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Human Rights Education's Curriculum Problem

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Abstract: Employing a theoretical perspective from the critical sociology of education, this article identifies a curriculum problem in human rights education (HRE) in schools and suggests strategies to solve it. The main problem is HRE's lack of an *episteme*—a disciplinary structure created in specialist communities—and, related to this, the flight of scholars from the field of curriculum practice, redefining it away from subject matter. A more robust HRE in schools will require not only advocacy but a curriculum, one that teachers can adapt to local needs, constraints, and students. Knowledge matters. If knowledge work of this sort is missing from HRE then it is difficult to claim that HRE has a social justice mission.

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Introduction

While evidence suggests that human rights education (HRE) in some respects “has expanded dramatically over the last few decades” (Russell & Suarez, 2017, p. 39), its curriculum remains at best opaque and at worst so under-developed as to include only “mentions” of something called “human rights.” A deep conceptual understanding of subject matter goes well beyond this, of course, as does the kind of curriculum development that facilitates it. The World Programme for Human Rights Education (United Nations, 2005), to take one prominent example,¹ calls for a curriculum of knowledge, skills, values, and action, but does not develop one. Stopping short of curriculum development may be a wise strategy, as curricula need to be developed locally, where they must make sense, enjoy legitimacy, and get enacted. However, the result is that the HRE curriculum remains scattered, ill-defined, and too variable to be robust. This problem becomes apparent when HRE is compared to curricula that are coherent and well-established—school curricula for algebra and biology, for example, or national history. Such a comparison may strike readers as unfair, like comparing an infant to adults, or novices to experts, but doing so points to factors that can help HRE succeed in schools.

Curriculum development is what HRE requires now if it is to move forward to institutional stability in schools. School courses are notoriously difficult to establish, and once established they become entrenched as part of the “routine delivery of services to local constituencies” (Westbury, 2008, p. 2). Curriculum reform initiatives come and go, and then come and go again (Cuban, 1990). Advocates strain to enact change but face an uphill battle against the inertia of the curriculum already in place. My objective is three-fold: to indicate why curriculum development and implementation are difficult; to clarify HRE's curriculum problem; and to suggest particular forms of curriculum development that should strengthen HRE in schools. I will show how countervailing forces to the effort to strengthen HRE come not only

from the ethno-nationalist Right, as might be expected,² but also from the cosmopolitan-progressive Left, where we would expect to find a lot of interest in developing the HRE curriculum. A key part of the problem is that curriculum scholars on the Left have renounced curriculum development—a trend that began nearly fifty years ago (e.g., Pinar, 1975; Young, 1971). Dismissing curriculum development as technocratic, atheoretical, instrumental, uncritical, and so forth, these scholars disengaged themselves from school improvement, especially curriculum development. This robbed HRE of what could be a useful source of expertise today: curriculum scholarship that is focused squarely on the curriculum and on curriculum reforms such as HRE.

This article focuses mainly on the United States, where the federal system of government decentralizes education policy. Public school curriculum development is a matter for the fifty state governments, most of which further devolve authority to local school districts, thereby making some 14,000 ministries of education nationwide, each with a locally elected board of directors.³ My own interventions are curriculum research-and-development studies, or design experiments, in secondary schools in several states. As we shall see later in this article, these studies involve collaborative curriculum decision-making for college-preparatory courses. These courses have vast amounts of material to “cover,” and student learning is often superficial—just enough to pass the high-stakes summative exam. My colleagues and I endeavor to organize this subject matter so that core, driving concepts and skills might be learned more deeply without sacrificing the breadth of knowledge needed for exam success.

The theoretical perspective at work in this article is sociological, epistemological, and critical. However, it does not stem from the two prominent sociological paradigms in education — neither the ‘old’ sociology of education that was anchored in structural-functionalism and concerned mainly with system stability and efficiency (e.g., Parsons, 1951), nor the ‘new’ sociology of education that was critical in its intentions and approaches and concerned mainly with inequality, class interests, social control, and reproduction (e.g., Apple, 1979; Young, 1971). Each of these two traditions, one conservative and purportedly neutral, and one radical and purportedly emancipatory, has a disabling knowledge—and therefore curriculum—problem. Instead, I draw on a more recent development in the sociology of education, one that is called social or critical realism. Contemporary exemplars are collected in the volumes *Knowledge, Curriculum and Equity: Social Realist Perspectives* (Barrett, Hoadley, & Morgan, 2018), and *Knowledge and the Future School: Curriculum and Social Justice* (Young & Lambert, 2014). These scholars, intellectual descendants of Emile Durkheim and Basil Bernstein, are sober about what the education sector can and cannot do to ameliorate social inequalities originating in the surrounding political economy, but they have produced discerning scholarship focusing on what education *can* do. They are able to focus on the social justice potential of the school curriculum without committing either of two common, albeit contradictory, errors made by the Left: exaggerating education’s ability to change society (e.g., Dewey 1956); and dismissing education as merely epiphenomenal (e.g., Bowles & Gintis, 1976). The relevance of this scholarship to HRE is straightforward. If the reaction to the structural-functionalists was to abandon the rough-and-tumble of school improvement for the rarified chambers of radical theory and critique, then the current requirement for curricula, in general, and HRE, in

particular, is a synthetic praxis: a form of critical educational scholarship that is engaged unabashedly in school improvement, especially curriculum development.

