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The Political Construction of the 'Whole Curriculum'

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ABSTRACT *This article focuses upon the conflicts which emerged between powerful interest groups in determining the shape of the curriculum during 1988 and 1989. It explores the ideological and political processes of developing what became known as the 'whole curriculum', that is, the 'basic curriculum' of the National Curriculum and religious education, and the cross-curricular themes, skills and dimensions. Specifically, it explores the micro-political educational and bureaucratic tensions between politicians, Department of Education and Science civil servants and National Curriculum Council professional officers within what have been called the 'context to influence' and the 'context of text production'.*

Introduction

There is no shortage of material on the National Curriculum, much of which has served to confirm the view that its construction was powerfully ideological, problematic and beset by conflict and tension within a range of cultural, structural, historical and professional sites (Chitty, 1988, 1990; Johnson, 1991). However, discussion of the construction of a model for the 'whole curriculum', defined as the National Curriculum together with cross-curricular themes, skills and dimensions (National Curriculum Council NCC, 1990), is less readily available. Although both Maw (1993) and Graham with Tytler (1993) have discussed and analysed its discourse and its political framing, the idea of a whole curriculum has not been subjected to critical scrutiny by exploring the views of Department of Education and Science [DES] civil servants and National Curriculum Council [NCC] officers who were engaged in its construction. I want to begin that task here.

The National Curriculum structure described in *The National Curriculum 5–16: a consultation document* (DES, 1987a) was roundly criticised by powerful interest groups (Lawton, 1987; Haviland, 1988; Quicke, 1988; Goodson, 1989; Bash & Coulby, 1989). The consultation document was accused of deliberately avoiding curriculum relevance,

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political, economic and social thinking and of treating initiatives, such as the Technical and Vocational Educational Initiative (TVEI), as if they had never happened. Criticism of a National Curriculum which appeared to be dominated by traditional subjects focused upon ideological and political dogma, bureaucratic machinations and administrative ineffectiveness. I want to look at each of those criticisms in turn and then add to the analysis they present. Through the presentation of evidence drawn from interviews with DES civil servants, NCC officers and Her Majestey's Inspectors [HMI] closely involved in the construction of the whole curriculum, I offer an interpretation which adds to Goodson & Marsh's claim that the whole-curriculum model was seen as a threat to the 'symbolic logic of the National Curriculum as a "power cushion" to contain serious debate about the curriculum' (1996, p. 161).

The framework for analysis employed in the article is that developed by Bowe & Ball with Gold (1992), who identify three sites in the construction and reconstruction of educational policy in what they call a 'policy cycle'.

- *The Context of Influence*: where the ideological and political basis of policy is decided by government and interest groups.
- *The Context of Text Production*: where texts deemed to represent policy are constructed.
- *The Context of Practice*: the professional sites within which policy and policy texts are interpreted by teachers.

The context of influence provides the arena within which educational policy is initiated and policy discourses are constructed, the context where 'Interested parties struggle to influence the definition and social purposes of education' (Bowe & Ball with Gold, 1992, p. 19). Within the context of influence co-exist private and public decision-making networks. Private debate takes place within policy-making groups at work within political parties, government and their agencies. Public debate takes place within teacher unions, pressure groups, such as *the Centre for Policy Studies*, and the media.

In Bowe & Ball with Gold's description of the context of text production, three points are significant. First, policy texts are 'Articulated in the language of the general good. Their appeal is based upon claims to popular (and populist) common sense and political reason' (1992, p. 20). Second, individual texts are not necessarily coherent or clear; they are 'the outcome of struggle and compromise' (1992, p. 21). Third, the control of the representation of policy is problematic. Interest groups working within different sites of text production compete for policy representation and control over the timing of policy publication.

Within the context of practice, Bowe & Ball with Gold claim that 'The key point is that policy is not simply received within this arena rather it is subject to interpretation and then "recreated" … Parts of texts will be *rejected, selected out, ignored, deliberately misunderstood, responses may be frivolous etc.*' (1992, p. 22; my italics). They argue that teachers do not approach policy texts as 'naïve readers' (1992, p. 22); rather, they come with experiences, values and 'purposes of their own' (1992, p. 22).

While I acknowledge that work within the 'context of influence' is important, this article concentrates upon the contexts of influence and text production. I begin by briefly describing the relationship between the National Curriculum and the whole curriculum. I then explore analyses of whole-curriculum construction offered by Johnson (1991), Graham (Graham with Tytler, 1993) and Maw (1993). Their positions are then compared with the views of DES civil servants and NCC officers. The discussion is presented in the form of thesis and anti-thesis, an approach used with effect in Bosanquet's (1983)

study of the neo-liberal wing of the New Right. First, I present the 'thesis', evidence of the debate surrounding the construction of the whole curriculum which lies in the public domain. Second, the 'anti-thesis', which analyses those events through the responses of the DES civil servants and NCC officers who were involved in that process.

