Curriculum as a Selection from a Culture in Post-Apartheid South Africa

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INTRODUCTION

Almost 20 years ago, Lawton (1975) made the controversial claim that curriculum, in its broadest sense, constitutes a selection from a culture of a society. Drawing from his own experience in the British context in his seminal and subsequent works, Lawton (1975, 1980, 1982, 1983a, 1983b; Lawton, Prescott, Gammage, et al., 1976) initially devoted his attention to the notion of a common culture. He later explored questions such as who selects from the culture and from whose culture the selection is made, with specific reference to the relationship between school curriculum and politics. He also coined the term "cultural analysis" to typify an approach to planning school curricula which takes as its premise the cultural universals relating to questions about knowledge and values. As Urevbu (1985, pp. 24–25) explains, these universals should be the concern of education irrespective of the kind of society.

The present article attempts to establish critically the extent to which Lawton's concept of curriculum as a selection from a culture can be of use in planning curricula for post-apartheid South Africa. Further, by exploring pertinent issues such as which groups will be involved in the selection process in South Africa and from which culture (or cultures) the selection will be made, it attempts to determine the applicability of Lawton's notion of a common (core) curriculum to planning curriculum in a country which is explicitly divided along racial and ethnic lines. Lastly, some implications for South African education in the 1990s will be drawn using Lawton's model as a framework.

SELECTING CURRICULUM FROM A CULTURE

To comprehend fully the weaknesses and strengths inherent in Lawton's model, it is expedient to explore briefly the common usages of the notion of "culture" and how it is linked to education. For example, a distinction is often made between so-called "high" culture—which Lawton (1975, p. 25) and Bernstein (1977) identify as "mainstream" culture and Sharp (1980, p. 69) describes as "the" culture, that is, the culture

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of the dominant class—and the "dominated" culture of minority or subjugated majority ethnic or cultural groups. According to Arnold (Bantock, 1975), the former connotes "the best that has been thought and said" (p. 118). The latter, as the name suggests, refers to the culture of groups of people who have no say regarding what should or should not be transmitted by the schools because they lack bargaining power in the political process.

Lawton (1983a, p. 8) is explicit that his notion of selecting curriculum from the culture is by no means restricted to high culture. He further contends that schools must, in the interest of social justice, transmit disciplines which are "common" to the society (1975, p. 83). Lawton's core curriculum emanates from cultural invariants that designate universal characteristics human beings appear to share in common as well as from those invariants that refer to differences among people (Lawton, 1983a, pp. 30–40). In the British cultural context, he describes the following invariants:

> All can add up their shopping bills, they all drive on the left side of the road and recognize the tune of "God Save the Queen." But their differences are much more interesting than their similarities. (cited in Stenhouse, 1975)

The claim that curriculum constitutes a selection from a culture dates back to the early 1960s. Early proponents of the core curriculum were Williams (1961, pp. 145–147) and Skilbeck (Lawton et al., 1976, pp. 54–56), who forcefully and penetratingly argue that neither an analysis of the individual needs theory nor the theory of "forms of knowledge" as postulated by Hirst (1965, p. 18) and Hirst and Peters (1970, pp. 63–64) represent adequate criteria for selecting curriculum. Hirst's and Peters's theory asserts that, with some important modifications, a traditional curriculum (one based on distinct subjects) provides appropriate selections from the cultures of all pupils. However, Lawton (1975) provides an illuminating discussion on the implications of their thesis when planning curricula for societies with dominant and dominated cultures. Indeed, Lawton is openly critical of the "forms of knowledge" theory as a criteria for selecting curricula, and he argues that it tends to ignore the historical and social differences in cultures and subcultures.

Lawton's (1975, p. 88) own curricular prescription centers around five "core areas of knowledge": mathematics, the physical and biological sciences, the humanities and social studies, the expressive arts, and moral education. Although these disciplines are distinct, he argues that they are not totally unrelated and favors interdisciplinarity. Nonetheless, while Lawton's criticisms of Hirst's and Peters's theory are insightful, his own core areas of knowledge thesis has also been the subject of intense debate (Whitty, 1985, p. 66). It has been argued that the weakness inherent in Lawton's notion of core areas of knowledge is that these core areas are derived from a structure and organization of knowledge that is universal rather than culturally based. Supporters of Lawton's theory have been charged with retreating into Hirstian forms of knowledge and strategically treating as a side issue Bourdieu's assertion that a system of implicit and interiorized values help to define attitudes toward the cultural capital and educational institutions (Whitty, 1985, p. 66).