My method is interpretive, except for a brief section of empirical research that I include to illustrate a content selection strategy. I have organized this article discursively, with a problem-solution frame drawn from social movement theory (Gamson & Meyer, 1996). Nothing as firm as a solution is actually offered, however; rather, solution strategies are tendered. I begin with a brief examination of the general lack of HRE in U.S. schools, and then move to a broader treatment of the main task before us: developing and institutionalizing an HRE curriculum in schools.

Problem: Access to *What*?

HRE has a small presence in U. S. schools. The reason, in part, is rather widespread anti-United Nations sentiment and political opposition to cosmopolitan discourses in U. S. political culture (see analyses by Caporaso & Mittelman, 1988; Parker, 2011). For example, when a Utah legislator voted against additional funding for the International Baccalaureate (IB) program in that state's schools, she explained that she was 'opposed to the anti-American philosophy that's somehow woven into all the classes (IB courses) as they promote the U.N. agenda' (Fulton, 2008, ¶ 10). She did not feel the need to explain further, confident that this brief rationale would be understood. And presidential campaigns in the U.S. typically feature some amount of resentment toward the U.N., at least by the more conservative candidates, blaming it for undermining American sovereignty and for taking a disproportionate share of U.S. dollars without producing commensurate results or acquiescence to U.S. geopolitical positions. Recently, President Trump's "America first" campaign is indicative, as is his bellicose criticism of the U.N.

Equally consequential, however, is that there has been much contention over the meaning and aim of human rights education amongst its enthusiastic advocates. This constitutes a significant signal-noise problem that hampers HRE curriculum development. Starkey (2012), for example, advocates HRE as an intervention that will enable 'people whose value systems are diverse and apparently incompatible nonetheless to recognize and accept common standards and principles that make living in society possible' (p. 22); meanwhile, Matua (2011) suggests that the whole UN-based human rights initiative, while not exactly 'a Western conspiracy to deepen its cultural stranglehold over the globe' (p. 3) is nonetheless delaying an open debate about the 'reformation, reconstruction, and multiculturalization of human rights.'⁴ This is only one example of the tension Barton (2015) has identified 'between widespread recognition of its importance and lack of consensus over its meaning' (p. 50). Conflict over definitions and goals, and, for some at least, a sort of existential crisis about the regional (European) origins of a putatively "universal" initiative, rumble on unresolved alongside a passionate support for the project.

The United States is not the only country facing this second obstacle to HRE being taken more seriously (see examples in Bajaj, 2017, and Banks, 2017). There is a third obstacle that is more specifically American: HRE in the U. S. is situated mostly within the social studies curriculum, when it is to found at all; and the social studies curriculum already relies on a *civil* rights discourse. The civil rights idiom in the U. S. is a rights discourse, to be sure, but it is nationalistic rather than cosmopolitan. It is based on a three-century historical narrative that runs from the Declaration of Independence of 1776 and the Bill of Rights of 1789, neither of them rejecting slavery or patriarchy, to the Declaration of Rights and Sentiments of Women in 1848, the

Civil War and Emancipation Proclamation soon thereafter, and then the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. These benchmarks of the American “civil rights” struggle show that the story begins with a human rights promise (‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal’), moves quickly to a codification of those rights (for some), proceeds to a struggle for the extension of rights to women (‘...that all men and women are created equal’), and then goes on to secure racial equality. Here is Martin Luther King, Jr. using the civil rights idiom in his “I Have A Dream” address at the March on Washington in 1963. Note his reference to the earlier promise:

We have come to our nation’s capital to cash a check. When the architects of our republic wrote the magnificent words of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, they were signing a promissory note to which every American was to fall heir. . . . We have come to cash this check, a check that will give us upon demand the riches of freedom and the security of justice. (King, 2001, p. 82).

