedagogy would be relaxed to allow the pupils to introduce relevant knowledge from their own experience. Such a code requires consensus about the integrating idea amongst teachers, and their socialization into a new role. Teaching and course planning must be shared, the status of knowledge arrived at by negotiation, and modes of assessment more widely based. By declassifying the curriculum we are attempting to change the pupil's boundaries of consciousness.

The move towards integrated curricula in schools has been a feature of the last ten years. Writing in 1964, Marchant described the established position of school geography. The subject was popular in examinations at

all levels and there was a continued search for status: -

> ' - in the upper streams there is the determination that geography shall prove its worth as a mental discipline.'

Geography has resisted the social studies movement of the 1940s and was shortly to begin battle with new forms of integration. Marchant only hints at these towards the end of his paper:-

> ' But perhaps in this new interdependent world, subject frontiers are of less importance than that knowledge which is basic to mutual understanding and to effective influence on the world stage. - - geography given adequate teaching time might well be able to make a yet more potent contribution towards the understanding of some of these problems.'

There is much in Marchant's survey and others to suggest that geography teachers were prepared to relax their pedagogy, or in Bernstein's terminology, to adopt a weakened frame. Local studies, classroom resources, problem solving, fieldwork, and a willingness to discuss values were all signs of a move towards an open classroom. These changes are well established but are by no means universal. It is in those schools where strong classification remains that frame strength is proving most resistant to change.

A recent D.E.S. survey reflects the established position of school geography which Marchant described. Of the 217 schools sampled 63 had combined studies courses with various titles including social studies, humanities, and environmental studies. These courses are best developed in comprehensive and modern schools, and tend to be taught to pupils of average and less than average ability. There is a growing range of external examinations linked to these courses, and both universities and colleges of education are providing teachers with a professional training in some form of combined study. New professional associations such as the National Association for Environmental Education are growing in membership, and official reports from the D.E.S. and Schools' Council support these new curriculum frameworks.

What then are the problems facing geography in schools as it currently attempts to evolve? As Bernstein predicts the geography teacher socialized into the collection code is resisting change. We see this in most school departments to some extent, and it was clearly visible in Nicholl's presidential address to the G.A. in 1973. Not only is his subject perspective threatened by integration but change in the nature of geography itself further serves to unsettle the teacher. Geography was late in gaining its place in the curriculum. Its present resistance to change may be an indication that it is not yet ready to forfeit its hard won position. By continuing the practices which won it recognition geography in schools largely ignored the social and environmental problems in the real world which demanded attention. The new combined studies developed to meet an existing need and have gained ground at the expense of geography.

The new sociology of education does then offer a relevant perspective on the growth of geography within the secondary school curriculum. The subject won recognition in an academic curriculum of the collection type by proving its worth as a discipline, and by socializing teachers into its subject perspective. Although prepared to accept a weakened frame, geography has been reluctant to weaken its boundary with other subjects. The vested interest which was so necessary at the beginning of the century is now proving an obstacle. Many teachers regret that geography has not been more prepared to exert its interest in the name of integrated studies.

YOUNG M.F.D. BERNSTEIN B.B. ESLAND G.M.	Papers in KNOWLEDGE AND CONTROL, edited by YOUNG M.F.D., COLLIER MACMILLAN, 1971
ROBINSON H.	Geography in the dissenting academies, GEOGRAPHY, July 1951.
WILLIAMS R.	The Long Revolution, CHATTO AND WINDUS, 1958.
MARCHANT E.C.	Geography in Education in England and Wales, GEOGRAPHY, July 1964.
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND SCIENCE	Education Survey 19 - School Geography in the changing curriculum, H.M.S.O. 1974.

J. Huckle,
Bedford College of Education.

PUBLICATIONS RECEIVED

University of Birmingham: The hard working Centre for Urban and Regional Studies has just published:
Images of Place by Brian Goodey, consisting of essays on environmental perception, communications and education, price £2.25, 152 pages.
Urban Walks and Town Trails by Brian Goodey, providing comprehensive accounts of their origins, principles and sources, price £1.50, 123 duplicated A4 pages.

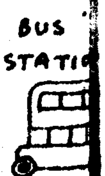
Edward Arnold announce three titles in their Topics in Medieval History series:
1. Villages and Farming by M.Chappell
2. People and Places by G.Day
3. Towns and Traders by G.Day
Each has 48 pages and costs £0.78.

