

Series Foreword

Routledge Cultural Studies in Knowledge, Curriculum and Education

This series brings interdisciplinary studies that focus on knowledge, “reason” or language of education, school, school reforms, curriculum, and research projects. Central to the studies are the knowledge, reason, or language of schooling as cultural practices about how life is to be lived and the possibilities of the future. The studies are referred to as “critical” in the sense that they make visible the principles governing and regulating what is known, done, and acted on in schooling.

The series provides ways of re-conceptualizing approaches to the study of school change and reform in policy, curriculum, and teacher education. It takes what are given as natural and taken-for-granted in the everyday life of schooling and its subjects of research and reform and provokes thoughts about the knowledge of schooling as cultural practices that simultaneously construe and construct the subjects and subjectivities of schooling.

This book, the first in our series, contributes to this purpose through its study of the attempts of the new democratic regime in Argentina to develop a civic and political culture through changing the curriculum after the fall of the dictatorship. The efforts involved re-visioning school policy and textbooks in order to make children aware of the evils of the prior dictatorship, the importance of democratic governments and society, and the re-visioning of Argentinean history to consider the dictatorship as a momentary aberration from longer republican history.

One intent of the series is to de-provincialize the often local and often myopic views of reforms in education. In this sense, the Argentinean case that Friedrich presents uses the national study of school reform to engage in a critical analysis of the rules and standards of “the reason” in which the social commitments are enacted. These principles are not merely those of Argentinean schooling. The contribution to the series lies in how “the knowledge” of schooling creates memory, fabricating the past in present as principles governing what is (im)possible as the future. Theoretically and methodologically, the book is innovative as the Argentinean study is not merely about its context but a way of exploring the broader problem of school change, the intersection of schools in social/political movements, and the critical and political in the study of schooling.

Friedrich introduces the idea of “historical consciousness” to frame the case of Argentinean reforms that brings into focus broader questions of how the present is governed through the models that order the school curriculum and teaching. The teaching of history in the school curriculum is not practiced to recoup the past. The teaching of history creates memory in the present through which the self and society are organized and collective belonging and “home” made a possibility. Focusing on historical consciousness, the study contributes to our thinking about the practices of schooling that govern its classifying of continuities and discontinuities.

The external devices of remembering the school curriculum are themselves recent social inventions. The rememberings that come through museums, archival materials, statues, and history as a school subject in modern school pedagogies were inventions in the late 18th and 19th centuries. The emergence of historicism replaced earlier notions of history through making questions about human development as distinct from that of nature. Humanity was given its own identity and reasoning about the representations given to form the present. The modern ideas of the republic and its notions of the citizen were interrelated with this notion of history as a device of remembering and creating collective belonging. The strategies which memory is made through are simultaneously the processes of forgetting.

Friedrich’s book problematizes how the notion of history is brought into the present as part of the governing practices of schooling and thus the cultural practices embodied in reforms. Further, the book contributes to this series by making the changes in the curriculum to substantiate changes of political regimes may re-inscribe and conserve rather than change the rules and standards of the reason embodied in the modern school. While the Argentinean reforms of the new democratic regime sought to define the dictatorship as an aberration in the flow of national history, Friedrich makes visible that the change in the narratives of history may reiterate particular principles to intern and enclose what is possible as changes in social and cultural spaces.

The book provides an alternative method of engaging in the study of school reform. Current reforms in science and mathematics, for example, have children learn more content and at the same time have teachers study more science, mathematics, and history as part of their teacher preparation. The curriculum models that translate physics, mathematics, and history into problems of learning and teaching are not examined in terms of their principles of reasoning or language of schooling. Nor are efforts to speak to questions of diversity and differences in critical pedagogies of schooling reforms that seek to give value to the voice of marginal populations. While representations of marginalized groups are important to correct social wrongs, the reforms proceed without examining what the political philosopher Jacque Rancière calls “the partition of the sensible” and thus

may function to police what is said, talked about, and acted on. History textbooks, for example, are revised to eliminate stereotypes of different ethnic and minority groups and to speak of the varied and diverse contributions made to society.

Yet if we think about the notion of historical consciousness that Friedrich engages, it becomes possible to extend and re-think the strategies of change embodied in the above studies. Friedrich recognizes the importance of the different reform efforts but argues through his analysis that while necessary, they are not sufficient. Friedrich examines how the revisions of the content may re-inscribe the very principles that require examination about how children know even when the content changes. In effect, reforms become less about change and more about motion and activity.

Friedrich's study further contributes to the series' intent by providing an approach that re-thinks the notion of "critical" in the study of schooling. Rather than assuming structural notions, he takes the common sense in schools and asks how and why these "things" of schooling are seen the way they are seen, thought about, and acted on—such as the rules and standards to order teaching, notions of childhood, ideas of community, and the notions of the citizen and citizenship in the school pedagogy. In contrast to "hidden curriculum" studies and current critical theories of schooling, the book provides a way to think about a critical theory that is historical and concerned with knowledge as a materiality—the construction of memory and historical consciousness are not merely about ideas or texts but about the principles that order what is thought, hoped for, and acted on.

The contribution to interpreting the politics of schooling and the problems of change goes beyond contemporary forms of structuralism and hermeneutic approaches, such as found in the Anglo-American "new" Marxist traditions. What is brought into view is the importance of knowledge or language as a material part of school. The notions of historical consciousness and the production of memory are not merely about remembering the past. They are part of the present, and operate as a conjunction of the past in the present to form a constellation that shapes and fashions possibilities for the future.

Further, this book contributes to this series by integrating theoretical ways of thinking about the knowledge of schooling that brings into focus the historical ways that the present is organized, conceptualized, and contextualized. The book provides an important method for thinking about issues of school change. It recognizes that the citizen is not born but made; and as the French historian Renan observed in the late 19th century, as part of a daily plebiscite.

While we are hesitant with claims of "new," we believe that this book contributes to scholarship that this series intends to provide in educational research.

1. It provides approaches for re-thinking central issues of our times in social change beyond those framed within the provincial borders of the nation.
2. It brings together different interdisciplinary approaches from the humanities and social sciences concerned with the materiality of “knowledge”—that is, knowledge as construing and constructing who “we” are and should be. The series thus provides ways to re-think, revise, and re-frame contemporary school studies built on the categories of representation and identities that given in schooling as the origins of descriptions and the location of causes.
3. The series provides alternative ways of thinking about the role of academic research and the social commitments to change. Since at least the late 19th century, the social and education sciences have been framed by national commitments to change, adopting the role of planning technologies in the making of the new society through planning people. Research has continually inserted particular salvation themes about the future and at the same time promised that such knowledge is “useful” and practical. The series provides a way to re-think the projects of social science and issues of change through historically sensitive approaches to the study of school knowledge and its languages.

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January 2013