My point is that a rather widely accepted *civil* rights discourse in U. S. schools—a discourse that is mainly national and political—may be precluding more attention to a *human* rights discourse that is cosmopolitan in reach and, further, that adds social and economic rights to political rights. (Granted, King made this transition later in his campaign, as did Malcolm X, but public opinion generally did not.⁵) A *human* rights approach would de-center the national narrative for a global narrative and, of course, include the study of texts such as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the Convention on the Rights of the Child. In a number of countries where civil and cosmopolitan rights discourses compete for curricular space, we find similarities to the situation in the U.S. (e.g., see Osler, 2016, on Norway; Bozec, 2017, on France; Ho, 2017, on Singapore). However, it would seem that a United Nations-based, cosmopolitan, human rights discourse is more common in much of the rest of the world.⁶

A fourth reason for HRE’s small footprint in the U. S. school curriculum is epistemological. This is the problem that I will explore in greater depth, before turning to some ways forward—solution strategies—that are aligned with this problem. The problem itself can be called “knowledge blindness” (Maton, 2014, p.3) and its crux is the curriculum field’s lack of attention to the curriculum. I am referring to the fact that curriculum scholars have abandoned curriculum planning, implementation, and evaluation. These very experts with the pertinent knowledge (historical, theoretical, comparative, and practical) are interested in other things, and largely ignore questions about the selection of knowledge and skills for teaching and learning in schools (the curriculum). This is ironic on several fronts. We live in a historical period that is branded as the “information age” and many people are said to work in a “knowledge economy.” The very thing that is trumpeted as central to nearly every aspect of our lives today is itself undertheorized, and this negligence extends to the one field where everyone needs it to be addressed deliberately and explicitly: education, and especially the curriculum field.

What explains the lack of interest in school knowledge-formation—the curriculum—in the scholarly community? It is here we would expect to find the most nuanced and robust attention. A good part of the explanation lies in the rise of

competing discourses in the education field.⁷ Curricularists have turned their attention elsewhere, mainly to ideology critique (skepticism, debunking, unmasking covert interests). Unfortunately, the curricular baby was thrown out with the structural-functionalist bathwater. Additionally, curricularists have turned their attention to a *learner* discourse and a *learning* discourse. Each is important, but attention needs to be paid to both of them. Schooling is not about one thing only; it is an interdependent mix of things.

The first of these competing discourses is a fifty-year-old sociological program of educational criticism that debunks schools' pretenses to ideological neutrality and reveals how school curricula reinforce rather than challenge the status quo and reproduce the inequalities of the surrounding society. This discourse has identified and analyzed educational inequality. It has also passionately advocated and worked towards enabling equal access to schools and, within them, to knowledge. This project is obviously very important insofar as it goes, but it does not go far enough. It is incomplete, for it does not attend to the forms of knowledge thus distributed nor to curriculum decision-making about which forms *ought* to be distributed. The question left unasked in this discourse is 'access to what?' To what knowledge?

This critical discourse has become mainstream in educational scholarship, despite its radical origins, and is often today's default setting in the academy—at least in education and the social sciences. The original works in England were by Bernstein (1971) and Young (1971) and then a bit later, in France, by Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) and the United States by Bowles and Gintis (1976), Apple (1979), and Giroux (1979). Mostly neo-Marxist, but not exclusively (e.g., Pinar, 1975), this critical discourse focuses on political-economic factors that are external to the education sector of society but structure what goes on there, reproducing relations of domination and subordination. Moore and Muller (1999) summarize: 'Knowledge relations were transcribed as class relations' (p. 190) and soon thereafter as gender relations and then race relations.⁸ Once transcribed in this way, such that knowledge is conflated with knowers, the category of knowledge becomes, as Moore (2007) writes, 'exhausted in standpoints and interests that it is held to represent. Once knowledge is "named" in this manner there is nothing else than can be said about it—the job has been done' (pp. 32-33). Instead, we say things about the learner and learning.

The contemporary discourse on the *learner* is child-centered and progressive. It places the learner in familial, ethnic, and other primary cultural contexts and identifications, and uses these referents to help students recognize themselves in the curriculum and to help them learn the curriculum, whatever it may be. Learners are individuals embedded in cultures; they have funds of relevant and usable knowledge—assets, not deficits. There is a touch of Rousseauian romanticism in this discourse: the child's purity is assumed and it is not to be corrupted. The curriculum should be guided by the intention to draw out and nurture the child's true self. The child's culture, too, is to be drawn out, recognized, and sustained. Contemporary exemplars of this literature in the United States are Ladson Billings (1995), Moll et al. (1992), and Paris (2012). This discourse may now be even more popular than the critical discourse, particularly in the wide-ranging discussions of culturally relevant pedagogy and differentiated instruction, both now standard fare in many teacher education programs.