Methodology

In addition to documentation in the public domain, material included in this article originated from conversational interviews with serving and retired Department for Education and Employment (*DfEE*) civil servants, serving HMI and School Curriculum Assessment Authority (SCAA), now the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA), professional officers and exprofessional officers within the NCC who were at the centre of curriculum policy-making in the period 1988–90. The basis for conducting the interviews relied upon a range of literature (Ball, 1990; Halpin & Fitz, 1991; Kogan, 1994; Gewirtz & Ozga, 1994). Of particular value was the collection of accounts edited by Walford (1994), which explores the methodology, ethics and difficulties of interviewing elites, including access and data interpretation.

Informants functioning at different levels of power and responsibility were interviewed. They were selected on the basis that they could provide data enabling me to explore the ideas and values of key actors who were involved in educational setting-making and who had influenced its substance and progress. Those selected for interview included:

- senior professional officers within the NCC who were responsible for managing the work of the 'Interim Whole Curriculum Committee' (IWCC) and for chairing NCC curriculum working parties;
- HMI with curriculum responsibility at a senior level and those with a brief as observers within NCC working groups;
- serving and retired civil servants from the DfEE who were responsible for curriculum policy-making and for cross-curricular themes in the period 1986–90.

Six serving and ex-civil servants were interviewed. Three serving HMI were also interviewed. Interviews were conducted with two ex-members of the NCC and with one serving officer at the QCA who asked not to be named. Territory can have an influence on the process and success of an interview and respondents were given the choice of time and venue, providing them with a sense of control over the proceedings. Interviews were conducted in an informant's workplace or home. Each interview was tape-recorded and lasted approximately 90 minutes. One informant requested that his comments not be taped but he was happy to pace the interview in such a way as to enable me to take detailed notes.

Interviews were conducted using a semi-structured schedule as a means of developing 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1984; Gewirtz & Ozga, 1994). Interviews were conducted between February 1994 and May 1997, 4–6 years after the events they describe. This had implications for the coherent remembering of events by respondents (Edwards & Potter, 1992). The possibility of partial remembering was countered by the reconstruction of events about which informants were questioned. I was able to provide factual information in the form of documentary evidence written by informants or by their colleagues and to remind them of particular issues, problems and events. Several interviewees had retained their own documentation to which they referred during interview.

Permission was requested from informants to quote them directly; they were asked to identify any section of their interview which they felt they did not wish to be used or which they would prefer to be quoted as 'private information'. Only a small selection of the interviews conducted appears in this article; some interviews do not appear at all.

Although issues relating to access and ethics are complicated, they are not as complex as those relating to the interpretation and use of data generated in interviews. At the heart of this process lies the question of 'the truth problem' (Kogan, 1994) and its relationship to power and knowledge. Interviews provide accounts and truth claims but not truth; these accounts are not 'Verbatim and literal, unproblematic, accurate and without distortion' (Edwards & Potter, 1992). Wetherell & Potter (1992) suggest that individuals will use appropriate forms of language to construct an account which shows them in a good light or as a way of morally and ethically justifying their actions. Edwards & Potter examined how politicians constructed their accounts and the ways in which they attempted to make them credible. Respondents were engaged in the 'Operation of interest management, fact construction and accountability' (Edwards & Potter, 1992, p. 7). Interviewing is a political process because interviewer and respondent create their own texts in the joint production of meaning (Cookson, 1994; Fitz & Halpin, 1994). This does not cast doubt upon the validity of conducting interviews, because they are important within the context of Gewirtz & Ozga's (1994) statement that power originates somewhere. As Kogan has reflected, 'We can only do our best' (Kogan, 1994, p. 77).

The position I felt most comfortable with corresponded to that described by Goodson & Mangan as ' "bearing witness" to acts of social construction and reconstruction' (1996, p. 50). While I was anxious that informants did not deliberately try to mislead, and I have no evidence that this occurred, I did not consider that not identifying a definitive or truthful account limited the research. Rather, I took the stance of recognising that for my informants, there would be different points of entry and departure along a plausibility–implausibility continuum. This opened up possibilities for analysis and enabled me to address ideological and political questions about how curriculum was constructed. It meant recognising that there existed conflicting versions of the 'truth' constructed by groups and individuals and that understanding why individuals supported alternative versions and accounts was as important as what they said (Potter & Wetherell, 1987).

With reservations about truthful accounts noted, the reliability of the interview material was checked using respondent validation (Ball, 1984; Woods, 1986). At the completion of each interview, subjects were asked whether they had anything they wished to add or if they wished to discuss an issue they thought significant which had not been raised. Each interview was transcribed and a copy sent to the respondent for comment. Respondents were encouraged to write on their transcripts. Returned transcripts were marked by ticks, double ticks for emphasis, crosses, comments in the margins, sometimes detailed, sometimes single words such as, for example, 'Yes', 'No', 'This is how I remember it'. This enabled the critical re-examination of my preliminary analysis and provided further information, corroboration and depth to descriptions and opinions.

