PLUS LA MEME CHOSE

The Early History of Learning Outcomes and Learner Centredness

> The novelties of one generation are only the resuscitated fashions of the generation before last. George Bernard Shaw, *Three Plays for Puritans*, Preface (1900)

Current attempts to ensure that education delivers according to the needs of the economy, as well as current critiques of subject-based curricula, are less new than they appear. Ideas about 'relevance', objectives, and learning outcomes, as well as the idea that subject-based curricula are obsolete, both of which have re-gained prominence in contemporary education policy, particularly through outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, have been influential periodically in the history of educational reform. And both sets of ideas have been supported by both left and right-wing educational reformers and policy makers.

For over a century, criticism of 'traditional' academic education and subject-based curricula has come from business leaders who wanted economy and efficiency in schools, and work-ready, relevantly skilled, and compliant workers. Politicians and industrialists (and people who claim to speak for industry) have argued that the traditional subject-based curriculum has caused economic decline. The subject-based curriculum has been associated with the ideas of an out-of-touch aristocratic elite, labeled by business leaders as out of touch with the needs of industry, contributing to industrial decline, not training people to be 'enterprise-minded', and not giving them useful skills.

Raymond Callahan's detailed study of North American educational reform at the turn of the twentieth century demonstrates that reform in the early 1900s was focused on making education more 'relevant' and 'practically useful':

> While the most specific outcomes of this pressure were the establishment of vocational schools and vocational courses in the existing secondary schools and the decline of classical studies, the utilitarian movement pervaded the entire school system from the elementary schools through the universities. A less tangible but more important corollary of the practical movement was a strong current of anti-intellectualism which, when it was given expression, generally appeared in such phrases as 'mere scholastic education' or 'mere book learning'. (Callahan, 1962, p. 8)

Callahan describes popular journals and magazines in early twentieth century North America which featured prominent educationalists arguing that education should not be concerned with "culture". A "gentleman's education" was seen as being of no used in the business world and, it was suggested, also not "desired by the mob". Such education was seen as inappropriately "preparing our children for a life of scholasticism" (Callahan, 1962, p. 50). This was linked to a campaign for running educational institutions as businesses. Callahan argues that the main procedure for educational reform between 1900 and 1925 consisted of making unfavourable comparisons between schools and business enterprises, applying business-industrial criteria (economy and efficiency) to education, and suggesting that business and industrial practices be adopted by educators. An interesting theme which Callahan picks up on, and which was to be a source of similar concern across the Atlantic for many years, was a comparison with Germany, and an argument that Germany's industrial superiority was due to its greater emphasis on vocational education; this led to attempts to vocationalize the school curriculum.

Ironically, as Doll (1993, in Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 253) points out, the late nineteenth and early twentieth century curriculum was at least in some ways highly focused on the workplace: arithmetic, not mathematics, was taught to young learners, with an emphasis on "store clerk functionalism, keeping the sales slips and ledgers accurate and neat. Problem solving was introduced as early as the second grade, but it was heavily, if not exclusively, associated with buying in an urban store". Ivor Goodson (1994, p. 49) laments the loss of 'the science of common things' from the 1840s, which he suggests was empowering for ordinary people. He argues that subsequently, "[k]nowledge increasingly became decontextualized and disembodied as the 'disciplines' developed closer and closer ties with the state and with university scholars", by implication becoming disempowering to ordinary people.

Many progressive educationalists have shared Goodson's concerns. Like the industrial reformers mentioned above, progressive educationalists have associated the subject-based curriculum with elites. They have argued that the school curriculum should be more aligned with the needs of society, and the interests and needs of individuals. Many, but not all of the educational reformers who have pushed for 'child-centred' or 'learner-centred' reforms have seen them as part of a broader left-wing struggle for an education system which can play a part in creating a more democratic and more egalitarian society.

Thus, from very different political perspectives, subject-based curricula and the idea of the acquisition of bodies of knowledge as a key purpose of education and the focus of curriculum development have been the target of much criticism. One early alternative for conceptualizing and designing the curriculum has been associated with terms such as objectives, outcomes, or competencies. Objectives or outcomes-based approaches start with tasks or activities in the everyday world, and specifically the world of work. Analyzing such tasks or activities, and then attempting to design a curriculum which prepares learners for them, it is seen as a way of overcoming the problems of 'traditional education', and ensuring the relevance of education.

The second approach, which is very different although also concerned with the need for education to be relevant to individuals, is child- or learner-centred reform. As I discuss below, this is sometimes presented with an emphasis on pedagogy only, but frequently slips into an approach to the curriculum. Reformers in this (very broad) tradition have suggested that the knowledge acquired at school must be more continuous with the knowledge of the everyday world of the learner as well as the knowledge of the working and social world into which they will progress.

In both approaches, the starting point for thinking about education, and designing curricula, is the projected or immediate utility of knowledge in the life of the learner. For some, the interests and life experiences of individual learners must drive the curriculum, while for others the workplace becomes the curriculum authority. These two approaches have frequently been at odds with each other politically, the former emphasizing humanism, autonomy and democracy, and the latter economic efficiency, the needs of employers, and the market. But in both cases, existing bodies of knowledge are not the *starting point* for designing a curriculum. This does not mean that either educational outcomes or child-centred education are *inherently* incompatible with the idea of subjects. Invariably subjects do still feature in various ways in many approaches which are labeled 'child-' or 'learner-centred', as well as in some objectives/outcomes-based approaches, as will be discussed below.

Both objectives/outcomes-based approaches and child- or learner-centred approaches have spawned many different lines of thought about educational reform. Neither can be associated with one simple reform agenda. They have sometimes been at odds with each other, and sometimes seen as sharing similar concerns. However, criticism of traditional subject-centred education has been a dominant feature of much educational thinking that has gone under both these labels.

Before considering the specific histories of qualifications frameworks (Chapters 3, 4, and 8), as well as the conceptual issues that they raise, it is worth taking a brief look back in time, to consider the predecessors of the current ideas about outcomes and learner-centredness. The cursory accounts below, both of outcomes/objectives-based approaches, and of child-/learner-centred approaches, are roughly chronological. This is not meant to imply a clear progression or move from one thinker or movement to another, but simply to show some of the ways in which similar ideas have emerged in the history of educational reform. I start with learning outcomes, and afterwards consider learner-centredness.

LOOKING BACK ON LEARNING OUTCOMES

Current policy documents describe learning outcomes as a new idea, even a 'new learning paradigm'. But actually this idea has rather a long history. Previous versions of it have surfaced particularly when reformers have wanted to improve relationships between education and labour markets, or increase the 'relevance' of education to work. Developing statements of objectives, competences, or learning outcomes is one way in which reformers have attempted to make education relevant, accessible,

and useful to the individuals acquiring it, to their employers, and to society at large. The premise seems to be that if we can just figure out *exactly* what it is that we want learners to *be able to do* by the end of education, we can design education systems that enable them to learn it.

