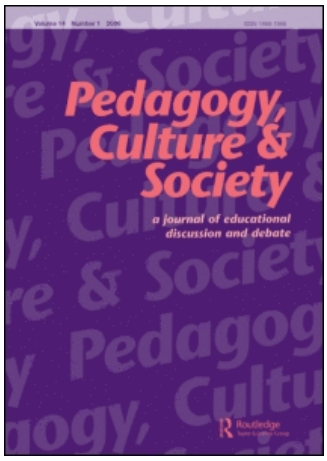

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The Curriculum in and for a Democratic Society [1]

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ABSTRACT The purpose of this article is to offer an analysis of the political and social role of the curriculum in a modern democratic society. It seeks to show how the assumptions embedded in inherited curriculum ideologies are impeding the potential of the curriculum in modern democratic societies from becoming a curriculum 'for democracy', that is a curriculum which would be constitutive of a more democratic form of social life.

Introduction

In his influential book, *The Long Revolution*, Raymond Williams argued that we are living in the midst of a period of fundamental social change that began in the second half of the eighteenth century and that is still to run its full course:

> We are living through a long revolution ... It is a genuine revolution transforming institutions; continually extended and deepened by the actions of millions, continually and variously opposed by explicit reaction and by the pressure of habitual form and ideas.[2]

This 'long revolution' argued Williams, is gradually transforming our experience of political, economic and cultural life. Politically, it takes the form of a 'democratic revolution' reflected in "the rising determination, almost everywhere that people should govern themselves" [3], Economic life has been transformed by an 'industrial revolution' which, despite its already massive impact, is still "at a comparatively early stage."[4] The transformation of cultural life – the 'cultural revolution' – is both caused by, and a consequence of, the aspiration for universal education: the aspiration "to extend the active process of learning ... to all people rather than to limited groups".[5]

About this 'long revolution' Williams makes three related points. First, despite the progress that has already been made, the democratic

cultural and industrial revolutions are still at a very early stage. In democracy, industry and education "what we have done seems little compared with what we are certain to try and do".[6] Secondly, the desire for greater democracy, for educational expansion and for new forms of industrial organisation continues to be frustrated and resisted, not only passively by the dead weight of custom and tradition, but also actively and openly by those whose interests such progress threatens. Finally, Williams argues that we will always misunderstand the processes of democratic, industrial and educational change if we interpret them as three separate and independent processes, rather than as interdependent parts of the larger and more complex 'long revolution' through which our present forms of democracy, industry and education have evolved. Thus, he writes:

> We cannot understand the process of change in which we are involved if we limit ourselves to thinking of the democratic, industrial and cultural revolutions as separate processes. Our whole way of life, from the shape of our communities to the organisation and content of education … is being profoundly affected by the progress and interaction of democracy and industry ... This deeper ... revolution is a large part of our most significant living experience, ... we must keep trying to grasp the process as a whole, to see it ... as a long revolution, if we are to understand ... the reality of our immediate condition and the terms of change.[7]

The purpose of this article is to offer an analysis of the relationship between curriculum and democracy which grasps 'the process as a whole' in order to understand the 'reality of our present condition' and the 'terms of change' that this present reality implies. The particular 'reality' I wish to understand is the 'immediate condition' of the curriculum in western democratic societies. The 'terms of change' are those which will make this curriculum a more appropriate curriculum for democracy. By grasping 'the process as a whole' I want to indicate why we can neither understand the reality of our present condition nor clarify the terms for change unless we treat curriculum development and democratic progress as dialectically related and mutually constitutive domains. My general argument will be that the curriculum in any contemporary democratic society always reflects the definition of democracy which that society has accepted as legitimate and true. Similarly, attempts to challenge the validity and legitimacy of a society's dominant definition of democracy always find expression in attempts to challenge the form and content of the curriculum of that society's schools In this sense, the debates about the curriculum that occur in a democracy at any given time will reveal both how that democracy interprets itself, *and* how that interpretation is being challenged and revised in order to bring into being a more genuinely democratic form of life than that which currently exists. The curriculum in a democracy is thus always a curriculum for democracy, incorporating both a record of its past and a message for its future. The purpose of the

remainder of this article is to explain and justify this argument in more concrete detail.

What is the Curriculum?