Shaping the Whole Curriculum

Much of what has been written about the construction of the whole curriculum has focused upon what has been interpreted as DES inefficiency and miscalculation in failing to integrate cross-curricular issues and themes into the curriculum model being devel-

oped. In this section, I analyse three examples of this interpretation before subjecting to them to critical review.

First, despite attempts to claim curriculum radicalism and originality (Baker, 1993), *The National Curriculum 5–16: a consultation document*, (DES, 1987a) was poorly received and widely attacked as being representative of a curriculum better at home in the late nineteenth century rather than the late twentieth century. The curriculum model presented was locked into socio-historical precedent, traditional and academic; the continuity with earlier curriculum models is striking. The *Times Educational Supplement* complained that 'The 8–10 subject timetable which the discussion paper draws upon has as academic a look to it as anything Sir Robert Morant could have dreamed up' (*TES*, 31 July 1987) and Goodson has pointed out the structural similarities between the 1988 National Curriculum and the 1904 Secondary Regulations (Goodson, 1988).

The document disregarded important areas of human experience; absent was consideration of a focus upon the humanities, social studies and environmental studies (summarised in Haviland, 1988). Subject areas such as sociology, politics and economics were ignored. Writing in 1987, Lawton complained that:

> Virtually all the enlightened views on curriculum planning are now agreed that subjects should be regarded as important only if they help to reach other objectives … All this is ignored in the Government's consultation document: no justification is put forward for the selection of the foundation subjects; no arguments put forward to give priority to the core subjects; no attempts made to relate subjects to wider objectives. (Lawton, 1987, p. 7)

In their submission, the Confederation of British Industry wrote:

> The document does not contain any specific reference relating to economic awareness and understanding, or careers education. It is important that the national curriculum allows sufficient scope for adequate coverage of aspects of the educational experience outside the narrow confines of the traditional individual subject disciplines. (quoted in Haviland, 1988, pp. 29–30)

The School Curriculum Development Committee (SCDC) complained that:

> There has been recognition in recent years that traditional subjects alone are not an adequate vehicle for conveying the knowledge, concepts, skills and attitudes required by pupils in the last years of the twentieth century and the early years of the twenty-first. The consequence of specifying the National Curriculum in subjects rather than in the now familiar areas of learning and experience or in terms of broad curriculum aims are a recurrent theme of this SCDC response. (SCDC, 1987b, p. 1)

Keith Joseph, Secretary of State for Education, in an interview with Chitty conducted at the time, complained, 'I am worried about the National Curriculum. It will be too academic and squeeze out vocational subjects' (quoted in Ribbins & Sherratt, 1997, p. 85).

The construction of a subject-based curriculum seemed to suggest that the policy battle had been won by supporters of tradition rather than the advocates of a utilitarian and pedagogic tradition (Hargreaves & Reynolds, 1989; Quicke, 1988). Johnson (1991), in *Education Limited: schooling and training and the New Right since 1979*, uses the phrase 'an astonishing silence' to describe the claimed absence of a focus upon multicultural education, social studies, personal and social education, political education and cross-curricular themes within the framework for the National Curriculum, which he

claims cut out a 'whole generation of innovations' (1991, p. 71). For Johnson, their rejection reflected the National Curriculum's origins as a neo-Conservative response to discredited educational practices predicated upon what Apple has called a 'sense of loss' (Apple, 1993, pp. 7–8). For Johnson, the National Curriculum structure was a deliberate and calculated attempt to resurrect and reinforce the hegemonic aims of a traditional curriculum; as such, it was a curriculum which disappointed Conservative 'modernisers' who supported the construction of a curriculum model which sought to establish a closer link between education and the economy.

Hatcher & Troyna (1994) have also argued that the Government's intention was to reassert and reinforce the traditional subject-based curriculum. In a critical essay which explores Ball's (1990) post-structuralist account of policy sociology, Hatcher & Troyna claim that Ball seriously underestimates the coercive structural powers of the state. They are critical of Ball's claim that one of the 'unintended' consequences of the National Curriculum was the reinforcement of traditional subject boundaries. On the contrary, argue Hatcher & Troyna, the Government's intention was 'clearly towards reinforcing subject boundaries' (1994, p. 165).

Second, in chair of the NCC, Duncan Graham's vitriolic account of his battles with DES civil servants, entertainingly described in *A Lesson for Us All* (Graham with Tytler, 1993), Graham portrays his relationships with civil servants as a 'distracting and debilitating power struggle' (p. 22). His analysis of the NCC's relationship with the DES focuses upon conflict threatening the council's independence and upon what he saw as the DES's determination to 'run the curriculum themselves' (p. 12). Graham's analysis casts the DES in the role of antagonist seeking to subvert the work of the NCC and wanting it to abandon work on whole curriculum issues in pursuit of its bureaucratic status and territory.

