



Abstract

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"The issue of knowledge contents has long remained the poor relation of sociological thinking on school, which historically developed mainly either down the road of analysing the structures of educational institutions in their relationship with social structures [...], or down that of describing the interactions within the school world considered as a social world".

Jean-Claude Forquin (2008)

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Contents and school curricula: how to interpret curricular reforms?

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Curriculum contents often seem to be natural knowledge that is "already there". And yet many studies show to what extent the **choices of contents are far from being neutral**: before being stabilised in the form of a discipline or school subject, contents are the outcome of a complex interplay of networks, lobbies, social struggles and conflicts of interest.

The concept of "curriculum" is generally used in this type of approach, because it makes it possible to include the question of contents as well as that of the objectives of education, modes of evaluation, teaching methods or courses within the education system.

Still not much in use in France, **the curriculum is, in many countries, not only a research subject but also a tool for educational action**, used by people in charge of public policies.

This approach makes it possible to gain understanding of reforms at international level, marked as they are by oscillations between traditional school contents and everyday knowledge, between acquiring competencies and going back to basics, between selecting elites and common culture, between training the future citizen and training the future professional...

Then, **the concept of curriculum appears particularly relevant to tackling the introduction of the common grounding in knowledge and skills in France**. As what was in many ways a new curriculum reform in France, the 2006 law moves away from the technical approach of syllabuses or "programmes" to raise the issue of the objectives and the contents of education at a political level. It therefore has major consequences on the disciplines, on evaluation and also on the way of teaching.

Finally, the curriculum allows us to grasp the specific nature of school culture and its relationship to society: what contents are best suited to ensuring both educational democratisation and to providing a common culture, which has meaning for all the members of a society?

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