The third, a *learning* discourse, draws attention to learning processes and the

psychology of learning. It is dominated today by a newer education discipline that calls itself “learning sciences”; this is rapidly replacing educational psychology, at least in name. This discourse reached its zenith in the United States with the publication of a National Academies of Science report, *How People Learn* (Bransford, Brown, & Cockling, 2000). Here, teaching is for and about learning, and learning includes learning processes, learning environments, and learners’ socio-cultural and familial homes. Biesta (2009) derides this “learnification” (p. 36) of educational discourse.

It is the redefinition of teaching as the facilitation of learning and of education as the provision of learning opportunities or learning experiences; it can be seen in the use of the word ‘learner’ instead of ‘student’ or ‘pupil’; it is manifest in the transformation of adult education into adult learning, and in the replacement of ‘permanent education’ by ‘lifelong learning.’ (p. 37)

Learning in this discourse is intellectual labor done by the learners themselves—this is constructivism—and it is facilitated and scaffolded, assessed and evaluated by the teacher. Teaching becomes the orchestration of learning. Additionally, learning is enhanced in some (often unspecified) way by new media and information technologies, which are lionized in this discourse. In all of this, knowledge is assumed. McEneaney and Meyer (2000) explain that ‘research inattention to curricular content arises, not because scholars think the matter unimportant, but because they tend to see it as obvious’ (p. 191). Scholars take the curriculum for granted because ‘the necessary content of modern education . . . is mostly established.’ Today we accept more or less without question that schools teach math, science, social studies, literature, and language. This is the curriculum—these are the school subjects. The matter is settled, more or less, around the world, and the urgent questions are about other things, especially *access*: achieving equal access to the curriculum (whatever it is), and then achieving equal learning of it (whatever), by better understanding how people learn it (whatever).

There is overlap between the three discourses and variation within them, but each highlights a crucial facet of education: First, the schools’ reproduction of unequal power relations and distributive injustices in the surrounding society; second, the child, understood as a cultural being deserving care and recognition at school; and third, processes of learning.

For present purposes, note that none of the three discourses attends to which knowledge students should learn and are entitled to learn at school. None proposes a curriculum, a selection of subject matter. This is a problem; since not everything can be taught, choices have to be made and, inevitably, are made. This subject matter selection is anything but neutral, as Young (1971) and Apple (1979) established long ago; the curriculum is a social construct (it is located materially in the social and historical practices and conditions of its production) and, as such, relays power relations from the political economy into the school. Much “critical” scholarship reveals how, where, and to whose disadvantage this occurs. Still, and here is the rub, a curriculum is needed if the school is to be a school. It is the asset that anchors and justifies the others: teachers, instruction, students, classrooms, assessment, parent-teacher conferences, administrators, cafeterias, and janitors. Save for its curriculum, there is no need for a school. And, at school, some forms of knowledge are more

powerful—that is, more empowering to learners and to society—than others. HRE should be focusing on these forms.

Scholarly inattention to this project means that schools generally, and HRE in particular, must proceed without curricular expertise. The curriculum field, having been drawn to adjacent matters (critiques of neoliberalism and reproduction, rapt attention to learners and learning), is of little help to HRE. Whatever may have been its problems when Joseph Schwab called the curriculum field “moribund,” today it has simply renounced its object. The curriculum field is circling inside an old discovery, rearticulating the seminal, critical work of the 1970s. This is important work, to be sure, but the project does not end here. Curriculum-making, implementation, and evaluation is needed. In the post-war years, progressive educators began to associate curriculum development with conservatism and, by the 1970s, the Left was abandoning subject matter concerns altogether.⁹ The consequences of this have dealt a serious blow to social justice education. The school curriculum was surrendered to interest groups and market forces whose testing-and-accountability initiatives and social-efficiency imperatives narrowed the curriculum in socioeconomically distressed schools to reading and math, thereby exacerbating inequalities in educational achievement, fueling school privatization and segregation, and opening the door to an instrumental curriculum of so-called “21st century skills.”¹⁰

Solution: Toward an Episteme for HRE

The situation is one of “crisis,” according to sociologist of education Michael Young (Young, 2013, p. 101). What compels us to listen to him is that he is the same Michael Young whose 1971 book *Knowledge and Control* launched the critical discourse discussed above—the ‘new’ sociology of education that jettisoned knowledge from the curriculum field by transcribing the field as power relations. Young now sees that the critical sociology he initiated was only half correct. Showing how school curricula relayed power relations from outside schools into the schools themselves, creating rather than attenuating achievement gaps and reinforcing rather than reforming the status quo, was enlightening; but the exposé left in its wake no curricula for schools to teach. Curriculum development, then, was left to politicians, corporate wunderkinds, entrepreneurs, and a multitude of state and local committees charged with creating curriculum standards. Furthermore, curriculum theory itself, where we would expect to go for expertise, was left without an epistemology, that is, without a theory of knowledge for content selection. Accordingly, let us turn to Young’s newer analytic framework, which is the social realist alternative referenced in the introduction to this article and neatly summarized by the title of his book, *Bringing Knowledge Back In* (2008).