Many researchers trace outcomes-based education to teacher education in the United States in the 1980s, where there was a focus on developing and measuring teacher 'competence', largely as a result of political pressures as school education came under public criticism (Spreen, 2001; Stewart & Sambrook, 1995). But, as Terry Hyland (1994) points out, this idea had already gained prominence in the United States in the early twentieth century, under the influence of Frederick Taylor and the 'efficiency' cult. Taylor conducted time and motion studies in order to increase the productivity of workers in manufacturing. His most famous study was on the processing of pig iron. This led to a flurry of publications on 'Scientific Management' between 1910 and 1916 (Callahan, 1962; Wainwright, 1994). Various reformers and curriculum writers developed this into the notion of the 'Scientific Curriculum'. For example, W.W. Charters, an influential north American educationalist propounded the idea of 'activity analysis': the notion that curriculum construction should begin by listing the major objectives of schooling, creating details of the lists of activities associated with work in which the student planned to engage, and then preparing study units on the basis of these objectives and descriptions of activities (Ravitch, 2001).

Franklin Bobbit (1876–1956), who claimed to write the first book on 'the curriculum', is an exemplary representative of this approach. I will consider his ideas in some depth because of their startling similarity to recent educational reforms. Bobbit was an enthusiastic follower of Taylor's Scientific Management, and wanted to use it to improve schools. He argued that schools needed clearly specified objectives, based on analysis of tasks and roles in the 'real' world. His strongest criticism of the contemporary curriculum was a lack of clearly articulated objectives. The essence of the theory of the 'Scientific Curriculum' was that one should "go out into the world of affairs and discover the particulars of which these affairs consist" (Bobbit, 1918, p. 11). The task of the curriculum developer was to "discover the total range of habits, skills, abilities, forms of thought, valuations, ambitions, etc, that the members of any particular social class need for the effective performance of their vocational labours, as well as for their civic activities, health activities, recreations, language, parental, religious, and general social activities".

Bobbit (1918, p. 11) argued that the curriculum was "that *series of things which children and youth must do and experience* by way of developing abilities to do the things well that make up the affairs of adult life". As opposed to nineteenth century education, focused, wrongly in Bobbit's view, on 'facts', the new education that he advocated would "train thought and judgement in connection with actual life-situations, a task distinctly different from the cloistral activities of the past. It is also to develop the good-will, the spirit of service, the social valuations, sympathies, and attitudes of mind necessary for effective group-action where specialization

has created endless interdependency" (Bobbit, 1918, p. 10). He emphasized the continuity between education and experience:

> … as education is coming more and more to be seen as a thing of experiences, and as the work- and play-experiences of the general community life are being more and more utilized, the line of demarcation between directed and undirected training experience is rapidly disappearing. Education must be concerned with both, even though it does not direct both. (Bobbit, 1918, p. 11)

Bobbit suggested that just as steel plants had precise specifications for their products, which were not determined by the mill but by those who had ordered the rails, education must have standards specified by the community, and not by educators. "A school system can no more find standards of performance within itself than a steel plant can find the proper height or weight per yard for steel rails from the activities within the plant," he argued, and went on:

> … the commercial world can best say what it needs in the case of its stenographers and accountants. A machine shop can best say what is needed in the workers that come to it. The plumbing trade contains the men who are best able to state the needs of those entering upon plumbing; and so on through the entire list. (Bobbit 1913b, cited in Callahan, 1962, pp. 83-84)

Teachers' expertise, according to Bobbit, lay in achieving the standard which had been specified by the experts:

> After society has given to the school its ultimate standard in any particular case, it then is certainly the business of the educational and psychological experts to determine the time of the beginning, the intensity of the work, and the standards to be attained in each of the successive stages. (Bobbit 1913, cited in Callahan, 1962, p. 84)

The analysis of tasks and roles would lead to a list of desired skills, which could then be broken down into constituent elements, and specified as the objectives of the curriculum. Based as it is on the ideas of Scientific Management, which used manufacturing as a template, this 'Scientific Curriculum' may be the origin of the tendency to use notions such as 'inputs', 'outputs' and 'efficiency' in educational discussions.

Bobbit's work was largely focused on *behavioural* objectives. He parts company with contemporary learning outcomes discourse in his attitude towards learners. Whereas the contemporary discourse puts emphasis on 'learner centredness', he saw "the interest of children as irrelevant to the educational process". Instead, "curriculum work was a practical task whose only need for theoretical justification had been 'discovered' analyzing the behavior of successful adults" (cited in Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 3). In this, he was at odds with his better-known contemporary, John Dewey (1859 – 1952), who stressed the importance of 'child-centred theory', and whose ideas I will return to below. Bobbit was also at odds with many of the

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educational thinkers and reformers who re-used, re-worked and developed his ideas, who increasingly took on the notion of learner centredness. For, as discussed in the previous chapter, recent documentation about learning outcomes and qualifications frameworks places emphasis on both the notion of learning outcomes *and* the idea of learner-centredness, the modern version of child-centredness. The two ideas are seen as intertwined, and policy makers, advocates and researchers increasingly describe learner-centredness and learning outcomes as part of the same package of policies.[1]

Elliot Eisner (1967), a critic of objectives-based approaches to the curriculum, argues that the 'Scientific Curriculum' movement of the early twentieth century collapsed under its own weight in the 1930s, because of the large number of objectives and very complex curriculum which emerged. Bobbit's approach led to long and unwieldy lists of learning objectives, something that remains a dominant feature of outcomes-based qualifications today. Herbert Kliebard, an authority on the history of the curriculum in the United States, quotes just a small selection of Bobbit's objectives, to give a flavour of the types of objectives that were developed: "the ability to keep one's emotional serenity, in the face of circumstances however trying", "an attitude and desire of obedience to the immutable and eternal laws which appear to exist in the nature of things", "ability to read and interpret facts expressed by commonly used types of graphs, diagrams, and statistical tables", "ability to care properly for the feet", "keeping razor in order" and "ability to tell interesting stories interestingly" (Kliebard, 1975, p. 40).

In the late 1940s and 50s, outcomes and objectives re-emerged. Specialists reintroduced the importance of specific educational objectives, often with links to, or invoking support from, the 'Scientific Curriculum' movement (Eisner, 1967). Ralph Tyler (1949), for example, although advocating broader objectives than Bobbit's, had a similar notion of curriculum making as linear: content must be selected on the basis that it achieves specified objectives. The means must only be determined once the end has been decided upon. Tyler argued that subject specialists should be consulted in curriculum design, but the focus should be on what the subject can contribute to the education of young laypeople; for example, how science can contribute to personal health, meet needs for responsible participation in socially significant activities, or encourage reflective thinking. Tyler emphasized studying young people and contemporary life outside the school in order to design the curriculum (Tyler, 1949). Tyler's doctoral thesis was supervised by W.W. Charters, champion of 'activity analysis', whose particular focus was on describing the competencies of teachers in order to better train them (Norris, 1991, p. 338).

The ideas of Benjamin Bloom (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956), particularly his notion of a taxonomy of learning domains, were very influential from the 1950s, and continue to be part of mainstream educational thinking, still widely taught to trainee-teachers in many countries. Bloom, and others working in his tradition such as Anderson and Krathwohl (2001) who have developed a 'Revised Bloom's Taxonomy', have a very different idea of the curriculum to those of Bobbit and the Scientific Curriculum movement. Bloom's original Taxonomy of Learning

Domains describes different kinds of cognitive processes. These are not specified competencies to be mastered and then moved on from, but rather, ongoing aims of educational processes. There may, however, be some continuities between these different schools of thought. The original taxonomy is dedicated to Ralph Tyler, and many later advocates of outcomes-based education link their ideas to Bloom. What the taxonomy developed and made mainstream is the notion of cognitive 'skills' disembedded from specific subject matters. Bloom's taxonomy also contains the idea that cognitive 'skills' can be organized on a hierarchy, from the lowest level of simple recall or recognition of facts, through increasingly more complex and abstract mental levels, to the highest order, classified as evaluation. This notion of a generic hierarchy in the absence of the context of a specific subject or knowledge area re-surfaces in contemporary outcomes and qualifications frameworks policies.