According to Graham, the curriculum sought by DES officials was narrow and focused upon a core curriculum (Graham, 1992). Graham writes:

> All the evidence suggests that they [the DES] did not want the National Curriculum Council because they wanted to run the curriculum themselves with some help from what would effectively become a subordinate HMI. Baker made it clear to me on more than one occasion that the politicians had to fight the Civil Service to create the NCC and SEAC. He therefore put me on my guard. (Graham with Tytler, 1993, p. 12)

Baker has since written, 'Duncan fell foul of officials in the Department of Education who spent a lot of their time trying to second-guess the work of the NCC' (Baker, 1993, p. 198). Graham is scathing in his criticism of civil servants and what he interpreted as their attempts, sometimes subtle, sometimes spiteful, to control the management *and* content of the curriculum against the wishes of the NCC and Baker (Graham with Tytler, 1993). According to Graham, the DES pursued its bureaucratic objectives with vigour. DES officials served on NCC committees and senior officials attended meetings of the whole council. Although civil servants were recorded as observers at meetings, Graham writes 'they were far more than that' (Graham with Tytler, 1993, p. 15) and were powerfully proactive in attempting to dominate the workings of the NCC in two ways. First, Graham claims that civil servants vetted documents prior to them being seen by ministers and attempted to obstruct whole-curriculum issues in a manner which prompted a major crisis in their relationship with the NCC.

> The attempts to make sure that the consultation documents said exactly what the civil servants wanted them to say as distinct from what the NCC wanted

> them to say in aggregate made the advice to NCC little more than a set of instructions. Sometimes the council knuckled under and sometimes it did not. More often than not it did. (Graham with Tytler, 1993, p. 16)

Graham also claims that the DES, in protecting its status and territory, tightly controlled the NCC's budget 'quite cynically to keep the council in its place: the council should tell them [the DES] what it wanted to do and then they would say whether there was any money available' (Graham with Tytler, 1993, p. 16).

In April 1989, Graham reported the NCC's position on cross-curricular issues to Baker in an interim report which placed the whole curriculum within the context of Section 1 of the 1988 Education Act (NCC, 1989a). The report defined cross-curricular themes as 'aspects of learning and teaching which permeate all or most elements of the curriculum' (NCC, 1989b, p. 1) and which played an important role in satisfying Section 1. The Interim Report recommended that 'the Secretary of State's National Curriculum Subject Working Groups be requested to take account of the NCC's work in mapping cross-curricular themes' (NCC, 1989a, p. 10).

The covering letter announced the NCC's intention to publish guidance on cross-curricular themes, the whole curriculum and its management designed to provide local education authorities (LEAs) and teachers with advice on how to implement the National Curriculum (1988b). The NCC's decision to publish guidance on cross-curricular themes was greeted with anxiety inside the DES. In October 1989, the *TES* reported that:

> A tense battle involving civil servants and top officials of the National Curriculum Council was fought earlier this year over a report which should have played a key role in the introduction of the new curriculum. Mr Kenneth Baker, the Education Secretary, is understood to have liked the report but was prevailed on by civil servants not to publish it because it would have undermined the policy of seeing the national curriculum as consisting of 10 foundation subjects … Tight-lipped NCC officials present at the launch of the annual report this week would only say that the delay was a technicality and that publication was now imminent. The council sees this as a crucial victory over its right to publish without interference from civil servants. Senior DES officials had demanded that the council should not be allowed to publish reports unless they were cleared by civil servants. (*TES*, 29 October 1989, p. 4)

This 'tense battle' had taken place in June and July of 1989 when according to Graham 'the roof fell in' (Graham with Tytler, 1993, p. 19). An analysis of these events illustrates the manner in which bureaucratic control over constructing the curriculum became an issue of intense conflict.

Following the publication of the Interim Report in April 1989, Graham received a letter from the DES, signed by Baker (in *A Lesson for Us All* Graham claims that Baker wrote it), stating that the NCC could not continue work which did not have the approval of the Secretary of State and that there was no funding for work on whole-curriculum issues, which was to be suspended. 'It was doubted whether the Secretary of State would sanction money on anything that was not directly connected with the introduction of the ten subjects' (Graham with Tytler, 1993, p. 17).

A further letter was sent on 8 June 1989 in which the DES civil servant responsible for curriculum wrote to Graham, 'Detailed guidance on particular cross-curricular themes now would, I believe, confuse schools rather than help them' (Private Information). Reaction within the NCC was one of frustration and annoyance; these views

were seen as a product of 'a fundamental misunderstanding of what whole curriculum and cross-curriculum issues are. They are seen by the Department as an addition or even a distraction from the national curriculum' (Private Information).