Bringing Knowledge Back In

If there is to be HRE in schools, there needs to be an HRE curriculum. The curriculum is the knowledge, the subject matter, the *what* teachers and others choose for instruction and, therefore, *what* students have the opportunity to learn should they be fortunate enough to gain access to good schools and good teachers. The curriculum is the school’s defining characteristic, its *raison d’être*. It is what parents send their children to school to learn. Furthermore, the *what* is not to be confused with the *how*: instruction. Instruction is about how teachers teach the curriculum and how they relate to students.¹¹ Just as there are different kinds of instruction (didactic,

constructivist, teacher-centered, student-centered, etc.), there are different kinds of curricular subject matter. The two main kinds of subject matter are content (information, concepts, principles) and skills, sometimes called know-what and know-how, or in Schwab's (1964) terms, the substantive and syntactical structures of knowledge. Together, they comprise the largest portion of the school's explicit curriculum.¹²

Like any curriculum (e.g., courses in biology, music, or history), a human rights curriculum needs to be based on a theory of knowledge (an idea of what is meant by knowledge). Further, it needs a pedagogical theory about how to organize that knowledge for learning by children and young people of different ages and stages. This will include, among other things, a framework explicating beginning, intermediate, and advanced understandings of human rights. The scheme for the former cannot simply distinguish one subject from another—say, physics from history—for this barely touches the problem. And the latter cannot rest simply on a quantitative metric of more (for “advanced”) and less (for “beginning”) knowledge of human rights, as this confuses breadth with depth. Moreover, and importantly for present purposes, both theories, the epistemological and the pedagogical, are, like any theory, social constructs; they are not found in nature or the heavens but in social activity. But this does not obviate the need for both. (Believing it does is the error made too often in the critical discourse described above—this is Young's “crisis.”)

Both theories contribute to the classification of the resulting knowledge as “disciplinary.” Disciplinary knowledge is undergirded by a theory of what knowledge is, as well as a theory of how to organize it for teaching and learning. But more central to defining disciplinary knowledge is Young's re-introduction of Durkheim's (1912) insight that there are two kinds of knowledge: abstract and concrete; that is, theoretical (disciplinary, scientific, academic) and experiential (everyday, socio-cultural, local). The two overlap to some extent in pedagogical practice, but the distinction is useful and has profound implications for deciding on the school curriculum. Disciplinary knowledge transcends the everyday, context-dependent, experiential knowledge of students; it is not common sense. It is generative, not static, because its central ideas stimulate additional inquiry; one discovery prompts another. Consequently, it is the most powerful knowledge students can be taught at school. It enables them to think outside the boxes of their upbringing. Students deserve to be taught this knowledge—and need to be taught this knowledge—precisely because it is not available in their experience. This is its window-opening, emancipatory promise. McPhail and Rata (2018) capture it well:

By having access to disciplinary knowledge, with its counter-intuitive character (i.e., it does not correspond to the everyday world of appearances), students can think about the world in abstract or context-independent ways. This takes students beyond the common-sense understandings acquired from their socio-cultural location, enabling them to develop a critical awareness of the forces structuring their lives and to imagine alternatives beyond their everyday experiences.... It is this liberating potential of disciplinary knowledge that makes it a political, as well as an epistemological, resource, one that all students should have access to. (p. 70)

The concepts that we expect to see at the core of a curriculum on human rights education are disciplinary concepts. These include, inter alia, universal rights, universal respect, human dignity, peaceful coexistence, justice, dissent, and activism. These are abstract ideas that are exemplified in and animated by an array of day-to-day cases and struggles. The ideas transcend the particulars, but they arise from them and are applicable to them. We use the concepts to recognize and analyze the cases, clarifying and defining them. We use them also to identify and define violations of human rights, and to protect rights and prevent violations. Imbued with such concepts, students are empowered; they develop the intellectual power to take intelligent action because they understand the world in new ways. In the U.N. General Assembly's (2011) *Declaration on Human Rights Education and Training*, concepts like these fall into the category of "education *about* human rights." This category "includes providing knowledge and understanding of human rights." Here are the norms and principles of human rights, the values that underpin them, their histories, the mechanisms for their protection, and methods and stories of political activism to hold governments accountable for protecting human rights and to protest and prevent violations.