Behavioural objectives acquired particular popularity in the United States in the 1950s, and were associated with the idea of 'mastery learning', as advocated, for example, by William Glasser, a psychiatrist outside of mainstream psychiatry in the United States who wrote an influential book, *Schools Without Failure* (Glasser, 1969). Glasser criticized traditional schooling for using norm referenced assessments in which students were ranked against each other according to achievements on assessment tasks, arguing that this just focused on selecting the 'fastest horses in the racecourse'. The idea of setting objectives which all students should be able to master in their own time was seen as more progressive, enabling all students to succeed in education, instead of setting some up for failure. In mastery learning the specification of objectives is tied to a notion of learner-centredness. While it is not necessarily opposed to a subject-based curriculum, Glasser raised other themes familiar from much contemporary education policy, including criticisms that schools do not prepare students for life, and criticism of memorization and focus on 'facts'. Schools, he argued, "usually do not teach a relevant curriculum; when they do, they fail to teach the child how he can relate this to his life outside of school" (Glasser, 1969, p. 50).

Another relative of the outcomes and objectives focus in educational reform is the criterion-referencing movement. Advocated by Glasser and others such as William James Popham, this movement gained force from the early 1960s, arguing for the clear specification of criteria against which learners would be assessed (Wolf, 1995). Popham (1972) also argued for more specific behavioural objectives. Drawing on Bloom's taxonomy, he argued that educational objectives need to be disaggregated according to the types of behaviours they are designed to promote.

Criterion-referencing has been a major influence in mainstream educational thinking, with a far broader reach than outcomes-based curriculum reforms and qualifications frameworks. It could be argued that this notion has been, to a large extent, mainstreamed in educational thinking today. For example, the notion of "supposedly clear and free-standing descriptors of what pupils at different 'levels' should attain" (Wolf, 1995, p. 3) is a key part of the National Curriculum of the United Kingdom. It is often also linked to ideas about learner-centredness and

mastery learning, and invoked in opposition to norm-referencing[2]. While it is not necessarily opposed to subjects, as criteria can be set within subject areas, it has also emerged in relation to the outcomes-based qualifications movement, as Alison Wolf describes in her book about the competence-based reform movement in the United Kingdom and the National Vocational Qualifications which emerged, and to which I will return in the following chapter.

The ideas of Bobbit, Tyler, and Glasser show that outcomes approaches have a long lineage. However, as mentioned above, most accounts link their current popularity to their use in teacher education during the 1970s in the United States. Here the focus was on the competencies that teachers were expected to have, echoing the work of W.W. Charters. It is to this movement that the current spread of outcomes and competencies is usually linked:

> CBET [competence-based education and training] can be traced to education of primary and vocational teachers in the US, starting in the 1970s. Performance-based modules were developed, starting in Ohio. By 1977 some 23 states had implemented performance-based vocational education, and in the late 1980s the concept shaped many programmes of vocational education and training. (Deissinger & Hellwig, 2005, p. 8)

I have shown above that this movement has clear roots in the earlier ideas of outcomes and objectives, and traces its genesis from Bloom and Glasser.

The same lineages can be seen in another figure who influenced the more recent outcomes-based curriculum reforms, particularly in the schooling sector: William Spady, sometimes referred to as "the Father of outcomes-based education". He is described by Spreen (2001, p. 86) as "[p]robably the most significant actor in the OBE [outcomes-based education] arena". Spreen traces Spady's intellectual lineage from Tyler as well as Bloom. Like Bobbit, a central feature of Spady's notion of education is that its prime purpose is to prepare learners for 'life roles' after their formal education is complete (Killen, 2007).

Roy Killen, Australian outcomes-based education advocate, argues in an unpublished memo on Spady that

> Spady has never felt bound to conform to traditional ways of viewing education, particularly the organisational and systems aspects of school education. He is very much a "systems thinker" and this is why his ideas about educational reform are so challenging. They are not just ideas about what teachers should do in classrooms. They are ideas about how educational systems should be structured, how schools should be managed, how curricula should be designed and, ultimately, how learning and teaching should be driven by significant outcomes. (Killen, undated, p. 3)

This argument is one made by many contemporary advocates of outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, as will be seen below in this chapter and in later chapters. The specification of learning outcomes is seen as a way of thinking about the

curriculum, but also of changing the way education is managed, funded, organized, and evaluated. Spreen links the emergence of learning outcomes in the United States to market-oriented influences, and points out that outcomes-based education incorporated corporate sector concepts into education. This is evidenced by a focus on notions such as 'client satisfaction', 'efficiency' 'measurable productivity' 'accountability', 'standards', and 'quality assurance'. Defining learning outcomes was seen as a key part of institutional strategic planning, in much the same way as quality management literature emphasizes goals. It is striking how naturalized these concepts are in education policy today.

Spady's ideas never became a major tenant of educational reform in the United States. They had a far greater influence on curriculum reform in Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa. Spady provided consultancy services and advocacy visits to these countries, all of which had lengthy experiments in various types of outcomes-based reforms (Spreen, 2001).

Two common threads are worth highlighting across these different thinkers and attempts at educational reform. One has been mentioned at length above: a general tendency to oppose a subject-based curriculum, or reject the idea of subjects as the starting point for curriculum design. This is not necessarily inherent to all the positions mentioned above. However, what is common, despite substantial differences, is that the various outcomes/ objectives/ competencies movements all entail attempts to describe skills, including cognitive 'skills', as disembedded from specific subject matter. In most instances this has led to difficulties, for although some sense of outcome, purpose, and standard is inherent in educational processes, pinning down exactly what this should be has proved difficult, particularly when outcomes are specified outside of specific contexts and subjects or bodies of knowledge. It is perhaps this problem which leads to the second common thread: a desire for dramatic change to education systems. The change desired differs— from empowering individual learners to improving the 'usefulness' of education to employers—but substantial change is believed necessary; the current system is seen as failing. And perhaps a third common thread is that while reformers aim for system-wide change, their mechanism is often the production of detailed and narrow technical specifications. Wolf's observation about reforms in England and Wales applies equally to outcomes-based approaches as a whole:

> [a] curious aspect of competence-based reform, at least in England and Wales, is that, although the reformers' ambitions are very wide, their focus has been very narrow. They would like to see major changes in the whole institutional context of vocational education and training but they have themselves treated the approach as an essentially technical affair. (Wolf, 1995, p. 131)

This 'technicalism' has in many instances been argued to have led to the downfall of outcomes-based approaches. Early and more recent criticisms of objectives and outcomes pointed out that they tend to trivialize education. This, Lawrence Stenhouse argues, (1975, 2002), is the consequence of an over-emphasis on endpoints and a

neglect of processes. Others (e.g. Scott, 2008) have examined how outcomes-based approaches have led to an atomized model of knowledge. I will pick up some of these critiques and debates in Chapter 6, after discussing more recent developments using outcomes and competencies. But first I turn to a brief and necessarily selective consideration of the history and major tenants of child/learner-centredness, as this is another key component of recent educational reforms.

