

### Abstract

Cormack, Phil and Green, Bill, (2000), (Re) Reading the Historical Record: Curriculum History and the Linguistic Turn, Paper presented in the 23rd Annual Meeting of the Society for the Study of Curriculum History, New Orleans, USA, April 23-24, 2000.

This paper is an exploration of the methodological challenges and implications for curriculum history presented by "the so-called 'linguistic turn'" (Franklin, 1999: 473) in the Humanities and Social Sciences, using research on subject English as a case-study. It both builds on previous historical studies of literacy debates, English teaching, and public schooling in Australia (Green, 1998; Green and Beavis, 1996), and informs ongoing work in this regard.

Franklin's (1999) recent synoptic essay on curriculum history, with reference specifically to the United States, Canada and the United Kingdom, usefully overviews work in the current-traditional and critical-revisionists traditions. It refers to new directions in research such as that of Popkewitz (1997) and others but doesn't elaborate on them, other than to note the increasing importance of language and related concepts and categories. Yet arguably such work initiates an important and distinctive challenge in and to the project of curriculum history. Histories informed by poststructuralist approaches, particularly those related to the work of Michel Foucault, have regenerated interest in the usefulness of historical studies to inform policy debate and curriculum practice in the present. Genealogical method provides insights into the way people and knowledges are constituted socially and historically, at the intersection of institutional, social, political and disciplinary discourses and practices. It also unpicks the continuities, discontinuities and fragilities of this constitutive process through time, thus disrupting classifications (such as the 'school subject') that appear today to be 'timeless and universal'.

Work in this vein (by Ian Hunter, for example) has considered the way that English operates in school as a key sociocultural technology in shaping a particular kind of moral and self-reflective future citizen. At the same time, however, such work has been criticised for paying insufficient attention to the historical record, and to local and contextual take-up and effects. In Collins' (1993) terms, it is therefore in danger of becoming 'another grand narrative' that will fail to help historical work contribute to the task of creating curriculum 'which is credible in a postmodern world'.

Our interest here is in research practices and perspectives that utilise the insights of poststructuralist theory while attending as carefully as possible to the local and contextual, in ways that supplement as well as review more conventional historical work. In this paper we will discuss the possibilities for:

- the use of discourse-analytic methods at a macro level to read changes over time in the way educational phenomena is constituted

- the use of discourse-analytic methods for detailed reading of the categories, metaphors, divisions and specifications employed educational practices and discourses at different times and their relation to local and contextual issues
- (re)reading histories as narratives which constitute the categories and subjects they describe
- the use of genealogical historical work on curriculum as 'supplementary histories'.

In particular, the paper explores the concepts of 'discourse' and 'history', arguing that these are mutually constitutive, and seeks to bring together 'discourse analysis' and 'historical inquiry', with specific reference to curriculum research.