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Sociology, Curriculum Studies and Professional Knowledge: New Perspectives on the Works of Michael Young edited by David Guile, David Lambert and Michael J. Reiss, London, Routledge, 2018, 292, £88, ISBN: 9781138675834

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Abstract

Curricula have been the subject of sociological consideration for some time. In the UK, this interest has recently burgeoned, driven in part by policy makers such as the Scottish and Welsh Governments who have, to greater and lesser extents, reformed their school curricula. In England specifically, the educational inspectorate, OFTSED, has also challenged teachers and school leaders to consider the intent, implementation and evaluation of their curricula. Of course, the annual 'PISA' rankings also prompt consideration of curricula across international contexts. Against this backdrop, Guile's, Lambert's and Reiss's book is a welcome text that adds insight on the sociology of education, curriculum studies, and professional knowledge. To do so, the book uses the work of Michael Young as a basis for 20 chapters by individual authors. This approach is warranted because Young has been a key figure in the sociology of education since the 1970's when he vigorously argued for social constructivist approaches to education. More recently, he has adopted a social realist perspective and argues for greater appreciation of knowledge to empower individuals with the '*power* to do something' in their lives. The book is a scholarly response to Young's arguments, and it provides a welcome consideration of *how and why* curricula may be designed and implemented to benefit learners. That said, the text is neither an introduction to Young's work, nor a practical manual on how to design curricula. Rather, it is a well-edited collection of chapters, authored by a gamut of senior scholars, who critically challenge and extend Young's research. Indeed, each chapter provides insights that are valuable for those who wish to theorise education, curricula and professional knowledge from sociological perspectives. Accordingly, I recommend the text to postgraduate students and academics who seek, not only to prescribe education, curricula and knowledge, but to understand it from varied theoretical perspectives.

Keywords: Sociology of education, curriculum, professional knowledge, Michael Young, powerful knowledge

'Sociology, Curriculum Studies and Professional Knowledge: New Perspectives on the Works of Michael Young' is a substantial and scholarly tome that analyses the contributions that Young's work has made to educational research over the past four decades. The book is comprised of 20 chapters, authored by 23 senior academics whose experience spans UK and/or international (e.g. China, South Africa, US) education systems. In the first 18 of these chapters, the authors critically consider Young's work and suggest directions for the future of educational research and policy. The authors do this by utilising a range of theoretical frameworks and providing nuanced insights in a challenging yet respectful manner. This approach is also illustrated in Chapter 19, which is authored by Michael Young himself. Within this chapter, Young responds to the critiques made in the preceding ones. He does so with a generous spirit as he clarifies arguments around, for example, the notion that knowledge may provide an individual with power over someone, but also the "power to do something" (p. 271). He also asserts that knowledge may often be restricted but does not have to be exclusive, arguing that powerful knowledge can be emancipatory and accessible to all. Furthermore, for those who seek to use powerful knowledge, Young declares that pedagogy is "always both learner and subject centred" (p. 273). In this way, Young, eschews polarised simplifications in favour of detailed arguments. Indeed, all authors throughout the text provide detailed arguments and these are communicated in a respectful and humble tone. This collegiality between authors is further emphasized in Chapter 20, where Charmian Channon briefly reflects on her long friendship with Michael Young. Thus, the book is an excellent example of scholarly discourse and will be of interest to readers from a variety of education fields including formal schooling, higher education and professional development.

In addition to drawing upon Michael Young's work, a plethora of social theories are

utilised in the text, particularly in the early chapters. For instance, in Chapter 2 Johan Muller draws upon the historical philosophy of both Peter Ramus (1515-1567) and Francis Bacon (1561-1626) to illustrate how education can address grand challenges. Similarly, other authors draw on theorists such as Bernstein (e.g. Kupder and Lauder in Chapter 4), and Durkheim (e.g. Rata in Chapter 5) to substantiate, explain, and critique Young's work. For example, Rata (Chapter 5) responds to Young's ideas on subject-based curriculum by exploring education and democracy. Utilising Durkheim's individual-socialisation concept, she argues for a 'partial loyalty' where education supports individuals to both understand the social contract between groups, but also enables them to "step outside the confines of the social group, objectify its conditions and adopt a critical stance" (p.75). Therefore, the book not only becomes an analysis of Young's own work but is also a gateway to a gamut of educational research. Indeed, the references at the end of each chapter provide a valuable starting point for further literature from philosophical, sociological, pedagogical and political perspectives.