LOOKING BACK ON LEARNER-CENTREDNESS

Many advocates of child-centred or learner-centred education are opposed to a narrow instrumental notion of education and oppose the notion of outcomes because they value the importance of process, and do not like the idea of fixed end points. Others are critical of the behaviourism that has been part of many outcomes-based approaches. But many reformers and thinkers who have adopted the terms 'child-centred' or 'learner-centred' have argued that allowing learners to determine what they want to learn, as well as how and when, helps to ensure not only that they do learn, but that they learn something useful to *them*. Following from this has been hostility, in the ideas of *some* advocates of learner-centredness, to the idea of subjects as the basis of the curriculum. In emphasizing the notion of relevance, the idea of learner centredness has at times developed common ground with the idea of learning outcomes. This is particularly visible in contemporary policy documents advocating for outcomes-based qualifications frameworks, but can also be traced back through the history of the idea of learner-centred education.

Educational reformers attacking the subject-based curriculum under the rallying cry, 'we teach children, not subjects' have a long intellectual lineage. Although usually associated with the works of John Dewey in the early 20th century, some track it as far back as John Amos Comenius in the 17th century, and others to Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, and Herbert Spencer in the 18th and 19th centuries. Rousseau (1712-1778) is probably the best-known early figure in this history, frequently cited by later educational reformers. John Darling (1994), British expert and advocate for child-centred education, argues that he may not be the starting point of child-centred educational thinking, but he is the most brilliant early exponent, and that the remainder of child-centered or progressive educational theory can be seen as a series of footnotes to him. Rousseau argued that we should observe the mind's pattern of development, and discover ourselves through education. Education should not be about learning an approved body of knowledge, but rather, discovering our individual nature and focusing our attention on creating the conditions for its fullest growth (Egan, 2008).

Rousseau wrote about a hypothetical boy, Emile, who would learn only from unmediated experience: from the real world, not in a classroom. As Barrow (1978) points out, his experience is not completely *unmediated,* because Emile would not be allowed to experiment with anything really dangerous. Further, in the sense that Emile's experience would be completely artificial, removed from society, it would

be entirely *mediated*. What Rousseau principally implies is that Emile would have no academic teaching and no moralizing or rules. The former is qualified, for, while there is to be no direct *instruction*, there is a tutor who could take advantage of situations in order to advance learning; thus Barrow (1978, p. 20) suggests that rather than having no teaching *per se*, "the tutor must not be detected by Emile in the act of teaching". For the first twelve years of his life he will not be actively introduced to books or reading. After this, he may start to gain some knowledge, starting with that most practical and relevant: for example, he will learn geography starting with the town he lives in, and science by the problems that confront him. Rousseau placed a strong value on practical learning—Emile should learn a trade. In the final stage of his education, from age 15 to 20, Emile would live with other people for the first time. At this time he would be introduced to 'facts' and books, including history and poetry, which, Rousseau argued, he would appreciate, as they would be new and interesting (Darling, 1994). Rousseau also wrote, more briefly, about the education of 'Sophie', who was to be brought up to be Emile's wife, her main role being to delight Emile.

Many of Rousseau's ideas are still popular today. His notion of child-centredness was based on the idea that education must be individualized. He also distinguished between "learning for the sake of learning, and the desire to find out about things that affect oneself and one's wellbeing" (Darling, 1994, p. 8), which is related to current ideas of useful or relevant knowledge. Other ideas that still have considerable currency are: the danger that education is preparing learners for a world that no longer exists; the primacy of sense experience, learning through experience, and learning by doing; 'learning how to learn', which is seen as more important than learning any particular skill or content; an insistence on useful or relevant knowledge; and suspicion of art and abstract study with a complementary emphasis on the dignity and value of learning a trade (Barrow, 1978, p. 183).

A lesser-known figure following Rousseau, and sometimes cited as a key early thinker about child-centredness, was Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi. Darling (1994) argues that there is a clear intellectual lineage of child-centred thought, and that Pestalozzi, like other child-centred reformers, knew the work of his predecessors, and developed or revised it, and suggests that Pestalozzi called his son Jean-Jacques as a testimony to his 'intoxication' with Rousseau (Darling, 1994, p. 17). Pestalozzi, who lived in Switzerland in the late 18th and early 19th century, also emphasized that instead of dealing with words, children should learn through activity and through interaction with objects, and should be free to pursue their own interests and draw their own conclusions (Darling 1994, p. 18). Like later child-centred reformers, Pestalozzi strongly emphasized the laws of nature, spontaneity, and self-activity. Children should not be given ready-made answers but should arrive at answers themselves; their own powers of seeing, judging and reasoning should be cultivated, their self-activity encouraged (Silber, 1965, p. 140), although Pestalozzi actually had very specific and prescriptive ideas about curriculum and pedagogy, which he saw as derived from nature (Pestalozzi, 1894).

Herbert Spencer (1820 – 1903) came to prominence later in the nineteenth century. He was an English philosopher who expounded similar ideas, although he did not link them to Rousseau, perhaps because of the latter's left-wing politics, with which he disagreed (Egan, 2002). Spencer claimed superiority to earlier philosophers of educational reform because, he argued, his ideas were based on science. He argued strongly for the now commonly accepted notion that education should be about educating 'the whole person'. He also believed that children's understanding could expand only from things of which they had direct experience, and that education should start with the concrete. He emphasized that the process of self-development should be encouraged, and children should be told as little as possible. He argued that traditional subjects were ornamental affectations of the elite. His publications were widely read by those involved in building the new state schools in the United States in the late nineteenth century: by the end of the 1860s, his book, consisting of four essays initially published separately, had been republished in 15 editions by seven publishers. During the 1870s it was reprinted in New York nine times by one publisher, D. Appleton, alone, and in the 1880s there were fifteen printings, all but two of them in the United States (Egan, 2002). He was offered honours in the United States, England, Italy, Denmark, Belgium, Greece, Austria, and Russia. However, as Egan (2002) points out, despite this popularity, Spencer is rarely mentioned in educational texts today, and many of the ideas that he argued for are attributed to John Dewey, who held very similar ideas about education[3].

John Dewey, mentioned above, was an educational reformer whose ideas dominated much educational thinking in the twentieth century and beyond. He is probably the most well-known voice of educational reform in the English speaking world, associated, amongst other things, with having "helped to legitimate child-centred educational theory" (Darling, 1994, p. 25). He is also linked with what is referred to as 'progressivism'[4] in education, which is often used as a synonym for child/learner-centred education. The Progressive Education Association in the United States codified many of Dewey's ideas to guide teachers, including examples such as, "Teachers will inspire a desire for knowledge, and will serve as guides in the investigations undertaken rather than task-masters"; and "Interest shall be the motive for all work" (Novack, 1975, p. 229). According to Darling (1994, p. 3), the progressive view "is that education should be designed to reflect the nature of the child". Dewey argued that education needed to shift its 'centre of gravity' so that it was centred around children. In terms that are very similar to the ways in which the current 'new educational paradigm' is discussed, he suggested:

> Now the change which is coming into our education is the shifting centre of gravity. It is a change, a revolution, not unlike that introduced by Copernicus when the astronomical center shifted from the earth to the sun. In this case the child becomes the sun about which the appliances of education revolve; he is the center about which they are organized. (Dewey, 1956, p. 34).