Answering this question is complicated by the fact that, in some European languages, there is no obvious way of translating the word 'curriculum' while those countries where the term is in common use may define it in different ways. In the English speaking world curriculum used to be defined in a narrow and specific way to refer to the content or subject matter that is taught in schools. More recently, this definition has been broadened so as to include learning objectives, teaching methods, assessment procedures and classroom organisation as well. Although these definitions have proved helpful in making the curriculum policies and practices of schools more explicit, they have also tended to neglect and conceal the important social and political role that the curriculum plays in initiating pupils into the culture, practices and social relationships of their society. Initial efforts to draw attention to the social and political function of the curriculum focused on the notion of the 'hidden curriculum', but more recent attempts to understand the ways in which the curriculum serves to sustain existing patterns of economic cultural and political life of society have drawn on the intellectual resources of 'reproduction theory'.[8] In his book *Understanding Education*, the American philosopher Walter Feinberg outlines this perspective in the following words:

> To speak of education as social reproduction ... is to recognise its primary role in maintaining intergenerational continuity and in maintaining the identity of a society across generations ... Education in this sense has two functions. First there is the reproduction of skills that meet socially defined needs ... Second, there is the reproduction of consciousness or of the shared understanding ... that provides the basis for social life ... At the most basic level, the study of education involves an analysis of the process whereby a society reproduces itself over time such that it can be said of one generation that it belongs to the same society as did generations long past and generations not yet born.[9]

A concern with the reproductive role of education and curriculum was of course at the heart of Plato's *Republic*, Rousseau's *Emile* and Dewey's *Democracy and Education*. The reason why these books have acquired the status of canonical texts is because they articulate a morally compelling vision of the 'good society', and the role of education in its formation and reproduction. Because the particular vision of the 'good society' advanced in each of these texts provides both the basis for a critique of an existing social order and the criteria against which curriculum proposals can be evaluated, it is hardly surprising that they treat questions about the aims, form and content of the curriculum and questions about what constitutes

the 'good society' as interdependent. Nor is it surprising that any view of curriculum that takes the interdependence of these questions seriously will be concerned to examine the moral vision of the 'good society' that any curriculum seeks to foster and promote. So understood, curriculum questions presuppose and anticipate a political debate in which questions about the kind of curriculum that would promote a desirable form of social life are openly acknowledged and consciously addressed.

To recognise that the form and content of the curriculum are an integral parts of the general process through which a society reproduces its own definition of the 'good society' is not to regard them as mechanically determined by external forces or society's demands. Rather, it is to recognise that curriculum questions about what to teach and how to teach it are themselves always a particular expression of political questions about whether existing patterns of cultural, economic and political life ought to be reproduced or transformed, and that political questions about how society ought to be changed and improved always give focus to curriculum questions about the kinds of knowledge, attitudes and skills that a more desirable form of social life presupposes and requires. The relationship between curriculum and society is thus always reciprocal: each serves to reproduce and transform the other.

Since different social groups with different political views about the future shape and direction of society have different views about what the content and organisation of the curriculum should be, curriculum policy and practice are always the subject of disagreements and conflicts within and between parties holding different views about the nature of society and the role of education in its reproduction and transformation. Fred Inglis has described this process of curriculum contestation as an ideological battle:

> The curriculum is the battleground for an intellectual civil war and the battle for cultural authority ... is a fervent one. Its different guerrillas include parents, pupils, teachers, bureaucrats, left, right, centre, nationalities and the compelling mercenaries of market forces.[10]

To characterise the process of curriculum contestation as an 'ideological battle' is to recognise that conflicting and contending views about the curriculum do not simply reflect the conflicting opinions of individuals. They also reflect different political ideologies: the socially structured and historically sedemented forms of consciousness through which individuals acquire their understanding of social life in general and their beliefs about the relationship between education and society in particular. In most contemporary curriculum discussions, the general ideological perspectives underlying contending curriculum views remain unarticulated and undisclosed and, therefore, serve to conceal the larger ideological assumptions that contaminate curriculum thinking and make ideologically dominant educational views seem unproblematic and self-evidently true. One way of making them more problematic and visible is to identify some of the familiar ideological perspectives that have

shaped the contemporary curriculum and to elucidate their different views of the nature of education and its reproductive role in society. These are often labelled the 'classical-humanists' the 'liberal-progressive' and the 'modernist-vocational' ideologies.[11] Each of these curriculum ideologies expresses the way in which the relationship between education and society has been interpreted in particular times and places and each embodies a set of interrelated educational principles governing the selection and organisation of curriculum content, and the methods for its transmission and assessment.

