

Book Review – The Curriculum Journal

Knowing History in Schools – Powerful knowledge and the powers of knowledge (edited by Arthur Chapman)

The book examines, from a range of perspectives, what constitutes powerful knowledge in history education. Through addressing wide-ranging questions on what a history curriculum should comprise and how best to develop inquiring historical minds, the book makes a valuable contribution both to the scholarship of history education and to the wider educational literature on epistemology and curriculum studies. It will therefore be of interest to a wide audience.

At the forefront of the discussions over the powers of knowledge are theoretical positions which the authors interrogate and evaluate. Social realist principles, Bernstein's knowledge structures and recontextualising fields, and Young and Muller's Three Futures, are threaded throughout and revisited at various points creating cohesion and enabling different perspectives on history education to be explored in subtle and diverse ways. While the book is collectively strong and logical in the sequencing of chapters, each chapter can be read independently which means it will be of use for researchers and teachers with specific interests.

Chapman's introductory chapter provides a valuable compilation of the critical ideas that have been promulgated in relation to a 'turn' towards knowledge in curriculum with the concept of powerful knowledge at its core. Chapman explains how an 'epistemic approach' to history has been present since the Schools Council's 'History 13-16' Project from 1972 but that Young's theory of powerful knowledge has provided a new impetus for considering what should be taught. His review of the way history education has been conceived through time is a useful overview which links readers to the main scholars in history education and illustrates how the 'knowledge turn' has come about. Chapman also contrasts the concept of powerful knowledge with other alternatives such as constructivist and skills-based approaches and explains the difficulties in pursuing a return to knowledge which avoids being seen as a 'traditional vision' (p. 5) of education.

Alison Kitson's chapter takes a deep dive into what Social Realism offers as a means of negotiating a pathway through competing views about knowledge. She explores the tensions involved in striking a balance between disciplinary and substantive knowledge, and between what are sometimes regarded as 'traditional' approaches and 'progressive' approaches to teaching. The chapter sets out the questions teachers and curriculum designers need to ask when considering what should be taught to enable 'young people to think differently about the world' (p. 48). Joe Smith and Darius Jackson similarly investigate social realist principles arguing that the history teaching community have fractured into two camps – 'traditional social realists' and 'radical social realists'. They contend, for example, that the two forms of social realists see the 'purpose of education (as) manifestly different' (p. 158) and that they hold different views over the role and contribution of the child in coming to understand history. The chapter illustrates the diversity of opinion on what history

education should entail and will challenge readers to think about where they stand on various aspects of the knowledge question.

The complexity of positioning is also shown in Catherine McCrory's chapter which examines the connectivity between *what* to teach and *how* students become knowledgeable about history. She argues that there can be assumptions that powerful knowledge simply exists if astutely selected, without taking enough account of how students' make meaning from the knowledge. McCrory shows how the inferential relations between types of knowledge, and between knowledge and learning activities, has implications for curriculum design and pedagogy.

Building on Bernstein's theories of knowledge, Kenneth Nordgren's engaging chapter looks at how the specialised discipline of history can relate to everyday lived experiences – something he calls a 45-degree discourse falling between Bernstein's horizontal and vertical forms of knowledge. He investigates how powerful knowledge can serve both the intrinsic goals of the subject and broader extrinsic goals, to connect the knowledge of the past with the present.

These theoretically based chapters are complemented by two empirically grounded chapters. In the first Arthur Chapman and Maria Georgiou highlight some of the polarised positions on education such as 'skills versus knowledge' and 'social realism versus constructivism' to argue for a form of *conceptual constructivism* whereby students integrate new knowledge into existing schemata. They contrast students' understandings of *accounts* of history in England and Cyprus and conclude that misconceptions and preconceptions about the discipline of history are prevalent in both countries and this can impede the acquisition of powerful knowledge. In the following chapter Richard Harris reports on research into young people's access to history education and the extent to which a disciplinary knowledge approach is evident. Findings indicate that many students are being denied access to disciplinary history and that the different types of school in England (e.g. Free schools, Academy schools) impact upon students' experiences of history. This chapter should provide food for thought for both history teachers and those with governance responsibilities.

How history teachers see themselves and project views about history education, is the subject of Nick Dennis' chapter. He provides a rare critique of our assumptions as history educators and questions whether we really deliver knowledge that is sophisticated, whether we really are particularly good at curriculum theory and whether or not we really should be anxious about the survival of the subject of history in schools. He also argues against the crystallisation of possibilities in Young and Muller's 'three possible futures' model asserting that they co-exist rather than offer alternative possibilities. Referring to the difficult period of colonisation in New Zealand and its lasting impact on the Māori people, Mark Sheehan believes that there is the potential to transform teaching to be more culturally responsive through teaching about contested histories and incorporating indigenous perspectives. Both Dennis and Sheehan's chapters are valuable in presenting the challenge to history educators to reflect critically upon the histories they teach.

Katharine Burn's chapter considers the importance of professional development for history teachers and argues that tapping into history academics' knowledge is of considerable value. With reference to specific programmes where teachers and academics have worked together, she concludes that there are positive outcomes for teachers in acquiring new knowledge, gaining confidence and agency, and being more effective in developing curricula.

In the final chapter Michael Young examines the development of the relationships between the sociologists of education, and subject-based education researchers and between educational theory and practice. He provides a fascinating account of how the work of history academics such as Peter Lee at the Institute of Education, London entered the consciousness of sociologists of education and led to a recognition that the insights gained from subject research was critical for sociologists engaging in curriculum theory. The second section of Young's chapter usefully addresses questions put to him about powerful knowledge. His responses provide the reader with a comprehensive and nuanced explanation of powerful knowledge and further discussion of points analysed and debated throughout the book.

This is a book which deals at one level with the recurring themes and concerns facing history teachers and scholars of history education while at another level raises the bar by addressing, with new insights, critical issues through the enlightening lens of powerful knowledge. There is much in this book that will interest scholars from across a wide range of subjects. It is a book which deserves wide readership.

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