Like his predecessors and followers, Dewey positioned his ideas as new, and emphasized the out-datedness of the contemporary system: "… our present education is … an education dominated almost entirely by the mediaeval conception of learning" (Dewey, 1956, p. 26). He emphasized "its passivity of attitude, its mechanical massing of children, its uniformity of curriculum and method" (Dewey, 1956, p. 34). Dewey argued that the knowledge presented in the curriculum must be driven by and related to the child's interests:

> An end which is the child's own carries him on to possess the means of its accomplishment. But when material is directly supplied in the form of a lesson to be learned as a lesson, the connecting links of need and aim are conspicuous for their absence. (Dewey, 1956, p. 25).

Dewey's idea, much in line with the contemporary popularity of the idea of teacher as 'facilitator', was that "…the teacher becomes a co-planner of work, whose expertise is based less on academic knowledge—though a broad general knowledge will be necessary—than on an understanding of children and groups" (Darling, 1994, p. 27). The children would carry out the educational process, guided and aided by the teacher.

Another idea explored by Dewey which remains popular today is 'learning to learn', which was linked to a preoccupation (equally prevalent today) with what was seen as a rapidly changing world. As mentioned above, this was also a concern of Rousseau. Like today's reformers, 'learning to learn' was juxtaposed with learning 'a fixed stock of information'. Like reformers who preceded and followed him, Dewey emphasized that 'changes' in society required 'changes' in education. In particular, he discussed the growth of science-based inventions that

> have utilized the forces of nature on a vast and inexpensive scale; the growth of a world-wide market as the object of production, of vast manufacturing centers to supply this market, of cheap and rapid means of communication and distribution between all its parts … One can hardly believe there has been a revolution in all history so rapid, so extensive, so complete. … That this revolution should not affect education in some other than a formal and superficial fashion is inconceivable. (Dewey, 1956, p. 9)

In the works of Dewey and many others the idea of 'learner-centredness' is often linked with ideas about student motivation—the assumption being that students will be more motivated if they can see the purpose of what they are learning, or if the starting point is their immediate interests. This has been influenced by the idea that children learn naturally, easily, and pleasurably if left to their own devices, and the idea, derived from psychological research into cognitive development, that learning involves the 're-construction' of knowledge by learners. It is believed that shaping education around learners' interests and inclinations will enable them to be active constructors of their own knowledge, instead of passive recipients (or memorizers) of inert knowledge. So, for example, Gay (2003) discusses teachers who draw

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on learners' life experiences to teach "higher-order math knowledge" to African-American middle school students in the United States:

> To teach algebra, they emphasize the experiences and familiar environments of urban and rural low-income students, many of whom are at high risk for academic failure. A key feature of their approach is making students conscious of how algebraic principles and formulas operate in their daily lives and getting students to understand how to explain these connections in nonalgebraic language before converting this knowledge into technical notations and calculations of algebra. Students previously considered by some teachers as incapable of learning algebra are performing at high levels—better, in fact, than many of their advantaged peers. (In Flinders & Thornton, 2004, p. 320)

The example above shows that the idea of *learner-centredness* is not inherently incompatible with the idea of subjects or a knowledge-based curriculum. Some advocates of learner-centredness see it as a primarily pedagogical notion: that the knowledge which is in the curriculum must be presented in ways that resonate with children's interests and existing knowledge. Thus, for some, disciplines or subjects should be the core of the *curriculum*, but *pedagogy* should be child-centred, to ensure that learning has meaning for the child. "Learning should be child-centred in that the learner comes to possess what he knows" argues Entwistle (1970, p. 203), who also suggests that ideas of child-centred education are focused on ensuring that schools are happy places.

But there is a frequent slip from arguments about learner-centred pedagogy to a notion of learner-centred curricula. The idea of the 'motivating curriculum'—that the curriculum will motivate learners to succeed in education if it is relevant to their interests and experiences—can contain a conflation of pedagogy and the curriculum. Some advocates of learner-centredness have gone so far as to denounce the idea of learner-centered pedagogy as a 'sugar coating', that simply appeals to learners' interests in order to in continue to teach predetermined subjects. Dewey argued: "When education is based in theory and practice upon experience, it goes without saying that the organized subject-matter of the adult and the subject specialist cannot provide the starting point" (Dewey (1993, p. 83) cited in Wheelahan, 2010, p. 114). Diane Ravitch (2001) discusses advocates of this line of argument who suggest that teachers must not just *start* with learners' interests in order to make the subject matter more interesting to them, but must *genuinely* work with what learners are interested in. This would mean, for example, that the pedagogical strategy of locating the teaching of mathematics in the everyday experiences of learners to help them make sense of mathematical concepts is not sufficient. Instead, as William H. Kirkpatrick, an early exponent of 'the project method' in the United States, argues, the teaching of mathematics should only involve mathematical ideas derived from, logical to, or embedded in the learners' everyday experiences. Kirkpatrick,

a mathematician by training, published an influential article in 1918, and later a textbook, in which he argued that projects in school must genuinely interest the learner and be chosen by them, in order to motivate them, promote democracy, and teach character and creativity. Others go further still, and argue against the teaching of 'mathematics' as a subject, and of subjects in general. Ravitch (2001), critic of child-centred education and progressivism, argues that while in some of his writings Dewey defended subjects as the basis of the curriculum, he did not oppose, and often endorsed, the writings of contemporaries which were more explicitly opposed to a subject-based curriculum.

Dewey was, of course, a highly prolific philosopher whose views shifted over time, and so cannot always be pinned down. The extent to which his notion of child-centredness is opposed to subjects is the focus of much debate. Like some present-day advocates of learner-centredness, (for example, Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006), he also argued against a neglect of knowledge in education, and suggested that children's interests should be seen as leverage to teach them more, not as accomplishments in their own right (Dewey, 1956).

Nonetheless, throughout the history of learning outcomes and learner-centredness, argument emerge to the effect that the boundaries between subjects are arbitrary, the structure of bodies of knowledge is unimportant and structured bodies of knowledge are not particularly important, nor should they be the starting point in curriculum design. Boundaries between subjects as well as between school knowledge and everyday knowledge are seen as similarly arbitrary and as counteracting effective learning. In Chapter 6, I will provide some epistemological arguments against this position, but for now I will merely mention the view of Egan (2002), who argues that the 'motivating curriculum' is often not motivating at all. He points out that children are frequently bored by curricula that are derived from their 'everyday' experiences, and are often more interested in dinosaurs and distant heroes than social studies focused on 'my community'.

What ideas of learning outcomes and the ideas of learner (and child) centredness as they have manifested at various points in the last century have in common is hostility, to varying degrees, to the subject-based curriculum. Both outcomes-based and learner-centred approaches have questioned the idea that subjects handed down by tradition should be the basis of education (Thornton & Flinders).

In the 1960s and 70s, the 'freeschoolers' took up the call against subjects, suggesting fundamental changes to schools. A.S. Neill, Neil Postman and Charles Weingartner were the prominent voices. Like Rousseau, they were suspicious of 'book learning', and, like most of the progressivist or child-centred reformers discussed in this chapter, emphasized 'natural' learning instead. They all argued for a learner-centred starting point for education, and generally argued against the 'traditional' curriculum and against subject division in the curriculum. In discussing the idea of starting from the 'interests' of the child, A.S. Neill extended the use of the word 'interest' to one similar to that advocated in policy documents today:

not just what fascinates a child, but what they perceive as being to their advantage (Barrow, 1978). The idea of the constantly changing world emerges again. Postman and Weingarter, for example, wrote in 1971 that "change—constant, accelerating, ubiquitous—is the most striking characteristic of the world we live in" (Postman & Weingartner, 1971, p. 13).