As the book progresses, the range and scope of Michael Young's work becomes apparent. In keeping with the title of the text, chapters that consider curricula follow those that focused on the sociology of education. In Chapter 9, for example, Michael Reiss explores the relationship between 'scientific' and 'everyday' knowledge. In doing so, he compares Young's social realist propagation of 'powerful knowledge' with John White's advocacy for curricula situated in the 'lived experiences' of learners. Like many other chapter authors, Reiss provides a coherent argument that starts by identifying the similarities between the two positions. As the chapter progresses, Reiss argues that Young's 'powerful knowledge' concept is a useful starting point to enrich curriculum but suggests it is most effective when knowledge is linked to the daily lives

of individuals. For Reiss, there is a motivational and, in some subjects, an epistemic rationale for connecting knowledge to the learner's experiences. In Chapter 10, David Lambert provides an example of how teachers may do this using geography curricula. He firstly challenges teachers to be curriculum 'makers' rather than 'takers' by engaging with academic knowledge at the forefront of their discipline. He then urges teachers to connect disciplinary knowledge to students' lives, issues and spaces. In doing so, he argues that knowledge can be powerful because it enables learners to do something actionable (e.g. a geographical understanding of rivers may enable local flood prevention action). Thus, Lambert connects teachers with subject disciplines, curriculum with pedagogy, and knowledge with relationships. As such, taken together, chapter 9 and 10 are illustrations of how a critical consideration of Young's work prompts nuanced understandings of education. This theme continues in later chapters that explore Young's work in the context of vocational education (Chapters 14-18), and these chapters may be particularly relevant to those (practitioners) working in areas such as physical education teacher education, coach education and personal training. In particular, in Chapter 17, Wheelahan rails against the marketization and fragmentation of vocational education. She challenges educators to move away from competency-based assessment that decontextualize and reduce theoretical knowledge to 'bite-sized', industry-focused learning outcomes. Instead, she encourages researchers and educators to work with institutions to ensure that learners have access to the in-depth disciplinary knowledge needed for their occupations but also to participate (meaningfully) in broader society.

Notwithstanding the evident strengths of this book, it must be made clear that it is not the easiest introduction to Young's work. As such, *Sociology, Curriculum Studies and Professional Knowledge: New Perspectives on the Works of Michael Young* is perhaps

most relevant to postgraduate students and academics. Indeed, although key concepts from Young's work are discussed throughout, the book does not begin with a distinct introduction to his research. That is to say that, fundamental concepts such as, 'powerful knowledge', 'knowledge of the powerful', 'Future 1, 2, and 3 curricula' are not described through neat sections in the early chapters. Similarly, Young's epistemic displacement from social constructivism in his earlier work to social realism in more recent times is not the subject of a dedicated chapter – though it is discussed throughout – nor is there a distinct section that provides simplified introductions to these paradigmatic positions. Rather, Young's core concepts are gradually presented, explained and analysed throughout the text with connections to educational policy and to Young's own life, for example his time living/working in South Africa. Moreover, the concepts are often critiqued in relation to other theoretical positions. At times, this approach assumes pre-existing knowledge on behalf of the reader, and without such knowledge, this text may be a difficult read. Thus, again, I do not believe that this book is the best starting point for Young's work. Indeed, for a quick introduction, Beck's (2013) analysis of powerful knowledge or Young's (2018) own consideration of the pitfalls and promises of a knowledge-led curriculum may be more appropriate.

With the challenging structure of the book in mind, it is interesting that in Chapter 6 – 'Revisiting the case for Powerful Knowledge'– Jan Derry not only explains the rationale for Young's core concept of powerful knowledge, but also helps to elucidate the structure of the book. With reference to Vygotsky and Durkheim, Derry argues that powerful knowledge involves an in-depth understanding and problematisation of concepts, including the disciplinary and experiential conditions in which knowledge is developed. In the absence of such understanding, Derry asserts that knowledge is liable to be misconstrued, uncritically applied in different domains, and come to represent the

‘sacred’ knowledge of the powerful. Derry concludes that failing to help students rigorously problematize how and why knowledge is constructed actually serves “the propagation of ruling ideas” (p. 95). Consistent with these arguments, the text does not present simplified, decontextualized or bounded introductions to Young’s work. Rather, in keeping with Derry’s argument that knowledge is powerful when its origins are understood, each chapter provides dense theoretical, personal and political considerations of the development, impact, limitations and future directions of Young’s work.

