
Chapter Six. Curriculum as Culture: entitlement, bias and the Bourdieusean arbitrary

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Developing some of the ideas introduced by Hartley in relation to the 'hidden' rationales and values' of school curricula, by Young (in relation to issues of knowledge and of curriculum selections of knowledge, and by Paechter concerning the existence and nature of power relations embedded in the school curriculum and the curriculum experience, this chapter introduces the value and relevance of Cultural Studies in curriculum analysis. It is argued that, though school curricula are often presented and understood in terms of selections from the knowledge and culture of a nation, what is typically selected continues to draw almost exclusively on the cultural skills and preferences of already privileged social groups. With reference to the ways in which the school curriculum 'responds' to the school-work of many students, it is suggested that, far from adopting an inclusive, pluralistic turn, the school curriculum - at least in England and Wales - may be seen as continuing to act as a culturally conservative force that encourages and promotes success for some at the cost of failure for others. Claims that the curriculum has become more 'multicultural' are interrogated with reference to Bourdieu's notion of curriculum arbitrariness.

Introduction: English teaching and assessment in the 1980s

In the often-demonised 1980s, when I was Head of English at a multi-ethnic, inner-London secondary school, it was not uncommon for schools to be allowed to design, subject to an examining board's approval, examination papers in some subject areas leading to nationally recognised qualifications at 16 plus. Such examinations - and, where relevant, their marking by the schoolteachers who had designed them - were, of course, subject to careful monitoring and standardisation processes in order to ensure equity and fairness; however, they offered English teachers genuine opportunities to put into practice locally some of the lessons about learning, teaching and cultural bias in the curriculum that had begun to alter the curricular and pedagogic assumptions of many schools and teachers since the late 1970s.

For English Departments such as mine, whose teachers were committed both to a comprehensive education for all and to the recognition and celebration of student diversity within that education, these locally-designed syllabuses achieved two things:

- First, they provided modes of public assessment that, while conforming to national expectations and standards of comprehension and performance, enabled school departments to take full and appropriate account of the specific interests, backgrounds and strengths of their particular students in designing curricula for students at 14 plus.
- Second, they enabled and supported the school-based development of *lower-school* curricula that gave English departments further opportunities to develop those interests, backgrounds and strengths alongside the more general skills and competences that

their students would need (for example, the development of expertise in standard English) in order to be able to make the most of their lives both at school and in adulthood.

Pluralism and inclusion: Errol's literature exam

In collaboration with my department and our partner examining board, I had helped develop two examinations for our sixteen-year-old students, one for GCSE Ordinary level English Language and one for GCSE Ordinary level English Literature. The Literature examination was in two parts. Fifty per cent was covered by coursework, whose central component was an extended essay on a negotiated subject of each student's choice. This was marked by the teachers and moderated by the Board. The other fifty per cent comprised an examination on (at the Board's insistence) one Shakespeare play. This was marked exclusively by the Board's own examiners and students had to score at least forty per cent on this paper to pass the examination overall even if they scored very highly on the coursework component.

In my own Literature class, which, like all others, was both mixed-ability and open to all students, there was a young man, Errol, who had started off at school nearly five years earlier in what was then called the remedial class for children deemed to be academically 'backward'. This student had not been born in England but in the Caribbean, and tended not only to speak in a Caribbean dialect of English but to include strong traces of that dialect in his written work. He was one of many students at the school for whom the mode of public examining for English at 16 plus was particularly helpful. This was a bright, interested young man with a great deal of imagination and plenty of critical ideas who, however, in most school subjects had clearly struggled to achieve to his potential. Our view as his English teachers was that this apparent failure on his part had been brought about at least partly by the fact that he was continually being assessed not just *through* but *in* his use of standard English, rather than in his cognitive-affective knowledge and skills: that is to say, one perceived weakness (a linguistic one) was not allowing his very many strengths (both cognitive and expressive) to be recognised and validated within the system.