Graham discussed with Baker the letter he had signed when the two met privately on 16 June 1989 in North Wales (Graham with Tytler, 1993). In *A Lesson for Us All* Graham described this meeting:

> We started with the letter and its implications. He looked at it and could not believe that he had signed it … We then discussed whether he really wanted the publicity that would follow the sudden cancellation of the working groups [the cross-curricular working groups]. He asked why I thought the civil servants had advised him so strongly and accepted that he had been persuaded by the argument that work of this nature could prove to be a distraction. He accepted … that he trusted me to ensure that if the working groups continued, the main thrust of the council's work would continue to be the introduction of the national curriculum. (Graham with Tytler, 1993, p. 21)

Graham claims that the NCC fought what he described as DES interference and in October 1989 published *The National Curriculum and the Whole Curriculum Planning: preliminary guidance* (NCC, 1989b) and in March 1990, *Curriculum Guidance 3: the whole curriculum.* In an article in the *TES*, Graham concludes that the NCC's 'defence' of the whole curriculum and the publication of *Curriculum Guidance 3* was its 'finest hour. It fought resolutely for the whole curriculum and won' (*TES*, 3 January 1992, p. 10).

Third, Maw (1993) claims that the 'neglect' of whole-curriculum issues in the construction of the curriculum was a mistake by DES officials who had been 'deficient in conceptualisation of the structure of the National Curriculum' (1993, p. 63). For Maw, the DES was a group with an established power base who originated the concept of a subject-based national curriculum. Maw writes:

> Arguably, it was not initially envisaged that the NCC's function of keeping all aspects of the curriculum … under review would require it to even entertain a concept of the 'whole curriculum'. The consultation document … certainly presents the curriculum as a list of subjects. (1993, p. 62)

Maw quotes a DES civil servant's observation that the omission of cross-curricular reference in *The National Curriculum 5–16* was an 'oversight' (Ball, 1990, p. 112), a failure on the part of Schools Branch 3 inside the DES to appreciate the popularity of cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning. On reflection, 'it might have been worth Schools Three's while to put in an additional paragraph or two' (Ball, 1990, p. 112). Maw concludes that Section 1 of the 1988 Education Reform Act, which called for a broad and balanced curriculum entitlement, was included to counter criticisms that the *National Curriculum 5–16* had failed to meet the concerns of Conservative modernisers and employers. Maw writes:

> At this stage one can only speculate that the reintroduction of a notion of 'the whole curriculum' was a response to professional pressure asserting that a list of subjects was an inadequate conceptualisation of the curriculum. (1993, p. 62).

The DES is accused of backtracking on whole curriculum issues and the NCC of engaging in a 'sleight of hand' by including references to the whole curriculum in its documentation.

In summary, the 'thesis' is that:

- the National Curriculum was a calculated attempt to deliberately ignore discredited educational practices, particularly whole curriculum issues and themes, and to restore the hegemonic aims of a traditional curriculum through the reinforcement of subject boundaries;
- the DES deliberately obstructed the development of whole-curriculum issues within the NCC in pursuit of bureaucratic objectives; and
- the marginalisation of whole-curriculum issues was the product of DES miscalculation.

This is a powerful set of arguments which I now subject to some critical review by drawing these threads together through an 'anti-thesis', based upon exploring the views of civil servants and NCC officers who were engaged in constructing a whole-curriculum model.

'An Astonishing Silence?'

It is possible to argue from the chronology of curriculum policy-making a continuity of thought and action in support of whole-curriculum issues, from *Better Schools* (DES, 1985), and its antecedents such as *Education in Schools* (DES, 1977), to *The National Curriculum 5–16* (DES, 1987a), suggesting that the concept of the DES ignoring whole-curriculum issues needs rethinking. For example, *Better Schools* was strongly utilitarian in focusing upon curriculum relevance, enterprise and market forces. Paragraph 9 states, 'Education at school should promote enterprise and adaptability in order to increase young people's chance of finding employment or creating it for themselves and others' (DES, 1985, p. para. 9). Paragraph 46 argues that 'It is vital that schools should always remember that preparation for working life is one of their principal functions … The balance within the curriculum and the emphasis in teaching it now needs to alter accordingly' (DES, 1985, p. para. 46) Paragraph 49 states:

> The government believes that all pupils should follow a *broad, balanced* and suitably *differentiated* programme until age 16; that such a programme should contain a strong element which relates to the technological aspects of working life; … All the elements of a broad 5–16 curriculum are vocational in the sense that they encourage qualities, attitudes, knowledge, understanding and competencies which are the necessary foundation for employment. (DES, 1985, para. 49; added italics)

In arguing that 'Education and training cannot always be distinguished … they are complementary' (DES, 1985, p. 25), *Better Schools* challenged the dominance of the academic, subject-based curriculum. Paragraph 53 claims that the curriculum is described in subject terms for the sake of convenience and that 'It is not in dispute that the purposes of education at school go beyond learning the traditional subjects' (DES, 1985, para. 53). The paragraph goes further in claiming that 'Subjects themselves change and develop. Moreover subject boundaries are not rigid and need to be approached flexibly' (DES, 1985, para. 53).