Bourdieu (1974, p. 33) also raises two assumptions by which he questions the fairness inherent in Lawton's thesis as a criteria for selecting curriculum:

(1) The school functions in a biased manner by demanding of every child what only some children can give, namely, a certain orientation to the culture of the school and the academic curriculum and a certain culture capital that reflects the cultural level of the home and that leads to success in school.
(2) The curriculum of the school cannot be treated as a neutral object because some elements are peculiarly dependent on the child's cultural capital.

Supporters of the Bourdieuian school such as Bernstein (1977) and Sharp (1980) argue that each family transmits indirectly rather than directly both its cultural capital and a certain ethos. By highlighting the importance of the learner's cultural capital and stressing that it is often counterproductive to try to reform schools without simultaneously reforming the contexts within which these institutions exist, Bernstein and Sharp assail the complacent view that school curricula alone can equalize opportunities in society.

The Selection of a Common Curriculum in South Africa

The relationship between education and culture is perhaps one of the most sensitive and hotly debated issues in the history of South African education (Eiselen, 1957). In the South African context the notion of "culture" has distinct racial and tribal connotations. As a result of the politics of apartheid and other divisive mandates which *inter alia* emphasize the separation of races and cultures, mainstream culture (the best that has been thought and said) distinctly refers to the cultures of the dominant Whites (Englebrecht & Nieuvenhuis, 1988, p. 164). Moreover, the selection of a core curriculum in South Africa is founded on policies which discriminate against Blacks on the basis of their cultural differences from Whites. This discrimination features prominently in both the political and educational policies of South Africa.

The type of relationship currently operative between culture and curriculum in South Africa is encapsulated in Act 110 of the nation's Constitution. The Act decrees the formation of a tricameral system of parliament in which Whites, East Indians, and Coloureds have representation, while Blacks are excluded under the pretext that they have political representation in their indigenous nation-states. As Black children constitute the majority of pupils in South Africa, this exclusionary decree has had serious implications on Black South Africans' involvement in educational policy making (Michau, 1984, p. 9). It must be noted, however, that Act 110, passed in 1983, is merely an extension—indeed, a modernization—of apartheid ideology and the philosophy of "Christian National Education" (popularly known as CNE) which has guided educational policy in South Africa for decades. CNE originated among the Dutch Boers in the Cape Colony as a reaction to Lord Somerset's policy of Anglicization of the educational curriculum of the former British-ruled colony of South Africa (Behr, 1988, pp. 57, 97, 98).

Articles 14(i), 14(ii), and 15 of the South African Constitution provide that a distinction be made between "own" affairs and "general" affairs among the various racial and ethnic groups that populate the nation. Own affairs are defined as matters which affect the retention of a national group's unique identity and the upholding and advancement of its own way of life, culture, traditions, and practices (Louw, 1983; Behr, 1988). This constitutionally decreed distinction between own affairs and general affairs has led to the creation of four separate departments of education within South Africa. Three of these departments serve the needs of Whites, Coloureds, and Indians, respectively. They are known as departments of education and culture and are administered by the own affairs bureaucracies of each group (Van Schalkwyk, 1986, pp. 73–83). The fourth department, the Department of Education and Training, is specifically intended to serve the needs of Blacks in the so-called "homelands" (independent satellite states) and urban areas of South Africa.[1]

One way of interpreting Lawton's theory of selecting a common curriculum from a culture refers to the process of selecting a core curriculum or syllabus for all population groups. In South Africa, the core syllabus is drawn up by the Committee of Heads of Education (CHE) and is described as being "common" to as well as binding for all the own affairs departments of education (Human Sciences Research Council, 1981, pp. 99–100; Louw, 1981, p. xviii). Despite claims that the administration and control of education falls under the auspices of one minister (the Minister of National Education and Development) and that syllabi are virtually the same across all population groups, in many subjects different examinations are employed based on the racial group to which they are directed. Another example of South Africa's constitutionally entrenched racism and tribalism is manifested in its National Policy for General Affairs Act of 1984 (Act 76), with which the government undertook to retain a number of educational bodies that existed at the time. Much against the popular plea for one decentralized education department, the government increased its bureaucratic style of control over education by appointing advisory and management bodies which generally had no credibility among Black South Africans.