I had negotiated with this particular student that his extended piece of writing would be on the life and work of one of his favourite Caribbean poets. When he first showed me a draft of the work, it was clear that, far from seeking to 'standardise' his language, as I had half expected him to do, he had, on the contrary, exaggerated its non-standardness on (so he told me) the grounds that he felt that this was an appropriate language to use in writing about a poet whose work was written in the same dialect. Fearing the worst, I felt that I should run this proposal past the examining board. To my surprise, they were not only accommodating in their response to the idea but expressed pleasure at the student's approach, telling us that this was just the sort of creative response to the coursework element of the examination that they had been hoping for. There might be issues in relation to marking the work, they said - that is to say, in making sure that the examiner was able to understand what the student was saying - but they felt that this was something they would simply have to deal with.

In the event, Errol passed his examination comfortably, obtaining the second-highest pass grade at the time, a grade B. I had been curious, however, as to how the coursework assignment had been assessed, and equally, if not more so, in relation to the marking of his set Shakespeare paper (*Julius Caesar*), on which I had feared he might fall down even though the Board's regulations only allowed examiners to dock a maximum of two marks out of a hundred for what they saw as technical inaccuracies.

We used to attend the Board's headquarters in those days for annual meetings between their nominated examiners and all the heads of English of schools operating this particular scheme. Because of this, I was able to discuss my student's work with one of the Board's examiners, who kindly shared with me the examiners' reports both on his coursework and on his unseen paper. To paraphrase these reports, I learned that, in respect of the coursework, expert advice had been sought and a special examiner had been brought in to evaluate the assignment. This had not been possible with the Shakespeare paper; however all examiners had been reminded about the 2 per cent rule for perceived technical inaccuracies, including deviations from standard English written expression. This second examiner's report was paraphrased for me by the examiner to whom I was speaking as follows:

'The examiner encountered some difficulty in reading these essays, since they had been written in a particular dialect of English with which she was not familiar. There was evidence, however, of the candidate's having a sound knowledge of the text and of using quotation and paraphrase to support points. Each essay was also characterised by an all-too-rare willingness on the candidate's part to be critical of those aspects of the play with which he was less than happy. He offered a particularly memorable critique, for example, of Shakespeare's representation of ordinary working people, comparing this to some of the prejudices that exist in modern-day society toward certain ethnic minority groups.'

Bernstein's codes: from 'collection' to 'integrated'

Errol's experience is not, I hasten to add, offered as typical: in another school, whose English Department had opted for standard 'off the peg' examination syllabuses, for example, I have little doubt that this student's ongoing difficulties with standard English would have resulted in his failing the Literature exam. It is, however, indicative of a certain *possibility* that existed at that time, itself linked to a more pluralistic approach both to curriculum and to assessment. At this point in curriculum history in the UK, when schools and education authorities were beginning to recognise and do something about racism in curriculum, pedagogy and assessment (there was a plethora, for example, of professional development 'racism awareness' programmes for teachers), here was a major examining board not only encouraging a student to base half his literature work around the study of a little known (outside the Caribbean) poet writing in a non-standard dialect of English, but clearly prioritising what the student had to say about this and more 'canonical' work - that is, his own creative, critical response to the works - above his grasp of a particular, standardised form in which to say it.

I can remember calling to mind at the time Basil Bernstein's conceptualisation of curriculum and pedagogy, made ten years earlier, in terms of two different and oppositional 'codes' (Bernstein 1971a, 1971b). The first of these codes, the 'collection code', described an approach to and style of curriculum and pedagogy that separated learning and teaching into distinct subjects areas (what Bernstein referred to as 'strong classification') and suggested grouping pupils according to notions of ability, giving very limited choice to pupils over lesson content, relying on single-mode (typically by written, end-of-course/year examination) assessment, and traditional, front-of-class teaching (pedagogies described by Bernstein in the expression 'strong framing'). The second of Bernstein's proposed codes, the 'integrated code', promoted cross-curricular organisation ('weak classification'),

enquiry-based learning, mixed ability grouping, a wider choice for pupils, multiple mode assessment (including coursework/teacher assessment) and a more interpersonal mode of teacher control of pupils (in Bernstein's terminology, 'weak framing').

In the case of Errol, we appeared to have a situation of weak framing (enquiry-based learning, mixed ability grouping, a wider choice for pupils, multiple mode assessment) within a prevailing curriculum organization of strong classification (in the sense of identifying and organizing learning into separate subjects, and in the insistence of including a Shakespeare play for close study) but also - across the school, where ability grouping and front-of-class teaching still predominated - within a prevailing pedagogic model of strong framing. In other words, we were seeing the insertion, within one subject area, of aspects of an 'integrated code' into a still-dominant but apparently threatened 'collection code'. It seemed for many English teachers at the time (and not *just* English teachers) that an important shift had begun which, sooner rather than later, would take us out of the traditional collection code model of operating altogether into the (for us) infinitely more appealing integrated model.