The authority for these concepts is found in intellectual fields: the HRE specialist communities that create them. This is true across disciplines: the physicists, biologists, and historians who argue over the core concepts, values, and procedures of those intellectual fields are the specialists who define those fields. 'Such fields have structures, principles, and logics of their own,' writes Moore (2007, p. 36), which is what make their output "disciplinary." Similarly, the HRE specialists who argue over the goals of HRE and the meaning of core categories such as rights, respect and peaceful coexistence are the actors who define human rights education. But more pertinent to the E in HRE are those specialists who focus on *education* for human rights. Human rights is a scholarly field within law, sociology, political science and other academic fields as well as in interdisciplinary centers. Human rights *education* is a related scholarly field; but the two are not identical. It is one thing to identify a field or discipline and another to select the subject matter and pedagogies for teaching and learning it in school. Making the move from one to the other—"recontextualization" is Bernstein's famous term (Bernstein, 2000, p. 41)—requires a consideration of subjects (these are young people, not adults; students, not experts), setting (schools, not workplaces or ball fields), and purpose (general education, not vocational or higher education).¹³ The point is that a specialist community is at the social heart of any discipline and that the disciplinary knowledge it produces is provisional, by definition, and subjected to ongoing criticism and revision within the community. The specialist community argues over the field's truth claims and interventions, constructs its parameters and the rules and procedures by which claims are legitimated, and, in the process, defines its substance and syntax. Knowledge is both social and real—both the knowledge claims *and the conditions of their production* are available for examination. The specialists' arguments are transparent thanks to their communities' conferences and peer-reviewed journals.¹⁴ This is not the case for everyday, socio-cultural knowledge. One is not better than the other, but they are different; and to acquire the one, but not the other, is why children are sent to school.

We can further specify three conditions needed for a powerful human rights curriculum in schools. First, as we have seen, its knowledge is abstract and therefore applicable to and anchored in numerous on-the-ground cases and contexts. Second,

this knowledge is generated socially in specialist communities that are more-or-less autonomous collectives. Historically, this has meant that these communities are relatively independent of religious dogma and government intimidation. Galileo, we recall, was forced to recant his observations of the moon when he was called to the Inquisition in Rome. However, he was not working alone but sharing his observations with other specialists who were also observing nature. So, in the end, while disciplinary knowledge lost a battle in Rome in 1633, it began to win the war that became the scientific revolution. Today, the membership of the International Astronomical Union, not the Pope, decides whether Pluto is a planet. Similarly, content selection for schools draws largely on the specialist communities known as the academic disciplines rather than on the clergy, the Party, or the military police. The proceedings of these scholarly collectives are transparent and their truth claims are subjected to ongoing criticism and revision via conferences and peer-review journals. Fallibilism (belief in the provisional nature of truth claims) anchors the value system. Therefore, the knowledge selected for instruction in schools is warranted by the procedures used to generate that knowledge.

Third, a powerful human rights curriculum is powerful because it is organized into a coherent symbolic order, as are the established curricula in physics, history, and biology. This includes logical conceptual progression from incipient understandings to complex and integrated ones—to “advanced” knowledge of human rights. It is in this third condition that HRE’s curriculum problem mainly resides and where curriculum development initiatives can be most fruitful. As we saw at the outset of this article, the miniscule attention paid to HRE in U. S. schools can be attributed in part to opposition to cosmopolitan discourses in schools and in part to a national civil rights discourse that already occupies the space that might be given to an international human rights approach. But the two additional problems discussed at the outset especially affect this third condition: one is the tension caused by HRE advocates who disagree with each other about goals and meanings; the other is the abandonment of curriculum development and evaluation by its primary specialist community - curriculum scholars. These two problems produce the epistemic incoherence of HRE—its ‘weak grammar’ (Bernstein, 1999, p. 168). The solution is to work toward greater epistemic strength. The school subjects of physics (with a hierarchical knowledge structure) and history (with a horizontal knowledge structure)¹⁵ can serve as models, for they have successfully achieved, despite their epistemic differences, institutionalization in schools. They have stable, large footprints. We see the feeble school presence of HRE when we contrast it with these relatively successful school subjects.

Conceptual progression (Rata, 2016) means that a school subject has an epistemic framework—an organized system of meaning—which includes a scheme for sequential teaching and learning. This requires in turn that educators possess a shared understanding of what constitutes a preliminary grasp of the subject and a more advanced grasp, and an understanding of the difference between superficial and deep knowledge of the subject. These understandings allow educators to plan instruction (lessons 1, 2, 3; courses 1, 2, 3; etc.) that systematically deepens students’ understanding of the subject. But to do this, and here is my point, HRE has to be organized and coherent within itself, internally. This is its *episteme*.