Proponents of Lawton's core areas of knowledge theory as a criteria for selecting curriculum have been criticized for treating cultural variables as side issues. In the case of South Africa, however, cultural variables assume peculiar prominence. Either deliberately or inadvertently, South Africa's core curriculum overemphasizes the importance of separating and distinguishing individuals and groups on the basis of color. Cultural differences have been exploited to further justify the policy of "separate

[1]The term "homeland" was coined to further the apartheid ideology and implies a reserve exclusively intended for settlement by a particular Black African tribal group. Current terminology designates the homelands as self-governing national states. Independent national states are those which have gained "independence" from the Pretoria government. It is interesting, however, that the organizational structures of almost all these homelands and independent states have been crumbling since the unbanning of Black political organizations and the release of political prisoners (see Botha, 1990; Nel, 1990; "Venda Coup," 1990).

but equal" (which has its roots in the strategy of "divide-and-conquer") with regard to the development and implementation of curriculum for different culture groups. The ideology of separate development further implies the concept of ethnicity and, concomitantly, a love for one's own cultural assets as the highest national ideal (Prinsloo & Malan, 1988, p. 274; Steyn, 1986, pp. 63–67); yet, in South Africa cultural variables are emphasized only to the extent they support the separation of educational systems across racial and ethnic lines. Moreover, curriculum planners in South Africa have not been sensitive to the importance of cultural capital for its own sake.

Who Participates in the Selection Process?

Although Lawton contends that curriculum should be selected from a broad range of cultures within societies, all of South Africa's cultural groups are not represented nor taken into account in the process of selecting the core curriculum. The three departments of education and culture clearly cater to the needs and aspirations of Whites, Coloureds, and Indians in the political structure of the country; but because Black South Africans are explicitly excluded from decision making, either educational or political, at the national level, Black involvement in the curricular selection process is moot. Each of the three "own affairs" departments of education and culture and the Department of Education and Training has the "right" to determine the contents of its own syllabi and the character of its education; yet the White-dominated Department of National Education (DNE) is responsible for the development of the so-called "core" syllabus. Moreover, in accordance with Act 76 of 1984, the own affairs educational departments are obliged to choose their various curricula from the DNE's core curriculum.

A specific aspect that reveals the overemphasis of a single culture in the curricular selection process in South Africa is the method of choosing school textbooks. All the representatives involved in the selection of textbooks used in South African schools are Whites (South African Institute on Race Relations, 1988–89); the books are written by Whites, and they are published by White-owned publishing companies in which some DNE authorities have vested economic and political interests (Stuart, 1988, p. 9; "DET to Probe," 1988, p. 7). As a recent survey (Meighan, 1986) of history textbooks used in South Africa's schools succinctly reveals:

> . . . only four history books used in schools mentioned the existence of Black slavery and this was presented in such a manner that children taught through these texts could not understand the hidden message. (pp. 101–102)

The White minority's monopoly on the process of selecting the curriculum for all South Africans has contributed to the serious discontent among the disenfranchised Black majority. The violent political conflicts that have characterized South African society in recent years are the fruits of overemphasizing cultural variables and differences in education and other aspects of national life. Given these complexities, an urgent need exists for a re-evaluation of the strengths of the cultural analysis model, and the implications thereof, in the impending post-apartheid

South Africa. While Lawton's cultural analysis model is certainly not the only model that can be tried, several features of his conceptual framework are recommended for adaptation to the South African condition and will be discussed below.

Prospects for a Post-Apartheid Curriculum

First, a case can be made for the exposure of all children to broad areas of knowledge, such as those promoted by Lawton, provided that the areas are contextualized. The concept of contextualization in this sense does not in any way imply that the curriculum must be differentiated on the base of race or color as is the case in South Africa. On the contrary, it refers to a significant shift from a traditionally subject-based curriculum to a curriculum that is sensitive to the political, social, and economic changes that are occurring in that country. Moreover, unless such a shift takes into account the cultural variants in South African society, a situation may develop where the ideas of the most powerful group will be regarded as the only ones to be inculcated.