Curriculum Ideologies

The *classical-humanist* ideology has its roots in pre-industrial society and remained dominant from classical times until the eighteenth century. Its views of society is aristocratic and it resonates with Plato's image of a society ruled by an elite group acting as the custodians of traditional values and universal truths. Within the ideology of classical-humanism the primary reproductive function of education is cultural: to ensure social stability and cultural continuity. Moreover, since the main purpose of education is to prepare an intellectual elite for the task of preserving their society's cultural heritage, the curriculum appropriate to this elite (but only this elite) is an academic curriculum in which classics, history, mathematics, grammar and literature predominate, and 'modern' subjects, such as science and technology are largely ignored. Rigorous selection is required to ensure that standards of 'academic excellence' are upheld and teachers are required to be authoritative masters of an academic discipline teaching in a formal, instructional and didactic way. Learning is systematic, disciplined and largely book-based. The assessment of learning is conducted through formal examinations designed to test the acquisition of abstract knowledge and the mastery of cognitive skills. Needless to say, within this ideology, curriculum change is (like the notion of social change) regarded as an inherently subversive notion that threatens traditional values by entertaining the parochial and fashionable preoccupations of the present.

The *liberal-progressive* ideology emerged in the eighteenth century as an expression of the Enlightenment vision that came to shape the liberal societies of western Europe. Within this ideology, the main reproductive function of education is not cultural, but political: to reproduce those forms of social life in which free and equal individuals can determine their own version of the 'good life' and collectively participate in formulating the common good of their society. Its view of society is thus egalitarian and it draws much of its inspiration from the political ideals espoused in Rousseau's *Social Contract,* and the romantic and liberation educational views expressed in his *Emile*.

Within the *liberal-progressive* ideology, the aim of education is rational autonomy and individual freedom. Education is understood as a process of rational development based on the common humanity of all,

rather than a process of cognitive acquisition based on the authoritative knowledge of an intellectual elite. For this reason, the curriculum reflects pupils' developmental needs rather than society's culture, and its content is largely defined on the basis of pupils' needs and interests. Academic subjects have a very limited curriculum role and the passive transmission of society's knowledge is always subordinate to the active development of the pupil's understanding. The teacher is primarily a guide rather than an instructor and teaching is largely a matter of stimulating pupils' natural curiosity and facilitating their own enquiries.

The *modernist-vocational* ideology emerged with the introduction of mass schooling in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and with the need to harness education to the economic needs of the modern industrial state. Within the modernist-vocational ideology the main reproductive function of education is not cultural or political but economic: to reproduce and regenerate the patterns of economic and industrial life intrinsic to modern technocratic society. It thus supports and envisages a meritocratic society in which access to positions of wealth status and power is not restricted to an aristocratic elite, or governed by abstract principles of individual freedom and social justice. Rather, it is determined through open competition in which all have an equal opportunity to acquire meritorious reward for their talent, efforts and achievements. It thus rejects the opposition between elitism and egalitarianism intrinsic to the conflicts between the 'classical humanist' and 'liberal progressive' ideologies as outmoded and irrelevant to the needs of a modern industrial society.

Within the *modernist-vocational* ideology the main purpose of the curriculum is to provide the knowledge and skills appropriate to future producers and consumers in a market economy. It gives particular emphasis to the need for the curriculum to prepare pupils for the world of work, and is sharply critical of the anti-industrial values conveyed by both classical-humanist and liberal-progressive traditions. It is also critical of traditional distinctions between education and training and between 'high status' academic knowledge and 'low status' practical knowledge. It seeks to replace the book-based curriculum of classical humanism and the learner-based curriculum of liberal-progressivism with a curriculum which transmits instrumental knowledge and practical skills that are relevant for working life.

It may be useful to set out these three curriculum ideologies in Table I.

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Table I. Three curriculum ideologies.