The National Curriculum 5–16 did not ignore whole-curriculum issues; there is a direct line of descent from *Better Schools.* Paragraph 18 claimed, 'there are a number of subjects or themes … which can be taught through other subjects … It is proposed that such subjects or themes should be taught through the foundation subjects' (DES, 1987

a, p. 8). Paragraph 27 places the determination of curriculum structure in the hands of schools in order to allow 'curriculum development programmes such as the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI), to build upon and to take forward their objectives' (DES, 1987a, p. 11). Paragraph 22 says, 'The description of the national curriculum in terms of foundation subjects is *not* a description of how the school day should be organised and the curriculum delivered' (DES, 1987a, p. 9; author italics).

Annex A of *The National Curriculum 5–16* presents the terms of reference for the subject working groups, asking that the working parties for mathematics and science should indicate how much curriculum time ought to be devoted to these subjects, including 'the teaching of cross-curricular themes to which mathematics, and science can contribute' (DES, 1987a, Annex A, para 3). There was also a need for attainment targets and programmes of study to 'reflect cross-curricular themes' (DES, 1987a, Annex, para. 3).

The introduction of technology into the National Curriculum framework represented a distinctive aspect of the new curriculum model designed to encourage whole curriculum issues. Duncan Graham saw it as 'quite the most revolutionary thing in what otherwise was a traditional ten-subject curriculum.' (Graham with Tytler, 1993, p. 53), 'a Trojan horse which could throw the curriculum wide open and challenge traditional subject barriers' (1993, p. 55). Technology's origins grew from a belief among a group of civil servants that it represented a curriculum area which might be colonised by projects which emphasised the development of cross-curricular learning. It was Civil Servants A's view that there was:

> a feeling that … CDT ought to be part of the general education of all pupils up to 16 and that the only way you were going to get this into schools was through some kind of central imposition. That was a compliment to the TVEI aspect because by this time a great number of people in the DES had come on board with TVEI and saw it as being a useful development.

Within 6 weeks of the publication of *The National Curriculum 5–16*, Kenneth Baker and Angela Rumbold were making speeches supporting the idea of the whole curriculum. At the University of Manchester on 17 September 1987, Baker challenged the criticism that a subject-based curriculum would marginalise a thematic or cross-curricular approach. Baker said, 'Let me say clearly that we are not trying to suppress project work or eliminate themes … I do, I assure you, understand the importance of teaching traditional subjects across the curriculum in varied and imaginative ways' (DES, 1987b, para. 16).

One week later, in a speech to the School Curriculum Development Committee, Rumbold reinforced this view: 'We make no claim that the "national curriculum" … equals the *whole curriculum. We are very clear that it does not* … Our policy on the whole curriculum continues to be that which has been hammered out over the last ten years or so in good professional debate, and recorded in *Better Schools*, various policy statements and HMI documents' (DES, 1987c, p. 6); (author italics).

Although it was criticised for having failed to acknowledge the importance of cross-curricular and whole-curriculum issues, *The National Curriculum 5–16* was not a significant departure from the underlying philosophy of *Better Schools.*. I interpret unexplained ambiguities, silences and semi-silences in the document over whole-curriculum issues as products of the ideological and political constraints within which it was constructed. *The National Curriculum 5–16* was a political and ideological construct linked inextricably to precedent, practice and the motives and intentions of powerful groups. The drafting of *The National Curriculum 5–16* took place within a highly

charged political context and its production became a site of conflict between the curriculum endorsed by Baker and the DES and that supported by Thatcher, her policy advisers and right-wing pressure groups.

The consultation document was discussed and drafted in the period January 1987–July 1987 against a background of public and private activity by neo-Conservative pressure groups. The Hillgate Group's *Whose Schools: a radical manifesto*?, *The Reform of British Education* and the Centre for Policy Studies (CPS) paper, *A Common Core*, were all published between January and April 1987, 3–6 months before the publication of the consultation document. In their demands for a minimalist National Curriculum focusing upon mathematics, English and science, the CPS was critical of Baker's approach to the National Curriculum. In an interview with Ribbins, Baker recalls, 'After the 1987 election I was open to a lot of pressure from pressure groups. I had to fight my corner' (Ribbins & Sherratt, 1997, p. 113). The idea that what appears to be a neglect of cross-curricular themes in the document was an oversight by an inefficient DES ignores the influence of extra-parliamentary pressure groups and of a Thatcherite clique within the Cabinet and the No. 10 Policy Unit.

It is difficult to associate DES motives and intentions with a single ideology and it is important to distinguish between officials functioning at different levels of power and responsibility. This is a pitfall Graham fails to avoid. There is no evidence that the DES was attempting to undermine the *educational* principles of a whole curriculum. As far as whole-curriculum issues were concerned, it was Civil Servant B's view that:

> The DES certainly did not take the view that those sorts of things should not be in the curriculum. I think one of the beneficial things that came out of consultation on the Consultative Document was a much better appreciation of how we might put in the mortar between the bricks, which is how we tended to describe it … The message that he [Ken Baker] was getting from us as policy advisers and HMI was you should not ignore this, this is important … and he fully accepted that … It wasn't a political thing. There was quite widespread acceptance in the DES of that, there was a whole division devoted to working up curricular interests in that area, on making sure that they got built into syllabuses … The idea that it was just an academic ivory tower is just outdated. (Civil Servant B).