Second, Mangedzo's (1988) observation that decentralization of decision making is a basic and fundamental aspect of the cultural analysis model is insightful and should be explored. In the case of South Africa this implies a significant shift from the current decision-making structure in which power and authority are concentrated in the hands of White politicians to one which demands the involvement of multiracial coalitions of politicians and educational experts at the local level. Decentralization of curriculum decisions in South Africa, as traditionally postulated in the Republic of South Africa's (1983) White Paper on the provision of education is clearly implemented along ethnic and cultural lines (Michau, 1984). The nation's educational advisory bodies (councils of education) and the school managerial councils are racially segregated. In the case of the education intended for the Black majority, these controlling and managing bodies are appointed; as a result, they have a low credibility among the people they are supposed to serve.

What is being proposed herein, in line with Lawton's thesis of selecting curriculum from various cultures in a society and Mangedzo's notion of decentralization, is genuine participation in the curriculum selection process of the people for whom the curriculum is intended. To ascertain whether the people have been meaningfully involved in curriculum decision making, it is expedient to distinguish between apprising, consulting, and real participation or power sharing (Havelock & Huberman, 1977; Hurst, 1983). In the first case, selected professionals or experts, usually at a national level, come together, arrive at a certain conclusion regarding a particular issue, and inform their constituents of their decision. Consultation involves the elicitation by decision makers of constituent views, yet decision makers are free to continue with a course of action regardless of its popularity. Participation is the active involvement of the people (or their representatives) in deciding the affairs that affect them. Following Lawton's construct, a reasonable selection of curriculum in post-apartheid South Africa can be said to occur when the people for whom the educational policies are intended are afforded the opportunity of partici-

pating in the curriculum. This does not mean that every South African citizen must be allowed to decide what the curriculum must include; instead, democratically selected experts in the field of curriculum design must come, through a process of deliberation, to a consensus as to the nature of South Africa's curriculum of the future.

Third, there is an urgent need for agreement upon a "new" common culture for post-apartheid South Africa (Nkomo, 1990, p. 307). This is not to suggest that the existing cultures be dispensed with, but rather that those cultural invariants South Africans of all races and ethnic groups share in common become the basis for curriculum selection in a post-apartheid, democratic society. Acceptance and respect for diverse cultures and the elimination of any suggestions that any one culture be regarded as superior to the others are mandatory in this regard. New culture in this context refers to a combinative South African culture which binds all of the nation's people together. Undoubtedly, this will not be a simple task as generations of South Africans have been raised and schooled in a society in which racism and tribalism have been the cornerstones of the curriculum. South Africans cannot reasonably be expected to change their cognitive and behavioral patterns overnight.

It is lamentable that the culture of violence which is sweeping the country gained momentum subsequent to the release of political prisoners and the unbanning of progressive movements. While it seems imminent that a democratic government and a constitutional Bill of Rights will eventually prevail in South Africa, a far greater challenge facing the nation will be to educate its citizens to think and act democratically. Educational change without redirecting and developing educational philosophies and skills can be likened to the biblical example of "pouring new wine into old bottles." Given the somber picture of South Africa today, there is an urgent need to inculcate democratic principles through schools and universities to build a non-racial, democratic nation of tomorrow.

Conclusion

The application of Lawton's cultural analysis model, his notion of selecting curriculum from a culture, and the "forms of knowledge" theory to the case of South Africa has revealed some important features of this curricular framework that tend to underplay the importance of historical and social differences in societies. Moreover, given the unique manner in which the notion of culture has been historically used in relation to curriculum in South Africa, it is pertinent to ask whether one can reasonably talk of selecting, as Lawton suggests, a common core of knowledge from a culture. In a society such as South Africa, which is divided along racial, ethnic, and cultural lines, the weaknesses and strengths of Lawton's model become apparent. Although Lawton's model provides a useful starting point, it would be a mistake to apply it uncritically in a country such as South Africa because, by overemphasizing the superiority of the cultures of the White sectors of its population, the apartheid ideology limits the sole sectors for selection to those of the Whites. Furthermore, as a result of the policies of apartheid, any

suggestion that curriculum be planned in a manner that encourages cultural differences has long been viewed with suspicion by Black South Africans.

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