It is important to make three related points about this way in which these curriculum ideologies are usually presented and described. First, the fact

that they are often analysed in an ahistorical way should not obscure the fact that each is the product of a particular historical period, and emerged in response to new social circumstances and changing cultural conditions. Secondly, although these educational ideologies have been portrayed as mutually exclusive, this should not be allowed to obscure the extent to which, in practice, they merge and overlap. Nor should it be allowed to conceal how they continue to shape the process of contestation through which the curriculum debate is conducted, and hence continue to compete with each other for the allegiance of politicians, policy-makers, teachers and other participants in the contemporary curriculum debate. Thus, it is that the curriculum debates dominant in a society at any given time always bears the marks of past ideological conflicts and political struggles about the role of education in reproducing a particular form of social life.

Thirdly, by drawing attention to the different ways in which the relationship between education and society has been interpreted, and enacted in different times and places, these curriculum ideologies enable us to relate questions about the contemporary curriculum to broader questions about the political ideas and ideals which now shape contemporary democratic society. By enabling us to recognise the curriculum as a socially-constructed cultural artefact which (like society itself) has to be made and re-made in response to changing historical circumstances, these ideological perspectives help us to discuss questions about the role of the curriculum in a modern democracy in a more critical and analytic way. To what extent do inherited ideological assumptions inhibit and impede the potential of the curriculum *in* democracy to become a curriculum *for* democracy? Under what conditions would a curriculum for democracy be possible? What kind of curriculum is constituted by and would be constitutive of a democratic form of social life?

What is Democracy?

Deriving as it does from the Greek words ‘demos’ (the people) and ‘kratos’ (rule) the task of defining democracy is straight forward. Democracy means ‘rule by the people’. However, the notion of ‘rule by the people’ is not unambiguous. Who are ‘the people’? Are certain groups (children, women) to be excluded? What is meant by ‘rule’? Does it mean that people actually rule themselves by participating in political decision-making? Or does it mean that political decision-making is restricted to a small group of political experts chosen by the representatives’ of the people? In the twentieth century it has become increasingly common to derive answer to these questions by appealing to large scale empirical studies of the political processes and institutions of advanced and long established democratic societies (usually, Great Britain and the USA). What these studies reveal is that in modern democracies ‘democracy’ does not mean that people rule themselves. As J. Schumpeter, the most influential

exponent of this way defining democracy, put it "Democracy ... does not and cannot mean that the people rule in any obvious sense of the term 'people' and 'rule' Democracy means only that the people have the opportunity of accepting or refusing the men who are to rule them."[12]

Thus, democracy does not entail participation or self-government or self rule. It is simply a method that enables 'the people' to decide who should rule by making a periodic choice between competing political elites. To quote Schumpeter again: "Democracy is an institutional arrangement for arriving at political decisions in which individuals acquire power to decide by means of a competitive struggle for the people's vote".[13]

Thus, what is now taken to be central to democracy is not participation by all but competition between rival political elites for the right to exercise political power. It is thus unsurprising that democracy so understood is found to flourish best in a capitalist society with a competitive market economy: a society in which political demands are satisfied through a competitive struggle between political parties in much the same way as material demands are satisfied through the mechanisms of the competitive market.

As numerous critics have pointed out, to arrive at a definition of democracy by identifying the characteristics of societies that are already assumed to be 'democratic' not only involves a circularity of reasoning that begs the very question at issue. It also serves to conceal the extent to which the historical meaning of democracy has been revised in the twentieth century so as to make it compatible with the institutions and practices of modern industrial societies. As Arblaster puts it:

> There are ... good reasons to think that those who try to define democracy only in terms of present day realities – as a type of political system or culture which some societies possess and others do not – will find themselves left behind by history ... To suppose that this century can fix the definition of democracy, or even more arrogantly that it is in this century that democracy has been finally and definitely realised, is to be blind not only to the probabilities of the future but also to the certainties of the past. Hence any study of what democracy is, any attempt to discover its essence or meaning must necessarily be a historical study.[14]

Interpreted as a request for historical intelligibility, rather than a description of contemporary practice, an enquiry into the meaning of democracy reveals it as having four related historical features. The first is that, for most of its long history, democracy has been regarded as virtually synonymous with 'mob rule' and thus as one of the worst types of government possible. MacPherson puts the point clearly:

> Democracy used to be a bad word. Everybody who was anybody knew that democracy ... would be a bad thing fatal to individual freedom and to all the graces of civilized living. That was the position taken by

> pretty near all men of intelligence from the earliest historical times down to about hundred years ago.[15]