Pluralism and Exclusion: the National Curriculum

How wrong we were! It is probably something of an understatement to say that the pluralistic stance adopted by the examining board in Errol's case would, post the introduction of the first National Curriculum for England and Wales, be neither expected nor, I suspect, 'allowed' in this country. This is not to say that public examinations or the National Curriculum have entirely abandoned the embracing of pluralism, much of the rhetoric of which remains in the official documentation. It has become a very watered-down version, however, that is rather stronger in words than in practice, and that is characterised, as it becomes absorbed into dominant discourses of 'standards' and 'basics', by what Ken Jones (1992, pp. 17-18) has called a 'tactic of half-recognition': that is to say, an approach in which 'within the shell of the new discourse ... restorationist meanings are accommodated' (ibid.).

A simple illustration of what is meant by this, and of what it might entail in terms of English Literature teaching, is provided by the original National Curriculum English Order of 1995 (see also Moore 1998). Having first listed a number of 'great' works and authors deemed worthy of the name Literature, this document offered the following advice to teachers:

'Pupils should be encouraged to appreciate the distinctive qualities of [identified 'major', 'high quality'] works through activities that emphasise the interest and pleasure of reading them'

[...]

'Pupils should read texts from other cultures and traditions that represent their distinctive voices and forms and offer varied perspectives and subject matter.'

(DFE 1995: 20)

On the face of it, this curriculum directive suggests what to many might seem an appropriate level of cultural inclusion: the English Order states, for example, not that

children 'might' but that they 'should' read 'texts from other cultures' in addition to those of the traditional English canon. On closer consideration, however, difficulties reveal themselves, as the production of 'otherness' marks its presence. In relation to appropriate Literature study, for example, some works are immediately othered through their being referred to as works from 'other cultures' (inevitably prompting the question, 'Other than what?'). These works are further marginalized through being presented as literature to be aware of - to have a passing knowledge of - rather than as items worthy of serious study or indeed capable of offering real enjoyment. The wording of the Order is highly significant here. In relation to the 'major' works of 'high literary quality', pupils are to be encouraged to 'appreciate' their 'distinctive qualities' through 'activities that emphasize the interest and pleasure in reading them'. In relation to the 'other' texts, 'read' replaces 'appreciate'; 'distinctive voices' replaces 'distinctive qualities'; no activities are referred to; and there is no mention of either interest or pleasure. The clear message is that while some texts have intrinsic qualities (for which, read 'quality') that are, as it were, to be 'discovered' and discussed by the student, others merely possess curiosity value. 'Quality' itself, meanwhile, is presented in the Order not as a judgment or an opinion, but as an indisputable, culture-free fact of life.

It would be nice to be able to say that since the Order of 1995 - which may in part be seen as a reaction against what some saw as the 'excesses' of the 1980s - the curricular pendulum had swung back towards pluralism, particularly in light of the revised National Curriculum's repeated emphasis on 'inclusion' (see, for example, DEE/QCA 1999; DfES 2000). Unfortunately, however, the wording of the English order in relation to Literature study has not changed significantly in the intervening period. In the current KS3 National Curriculum requirements (DEE/QCA 1999), for example, not only is English Literature still identified as a separate subject from English, but there is also the identification of, effectively, two subjects *within* that subject, through an insistence that students must study works (a) from what the Curriculum requirement calls the 'English Literary Heritage' and (b) 'Texts from Different Cultures and Traditions'. The word 'different' may have crept in to replace 'other', but an essentialist view of Literature still prevails whereby some is identified as more intrinsically worthwhile than some other: a canon of texts that are both 'appealing' and 'important' versus 'different' texts whose study is primarily of interest value. This Anglo-centric othering of 'different' literature, meanwhile, is further promoted through the examples given of 'important' and 'significant' texts and by the suggested readings under 'literary heritage' and 'different cultures and traditions'. Examples of important texts - curiously, perhaps, for a multicultural and largely secular society - are given as the Greek Myths, the Arthurian Legends and the Authorised Version of the Bible. Under 'major' playwrights, poets and writers from the English Literary Heritage, a lengthy list of Anglo-Saxon authors is given, while the much shorter recommended list under 'examples of drama, fiction and poetry by major writers from different cultures and traditions' includes, among the 22 suggestions over a third - Arthur Miller, Tennessee Williams, Ernest Hemingway, Doris Lessing, John Steinbeck, Emily Dickinson, Robert Frost, Robert Lowell - who might seem equally at home in the longer 'canonical' list.

