SOCIAL FACTORS AND THE CURRICULUM

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The principal influence of social reality on the curriculum is connected with the fact that in the process of education the content of teaching and learning is itself a part of the social experience transferred to the young generation through whom social continuity is maintained. In this sense, social reality is always reflected in a way in the curriculum. At the present time we need to investigate the interrelationships which result. Such an investigation needs to be based mainly on the most important and obvious social changes in the world of today: the scientific-technological revolution, the democratization of the whole of social life and the distinctive demographic phenomena of the school population. In this paper I shall try to discuss briefly these aspects of social influences on the curriculum. The empirical basis of my considerations are the experiences of Czechoslovak schools in recent times.

In the curricular changes of the last decades there is reflected not only contemporary social reality, but very much also the idea of the future. This is not a completely new feature of curricula but in contemporary schools it is stressed more distinctly than ever before. As a result, the curriculum is more and more enriched with sociological, economic, political and other knowledge from the field of the social sciences. This knowledge is included both in the traditional subjects and also in new ones in the curriculum of the secondary school: philosophy, sociology, economics, civics, etc.

During recent times the attitude of the school to political life has also changed. Instead of the isolation of the pre-war school from political life the school has become political. It is preparing pupils for political activity and for responsibility as engaged citizens. This general trend brings to schools not only new subject-matter but also a new kind of activity, having different forms in different countries according to their political structures. Methods of teaching are also changing, relating more to the scientific foundations of what is now being taught.

The development of the curriculum is not the result of a series of simple decisions of a limited group of competent experts. It is a long and complicated process beginning with fundamental discussions about the goals of education and ending with the actual teaching and learning at school. Important roles are played by several distinct social groups in this process.

In Czechoslovakia, during the last years, the following social groups have contributed to the shaping of new curricula in secondary schools: 1) the authorities of state and party, 2) research workers in the field of education, 3) groups of creative workers in the field of culture, 4) teachers in secondary schools, 5) pupils of secondary schools, 6) the consumers of graduates of secondary schools (employers on one side and higher education on the other), 7) the public at large, parents, newspapers, etc.
Through the differentiation and activity of these groups, discussion concerning the secondary school and its curricula in Czechoslovakia has led to attempts to change them. Teachers as a group played a very important role in this process, thus, re-asserting their political power. Positive teachers serve the schools by raising interest in the shaping of schools. However, teacher discussion has been characterised by competition between several different points of view, especially the conservative and the progressive ones (return to the traditional ways or modernisation of curricula and the structure of the school system). Conservative attitudes are often based on a narrowing of the problem of curricula to the problem of teaching and learning in class instead of being able to see the whole social role of the secondary school and its curricula. They appear also to derive in part, in the discussion of the contemporary secondary school, from teacher experience of previous school reforms which were simply imposed without broad discussion with teachers and other social groups. This experience seems to be of more general applicability.

LES FACTEURS SOCIAUX DANS LE PROGRAMME D’ÉTUDES

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Le fait même d’enseigner et celui d’apprendre est une part de l’expérience sociale, qui se manifeste dans le processus d’instruire les jeunes. Dans les récents changements apportés au programme d’études en Tchécoslovaquie, il a été tenu compte du contexte social, non seulement actuel, mais aussi de celui que réserve l’avenir. On a inclus dans le programme les sciences sociales et économiques. Les études destinées à préparer l’élève à des activités politiques ont comblé le fossé qui isolait l’école de la société.