While NCC Officer 1 recognised that the DES was concerned, wrongly in his view, that focusing upon whole-curriculum issues might damage the introduction of the National Curriculum, he recalls no antagonism towards the principles of whole-curriculum work. In discussing the role of the DES and HMI observers at the meetings of the Interim Whole Curriculum Committee, he remembers:

> Those two were always extremely supportive and in fact all of the HMI and DfEE people working at that level were totally supportive. They didn't bring any baggage with them, it was *fait accompli*, That committee was up and running, it had a brief and they were there to go along with it, they didn't try to spike it. (NCC Officer 1)

NCC Officer 1 was of the opinion that senior DES civil servants were not opposed to whole-curriculum issues. In his view, Nick Stuart, who attended council meetings 'always had some sniping questions but I must confess that I got the feeling that in his heart of hearts he was very supportive of what we were doing.' (NCC Officer 1).

The context within which the DES justified its unease about the whole curriculum was bureaucratic and based upon its aim of a speedy and unproblematic introduction of a

subject-based National Curriculum. Baker wanted curriculum documentation for each subject ready for consultation by the end of 1989 (Baker, 1993). This objective was transmitted to council members by Nick Stuart, a Deputy Secretary at the DES who was responsible for drafting the Education Reform Act (Lawrence, 1992; Taylor, 1995; Ribbins & Sherratt, 1997).

While DES civil servants may possess alternative and competing educational values, they have one thing in common, a desire to see the effective management of the education service. Rather than expressing an ideological antipathy towards whole-curriculum issues, the stance of some senior officials in the DES is more accurately interpreted as a response to a concern over the control, management and efficiency of the system. It was Civil Servant C's view that:

> We were not there to make educational decisions, we were there to listen to advice from a number of different quarters, work out the balance of advantage and move forward. So I don't think that the Department has ever actually advanced itself, has ever actually taken up a curricular position on any topic. It has been represented as doing so, inevitably, because of the way things happened but I don't think it actually has. I don't think that there was any view anywhere that we had our own view on what the content should be, we are not educators and we were the first people to say that. Our role was in planning, structure and administration, it's not a content role. We were certainly there to fight for the inclusion of particular areas of work but not to say what that should comprise. I couldn't have constructed a curriculum guidance to save my life. [laugh] Civil Servant C)

Conflict over the whole curriculum focused upon what DES civil servants considered to be the inaccurate definition of their role as curriculum developers held by the NCC. Civil Servant B recalls:

> If I am honest there was a little bit of defensive behaviour in terms of we've done all the work on the curriculum subjects with the curriculum subject working groups, we were pretty close to ministers and knowing what they were coming up with, 'we' here includes HMI. When the NCC started developing its own view of the world, yes, we did feel, hang on, you don't know the background on this. But it wasn't defensive in terms of we are in opposition or the NCC have the ear of Margaret Thatcher and we haven't or anything like that because the NCC were way out from Margaret Thatcher. In fact one of our worries was that it would unpick a good deal of the ground that we'd won. (Civil Servant B)

From an NCC perspective, NCC Officer 2 recalls that there was an:

> element of institutional rivalry in that this was an initiative from NCC, they were proposing to send these publications out to schools. NCC had a statutory remit to disseminate information on the curriculum to schools. Duncan Graham felt that if it wished to do so NCC should be able to send materials to schools without necessarily getting the consent of ministers or the Department as an independent statutory body. When the department began to query in the way that I've mentioned it became a bit of a battle over the degree of autonomy of the NCC as a statutory body. (NCC Officer 2)

This explanation of the relationship between the NCC and the DES illustrates bureaucratic conflict rather than tensions over curriculum content. Tensions surfaced in

late 1988, by which time it was acknowledged that overload was proving a major problem for schools (*TES*, 25 November 1988). Civil Servant B summarises a view commonly held by each civil servant interviewed:

> By that time we were becoming very aware, late '88, well into '89, of dangers of curriculum overload … We were having a battle on trying to reduce the overload. The NCC then comes in and says well we must have whole curriculum and cross-curricular themes, we must build those in and started pushing a lot of documentation to teachers saying you must do this as well. Frankly we were getting screams back from the schools saying we simply can't manage this. There we were trying to establish the main subjects and get those put in place and teachers didn't know what they were supposed to be doing, what they were supposed to be following. (Civil Servant B)

The 8 June 1989 letter to the NCC was not, in Civil Servant A's view, an attack on the principles of whole-curriculum issues. 'The key word there was detailed, that was what the row was about … they've [teachers] got enough on their plates and it needs to be integrated with what is coming out of the curriculum working groups'. It was a pressure recognised within the NCC. NCC Officer 2 remembered that:

> The DfEE began to have doubts about whether it was sensible to put this swathe of publications out, whether it was wise to put them out at that point given that there were growing concerns with the National Curriculum being overloaded and was it strategically sensible to put out this swathe of additional publications at the same time. They were not mandatory but they were going out from NCC, a body which was seen as a fount of instructions about what you had to do and it was going out automatically in quantity to all schools … some schools did have trouble in distinguishing between cross-curricular publications and the National Curriculum documents. (NCC Officer 2)

Guidance on whole-curriculum issues and the management of the whole curriculum and cross-curricular issues within the framework of National Curriculum subjects was being dispatched to schools before guidance for the planning and teaching of individual subjects. Civil Servant C recalls:

> In some respects they were preceding publications about the National Curriculum subjects and it's terribly difficult to put out authoritative material about something which ought to permeate all aspects of the curriculum when the curriculum documents themselves don't exist.

Conclusion

This account adds a complexity to our understanding of the development of a whole curriculum but I am not suggesting that it provides a definitive account. Nor am I suggesting that we should accept uncritically the views of key participants involved. What is expressed in this article are claims to truth based upon reconstituted rememberings (see earlier). However, what I am suggesting is that generic ideological and political stances do not provide a sophisticated enough framework from which to analyse either the perspectives embraced by policy-makers or their actions.

I also remain to be convinced about the extent and influence of individual and group agency in the construction of curriculum and have doubts about the theoretical and empirical dominance of qualitative studies of resistance and redefinition. Hatcher &

Troyna (1994) have argued that the 'policy cycle' distorts understanding of the policy process, 'especially in the relative powers which it assigns to the central apparatus of the state and to the schools' (1994, p. 156).

While Ball claims that the economic provides a 'backdrop', a context and a set of constraints (1990, p. 14), Hatcher & Troyna argue that the economic is more than a context; it 'intervenes in and shapes the political the social, the cultural, the ideological' (1994, p. 159). I have some sympathy with this view and I am not convinced of Bowe, Ball & Gold's claim that the Education Reform Act was open to 'Novel and creative readings' (Bone & Ball with Gold, 1992, p. 23).

I see merit with Fitz, Halpin & Power's (1994) discussion of the work of Ball and his colleagues where they argue that 'In the contemporary English context … one senses that the recursive possibilities of the policy cycle may be more rhetorical than real' (1994, p. 60), and, in their analysis of grant-maintained schools, that the centre has the capacity 'to create and recreate a framework to optimise the implementation of its policies' (1994, p. 60).

Ball has defended what he calls his pragmatic approach to describing the 'real world' of education policy (Ball, 1994), but in that real world we rarely get a sense of history in his work. In answering his critics Ball admits that:

> What is suggested is that I am arguing that the forcefulness of policy is always subordinate to the interpretation and responses of situated social actors. If that is what my analyses convey, and I accept they might, then I am at fault. Clearly, some people are sometimes required to do things or are positioned in such a way by politics that they have little alternative but to comply (1994, p. 180).

Ball also claims that in their implementation of the National Curriculum teachers were 'reduced to agents of policies which are decided elsewhere' (1990, p. 171). Ball, in acknowledging that problems of capital accumulation provide a major problem and constraint in the workings of powerful groups, also writes that 'The purposes and intentions of political actors are important but they do not provide a sufficient base for the interpretation of policies and policy makers' (Ball, 1994, p. 108). But at that level of analysis, Ball does not take us there, an omission which makes his aim of relating contemporary education policy 'to the ideal of society projected in Thatcherism' (1990, p. 3) difficult to realise.

There is also a danger of seeing particular groups, whether bureaucratic, political or professional, as representing a homogeneous view of curriculum. Organisations such as the DES are not best understood as homogeneous groups whose members share common interests, values and identities. Instead they ought to be seen as a shifting amalgam of groups, subgroups and factions who act in support of differing missions and traditions. We ought to be cautious about holding too closely to the view that the curriculum constructed by civil servants and politicians reflects an uncritical acceptance of an academic and subject-based tradition supported by restorationists. I see more merit in the argument that the DES were bureaucratically seeking to manage the implementation of the National Curriculum and the whole curriculum within a particular ideological and political context.

Writing about DES attitudes towards the curriculum in the 1970s, Chitty (1988, p. 329) wrote, 'the desire to exert direct influence over the curriculum was more important than the precise nature of its form and content'. I suggest that Chitty's analysis

reflects DES approaches to the whole curriculum; the controversy over the whole curriculum stemmed not from educational doubts but from bureaucratic concerns.

The debate over the whole curriculum is representative of a conflict over the strategy of curriculum implementation. The political objective for the DES was to get teachers to accept, understand and implement a National Curriculum free from the distraction and competition provided by the whole curriculum. The political decision was that publishing guidance on whole-curriculum issues during 1989 was unhelpful; that is not the same as arguing that the DES was against the principles of whole-curriculum initiatives.

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