The second feature of democracy is the opposite of the first: it is now a 'good' word, which functions to confer respectability on a particular form of government or society. As one writer puts it: "the consent of 'the people' has increasingly become the principle source of legitimacy for governments and regimes however 'undemocratic' or authoritarian they may be in reality ... In the twentieth century, democracy represents political virtue."[16]

However, though democracy is now widely approved there are radical differences – both conceptual and ideological – in how democracy is understood. To quote MacPherson again:

> In the last fifty years ... revolutions have been made against our kind of democracy – our Western liberal democracy – in the name of proletarian democracy, of 'people's democracy' and of several varieties of African and Asian democracy ... Democracy has become an ambiguous thing, with different meanings – even apparently opposite meanings – for different peoples.[17]

Thus, the third feature of democracy revealed by its history is that 'democracy is a prime example of what W.B. Gallie called 'essentially-contested concepts' – concepts whose very meaning is the subject of endless disputes and fundamental disagreement between rival political and social groups. Of course, to concede that democracy is an 'essentially-contested concept' is not to concede that it can mean whatever anybody wants it to mean. 'Contested concepts' always have some uncontested common core, which make rival interpretations of its meaning rival interpretations of the same thing. The best way to identify the common core of any essentially-contested concept is to look to its history.

As with so much else, the origins of the concept of democracy are to be found in ancient Greece where the concept was introduced to describe the kind of city state – the *polis* – in which citizens governed and ruled themselves. Thus, the essence of Greek democracy was the direct participation of citizens in the common life of the political community. In such a community, man (but not woman) was, by nature, a political animal whose very being was constituted and affirmed through political activity. In the democracy of ancient Greece, citizens understood themselves as free and equal participants in a political society developing and realising their human capacities within the framework of the common life. In this sense, the primary function of democracy was educative: "to educate an entire people to the point where their intellectual, emotional and moral capacities have reached their full potential and they are joined freely and actively in a genuine community".[19]

Any adequate history of the eclipse of Greek democracy would have to explain both why the Greek conception of democracy remained unchallenged until the eighteenth century and why it was so universally

rejected and denounced. However, what such a history would also need to explain is how, when democracy re-emerged and found favour in Western Europe in the eighteenth century, it was linked to a view of the relationship between the individual and society very different from that which Greek democracy had sought to sustain. Indeed, its main attraction was not that it promised to create a particular form of social life, but that it offered a system of government that would most effectively allow an already established form of society – a liberal society – to work. As McPherson puts it: "In Western societies the democratic franchise was not installed until after the liberal society was firmly established. Democracy had to accommodate itself to the soil that had already been prepared ... Liberal democracies were liberal first and democratic later."[20]

In Britain, this form of democracy – liberal democracy – received its clearest and most influential justification in the utilitarian philosophies of Jeremy Bentham, John Mill and his son James Stuart Mill.[21] The theory of liberal democracy propounded by Bentham and the Mills deviated from its classical Greek predecessor in two crucial respects. First, it replaced the Greek idea of participation in political decision making by all, with the idea of 'representative government' in which political decision making was restricted to a political elite. Secondly, it did not interpret democracy as a distinctive form of social life but as a mechanism for protecting the liberty of individuals from undue inference from either government or state.

The political theories of Bentham and the Mills are rightly regarded as providing the philosophical foundations for liberal democracy and the intellectual legitimation for many nineteenth and twentieth century educational reforms. It is also true to say that J. S. Mill fully recognised that representative democracy required that those who were elected were adequately educated. However, although he recognised that a liberal democracy required an expansion of educational provision, he wrongly assumed that this requirement could be met simply by extending the kind of classical-humanist curriculum previously reserved for an aristocratic elite. For J. S. Mill, the curriculum required by the democratic representatives of the future was to be no different from that of the undemocratic political leaders of the past. For J. S. Mill, "democracy was to be the gift of the aristocracy to the middle classes on condition that they underwent an education which paralleled their own"?[22]

Democracy and the Curriculum

By assuming that a curriculum that had served to re-produce an aristocratic pre-democratic social order was entirely appropriate to the needs of a democratic society, J. S. Mill conspicuously ignored the role of the curriculum in the process of social reproduction and transformation and hence remained blind to the fact that the democratic transformation of the society required the transformation of pre-democratic forms of curriculum as well. Fortunately, this failure was rectified by John Dewey. In *School and Society* – a series of lecturers delivered in 1899 – Dewey

described how the process of industrialisation had brought about the disintegration of traditional communities. The division of labour, and the division between home and work meant that the cultural environment in which people lived and worked was no longer conducive to the spirit of co-operative living that had characterised pre-industrial life. However, at the same time, by introducing modes of production in which science and technology controlled nature, industrialisation had created the conditions in which people's personal capacities could be liberated and a form of society "which makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms" [23] could be realistically envisaged. This kind of society – a society in which all people can develop their individual freedom by collectively participating in defining the common good – is what Dewey meant by democracy.