This is, I would suggest, a worrying trend, comprising an increasing cultural 'puritanism' (the re-assertion of a dominant white, middle-class canon) that deliberately marginalizes just about all and any literature written in non-standard dialects and genres of English including a great deal of important poetry, drama and fiction, and that finds its parallel in the introduction of a 'National Literacy Strategy' that, in its espoused aim of developing standard English skills, does little or nothing about recognizing, valuing and promoting

non-standard forms and skills. In his book *Cultural Imperialism* (1991) John Tomlinson, with a nod to Herbert Schiller, writes:

“‘Cultural imperialism’ is a critical discourse which operates by representing the cultures whose autonomy it defends in its own (dominant) Western cultural terms’.

(1991, p.2)

Such imperialism, I would suggest, is not only present in the naturalised selection of ‘great’, ‘important’, ‘significant’ writers in the English ‘canon’ (and indeed in the identification of a canon at all) but in the way in which - and the agency *through* which - ‘major writers’ from ‘different’ cultures and traditions are selected. In this connection, it is important to note that each of the terms ‘major’, ‘cultures’ and ‘traditions’ is itself defined within an Anglo-Saxon canonical discourse *by* people in positions of authority, and that anything not included in the lists of suggested readings is clearly intended to be seen as falling outside those definitions.

Inclusivity and selection: difficulties with the common curriculum

This last point raises several important and abiding issues for teachers, for policy makers and for curriculum theorists regarding (a) tensions between curricular inclusivity and selection; (b) conceptualisations and understandings of knowledge (epistemological issues); (c) cultural inclusion and cultural reproduction.

It may seem ironic that the pluralist practices that were possible in the pre-National Curriculum 1980s, when it was often argued, not without some justification, that the curriculum offer for any given student depended too heavily on the school they happened (often for purely geographical reasons) to attend, have been so greatly reduced following the introduction of a National ‘Curriculum for all’ aimed in no small part at overcoming such inequalities. Certainly, one of the central rationales for the development of national curricula - be they in the UK or elsewhere - concerns fairness and equity. One of the earliest and strongest voices for the development of such a curriculum in England and Wales, Denis Lawton, argued very persuasively (Lawton 1968, 1975) that the development of comprehensive schools to which all children, regardless of their background and achievements to date, would go for their secondary education, made little sense of they continued to follow separate curricula within those schools. Indeed, a fundamental underpinning of his argument for the comprehensivisation of *schools* was his argument for a comprehensivisation of the school *curriculum*: an entitlement, common, or core curriculum for all students. This curriculum, Lawton argued (interestingly and importantly in light of what I have already said), should be based on the identification of a ‘common culture’ (Lawton 1975:114).

The belief in a ‘sufficient’ common culture (sufficient, that is, to provide the basis of a core - though not, we are intended to think, a completely common - curriculum) which we find again in the more recent Crick Report on Education for Citizenship and Democracy (QCA 1998), is, I believe, a problematic one for all its good intentions. It is, furthermore, as I shall argue below, one that becomes increasingly problematic the more detailed and prescriptive the common curriculum becomes and indeed the more culturally heterogeneous a society becomes. It also raises important questions as to how much knowledge - and what kind(s)

of knowledge - can ever really be 'culture free' or indeed, as Lawton suggested, 'classless' (Lawton 1975, p. 51: see also Cairns, Gardner and Lawton 2000). We might, I suppose, agree that (for example) five fours are twenty, or that the Battle of Hastings took place in 1066. Once knowledge begins to move beyond such basics, however, it inevitably becomes more interpretive as well as more selective. Students may be able to cite, in examination, the causes of the First World War - but what they are actually citing might be what Apple (1993) calls 'legitimate' causes rather than 'unlegitimated' ones. Similarly, students might become very adept at explaining what it is that makes Shakespeare's plays 'great' without ever really believing that they *are* great or truly benefiting from the plays themselves (a kind of knowledge akin to the 'ritualistic' knowledge described by Edwards and Mercer [1987] and to the generic skills described by Kress [1982] whereby the tokenistic 'display' of knowledge takes on greater importance than its internalisation or retention). In other words, what counts as 'knowledge' on these occasions is inextricably interwoven with what most of us would recognise as *opinion* - although the interweaving may remain disguised as the curriculum is presented to and experienced by the student.

