

A Study on Critical Pedagogy's View of Curriculum Knowledge

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Abstract: Only when knowledge becomes legal knowledge can it enter the field of curriculum. Critical pedagogy holds that curriculum knowledge is the knowledge of the ruling class and represents the interests of the ruling class; the curriculum knowledge is chosen by the dominant class in the society with its power, and the knowledge in line with the interests of the class is given a legal status and introduced into the school; because the curriculum knowledge can reproduce the ideology of the ruling class, spread its culture, and finally consolidate its position, the ruling class of has to strictly screen the curriculum knowledge into the school; the criterion of selection is to conform to the ideology of the ruling class, so that the knowledge finally selected is the knowledge that represents the ideology and values of the ruling class. Critical pedagogy opens a new perspective and methodology system for the study of curriculum knowledge selection, but it also has some limitations.

Keywords: Critical Pedagogy, Curriculum Knowledge, Selection

1. Introduction

Critical pedagogy holds that the selection of curriculum knowledge is not a "technical selection" based on the research of society, students and subjects, and that the selection of certain knowledge into the school curriculum system does not prove that it is completely correct, but only shows that it meets the requirements of the will of the ruling class of the country. In fact, this kind of choice is only a "social choice" based on the value orientation of the national decision-making stratum, and the whole selection process is full of the restriction of the state power¹.

In answering the question "Whose knowledge is most valuable", M. Apple first mentioned whose knowledge is taught and produced in schools, and whose interests are represented by the curriculum. Since curriculum knowledge is not objective, neutral and valueless, whose knowledge is it after all? Whose interests do they represent? Scholars of critical pedagogy, such as M.F.D. Young, P. Bourdieu, M. W. Apple, P. L. McLaren, H. A. Giroux agree that curriculum knowledge is the knowledge of the mainstream class and represents the interests and requirements of the mainstream class.

2. The Subjects in the Selection of Curriculum Knowledge

The essence of curriculum knowledge selection is to judge the value of human knowledge. It is not an objective process to judge the value of knowledge but has some subjectivity. Different subjects of choice have different beliefs about what knowledge is most valuable. Therefore, when we want to discuss what knowledge to choose into the field of the curriculum, the first thing to discuss is who selects this knowledge. In the specific historical background and social environment, curriculum knowledge is the knowledge of the ruling class. Therefore, the scholars of critical pedagogy put forward that curriculum knowledge is selected by the dominant class in the society with its power, and the knowledge in line with the interests of the class is given a legal status and introduced into the school. From the perspective of power distribution, the subjects of selection can be divided into three levels: state, local government and school.

¹ Wei Fengyun, Yu Wei(2018). Review and analysis of McLaren's School Life. Social Science Front, vol.274, no.4, p. 278.

2.1 State

In the field of curriculum, the selection of curriculum knowledge at the national level is mainly reflected in the aspect of curriculum policy. For example, curriculum planning, syllabus, curriculum development and management, textbook compilation and curriculum evaluation all reflect the ideology of the ruling class, which is prescriptive and controlling. Therefore, the state is the largest subject of curriculum knowledge selection. The state does not directly exercise its power in selecting curriculum knowledge, but empowers some curriculum experts that meet the standards. The curriculum experts select the knowledge that represents the national interest, and finally present it to the public in the form of textbooks. In this process, the curriculum expert is the spokesman of the state or the ruling class. The state empowers some curriculum experts for two reasons. Firstly, as the authority in the field of curriculum research, curriculum experts are adept and proficient in professional knowledge. They can select curriculum knowledge according to the law and value of professional knowledge. Secondly, curriculum experts are selected by the state according to certain standards and requirements, representing their ideas and ideologies, and the curriculum knowledge selected must also meet their interests. It can be seen from this that the choice of curriculum experts is not based entirely on the law of knowledge itself and the needs of students' development, but has a certain political tendency. With its legal status, curriculum knowledge has become an important tool to maintain the ruling status of the state. On the surface, the power of curriculum knowledge selection seems to be delegated to scholars, which seems to lead to democracy. In fact, the curriculum knowledge selected by scholars as national spokesmen is still the knowledge representing national interests, and curriculum knowledge still serves the ruling class¹.