With consideration of the significant body of work Young has undertaken within education, it is unsurprising that the book seeks to clarify some of the misconceptions and misappropriations that have come to be associated with it. Specifically, the relationship between Young’s work and UK government policy from 2010 onwards is briefly introduced in Chapter 2 and reappears sporadically throughout. Several authors contrast Young’s social realist approach to knowledge with the ‘knowledge rich’ curriculum implemented in England by the former Minister for Education, Michael Gove. This is a helpful aid for readers because Young’s ‘powerful knowledge’ work is occasionally (and perhaps inappropriately) associated with Gove’s reforms. This confusion arises because, according to Oates (p. 160), Young is associated with an English Baccalaureate originally proposed in 1990, and a ‘knowledge-rich’ version of a Baccalaureate was introduced in 2010 by Gove. Furthermore, Michael Gove’s statement that “every child should have the chance to be introduced to the best that has been thought” (RSA, 2009) has similarities with Young’s Arnoldian influenced aspiration that “all children in their schooling have a right of access to the truth or the best knowledge we have in any field they study” (p. 279). That said, throughout this book, it

is argued that Gove's reforms have been influenced more by the work of E.D. Hirsch than Michael Young. Indeed, it is suggested that knowledge-rich curricula are superficial lists that reflect the 'knowledge of the powerful' à la Govian curricula, and this is contrasted with Young's 'powerful knowledge' concept that advocates for deep and contextualised disciplinary teaching.

Personally, I am pleased to see authors somewhat distance Young's work from the 'knowledge rich' curricula, standardised high stakes testing, and performative assessments of teachers that, for me, have characterised the UK Government's education policies since 2010. Theoretically, Dewey, Freire and Noddings – and their associated concepts such as growth, relationships, and emancipation through dialogue – have influenced my thinking around education. Thus, it is perhaps not surprising that I would appreciate critiques of current and previous UK government policies. That said, this does not mean that I accept or reject all of Young's arguments or even all of those of the other authors in the text. The discussions are nonetheless helpful because unlike much educational discourse (e.g. on social media) they eschew polarised, definitive and oversimplified arguments. Indeed, as highlighted above, the text is predominantly defined by nuanced insights on Young's research, delivered in a language that is both respectful of Young as an individual and constructively critical about his positions. As such, the text provides a thorough and insightful consideration of education, knowledge and pedagogy that deals directly with learners and their emancipation. That said, readers of this journal should note that sport, physical education (PE), physical activity and health contexts are absent from the text; although this is not to say that the text is irrelevant to those interested in those areas. On the contrary, the book raises many questions for researchers in this field to address. For example:

1. What counts as powerful knowledge in PE and sport?
2. What 'power to do' does knowledge in PE and sport provide for individuals?
3. Does the knowledge of the powerful dominate teaching and coaching practice within PE and sport?
4. How can institutions such as universities, industry, and schools collaborate to support rich and in-depth curricula in PE and sport?
5. How can interdisciplinary connections be made between knowledge in PE and sport?
6. Are PE teachers and coaches supported to 'make' knowledge rich curricula?
7. Do we, as researchers and teachers, appreciate the disciplinary knowledge of our field, or are we too quick to import knowledge and pedagogy from other disciplines?

These questions are certainly of interest to those involved in curriculum construction such as PE teachers, coaches, coach educators etc. Indeed, across wider education contexts, the notion of curriculum has had renewed interest and this book illustrates, that curriculum studies remains a vibrantly contested area with much to gain from sociological, philosophical and pedagogical research. Thus, this text is a particularly valuable contribution at a time when education systems such as those in Wales and Scotland are being formally reconstructed. Further, in order to avoid an oversimplification or misrepresentation of Michael Young's work, Guile, Lambert and Reiss provide a deep, theoretically informed, and nuanced contemplation of his ideas. Such work has much to offer those willing to eschew polarised simplifications and critically examine how curricula, knowledge, and education can empower individuals.

Accordingly, I consider the book worthy of a place on university reading lists and I recommend it to post-graduate students, academics and teaching colleagues. Indeed, the text ultimately prompts readers to ask the question – do our learners have access to the best of the knowledge in our field? Such consideration holds much promise for all involved in education.

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