The ideas of radical literacy educator Paulo Freire (e.g. Freire, 1974), and the struggles of liberation movements against colonial education systems, are sometimes used to oppose subject-based curricula, although Freire did not advocate an anti-subject approach. Freire's emancipatory pedagogy emphasized that education should help learners to connect their personal problems to broader structural issues in society, arguing against what he described as 'banking' education, where facts are seen as things to be deposited into empty learners. Instead he advocated an approach which was based on dialogue. These ideas are often *invoked* as arguments against a subject-based curriculum. However, teaching people subjects does not necessarily mean treating them as blank slates, and, many of Freire's ideas were not about formal schooling, but about conscientization; he was concerned with the role of literacy in political activism, and the ways in which it could be used to develop self-awareness and insight into the world. Freire's approach is sometimes invoked to justify an anti-subject stance in the sense of working with issues of immediate concern to learners; this is something which may well be appropriate in activist groups. But, as I will argue in Chapter 6, it is less appropriate in formal schooling. I cannot here do justice to the nuance of Freire's ideas, nor evaluate their strengths and weaknesses. The point for now is to note that he was a key left-wing figure who is often presented as being against subject-based curricula.

The concept of 'deschooling' is another idea that has emerged again and again in the history of educational reform. Many reformers in the 1960s and 70s referred back to earlier theorists, arguing, for instance, that the logic of Rousseau's ideas implied that the school system itself was the problem. The 'deschoolers', who included Ivan Illich, Paul Goodman and Everett Reimer, argued for the abolition of educational institutions (Barrow, 1978). Although Illich later distanced himself from the term 'deschooling', what is common to these three thinkers is profound hostility to institutions, including, or perhaps particularly, educational institutions. Reimer, quoted in Illich (1970, p. 105), argues that "learning occurs only with great difficulty in the role of the classroom student"; it occurs "naturally at work and at play, but must be artificially stimulated when separated from them". Like earlier reformers, and like today's policy makers, they emphasized the changing world as a key motivating factor in radically changing education. Goodman was not completely against schools, but was strongly against teachers and professional training for teachers, and argued, like Rousseau, that there should be no prescribed curriculum until the age of 12. After 12, he argued for an extended apprenticeship system, in which an individual could be apprenticed in anything that interested them[5]. The 'deschoolers' were concerned with efficiency, and saw schools as wasting children's time. Like many of today's enthusiastic reformers, they were excited about the

possibilities of technology replacing schools, and, like Pestalozzi before them, were critical of teachers. As Entwistle (1970, p. 167) writes:

> Enthusiasm for the mechanization of schooling often conceals a mistrust of the average teacher which is nowadays rarely expressed as candidly as it was by Pestalozzi, himself a central figure in the child-centred tradition.

The passage below gives some indication of Pestalozzi's mistrust:

> I would take school instruction out of the hands of the old order of decrepit, stammering, journeymen-teachers as well as from the new weak ones, who are generally no better for popular instruction, and entrust it to the undivided powers of Nature herself, to the light that God kindles and ever keeps alive in the hearts of fathers and mothers, to the interest of parents who desire that their children should grow up in favour with God and man. (Pestalozzi, 1894, p. 97)

Thus, the ideas which dominate qualification reform today have a rich and long ancestry, despite their presentation by policy makers as 'new learning paradigms'. In fact, this tendency to present their ideas as new, forward-looking, and progressive innovations is another commonality across time and space between outcomes-based approaches and learner-centred approaches (Egan, 2002; Muller, 2001). Many of them have been associated with new developments in technology, which are seen as changing knowledge, the role of teachers, and the ways in which learners can access knowledge.

Presenting 'newness' as a virtue is common in education. Those concerned with social justice tend to position newness in juxtaposition to ideas that are seen as conservative or elitist simply by virtue of being old. Left-wing educational reformers have usually wanted to achieve 'radical' change, in the sense of dramatic and substantial change, and so favour ideas which seem to be new and forward-looking. Reformers associated with market-oriented approaches or economic efficiency link 'old' or 'traditional' approaches to education with backwardness, inefficiency, and irrelevance to industry. Callahan (1962), for example, writes that this type of charge was made by industry-oriented reformers in the United States in the early twentieth century. Educational reformers today likewise argue that the 'archaic' content and pedagogy of traditional education are out of touch with emergent social realities, including the impact of the mass media and the 'knowledge explosion' (Sedunary, 1996). David Harvey (2005) argues that the fetishization of newness as well as of technology is a product of capitalism, because new technologies often lead to profit increases and new market shares. As the ideas dominating qualification reform show, it doesn't even matter whether the ideas are really new, only that they are presented as such.

THE PENDULUM OF IDEAS

Conservatism in education has been associated with an invocation of tradition, and the arguments that the traditional curriculum embodies traditional wisdom, values, and authority, and that the culture represented in 'traditional' subjects transforms and

enriches individuals (Moore, 2009, p. 4). Matthew Arnold's notion of education as the 'best that has been thought and said' is usually invoked[6]. The traditional division of the disciplines and disciplinary knowledge "are endowed with timeless and universal features. The role of the curriculum is to transmit timeless truths through contemplative processes, and to inculcate appropriate deference to traditional bodies of knowledge, and instill respect for authority and traditional values" (Wheelahan, 2010, p. 107). Pring (1976, p. 144) expresses it thus:

> Conservative restorationists argue that the curriculum should be anchored in the past and they emphasise canons of influential texts, formal and didactic modes of pedagogy, the inculcation of values rooted in stability and hierarchy, strong insulations between disciplinary and everyday knowledge, strong forms of classification between different aspects of knowledge, and indeed in some cases a belief that curriculum knowledge is either intrinsically justified or transcendental.

This is why the traditional curriculum is associated with conservative social and political agendas, and has led many to argue that the notion of 'an educated person' is circular: "What is often meant in calling people educated is that they have learned the kind of stuff that has traditionally been taught in educational institutions" (Darling, 1994, p. 63).

As discussed above, various arguments against this have been laid out through the course of educational reform movements. Reformers from the nineteenth-century onwards have observed that the "richness and abundance of understanding that should have come to all students from literacy through an education in the classics had too often descended into dry pedantry" (Egan, 2008, p. 21). Many have argued that the traditional curriculum is alienating, and leads to failure and students dropping out of education. And the idea of 'tradition' dictating subjects has a serious practical problem: it does not provide criteria with which to make decisions about which knowledge should be chosen for specific individuals or groups, either in terms of broad subject areas or in terms of selection of knowledge within subject areas.

And yet, learner centred approaches to the curriculum do not have a great track record in achieving the claims made for them—neither the more modest claims of ensuring student success at school, nor the more radical claims of ensuring that schools disrupt rather than reproduce the *status quo*. Egan (2002) points out that while learner alienation, drop-out and failure are usually discussed in relation to an assumed subject-centred approach, in fact learner-centred curricula are in many instances the orthodoxy in schools, have been *attempted* in different forms for over the past 100 years, and have not solved these problems.