However, as well as liberating people from many laborious tasks, industrialisation had also given rise to a demand for illiberal forms of vocational education that would restrict the personal development of individuals and rely on a curriculum which would do no more than equip the majority for the world of work in the newly emerging industrial society. The only way to prevent this was to introduce a system of education deliberately designed to protect and promote the democratic impulse implicit in industrial life.

Dewey recognised that, though the close connection between democracy and education was well known, the usual explanation of this connection was 'superficial':

> The superficial explanation is that a government resting upon popular suffrage cannot be successful unless those who elect and obey their governors are educated. But there is a deeper explanation. A democracy is more than a form of government: it is primarily a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated experience.[24]

If democracy is 'primarily a mode of associated living' then education could not perform its democratic role simply by extending traditional forms of schooling to all children. Traditional forms of education, argued Dewey, had been 'formulated in earlier social conditions' [25] to serve the needs of a pre-democratic social order. To the extent that these traditional forms of education continue, they "hamper the adequate realisation of the democratic ideal"[26] by supporting teacher methods which breed democratically undesirable social attitudes (such as obedience and self-interest) and encourage schools to rely on authoritarian methods (such as direct instruction and the inculcation of fixed beliefs). "Much of our present education fails", wrote Dewey, "because it neglects the fundamental principle of the school as a form of community life."[27] For Dewey, it is only when schools themselves become democratic communities that individuals will acquire those qualities of mind and social attitudes which are the prerequisite of a genuinely democratic society. In a democracy, education must itself be 'democratic'. What does democratic education require?

First, it requires that schools themselves become democratically organised institutions. For Dewey, individuals can only learn to understand themselves as democratic individuals by becoming members of a democratic community in which the problems of communal life are resolved through collective deliberation and a shared concern for the common good. For this reason, a democratic school is a common school providing a broad social community to which children of different race, class and religion can belong. In this sense, democratic schools offer 'a mode of associated living' in which the kind of educative environment provided by the social communities of pre-industrial society could be reproduced.

However, unlike pre-industrial education, the primary aim of democratic education is to develop in pupils 'the habit of intelligence' – the habit of confronting and resolving problems through reflective enquiry, collective deliberation and rational debate. This aim cannot be achieved by controlling or directing what and how pupils think. Rather, it requires schools to provide a democratic culture in which pupils are encouraged to resolve practical, moral and social problems through joint activities, and collective decision-making. Since, in a democracy, decision making is no longer the preserve of an aristocratic elite, schools must become 'embryonic' societies providing all pupils with opportunities to formulate and achieve their collective ends by confronting shared problems and common concerns. For Dewey, it is only by promoting the habit of intelligence through co-operative problem solving activities that schools can support and promote the evolution of a more democratic social order.

If schools were themselves to become 'embryonic societies' assumptions and practices derived from pre-democratic educational ideologies would have to be abandoned. For example, the division between a 'classical humanist' curriculum for an aristocratic elite and a 'vocational' curriculum for the masses of ordinary people would no longer be acceptable. In a democracy, all pupils would receive a common curriculum experience in which the distinctions between intellectual and practical activities, and between a liberal curriculum and a vocational curriculum would disappear. Similarly, the principle purpose of a vocational curriculum would not be to adapt pupils to the existing social and economic order. It would be to develop a form of social and economic understanding usually associated with liberal education and that is the opposite to the limited technical understanding that preparation for particular occupational roles required:

> The kind of vocationa1 education in which I am interested is not one which will 'adapt' workers to the existing industrial regime. I am not sufficiently in love with the regime for that. It seems to me that the business of all who would not be educational time servers is ... to strive for a kind of vocational education which will first alter the existing industrial system and ultimately transform it.[28]