Comment

GEOGRAPHY - A VESTED INTEREST IN EDUCATION

As a self-confessed, even unashamed, member of that interest group to which John Huckle refers in his article Geography - A Vested Interest in Education (C.G. Feb. 1975), might I make some comments on his analysis and pose a few questions which seem as yet unresolved or ignored?

I see no point in denying that the subject geography is a pillar of the "subject curriculum". Mr. Huckle's brief but illuminating account of geography's rise to its present position of (relative) eminance in the secondary school, bolstered by shady liaisons with the dreaded examination system and the undercover support of such insidious organisations as the Geographical Association, has the ring of truth about it. Geography has undoubtedly achieved its status in the school curriculum through the interplay of diverse historical circumstances (what used to be called 'historical accident') rather than as a result of rational curriculum planning. While I believe geography to be a subject rich in ideas and challenge for anyone lucky enough to study it, I would accept that its relative status in the curriculum, to the virtual exclusion of many other rich collections of ideas (such as sociology?), is largely indefensible.



Could Mr. Huckle and I perhaps further agree that the use of "subjects" as the basis for a school curriculum has imperfections both in conception and in implementation? Undue compartmentalisation of knowledge would surely be condemned by all and the teaching of geography may indeed, as do most things, fall short of the ideal. But, in pointing to all this (the vested interest of geography, its origins, the arbitrariness of the conventional subject 'mix' in schools, the defects of a curriculum based solely on subjects), isn't Mr. Huckle really only indulging in that favourite pastime of sociologists - articulating, and elaborating on, what is obvious? I couldn't but agree that the subject curriculum, with geography as a part of it, has significant defects, but has a case been made for abolition rather than reform? When it comes to discussing what is to replace subjects, such as geography, as a curriculum framework, Mr. Huckle's article is decidedly vague, in contrast to his sharp critique of the status quo. Hence some questions which seem to require an answer:

1. Mention is made of "declassifying the curriculum" and the "integrating idea". Is the new curriculum, having abandoned its subject-based structure, to be completely unstructured, or is it to have a new structure, as yet unspecified? To what, ~~in practice~~ is Mr. Huckle referring when he talks of a "move towards integrated curricula in schools" in the last ten years? Surely he is [illegible] school courses as plausive steps ~~towards~~ a [illegible] critic based on.

Bernstein's conception of the "integrated code"?[1] Are not the super-subjects, such as Humanities and Environmental Studies, now being fostered in some schools, more closely allied to what Bernstein describes as a "collection curriculum"? While there may be a weakened "classification" (i.e. a blurring of subject boundaries) within the new subject groupings, is not the curriculum a a whole characterised by strong classification between say Humanities and Science? A curriculum structured in terms of several "broad fields of experience"[2] such as these, is surely more of a reshuffled subject curriculum than a genuine example of the integrated ideal in practice?

2. Bernstein's term "frame" refers to "the degree of control teacher and pupil possess over the selection, organization and pacing of the knowledge transmitte and received in the pedagogical relationship". Can the weakening of frame associated with integrated studies really be regarded as a gain for education? What seems to occur all too often is that the firm roots and clear, if limited, objectives of the pre-existing subjects are superseded by a new creature, such as Environmental Studies, of uncertain origins, multifarious manifestations and nebulous goals. The weakening of control over what is transmitted and receive in the classroom seems in practice to encourage portentous course titles (e.g. Social Studies), global themes (e.g. Man in Society), together with a disease which might best be described as "content gluttony". Such courses are liable to devour any topic in sight (which isn't relevant to a general, as distinct from a subject(s) based, course on Man in Society?), resulting in severe indigestion and grossly overweight syllabuses with little room left to explore the ideas which purport to be at the heart of it all. (It should be said that this is a disease not unknown in geography, especially in the 'cover the world' school of regional geography. Hopefully, with progressive attempts at defining fundamental geographical concepts and devising courses built round them, its incidence in geography is declining).

3. Bernstein defines integration as referring minimally to

> "the subordination of previously insulated subjects or courses to some relational idea, which blurs the boundaries between the subjects".

Could we have some examples quoted of such relational ideas? Are they really higher order concepts which transcend subject boundaries, or is the term relational idea being equated naively with wide-ranging topics or themes (e.g. underdevelopment, race), the teaching of which can be as rich in ideas or as devoid of them as those devising the course make them?

4. Mr. Huckle talks of a more relevant curriculum and of relevant knowledge. What is meant here by relevant, and relevant to what? An old question, but worth asking when the idea of relevance is used as a freely available but ill-defined justification for innovation. Are the best integrated studies courses necessarily more "relevant" than the best geography courses?