An additional difficulty arises in the selections of curriculum items in the first place. Just as the ways in which knowledge is presented cannot be culture free, neither can the selections of knowledge that find their way on to the curriculum. Sticking with History, it is not unreasonable for us to ask why we should be studying the Battle of Hastings in the first place. Is this a fundamentalist, self-validating choice based on an unelaborated argument in favour of the need to know about our national history simply because it *is* our national history? Or are there any enduring benefits to accrue from the study of this particular curriculum item that could not be as readily obtained from the study of some other? I am often asked in relation to my objections to the standard inclusion of Shakespeare in the English Literature curriculum if I think that it would be equally justifiable for students to study a children's comic like the *Beano* - presumably by way of obtaining an admission that for all my objections, some works of literature really are intrinsically superior to and therefore more worthy of curricular inclusion than others. My response to this is that, depending on the manner of teaching and the curriculum objectives, huge numbers of young students might, indeed, gain more pleasure, more instruction and more enduring knowledge and understanding from studying contemporary comic books than from studying Shakespeare's plays, regardless of what *I* might think of the relative merits of the two sets of work: in other words, our view of what should be included in the curriculum might need to begin with what we hope students will learn and how best they might learn it than from the imposition of a curriculum item on the grounds that we ourselves may have drawn some lasting benefit from it - a selective act born not so much of wisdom as an inability to decentre.

Culture and knowledge

As I have argued elsewhere (Moore 2005) Lawton was absolutely right to remind us that knowledge is not - and should not be - the preserve of the middle class: that a classless system of schooling needs to be accompanied by, in a sense, a classless curriculum. The problem arises, however, when the science, history, art, philosophy, moral education and so forth that finds its way on to the common curriculum is only - or practically only - the science, history, art, philosophy and morality of the dominant social classes: a problem that is exacerbated when attempts are made to squeeze rather too much curriculum into rather too narrow a timetable. Unfortunately, this is exactly what has happened with the curriculum for English Literature and Language in England. This curriculum has not only

resided over a steady erosion of 'non-dominant', 'non-standard' forms of expression but, in so doing, has produced a far less pluralistic and indeed a far more sterile curriculum for all our young people, whatever their home backgrounds.

All of this suggests a particular set of questions which never quite goes away from curriculum theorizing but which is more likely to be overlooked, ignored or denied by governments locked into more pragmatic orientations to curriculum means and ends (in this regard, see Young's chapter, above). That is to say:

If we feel that a core or common curriculum is the only way of ensuring equity and social justice for our young people, how detailed should - or indeed can - that common curriculum be? Should it, for instance, account for the *entirety* of the curriculum or for only a part of it? Should it be *primarily* knowledge-based or skills based? And in what ways might a higher degree of specificity work for or against the interests of a curriculum that is both fair *and* pluralist (i.e. that is genuinely 'socially just')?

What I am suggesting - and of course I am by no means the first or only commentator to do so - is that there are at least two unresolved crises at the heart of the so-called 'entitlement' curriculum. First is the question of who decides what the entitlement should be - and what desires those choosers bring to their choices. (The choices are not made, for example, through what we recognise as normal *democratic* processes.) Second, the notion of entitlement assumes a certain *commonality* of desires, needs, requirements that is not necessarily reflected in society. Some desires in this entitlement, then, will be repressed or marginalised, while others will be celebrated and prioritised. Indeed, it is not difficult to see how entitlement for one student may be perceived and experienced as imposition by another.