This explicitly critical view of the anti-democratic effects of the economic structures of modern industrial society led Dewey to conclude that schools could not effectively develop the kind of co-operative social relationships required for the newly-emerging democracy so long as society retained forms of economic life in which competitive social relationships were endemic. Indeed, for Dewey, the question of resolving the contradiction between the 'co-operative' principles of democracy and the 'competitive' principles of a liberal market economy, constituted the fundamental educational problem of contemporary democratic reform. Thus, he wrote:

> The greatest particular obstacle in the way of the introduction into schools of that connection with social life that [educational reformers] regard as desirable, is the great part played by personal competition and the desire for private profit in our economic life … Only in a society based on the cooperative principle can the ideas of educational reformers be carried into operation.[29]

Dewey's political and educational philosophy was the product of historical conditions very different from our own. Nevertheless, it constitutes a powerful theoretical vindication for the belief that the primary role of the curriculum *in* a democracy is to be a curriculum *for* democracy, reproducing those forms of consciousness and social relationships that meaningful participation in democratic life requires. However, what Dewey also emphasises is that this curriculum *for* democracy cannot be realistically enacted in a competitive market driven society in which democratic values and beliefs cannot be adequately expressed. In a society whose culture, practices and social relationships are incompatible with the culture, practices and social relationships of a democratic form of social life, the type of curriculum *for* democracy that Dewey proposed lacks the necessary conditions for its practical application. Although, in such a society, the kind of 'curriculum for democracy' envisaged by Dewey is bound to fail, the reasons for its failure are not to be found in his curriculum theory, but in the inadequate and impoverished conception of democracy that such a society embodies and accepts.

Conclusion: the curriculum in and for democratic society

I have tried to show why any attempt to probe the future of the relationship between democracy and the curriculum must be partially constituted by an attempt to understand its history. However, that version of history which interprets democracy as something which has been accomplished with the achievement of universal suffrage always under-estimates the extent to which this interpretation is itself the product of a longer history of social and economic transformation through which our understanding of democracy has changed. Moreover, if we treat the history of democracy and the history of the curriculum as two separate histories, we remain blind to the possibility that the curriculum

in modern democratic societies would not – perhaps could not – have taken its contemporary form unless the long standing classical conception of democracy as an educative and communal form of social life has been transformed. Once we regard these two histories as mutually dependent parts of one ordered totality, four general conclusions begin to emerge.

The first is that 'democracy' and 'curriculum' stand in a reciprocal relationship such that each provides the foundations on which the other is erected. To recognise this is to acknowledge that without a democratic transformation of society a 'curriculum for democracy' will remain ineffective, and that without the educational and political struggle to promote a 'curriculum for democracy' the further democratisation of society is unlikely to occur. The democratic transformation of both the curriculum and society is thus the condition for the democratic development of each.

The second conclusion is that, in the course of the transition to a non-participatory liberal conception of 'representative' democracy, our understanding of the political role of the curriculum has become distorted and only a society whose curriculum is itself formulated on the basis of widespread democratic discussion about the role of education in shaping the future of society could avoid such distortion. However, technologisation, bureaucratisation and specialisation – those central pillars of modern liberal democracies – virtually ensure that the curriculum is understood as something which serves economic and vocational purposes rather than general social and political ends. In such democracies, curriculum deliberation has been reduced to a mundane technical expertise in which non-technical non-expert questions about the social and political role of the curriculum are not even asked.

The third conclusion is that the modern and truncated redefinition of the original meaning of democracy effectively ensures that any 'curriculum for democracy' will have a relatively unimportant and marginal place in the curriculum corresponding to the relatively unimportant and marginal place that active democratic participation has in the lives of most ordinary citizens. In a modern liberal democracy, 'education for democracy' invariably comprises little more than a form of political education which combines an uncritical knowledge of government institutions with a passive socialisation into the political *status quo*. As a result, pedagogies and forms of learning which are appropriate to preparing pupils to actively participate in the political life of society are neglected and curriculum subjects such as History and Literature are organised in a way that ignores their political role. Because a modern liberal democracy requires a depoliticisation of democracy, it must necessarily depoliticise the role of the curriculum as well.