If the picture painted here of the reality of integrated studies is in an excessively critical vein (and it is intended to be so), it is only a reaction in kind to those who insist on comparing the admittedly imperfect reality of geography teaching with an abstract ideal. For the sake of a balanced argumen it might be more fruitful to distinguish between the comparison of realities (present and predicted) and the debate on ideals.

The present curriculum structure in our secondary schools is founded on the assumption that

> "No enquiry can take place except within a particular system of thought and this involves recognising the implicit rules of procedure built into this system rather than another"[3]

If the integrated code is to provide an alternative foundation for the curriculum, or even a complementary one, its proponents have the obligation of interpreting that sophisticated ideal in terms of the realities of the school as an institution. There can surely be no justification for integration being an approach applied only to the less able. However, until the implications of the integrating idea have been carried through into the practical sphere of curriculum design and the learning experience of the individual pupil, that idea will be resisted not only because of the vested interests of specialists but also because it has yet to be justified as a viable alternative philosophy for the secondary curriculum. Once the case has been made, I shall steel myself for the role disorientation, loss of subject identity and other traumatic experiences which the sociologists warn us to prepare for.

REFERENCES

1. B.B. Bernstein 'On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge' in Knowledge and Control, ed. M.F.D. Young Collier Macmillan 1971.
2. R. Pring 'Curriculum Integration' in The Philosophy of Education, ed. R.S. Peters Oxford 1973.
3. R. Pring 'Curriculum Integration' in The Curriculum: Context, Design and Development ed. R. Hooper, Oliver & Boyd (for the Open University) 1971.

Richard Daugherty.

Comment

GEOGRAPHY - A VESTED INTEREST IN EDUCATION

I was pleased to read Richard Daugherty's comments on my article 'Geography - a vested interest in education'. May I offer the following replies to the questions he poses?

1. Mr. Daugherty is of course correct in stating that the integrated curriculum represents simply another form of ordered knowledge, into which the pupil must be initiated. The disarray within the field of Environmental Studies, so ably described by West in the current issue of B.E.E., is an indication that these new 'super subjects' are striving to achieve status with undue haste. The new sociology of education suggests that the 'ideal' integrated curriculum would allow the pupil to arrive at his own structuring of experience or knowledge. In this sense the new structure can be regarded as unspecified.

2. The weakening of frame strength can be recognised as a gain for education by those who wish teachers and pupils to be important agents in deciding curriculum content. That this ideal is distorted in practice, to produce over-weight syllabuses in which central ideas lie hidden, is often the result of a failure by teachers to become socialised into an integrated code to the extent that they forfeit subject priorities. To suggest that Environmental Studies, and Social Studies, lack clearly defined objectives, in theory, is to ignore much recent literature. That these objectives can be met without 'content gluttony' will become increasingly clear as new courses are taught and evaluated.

3. 'Power' is an example given by Pring of a relational idea which transcends subject to boundaries. The use of such ideas is clearly seen in the Schools' Council 'History, Geography, and Social Science 8 - 13' Project. The curriculum developed is organised around seven key concepts - communication, power, values and beliefs, concensus/conflict, similarity/difference, continuity/change, and causality.

4. At a time of rapid social and environmental change, a curriculum which is to be relevant to the future lives of pupils must stress fundamentals. It is perhaps not over emotive to agree with Postgate and Weingartner that relevant knowledge is that which is needed for survival. Their proposed curriculum, (a 'what's worth knowing' questions curriculum) would promote open inquiry and develop attitudes and skills of social, political, and cultural criticism. The best integrated courses are not necessarily more relevant, they simply place fewer constraints upon the pursuit of relevance.

Contrary to Mr. Daugherty's suggestion epistemological considerations show that geography has few claims to be considered a single system of inquiry. (Pring is clearly drawing upon Hirst and Phenix to suggest a foundation for curriculum design.) He also clearly recognises that the nature of problems, and pupils' needs will often prompt integration. On these occasions the explication of geography will become a secondary aim to that of explicating some social or environmental problem.

While Mr. Daugherty is correct to emphasise the gulf between an imperfect reality and an abstract ideal, practice in schools must be guided by a body of educational theory. A key implication of the new sociology of education is that the 'realities of the school as an institution' should be changed if they prevent the implementation of a curriculum based on sound ideals. I would maintain that the integrated code already offers a viable alternative philosophy for the secondary curriculum. That it fails to convince Mr. Daugherty, and many other geographers, of its value in practice, is partly the result of vested interests preserving those very institutional realities within which it cannot flourish.

