Mapping Curriculum and Pedagogy

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I can no longer remember when I first encountered Jean Anyon's work. It was probably early in my career at Teachers College in the mid-1980's. As was true for many sociologists of education of my generation, my doctoral training program saw the sociology of education as primarily a subset of the study of status attainment processes. The key contribution that the field could make, many felt, was to elaborate the role of schooling in the process of intergenerational social mobility. Schooling was viewed as a series of stratified positions differentiated both horizontally and vertically, paralleling the stratification of occupational positions, and much attention was showered on the net association between educational and occupational statuses. William Sewell, David Featherman and Karl Alexander and their colleagues introduced a social-psychological dimension focused on the individual, and James Coleman, Ed McDill and others explored school compositional effects, but these were not, for the most part, fundamental reformulations of a basic model of how schools and schooling worked.

Noticeably absent from the landscape was attention to curriculum and teaching, a notorious blind spot in American sociology of education from Willard Waller onward. With but few exceptions, the substance of what happened in classrooms at the intersection of teacher, learner and subject—so central in the writings of John Dewey and Joseph Schwab—was ignored. Bowles and Gintis flirted with curriculum in their exposition of the correspondence principle as a mechanism for social reproduction, but there was little empirical support beyond Melvin Kohn's monumental work on social class and values, which was much more about work than about schooling. Meanwhile, Basil Bernstein's program of research on class, codes and control at the Institute of Education in London emphasized the relationship between social class and language use; but classification and framing, though extremely important to understanding the nature of knowledge, still skirted the content of what was to be taught and learned. The connections between capitalism and the state, so central to later critiques, were not yet developed.

Jean's work opened up new vistas for me. Her study of the content of U.S. history textbooks used in high schools forced me to engage with the idea that curricular content is not neutral, and is more than just an accumulation of disparate bits of knowledge to be recalled on demand when a student is tested. Instead, she demonstrated, the representations of American history from the Civil War to World War I were one-sided, reflecting the interests and perspectives of dominant groups, and ignoring the contributions of the less powerful to social and economic development. Jean argued that the lack of attention to class relations and

class conflict in these "official" texts stunted the development of a working-class identity and consciousness in the U.S., and altered the potential for resistance to class imposition.

She then cast her critical eye to social class differences in the nature of school knowledge, making deep connections between the nature of social class, inscribed in the features of ownership of capital, authority relations, and the nature of the work process, on the one hand, and the nature of curriculum and pedagogical practice, on the other. It is striking to revisit her distinction between reproductive and nonreproductive knowledge in the era of No Child Left Behind and the Common Core Learning Standards. Much of what is taught in schools today under the guise of raising standards and promoting excellence is reproductive knowledge, both via commission and omission. What is not taught is at least as important to understanding contemporary American schooling as what is part of the manifest curriculum, which has narrowed precipitously over the past two decades. Jean saw this coming, but found little joy in her success at predicting the future.

I owe a great debt to Jean Anyon for pushing me to look more closely at assumptions that I had simply taken for granted. Things were more complicated than I'd realized, and the threads connecting different features of social life and schooling were apparent once she provided a map.

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