In addressing these questions and issues, it seems very important that we think carefully about what we mean by culture and what we mean by knowledge - and the extent to which the two can be treated as separate entities. There is, I think, something of an abiding confusion here which may well encourage us to see all knowledge as culturally produced and embedded, but which may differentiate between subjects and topics in terms of the relative strengths of their claims (however spurious in reality) to some kind of objective truth. With reference to what I have already said about knowledge's increasing incapacity to be class and culture free the more complex it gets, this becomes a particular problem when we look at a subject like Mother Tongue (in the case of England, the subject we call English). Here, it is not only the curriculum selection that is problematic (in the English curriculum relating to Literature, for example, a preponderance of white, dead, male authors writing in 'standard' English) but the fact that, in their own assessed writing, young people are required specifically to replicate certain expressive genres (Kress 1982; Britzman 1989) and are judged on their capacity to do so, rather, often, than what they actually have to say. What (English teachers and their students might, not unreasonably, ask) *is* the Shakespeare play as a curriculum 'object'? Is it knowledge that we are acquiring through its study? Is it cultural experience? Or can it be both? And what *is* a 'good' short story? Is this, likewise, a question of knowledge embedded in some kind of eternal, unquestionable criteria, or is it more about the acquisition and display of certain cultural norms?

The possibility that we may need to identify and to understand different kinds of knowledge differently is not a new one. The relation of these different forms to culture, however,

continues to demand a great deal of thought. It may appear to make sense and be socially just that we all have access to the same knowledge if that knowledge really is of any value ('intrinsic' *or* contrived) - any value, that is, that can be distilled from its social and cultural contexts, questionable though such a possibility is. But if, as I am suggesting, there is culture-embedded knowledge (of science, maths, technology, and so forth) and knowledge 'of or in' culture (for example, Art, literature and music), it may well be the case that different, if related, purposes are served in the selection processes for either domain. I am thinking, for example (although Hartley's argument, in Chapter Four, above, renders the discussion rather more complicated), of the possibility, given obvious overlaps and exceptions, that selections in relation to subjects such as maths, science and technology may be more directly referenced to the requirements of the *workplace*, while selections regarding literature, music and art may have (or traditionally have had) rather more to do with reproducing dominant cultures and thereby producing a docile and compliant *workforce* (Apple 1979). If we consider the various attempts to identify the different underpinning values inherent in school curricula (Walsh 1993, Chitty 2002, Moore 2000), the curriculum selection of Shakespeare's plays, for example, is clearly not made to satisfy a sudden demand for Shakespearian actors or critics; nor, bearing in mind the negative responses to 'the Bard' of the vast majority of young people, is the argument very convincing that it is there to delight them or to improve the quality of their lives.

'Getting away with it': meconnaissance and the Bourdieusean arbitrary

I referred in the Introduction to this book to the fact that in one of our leading retailers of books about education works on Curriculum Studies, which seek to critique and offer better understandings of the origins, the role and the nature of school curricula, had become marginalized in favour of a plethora of practical guides for teachers and practice workbooks for students and their parents. That is to say, major discussions about the nature and form of the school curriculum appear to have become sidelined, in England at least, to the margins by concerns about implementing an implicitly unquestioned and 'naturalised' National Curriculum.

This is an important point, because at the moment both politicians and dominant socio-cultural groups in British society (and arguably very many other societies) are continuing to get away with things that work against the best interests of the intended beneficiaries of the common curriculum, the 'curriculum for all': that is to say, those students who were most discriminated against in pre-comprehensive, pre-National curriculum days. What politicians are getting away with is the avoidance of debating key issues in education and curriculum in the same way that they are being addressed in some other countries. They are doing this by cramming the curriculum with knowledge content and then focussing the debate on issues of how best to 'deliver' that content. What the bearers and perpetrators of dominant ideologies are getting away with is the selling of a curriculum as intrinsically 'right' and 'neutral' that continues, in fact, to be biased and marginalising. This is achieved through the naturalisation of what Bourdieu calls an 'arbitrary' curriculum and its acceptance and perpetuation by those whose interests it works against via processes of misrecognition or 'meconnaissance'. For all the talk of change, and the recent introduction of more and more 'specialist schools' in the UK, the truth is that, as John White reminds us elsewhere in this book, the curriculum followed by today's young people in England and Wales - in terms of both shape and subject content - is very little different from that followed by young people a hundred years ago, and (I would add) no more adept or intentioned in overcoming cultural bias.