One reason given to explain this state of affairs is that learner-centred approaches have not been 'properly' or 'thoroughly' implemented, or have become distorted and diluted in their implementation. Paul Goodman, a 'deschooler', argues that progressive ideas are distorted through their institutionalization (Goodman 1964). Some supporters of progressivism (for example, Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006),

argue that while aspects of progressivist or learner-centred reforms in Canada and the United States may have been adopted to some extent, or in official rhetoric, they were never fullyimplemented, and where they were implemented, conservative backlashes have mainly reversed them. Some researchers suggest that, while they have had some successes, particularly at specific times in history, vested elite interests have unleashed backlashes which have ensured that the subject-based curriculum prevails. Darling (1994), for example, describes progressivism as the established orthodoxy in the 1960s in primary education in the United Kingdom, a situation he attributes to the intellectual freedom of the 60s, but describes a 'backlash' against it in later decades. Scott (2008) agrees that in the 1970s and 80s curriculum theorists put more focus on knowledge, in particular transcendental knowledge, and Tomlinson (2009, pp. 26–27) links this with a return to education "as an allocator of occupations, a defender of traditional academic values, teaching respect for authority, discipline, morality and 'Englishness' and preparing a workforce for the new conditions of flexible, insecure labour markets". Darling (1994) describes this shift as culminating in John Major's announcement to the Conservative Party Conference in 1991: "The progressive theorists have had their say, and they have had their day".

However, nearly all commentators agree that *some* reforms and ideas introduced under the banner of child-centred or progressivist reforms have been positive. These include, for example, acceptance that failure to learn the curriculum might be "due to faults other than the child's recalcitrance" (Entwistle, 1970, p. 24), and that schools should not be dreary places. Tomlinson similarly (2009) suggests that the reforms actually instituted through the child-centred movement in the United Kingdom were much more modest than their critics suggested, and were generally necessary, with positive effects. There is also some agreement that child-centred or progressivist reforms have been influential, regardless of whether this is seen as positive or negative. Darling (1994), arguing in favour of progressivism, and Egan (2002) and Ravitch (2001), arguing against it, all agree that many aspects of it, or of the child-centred tradition, have become common-place and accepted wisdom, particularly in primary schools. Darling (1994, p. 32) points out that Dewey's influence was massive in the United States and United Kingdom, as well as in Russia and China, countries which he visited and toured, and in many other countries which learnt of his ideas. Entwistle (1970) also claims that child-centredness is a foundation of much educational thought. Egan (2002) and Ravitch (2001) both argue that progressivism has become conventional wisdom in North American education; Egan argues that even where progressivism is not the default in terms of practices in schools, it is the default in terms of the concepts and vocabulary that dominate educational research and teaching.

But they and other critics suggest that there are problems with progressivism which are intrinsic to it. Young and Muller (2010, p. 19), for example, argue that when boundaries between knowledge areas are not made explicit (as they are in a subject-based curriculum) learners who stumble are less able to see what causes them to stumble. Drawing on the extensive work of Bernstein (for example,

Berstein 1977; 2000), they demonstrate that the difference between 'progressive' and 'traditional' curricula is not the presence or absence of rules, but rather their *visibility* or *invisibility;* in other words, the degree to which they are made explicit to the learners, as well as the degree to which learners are prepared by their home background to perceive and understand what is expected of them. They argue that progressive curricula are likely to *entrench* social inequalities (Muller, 2001; Taylor, 2000; Young & Muller, 2010). Even if learner centredness is only considered from the point of view of pedagogy, and not as the basis for curriculum construction, in other words, where learner centredness means using learners' everyday experiences and interests in order to draw them into prescribed subjects, some argue that over-emphasizing context can sometimes make it more difficult for learners to acquire systematically organized knowledge in educational institutions. Bernard Charlot (2009, p. 92), for example, argues:

> José leaves home with thirty euros and loses ten euros: how many euros will he get back home with? The pupil solves this problem without difficulty because the meanings "lose" and "subtract" converge. Now, José leaves home with thirty euros, earns money and comes back home with fifty euros: how much did he earn? To solve the problem the pupils have to do a subtraction, which they do not find logical, given that José earned money. One can give lots of examples in which the reference to the every-day world creates a difficulty for the pupil.

The effects, positive or negative, of learner-centred reforms and learning outcomes and objectives are difficult to evaluate empirically. One obstacle to such evaluation is the enormous number of uncontrollable variables which will always be present in research in schools. But more importantly, the different perspectives involve different notions of what education can and should achieve, and hence different criteria for educational success. For example, while some researchers (for example, Donnelly, 2005) argue for teacher-centred classrooms and prescribed syllabuses on the grounds that this leads to improvement in international and national achievement tests, critics argue against international and national achievement tests on the grounds that they lead to teacher-centred classrooms and prescribed syllabuses (for example, Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Zajda & Zajda, 2005).

The continued rediscovery of educational ideas may be located in the different manifestations of both subject and learner-centred curricula, and the fact that different uses and interpretations of outcomes, objectives and competences have also taken different forms across different levels and sectors of education systems. The extent to which a curriculum is centrally prescribed, and how prescriptive it is, also tends to confuse matters[7]. There are inevitably substantial differences between the education policies of various countries, between policy rhetoric and the reality of education institutions and education systems within countries, and between policies implemented at different times in the same country. In some instances the same education systems have some policy mechanisms which support 'subject centred'

approaches and others which tend towards 'learner centred' approaches. 'Subject-centred' approaches have tended to hold stronger ground in senior secondary schools and universities, and 'child-' or 'learner-centred' approaches have been more prominent in adult education, primary education, and nursery schools, as well as in vocational education, especially in competence-based training. Elite education, particularly exclusive private secondary and tertiary institutions, has generally taken a more traditional subject based approach[8].

What is contested is not just the merits of the arguments for and against these approaches, but the extent to which curricula and education systems are influenced by them today. On the one side, researchers and policy analysts argue that narrow subject-based curricula are increasingly entrenched internationally (Scott, 2008). Goodson (1994) talks about the 'impregnable fortress' of the subject-based curriculum, drawing the term from Kliebard, who concludes his study of the history of the American curriculum with the observation that "by and large, dethroning school subjects turned out to be a much more formidable task than the proponents of such change ever imagined" (Kliebard, 2004, p. 218). David Scott (2008) suggests that contemporary curricula are governed entirely by disciplines, and that any debates within governments about the correctness of this have been put aside:

> governments around the world, although not exclusively so, have sought to reinforce strong boundaries between disciplinary and everyday knowledge in developing the contents of their curricula, and have reinforced strong insulations between learners, between learners and teachers, between knowledge domains and between institutions which focus on teaching and learning. (Scott, 2008, p. 146).

He argues that the ideas which predominate in contemporary curriculum thinking are: that traditional knowledge areas and the strong boundaries between them need to be preserved; that each of these knowledge areas can be expressed in terms of lower and higher level domains, and the former have to be taught before the latter and sequenced correctly; that certain groups of children are better able to access the curriculum than others, and therefore a differentiated curriculum is required; and that the teacher's role is to impart this body of knowledge in the most efficient and effective way possible. Other contemporary critics bemoan how 'conservative' schools and the subject-based curriculum are (for example, Murgatroyd, 2010). Like advocates for earlier child-centred reforms, Murgatroyd (2010, p. 260) attributes the problems with contemporary education to a focus on 'content' at the expense of 'learning how to learn' or 'skills and competencies', and makes much of the 'speed of discovery' of knowledge, which, he argues, means that "much of what is taught in schools is, by definition, outdated".