2.2 Local Government

Generally speaking, the state will delegate a certain amount of choice to the local government, and let the local government make the choice according to their actual needs. In a sense, this is a decentralization, a redistribution of power within the ruling class. In class society, the national ruling class is not a fixed class, but also includes other interest groups. Because each interest group has different values, they all want to choose the knowledge that meets the requirements of their own interests, so conflicts often occur in the choice of curriculum knowledge. In order to prevent and resolve conflicts, the state devolves certain right of choice to local governments, so that local governments can choose curriculum knowledge according to their actual needs, which has become the main form of easing conflicts. The curriculum selected and established by local government is called local curriculum, which refers to "the final curriculum formed by selection, redevelopment and implementation according to national curriculum standards on the premise of safeguarding the interests of local government"². Like state, local governments also entrust specialized institutions and curriculum experts to carry out specific selection, but the criteria and premise of its selection are the will and interests of local governments. Therefore, these carefully selected professional institutions and course experts become the spokespersons of the local government, and they also select the knowledge that is in the interest of the local government.

2.3 School

School, as the most important place to spread knowledge, is also one of the subjects of selection. At the school level, teachers (the principal, as the top administrator of the school, is also a member of the school teachers) are the main elements, while students, parents and other social forces are also involved to some extent. The introduction of curriculum knowledge into school curriculum through national and local selection does not mean that it can be taught and disseminated in school completely according to the original intention of the ruling class. As the developer and disseminator of curriculum, teachers have the right and ability to develop curriculum knowledge. However, the professional nature of a teacher determines that he is the spokesman of a country, and what he chooses and teaches is the knowledge that conforms to the ideology and values of the country. Students are educated in the process of school education. The knowledge they learn in school is specially selected and conforms to the ideology of the ruling class. Therefore, they will subconsciously think that the knowledge they

¹ Wei Fengyun(2019). A Study on McLaren's Critical Pedagogy -- with the Clue of Life in School. Northeast Normal University,p.67.

² Jiang Junhe(2012). A Study on the Legitimacy of Curriculum Knowledge in American Primary and Secondary Schools. Northeast Normal University, p.135.

learn in school is the most valuable and correct knowledge. Even if some of the choices and actions of some students do not conform to the ideology of the ruling class, under the instruction and help of teachers, parents and other groups, students will generally "turn over a new leaf", and those who refuse to wake up will be ignored and indulged by teachers as "rebellious students".

Parents and other social forces have internalized the values of the ruling class in a given social environment. What they care about most is the growth and future of their children, so they will carefully choose the knowledge that meets the requirements of the ruling class, so that they can be recognized by the state and become social people in line with the requirements of social development. In this process, parents and other social forces have unconsciously become the spokesmen of the state.

To sum up, the scholars of critical pedagogy believe that from the perspective of subjects of curriculum knowledge selection, although local governments and schools have partial selection right, the premise of their selection of knowledge is consistent with the ideology and values of the ruling class. Many local curriculum and school curriculum knowledge selections are mere formality, and many of them are also repeated selections of national curriculum knowledge, without great significance. In reality, the selection of curriculum knowledge is firmly in the hands of the ruling class, the ruling class is the subject of the selection of curriculum knowledge, other subjects of selection are in vain, and there is no pluralistic selection subject in the true sense.¹

3. The Selection Criteria and Content of Curriculum Knowledge

3.1 Selection Criteria of Curriculum Knowledge

The scholars of critical pedagogy believe that the ideology of the ruling class is the selection standard of curriculum knowledge in reality, and all the knowledge that does not conform to the ideology of the ruling class is excluded from the curriculum. Ideology is a political concept that is always associated with certain values.

Wu Yongjun, a famous Chinese scholar, pointed out: "The ideology of the ruling class emerges as a social norm, a legal ideology that all members must follow. It is the legal and only ideology when guiding curriculum experts to choose curriculum knowledge, and the primary standard for curriculum knowledge selection. "In Apple's view, "the school curriculum knowledge system accepts or excludes certain kinds of knowledge, often serving ideological ends."² " Therefore, he believes that the dominant class always likes to choose curriculum knowledge and legalize it with its ideology, so as to control the school knowledge and achieve the purpose of safeguarding its interests.