Strategies

HRE lacks this basic structure, this disciplinary integrity. The first step to achieving it, as we have seen, is to identify HRE's knowledge base: its disciplinary concepts, cases, history, literature, and skills. This involves organizing its knowledge into at least two sets: a smaller one judged to be core and a larger, broader one judged to be marginal. The two sets are interdependent and related center-to-periphery, like a sun with its orbiting planets and moons. This strategy (if not the solar metaphor) was made popular by the mid-century "structure of the disciplines" movement led in the United States by Bruner (1960) and Schwab (1964). As they saw it, nearly any curriculum will contain too many topics to be internally coherent, let alone teachable and learnable, if it is not organized in such a way that some topics—let us call them core topics—anchor the others.¹⁶ Hilda Taba (1945) had written earlier that the overcrowding of a curriculum 'is such a time-worn criticism as to appear trite. The content in many subject areas...has been expanded to the point where only superficial knowledge is possible, and little or no time is available for thoughtful reflection and generalization' (p. 93). This is precisely the problem that requires content selection and core-periphery organization. As Bruner argued, to learn any meaning system—any conceptual framework—is to grasp how its parts are related. This insight requires HRE specialists to do the intellectual work of selecting and articulating core and peripheral knowledge in such a way that the gravitational pull of the suns carries the planets and moons along with them. An illustration of this strategy from a recent empirical study may be helpful.

My research team was attempting to select and organize knowledge for a college-preparatory course that hundreds of thousands of American high school students take in upper secondary school. The course is called Advanced Placement U. S. Government and Politics. Our goal was that students would perform as well or better on the summative, breadth-oriented exam as students in traditional versions of the course, but they would learn the subject matter more deeply. This meant that students would need to learn both the core content deeply and the peripheral content at least superficially. Our task was not to replace breadth with depth but to articulate the two, and our procedure was a practice we called deliberative content-selection. This practice entails deciding collaboratively and iteratively, in face-to-face meetings, on the substantive and syntactical structure of the course.¹⁷ The concepts *federalism*, *limited government*, and *separation of powers* were eventually selected as the substantive suns of the course and *constitutional reasoning* and *perspective taking* as the syntactical suns. Once these core concepts and skills were selected, they could be spiraled through the course, thereby affording recursive instruction on them, deepening students' understanding while drawing in the peripheral knowledge along the way. Details and results of the study can be found elsewhere (Parker et al., 2011, 2013; Parker & Lo, 2016; Parker, Valencia, & Lo, 2018). Generally, students in the course did as well or better on the exam as students who were following traditional courses. However, they learned the core knowledge more deeply. The point to be made for present purposes concerns the essence of this strategy: selecting and organizing the curriculum so that instruction has a clear object.

A second strategy is needed, too, although this one is instructional rather than curricular. Beyond selecting and arranging knowledge into a center-periphery scheme, teachers need to articulate this disciplinary knowledge with students' everyday, socio-cultural knowledge. These two are also related and interdependent, for as Moll (1990) wrote, after Vygotsky, 'everyday concepts mediate the acquisition

of scientific concepts' (p. 10).¹⁸ Children's home knowledge mediates their learning of disciplinary knowledge at school. This second strategy has enjoyed renewed attention in the past twenty years as part of the rise of the "learner" discourse sketched above and is a familiar theme in the HRE literature (e.g., Bajaj 2017; Lundy, 2007; Osler, 2016). It represents a traditional, one could say classic, tension in education. It appears in Plato's dialogue *Meno* and is summarized in the title of John Dewey's 1902 essay *The Child and the Curriculum*. Dewey wrote,

Abandon the notion of subject matter as something fixed and ready-made in itself, outside the child's experience; cease thinking of the child's experience as also something hard and fast; see it as something fluent, embryonic, vital; and (then) we realize that the child and the curriculum are simply two limits which define a single process, just as two points define a straight line. (Dewey, 1956, p.11)

The two strategies—the articulation of core and peripheral disciplinary knowledge and the articulation of disciplinary knowledge with students' everyday knowledge—will go a long way toward organizing a curriculum and helping students learn it. The second without the first, however, is meaningless because instruction is adrift without a curricular object. A human rights education designed with both strategies in tandem, whether for a single course or spiraled systematically across the years of compulsory schooling, would be an achievement.

Conclusion

Knowledge is the central category of education. It is education's activity (transmitting knowledge) and goal (achieving knowledge; closing achievement gaps between groups of students). HRE can be strengthened in schools if concerted attention is paid to its knowledge base—its curriculum. School subjects like physics and history have been successfully institutionalized around the world, not without argument and variation of course, but they are relatively stable and routine nevertheless. They have strong grammars—epistemic coherence—constructed through decades of theoretical debate, research, practice, and revision in more-or-less autonomous specialist communities. HRE does not have this advantage, this path to institutionalization. Far from it; HRE is young and fractious and anything but a school staple. In the United States, it is a curricular wannabe. Its prospects for institutionalization are limited, and progress will be slow and episodic. Furthermore, the abandonment of curriculum development by curriculum scholars has not helped. The shift of attention to ideology critique, learners and learning has resulted in a lacuna at the core of HRE: content selection and organization.