Bourdieu's conceptualisation of curriculum and culture (e.g. Bourdieu and Passeron 1977) is worth dwelling on here - indeed worth dwelling on by students of curriculum generally - since, for all the accusations that it gives insufficient weight to human agency in its focus on social structures, it still provides one of the most helpful frameworks for understanding and critiquing not only curriculum selections but their general and often surprising acceptance. Of particular interest for advocates of Bourdieu's analysis is the issue of the assessment criteria against which school students are deemed to be 'good' or 'bad', 'able' or 'less able' intellectually and academically. As with the curriculum, these criteria are generally presented (if not always experienced) as fair, in that they are universally applied and in that they claim to give everyone an equal chance to show their worth against the same measures of achievement. If we accept this 'fairness', then we may draw the conclusion that when working-class children (for example) do less well than middle-class children, it is either because they are less intelligent, or because their schools and their teachers have somehow failed them: perhaps, indeed, that it is their schools and teachers who are prejudiced and unjust, rather than the curriculum, the criteria or the education system in general.

In reality, of course, the assessment criteria, like the curricular items they promote and underpin, are, to use Bourdieu's term, 'arbitrary'. This does not imply that they are 'chance' or haphazard or provisional: far from it. When Bourdieu talks of the 'arbitrary' selections of curriculum knowledge and assessment criteria, that arbitrariness lies in the fact that the selections are not universal, 'natural' or 'God-given' (as they are typically presented), but that they are culturally, historically and socially *produced*. As Ross (2000: 10) reminds us:

'a national curriculum requires someone, somehow, to rule that certain cultural artefacts (selected, by very definition, from particular cultures) should be elevated to be passed on to all children, and that other cultural manifestations be excluded from formal education, even though they will probably be the principal cultural determinants of many children in the system.'

(See also Apple 1993, 2000; Geyer 1993; Goldberg 1994.)

Related to this notion of arbitrariness - very importantly if we are to take account of human agency as well as of social structures - is the concepts of misrecognition or 'meconnaissance'. Meconnaissance refers to a certain self-deception on the part of the learner experiencing (for example) the curriculum encounter, that goes hand in hand with and reinforces the rather more deliberate deceptions of those by whom and on whose behalf the curriculum itself is constructed. According to this part of Bourdieu's theory, the dominated individual's lack of choice and opportunity - caused by the conditions that prevail in the very real social circumstances, infused with power relations, into which that individual is born and lives - is either not seen at all *by* the individual or else is misrecognised in terms of their *own* deficiency. That is to say (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977, p. xiii)

'power relations are perceived not for what they are but in a form that renders them legitimate in the eyes of the beholder' -

the beholder here being both the curriculum designer/imposer *and* the curriculum consumer.

This notion of *meconnaissance* (see also Bourdieu's conceptualisations of habitus and field [1971, 1977]) provides a part answer to the question as to why more of us do not question more often than we do the biased systems within which we operate and which clearly work against many of our best interests. Bourdieu's suggestion seems to be that this is partly because the social fields in which we operate and gain our experience of social life are so tightly structured and controlled that resistance is at best very piecemeal. Equally importantly, however, is the suggestion that the dominated, excluded, marginalized members of society do not necessarily '*know*' that they are actively dominated, excluded or marginalised in the particular, often carefully disguised or hidden ways that they are - or, if they do recognise it, that they may themselves be inclined to impute social inequalities and their own underachievement to the natural order of things.

If we focus our attention on the school setting, this particular configuration suggests that marginalized students from working-class or ethnic-minority backgrounds do not necessarily view (to take one example) the selection of literary texts on an English Literature syllabus as being based on cultural *preference* (the cultural preference, that is, of the English middle-class), but rather on matters of intrinsic *quality*. It would not be surprising if they then, as a corollary, view 'other' literary texts, favoured by and within their own 'home cultures', as inferior and not *worthy* of wider study. To return to the two examples elaborated earlier of Errol and the National Curriculum Order for English, while Errol's choice of literature for academic study was validated by a wider curricular and assessment system which, for all its lack of consistency across schools enabled, *in this particular case*, a non-standard work to achieve the same status as - say - a Shakespeare play, the subsequent 'inclusive' National Curriculum, in the very act of providing greater levels of consistency of curriculum offer across State schools, achieves the very reverse through over-detailing what that inclusive curriculum should comprise. In the process, it reinforces the ex-clusive view that there is culture and there is Culture.