3.2 The Content of Curriculum Knowledge

The scholars of critical pedagogy believe that knowledge is not objective and neutral, but has value characteristics, and the knowledge selected into the school curriculum always serves the specific society and reflects the specific values.

From the aspect of nature, the scholars of critical pedagogy believe that as the legitimate knowledge into the curriculum are mainly those with scientific nature, universal objectivity, certainty, explicit knowledge. Such selection of knowledge was in the interest of industrial society and in line with the concept of "scientific" management, which focused primarily on strong control over schooling. But this does not accord with the nature of compulsory education. The so-called legal knowledge in education must be objective and neutral, which ignores many other properties of knowledge, such as uncertainty, value, subjectivity and tacit knowledge.

In terms of types, knowledge can be divided into disciplinary knowledge and non-disciplinary knowledge according to whether it is disciplinary knowledge or not. The scholars of critical pedagogy believe that disciplinary knowledge is the main legal knowledge that enters the curriculum. Disciplinary knowledge includes natural science knowledge, social science knowledge and humanities knowledge. This kind of knowledge classification conforms to the classification standard of the hegemony stage of scientific knowledge. It is believed that knowledge must be scientific, and scientific

¹ Wu Yongjun(1999). *Curriculum Sociology*. Nanjing: Nanjing Normal University Press, p.149.

² Michael W.Apple (2004). *Ideology and Curriculum*. Routledge, p. 64-63.

knowledge can be disciplinary based, so that other kinds of knowledge are excluded and their hegemony status is obtained. In the stage of hegemonic knowledge, scientific knowledge becomes the first selection of the ruling class, which is considered to have the characteristics of universality, objectivity and value neutrality. Because of its hegemonic status, the norms of scientific knowledge used in the field of natural science have also penetrated into social knowledge and humanistic knowledge, and scientific knowledge has become the master of all knowledge and life¹. Therefore, it also exposes the singleness of curriculum knowledge in practice.

From the perspective of the carrier of knowledge, written knowledge is the main legal knowledge that enters the curriculum. Especially in the stage of scientific knowledge hegemony, the knowledge that enters the field of school curriculum must be the classical and written knowledge that can be called the outstanding cultural achievements of mankind. Usually the teacher just teaches the existing written knowledge to the students in accordance with the rules. Over time, the students are gradually used to accepting the existing knowledge and do not know how to study the knowledge by themselves. This is also one of the important reasons for the boring classroom teaching activities in schools.

4. Conclusion

From the view of curriculum knowledge selection in critical pedagogy, we can see that they hold a critical attitude towards the current curriculum knowledge selection. They believe that curriculum knowledge is official knowledge and legal culture. The viewpoints of the scholars of critical pedagogy of studying curriculum knowledge selection from the whole social, political and cultural background and introducing different kinds of knowledge into the school curriculum system greatly broadens the research scope of curriculum knowledge selection and opens up a new way of research. They use dynamic, macroscopic and microscopic methods to reveal the relationships in the course of curriculum knowledge selection, which opens a new methodological system for the study of curriculum knowledge selection.

However, like other schools, critical pedagogy also has some limitations in its understanding of curriculum knowledge selection due to the influence of social objective environment and researchers themselves. First, critical pedagogy believes that the selection of curriculum knowledge reflects the ideology and political power of the ruling class, so it pays much attention to the study of political factors, but it relatively neglects the study of the development law of knowledge itself. Secondly, critical pedagogy holds that the selection of curriculum knowledge is completely based on the ideology of the ruling class, and overemphasizes the sociality and political nature of curriculum knowledge, so it is easy to go to extremes in the discussion of the relationship between curriculum knowledge and ideology.

Although the school of critical pedagogy has many limitations and deficiencies in the understanding of curriculum knowledge selection, its passionate and vigorous critical spirit and proposition is of great significance to the theoretical research and practical reflection of curriculum knowledge selection. Although critique is not the theory itself, it is only the beginning of analysis, but the use of critical spirit to study the selection of curriculum knowledge is in line with the historical trend.

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¹ Jiang Jianhua(2010). Knowledge power curriculum: curriculum research from the perspective of policy. Beijing: Education Science Press, p. 66.

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