My argument has been that knowledge matters in HRE, and that we must pay attention to this fact. I have critiqued the trends that have pushed it so far into the background that knowledge blindness affects the very field we rely on for advice on the knowledge dimension of schooling: curriculum studies. I do not suggest that ideology critique and attention to learners and learning should be pushed to the background to make room for curriculum in the foreground; rather, I suggest that all four concerns be kept in the foreground at once, rather like a juggler keeping multiple balls in the air. Again, schooling is not about one thing only, but an interdependent mix of things; and if epistemology and curriculum decision-making are missing from

the action, it is difficult to claim that the action has a social justice mission. Wanting to learn important content and skills is, after all, the reason why marginalized groups struggle to gain access to schools. Similarly, it is why already advantaged groups scramble to get into ever-better schools (Labaree, 2010). If school-access and school-inclusion initiatives are to be meaningful, then the school curriculum itself must be meaningful; and this requires that it be deliberated, selected, and organized rather than presumed.

HRE's curriculum problem is twofold: the flight of expertise from the field of curriculum practice, redefining it away from subject matter to students, their lives and learning processes; and HRE's lack of a coherent knowledge structure—an episteme. A more robust HRE requires not only advocates and arguments but a reasonably stable curriculum that its advocates—teachers, policy makers, and HRE specialists—can adapt to local needs and circumstances. It will be particularly interesting in the United States to see how HRE curriculum-makers articulate its core concepts, cases, history, and skills with those already at the center of the more successfully institutionalized *civil* rights curriculum. There are, no doubt, parallels in other nation-states where local norms, desires, and understandings encounter abstract, cosmopolitan ideals.

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Notes

¹ The World Programme is just one example. It is a valuable initiative, and there are many others (e.g., Council of Europe, 1985). I would not claim otherwise.

² See analyses by Osler (2016) and Panjwani et al. (2018).

³ See Tyack's (2003) account.

⁴ See also Keet (2015) and Zembylas et al. (2017).

⁵ See Foner (1998).

⁶ John Meyer's cross-national research is insightful, alongside that of Russell and Suarez (2017). For example, Meyer, Bromley, and Ramirez (2010) show that HRE in textbooks has an implicit goal to construct a common humanity of rights-bearing individuals, each a sovereign actor on the public stage.

⁷ This section draws from Parker (2017).

⁸ Moore (2007) demonstrates the inadequacy of standpoint theory for explaining how knowledge is produced socially and, consequently, its inability to produce a school curriculum. By reducing knowledge to knowers and their contexts, standpoint theory inevitably must show that there is actually no knowledge, per se, of anything. See also, Wexler (1987).

⁹ See the accounts of Moore and Muller (1999), Moore (2007), and Young (2008, 2013); also Delpit (1988) and Gramsci (1971) for their critiques of progressive educators' abandonment of powerful subject matters for "progressive" child-centered pedagogies.

¹⁰ Studies of this phenomenon include Labaree (2010); McPhail and Rata (2018); and Morgan and Lambert (2018);

¹¹ On the distinction between curriculum and instruction, see Deng & Luke (2008) and Young (2013).

¹² See Eisner (2002) on the distinction between explicit, implicit, and null curricula.

¹³ Shulman's (1986) category "pedagogical content knowledge" points in a similar direction: educators' knowledge of how to 'represent... the subject to make it comprehensible' to students (pp. 6-7). But in Bernstein's (2000) analysis, more than this is involved in the selection and transformation of knowledge into pedagogic communication.

¹⁴ In the field of human rights education, a short list of its specialist-interlocutors writing in English would include Bajaj (2011), Bowring (2012), Keet (2015), Osler (2015), Starkey (2012), Suárez (2007), and Tibbitts (2017). And the field's journals would include the new one you have in your hands as well as the journals in which these authors' articles were peer-reviewed and published, and others as well. (Of course, an argument will ensue over the "short list" proffered here, which exemplifies the point I am trying to make.)

¹⁵ See Bernstein, 1999.

¹⁶ This core-periphery strategy is not to be confused with Hirsch's (1987) "core knowledge" project.

¹⁷ See Reid (2006) and Parker & Lo (2016) on the theory and practice of deliberative content selection.

¹⁸ On this mediation, see also Barrett (2017) and Morais et al. (2001).

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