The fourth conclusion to emerge is that the curriculum in most modern liberal democracies is deeply implicated in the reproduction of inequalities of economic and political power, which have a distorting effect on the progressive development of democratic life. In such democracies, the task of any 'curriculum for democracy' is to bring pupils

to a historical consciousness and critical awareness of how their societies present understanding of democracy is the result of past struggles through which the demand for greater political equality were achieved, of how these achievements became embedded in the institutions of modern democratic society and of how these institutions need to be continually reformed if they are to continue to advance to democratic ideals they were originally created to promote. In short, the curriculum in democracy will oniy remain viable as a curriculum for democracy so long as it does not passively interpret the meaning of democracy as synonymous with its own contemporary institutional definition. The British historian E. H. Carr put this point as follows:

> To speak today of the defence of democracy as if we were defining something which we know and had possessed for many decades ... is self deception and sham ... The criterion must be sought not in the survival of traditional institutions but in the question of where power resides and how it is exercised ... We should be nearer the mark and should have a far more convincing slogan if we spoke of the need not to defend democracy but to create it.[30]

What I have tried to show is that a curriculum *for* democracy is not a curriculum which simply seeks to reproduce existing democratic institutions and practices. It is a curriculum which acknowledges that 'democracy' has to be continuously transformed by continually transcending the limitations and inadequacies of its contemporary meaning. It is only by preparing pupils to engage in this process of transformation that the 'curriculum *in* democracy' will become a 'curriculum *for* democracy' – a curriculum which empowers all future citizens to participate in the 'long revolution' through which the progressive development of both democracy and the curriculum have been, and will continue to be achieved.

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Notes

[1] The ideas and arguments on this paper are analysed in much greater theoretical and historical detail in W. Carr & A. Hartnett, *Education and the Struggle for Democracy: the politics of educational ideas* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1996).

[2] Williams, *The Long Revolution* (London: Pelican Books, 1961), p. 10.

[3] Williams, *The Long Revolution.*

[4] Williams, *The Long Revolution,* p. 11.

[5] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 11.

[6] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, p. 11.

[7] Williams, *The Long Revolution*, pp. 11-13.

[8] See for example, S. Bowles & H. Gintis, *Schooling in Capitalist America: educational reform and the contradictions of economic life* (New York: Basic Books, 1976); M. Apple, *Ideology and Curriculum* (London: Routlege & Kegan Paul, 1990, 2nd Edn).

[9] W. Feinberg, *Understanding Education* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983) p. 155.

[10] F. Inglis, *The Management of Ignorance: a political theory of the curriculum* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), p. 23.

[11] These are based on the curriculum ideologies described by Lawton, Skilbeck and Kemmis. See D. Lawton, *Curriculum Studies and Educational Planning* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983); M. Skilbeck, Ideologies and values, in *Curriculum Design and Development* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1976); Stephen Kemmis , P. Cole & Dahle Suggett, *Towards the Socially Critical School* (Melbourne: Victorian Institute of Secondary Education, 1983).

[12] J. Schumpeter, *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1976).

[13] Ibid.

[14] A. Arblaster, *Democracy* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 1987), p. 6.

[15] C. B. MacPherson, *The Real World of Democracy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1966), p. 1.

[16] Arblaster, *Democracy*, p. 9.

[17] MacPherson, *The Real World of Democracy*, p. 2.

[18] W. R. Gallie, Essentially contested concepts (*Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 1955), pp. 97-114.

[19] C. Pateman, *Participation and Democratic Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 21.

[20] MacPherson, *The Real World of Democracy*, p. 7.

[21] J. Bentham, Constitutional Code (1843) reprinted in J. Bowring (Ed.) *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, vol. ix (Edinburgh: W. Tait, 1938); J. Mill, *An Essay on Government* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1837); J. S. Mill, *Considerations on Representative Government*, in H. B. Action (Ed.) *Utilitarianism, Liberty and Representative Government* (London: Dent & Sons, 1951).

[22] W. Reid & J. Filby, *The Sixth: an essay in education and democracy* (London: Falmer Press, 1982), p. 31.

[23] J. Dewey, *School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1899), p. 16.

[24] J. Dewey, *Democracy and Education* (New York: The Free Press, 1916), p. 87.

[25] Ibid., p. iii.

[26] Ibid.

[27] J. Dewey, My pedagogic creed, in J. McDermott, *The Philosophy of John Dewey* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981), p. 446.

[28] J. Dewey, Liberal education, in P. Munroe (Ed.) *A Cyclopedia of Education: 4* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), p. 4.

[29] Dewey, Liberal education, p. 6.

[30] E. H. Carr, *The New Society* (London: Macmillan, 1951), p. 76.