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BOOK REVIEW

***Understanding the School Curriculum: Theory,
Politics, and Principles*, by Alex Moore.
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(198 pages).**

The rapid developments in today's society entail changes in many fields and especially in education. As the goal of education is to prepare students for society (Risinger, 2009), the schools should help them develop the 21st-century skills such as "communication, critical thinking and problem solving, professionalism and work ethic, teamwork and collaboration, working in diverse teams, applying technology, leadership and project management" (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, p. 7). In this preparation, the curriculum plays an important role in adjusting education to society's needs and to properly prepare today's students for tomorrow's society (Kitchen, Fordham, Henderson, Looney, & Maghnouj, 2017).

In line with this preoccupation of developing an effective curriculum, is the book *Understanding the School Curriculum: Theory, Politics, and Principles*. The author, Alex Moore, is an Emeritus Professor at the Institute of Education, University of London, UK. The book is addressed to students (undergraduate and graduate in the curriculum), teachers, and other people involved in the educational process. The author presents the actual necessity to develop a curriculum for the future. This must keep in attention

the swift changes of the society, which demand a “flexible, dynamic, evolving and reflexive” curriculum (p. 13).

The book is structured in nine chapters, each of them adding a new link in the curriculum comprehension’s chain. In the introduction, the author explains the importance of developing a curriculum not only for the present but also for the future. It is important teachers understand why they teach a certain curriculum and for students to understand why they learn certain content. Responding to the *why* question brings understanding and acceptance of the changes decided and implemented at the curriculum level. In the second chapter, the author introduces a new concept *curriculum dynamikos* (p. 21). This is closely related to the major need for education: an efficient curriculum for the specific society’s needs. Developing an efficient curriculum requires addressing questions about the educational purposes. Even if the purpose of education is known, the curriculum must be dynamic as the society is also dynamic. Addressing questions about what is needed in a certain moment, regarding curriculum, may offer valuable responses and solutions in balancing curriculum policy and curriculum practices.

In the third chapter, the *contestability* of a curriculum (p. 43) is the central approach. The author analyzes the notion and the applications of the curriculum and uses different ways to define and comprehend it. He presents the curriculum from the view of Stenhouse, as a product, as a process, as praxis, and as context. Additionally, he brings in attention the Tyler’s questions addressed in understanding and deciding on curriculum purposes, experiences, organization, and evaluation. Chapter four explores the curriculum as *knowledge* (p. 65). Moore states that it is necessary to keep a balance between knowledge and skills. Knowledge may be classified as propositional, procedural, and knowledge by acquaintance. Further, the author highlights the importance of developing students’ skills and knowledge, as a package, basing his statement on Bloom’s taxonomy which

emphasizes the need for both knowledge and skills, adding to them, experiences and feelings. Chapter four ends with the idea of using meaningfully knowledge and not just knowing.

In chapter five, the author addresses the issue of digital technologies and their role in the curricular and pedagogical areas. Since, in the entire world, the new technologies occupy an important social role, learning occurs not only in the classroom but also outside of it. He also presents the concept of *flipped learning* which places the students in the role of self-learners, guided by the educators. Chapter six, *Internationalising the Curriculum*, presents the importance of having curriculum items in common. From a multinational perspective, Moore introduces two terms in this chapter: *internationalisation* relating to the curricula, and *globalization* (p. 106), concerning the evolutions in the communication area.

In chapter seven, the author presents those groups who can decide when and how to update the curricula, taking into account all the changes in the community. The author reveals that the decision may be central, coming from the government, and local, coming from the schools. Nevertheless, the pros and cons reasons are given for each type of decision made at the curriculum level. Chapter eight demolishes some curricular *myths* that became *misrecognized* (p. 150) as methods to do something in the educational area. Thus, the author relates the curriculum to the “decision-making perspectives, philosophies, and ideologies and the actual curricula they produce” (p. 149). He also provides criteria for deciding what and what not is worthwhile in education activities. In chapter nine, Moore presents various action points developed as *curriculum alternatives* (p. 171). These are proposed as solutions to the conventional ways to see the theory and practice, the content, and the evaluation. He agrees that the old curricula should not be considered as unconventional or in contradiction with the students’ best involvement. Furthermore, the *national curriculum* and the *national identity* should be

associated, because sometimes the curriculum can be hostile to changes.

The book is written clearly and systematically. The author adds every chapter as an argument to support his theory about the necessity of a curriculum for the future. In doing so, he fulfils the purpose of his book, using a balanced and accurate style. Moore analyses other authors' opinions and summarizes them in an easy to follow way for the readers. From the beginning, the author argues for the necessity of a dynamic curriculum. Equitably, avoiding generalization and speculation, the author offers proper examples for specific issues. He presents his theory in a flexible manner. Furthermore, he repeatedly emphasizes the idea that each national educational system has to choose those reforms which are related to the social needs and with their educational environment. To explain and to create a clear image, the author presents a theory for a dynamic curriculum. By offering detailed examples of alternative curriculum applications in five different countries with good educational results (Malta, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, Singapore), the author convinces the reader about the necessity of curriculum change, without sacrificing the principles of education (p. 24).

The book *Understanding the School Curriculum: Theory, Politics and Principles* can be recommended for students, teachers and other people involved in the educational field and dissatisfied with the current curricular situation. It can be a good guide for understanding the development of a curriculum for the 21st-century.

References

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