References.

Teaching as a subversive activity, Postgate & Weingartner, Penguin 1974.

John Huckle.

Mr. Huckle would not expect me to look forward to the day when this journal is renamed the "Classroom Integrator" any more than I would expect him to hope for much good to come of a revitalised subject curriculum. I must however take further issue with him on certain crucial matters:

- the nature of the relational ideas on which an integrated curriculum is to be founded,
- the structure of that curriculum,
- the relationship between the "integrated ideal" and the integrated studies phenomenon in our secondary schools.

Any subject such as Geography generates a body of ideas which, however abstractly expressed, can be shown to contribute to the understanding of subject matter, i.e. they have a <u>demonstrable functional value</u>. Mr. Huckle quotes some 'relational ideas' from History, Geography and Social Science. To take 'power' as an example, is this really an idea transcending subject boundaries? No doubt power is a key concept in the study of political history, but in Geography is it anything more than a <u>topic</u>, i.e. a term which delimits certain subject matter? All too often what masquerades impressively as a 'relational idea' is no more than <u>an amalgam of diverse subject-based meanings</u>. When such curious amalgams are used as building blocks in syllabus construction, "sooner or later somebody is going to integrate fashions and firefighting under the heading "Hose", or nuts, bolts and needlework under "Threads" ".[1]

Accepting that some relational ideas will indeed be concepts which have functional value within each of the subjects being integrated, is not the relating of those ideas more a matter of <u>cross-referencing multiple usage</u> than "transcending" subject boundaries? Further, what criteria are to be used for the selection of relational ideas such as the seven key concepts of the Liverpool Project? Within what system of knowledge are they "key"? Surely it is not suggested either that they are central to some unitary system of knowledge or that the ad hoc grouping of History, Geography and Social Science is capable of establishing its own criteria? Perhaps what is really being said is that

they are commonly occurring and therefore must have greater significance than ideas found only within the narrow confines of one subject. If so, does this mean that peculiarly geographical ideas such as 'friction of distance' are less worthy of study than the key concepts? This chain of illogicality may account for some of the distortion and misrepresentation of the contribution of subjects to integrated studies.

What of the curriculum structure within which relational ideas are to be studied? I would argue that, in any conceivable school, structure is a characteristic which is both inevitable and desirable. Hence my plea to Mr. Huckle to think in terms of the reality of school as an institution when he talks of "unspecified" curriculum structure. Even Bernstein,[2] a major inspiration for integration, defines integration as a blurring (not abolition) of subject boundaries and the integrated code as entailing markedly reduced classifications between subject components (not no classification). Thus it may be helpful to recognise that the debate is not about structured versus unstructured curriculum but

a) more structure v. less structure, and
b) structure A (subject based) v. structure B (based on "broad fields of experience").

I would not want to argue for A to the exclusion of B. The loose, and preferably flexible, grouping of subjects has merit - whether it be in reducing the number of teachers each pupil encounters in the lower secondary school or as a convenient way of infiltrating fresh ideas into a curriculum otherwise resistant to change. Furthermore, I hope it is understood that the argument is about "means" and not "goals". The goals of integration - the integration of concepts with each other and the integration of concepts learned in school with pupils' experience outside school - would surely be generally accepted. The means proposed by Mr. Huckle - integrated studies courses - are more open to question. The sociology of knowledge offers some fascinating insights into educational knowledge codes but, in concentrating on only one aspect of the nature of schooling, it cannot in itself provide an adequate foundation for the planning of our secondary curriculum. The more ardent supporters of integrated studies, basking in the aura of words such as "integrated" and "relevant", attempt to transform Bernstein's searching analysis into a blueprint for curriculum reform. It is because I share Mr. Huckle's concern that any curriculum should be guided by a body of educational theory that I hope the practice of integrated studies (in its commonest form of super-subjects/pseudo-subjects such as Humanities or Social Studies) will be recognised for what it is - a valuable pragmatic response to certain circumstances and bearing little resemblance to Mr. Huckle's still unspecified integrated ideal.

1. D. J. Luke 'Integration overdone', T.E.S. 22.3.74.

2. B. B. Bernstein 'On the Classification and Framing of Educational Knowledge' in Knowledge and Control, ed. M. F. D. Young, Collier Macmillan 1971.

Richard Daugherty.