But still other researchers call for knowledge to be 'brought back into the curriculum' (Young, 2008), and suggest that knowledge is undermined or marginalized in contemporary curricula (Muller, 2000; Rata, 2012; Young, 2007). Young and Muller (2010) argue that this results in tracked or streamed systems,

which preserve classical education for the elite, and provide vocational or practical alternatives for the rest. Ravitch (2001), fiercely critical of progressivism in the United States, and until recently associated with conservative political agendas, suggests that progressivism has dominated educational thinking in the United States since the 1890s. She laments the loss of subjects in North American education, arguing that it has led to poor students being denied access to meaningful education.

It could be hoped that the different schools of thought would have moderating effects on each other. Entwistle discusses the notion of a counter-cyclical theory of education: when the needs of children dominate, theorists assert the claims of the disciplines, and vice versa: "Out of this, it is hoped, would emerge a satisfactory synthesis, a stabilizing of educational practice at a point mid-way between the extremes to which the pendulum swings" (Entwistle, 1970, p. 211). On the contrary, he argues that the problem with the swinging pendulum is that it leads to the worst sides of both approaches. Instead of producing some kind of happy medium, educational theory is perceived as in perpetual conflict: "There can be no gain, least of all for children .… For the middle ground is not a neutral territory where reasonable men come together to fashion a treaty of peace; it is a no-man's-land where virtually nothing of rational educational theory survives at all" (Entwistle, 1970, pp. 211–121). Similarly, Egan (2008, p. 26) describes the history of education in the twentieth century as "a bizarre war between those who were 'subject-centered' and those who were 'child-centered', between traditionalists and progressivists". The war has manifested itself, he suggests, in swings from the one to the other, as well as uneasy, (and, according to him, ultimately unworkable), compromises between the two. And, in Egan's view, it is precisely the *failures* of *both* approaches that lead to this periodic and unsatisfactory swinging between the two.

Much educational literature assumes that learner-centred policies are intrinsically left-wing, and subject-centred policies intrinsically right-wing. Darling (1994), for example, suggests that attempts to halt the advance of the child-centred movement are the product of social conservatism. The clash between child- and subject-centred education, he suggests, is not a clash of intellectual ideas, but of ideologies. Referring to the opposition to child-centred education of R.S. Peters, Paul Hirst, and Robert Dearden, he argues that these "[p]hilosophers of education are therefore not spectators at the revolution, but counter-revolutionaries" (Darling, 1994, p. 86).[9] However, as can be seen in the very brief discussion above, the inherently conservative nature of the subject-centred curriculum is disputed. Indeed, Marxist Antonio Gramsci saw traditional education as empowering and necessary, as I discuss in further detail in Chapter 6. And many contemporary researchers (e.g. Young, 2008) argue for a left-wing approach to a subject-based curriculum, on the grounds that the knowledge which the elite are taught in school is useful or powerful, and hence should be taught to everyone: Young argues that it is the *power* of this knowledge that makes education a social justice issue. In other words, while most critical writers on education agree that it is inevitably political,[10] it is much less clear that particular ideas about education and the curriculum, as well as about

epistemology, are inherent to particular political agendas. Thus while it is difficult to separate ideas about what should be taught, to whom, by whom, and at whose cost, from broader political questions, the relationship between different approaches to the curriculum and particular political ideologies are not straightforward. This issue will be explored most thoroughly in Chapter 7. In order to lay the basis for this discussion, I will now pick up the story of learning outcomes and objectives, as well as learner centredness, as they emerged in qualification reform in the 1980s and 90s. The following chapter examines outcomes-based qualifications in vocational education reforms in the United Kingdom and Australia, and an outcomes-based National Qualifications Framework in New Zealand which was intended to reform the entire education and training system.

ENDNOTES

[1] Dewey also supervised the doctoral thesis of W.W. Charters, leader of the 'Scientific Curriculum' movement, so there may have already been relationships between these two schools of thought (Ravitch, 2001).

[2] Criterion-referencing and norm-referencing are often positioned as two alternative ways of conducting assessment. Advocates of criterion-referencing tend to suggest that norm-referencing is an unfair system of assessment. The very term 'criterion-referenced assessment' implies that there are ways of assessing that invoke no criteria at all. This does not make sense. All assessment is based on criteria, whether implicit or explicit. Norm-referencing is about what happens to the results of assessment; how they are used for ranking students within schools or for selection into professions. Although there is no necessity for this, in policy documents norm-referencing is usually associated with written examinations, and presented as a package with other 'bads' like memorization and 'passive learning'.

[3] Egan attributes this to Spencer's unpalatable political ideas, such as social Darwinism and racism, as well as his opposition to public education, particularly for the 'lower classes', despite the fact that the educational ideas which he advocated were in many substantial ways the same as those of earlier and later 'progressive' reformers.

[4] The term 'progressivism' is highly contested both by those who align themselves to it and those who are critical of it. Some suggest progressivism is so diverse that it can't be pinned down (for example, Kliebard, 2004), while others (for example, Ravitch, 2001) suggest that the different strands, diverse as they are, have certain core things in common—particularly, she argues, hostility to subjects as the basis of curricula.

[5] Even those sympathetic with the deschooling 'school of thought', such as Ian Lister (1974), have pointed out that in most instances apprenticeships are just as likely, if not more likely, to be as exploitative and oppressive to learners as schools.

[6] Although Arnold and his idea are usually associated with a conservative political agenda, a close consideration of his works reveals that they are not open to easy labeling. His argument was that culture "seeks to do away with classes; to make the best that has been thought and known in the world current everywhere; to make all men live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, where they may use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely—nourished, and not bound by them" (Arnold, 1993, p. 79).

[7] A centrally prescribed curriculum often seems, in critical educational writing from the United Kingdom and United States, to be assumed to be bad. Hyslop-Margison and Sears, for example, argue for a subject-based curriculum, but argue that it should not be centrally prescribed: "Policies such as centralized curricula development enforced by rigid testing and teacher accountability are designed more to constrain teachers than they are to define and measure student achievement" (Hyslop-Margison & Sears, 2006, pp. 16–17). It is possible, however, to be highly prescriptive without having a subject-based curriculum. The South African outcomes-based curriculum prescribed

learning outcomes to a very fine level of detail, without any subjects or indeed any content at all being prescribed. Ravitch (2010) discusses extreme examples of prescriptiveness around pedagogy in literacy and maths programmes in North American schools, as well as the negative effects of 'skills-based' accountability tests which are de-linked from a curriculum because there is no prescribed curriculum, and suggests that a prescribed curriculum may liberate teachers from this.

[8] Young (2008) suggests this may be a key factor in perpetuating the idea that traditional education systems produce inequality, because it creates a perceived link between elites and the subject-based knowledge learned in elite schools, which is then seen as elite knowledge, or knowledge that operates in the interests of elites.

[9] Although less critical of their intentions, he suggests that an 'unintended' consequence of their ideas was to give ammunition to conservatives in a 'back to basics' agenda.

[10] There are exceptions, a recent one being Frank Furedi (2009), who argues for the depoliticization of education.