

‘Gatekeepers and Licensers’: Exploring aspects of curricula change in 21st Century Cornwall.

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Introduction

Following the election of the Labour Party to government in 1997 a number of long standing concerns about political representation, resulted in the devolution of power held by the government in London to Scotland, Northern Ireland and Wales. In addition, building on the earlier Labour Party publication entitled ‘A new voice for England’s regions’, the new administration examined how it might further devolve or decentralise power within England. Campaigning organisations (Campaigns for the English Regions) were set up in 1999/2000, in each of the identified regions, with the intention to both make the case for devolution and also to provide fora for discussion on how this might be taken forward.

Political Devolution and Cornu-appropriate curricula

In the South West, the identified region extended from Gloucestershire, across to Dorset and down the peninsula to include Cornwall. The South West Constitutional Campaign group, however, was joined by a separate cross-party organisation in Cornwall, which, unlike the larger regional body, campaigned for a separate assembly that covered Cornwall alone. The possibility of increased sub-national responsibility found particular resonance in Cornwall where there had been a long history of calls for the restoration of self governance and a recognition by Westminster of the different legal relationship that exists between Cornwall and England (see Deacon, Cole and Tregidga (2003) for an overview). Emboldened by the potential for a local assembly a number of representations were made to Europe and the UK Government including a claim for the recognition of the Cornish as an ethnic minority (Deacon.1999) and for their language to be officially recognised under the European Charter (MacKinnon.2002)

The political claim for a degree of self governance in Cornwall stalled, however, when the government’s planned regional devolution was shelved in 2004 following the referendum result in North East England. The raising of awareness of distinctiveness did not, however, subside with this rejection by government and calls for recognition of difference continued to be heard and debated in Cornwall. Varying social groups, drawing on their respective backgrounds, proposed a range of possibilities about how this might be taken forward, resulting in a continuum of positions that extended from maintaining the current relationship with England, to the creation of a Unitary Authority

through to calls for the creation of an independent state. Against this backdrop of debate there was a growing interest in the way that the education system, and the National Curriculum in particular, contributed to students' understanding of such differences. Calls were made to introduce curriculum changes that were not anglocentric (Angarrack.2002) in nature and would support the promotion and recognition of difference with specific reference to Cornish history and identity.

Recontextualisation of Official Knowledge

Bernstein (2000.66) suggests that where there is a requirement to engage with contemporary cultural change then curriculum reform is likely to occur. As part of the changing focus on the nature of political power and the increased interest in involvement at a sub-national level, educational institutions in the first decade of the 21st Century, were encouraged by a number of government directives to be cognisant of local needs. Whilst working within the national funding and curriculum frameworks educational institutions were able to incorporate local foci by either extending or developing new provision. The forms that these foci took differed between sectors but offered opportunities for social factions to influence locally published curricula: the outcomes of which contribute to help 'produce and institutionalise' particular pedagogic identities, which subsequently become part of the lived experiences of students.

This paper will utilise Bernstein's Pedagogic Identities Classification to examine the influence of different groups, on the recontextualisation of Official Knowledge in Cornwall during this period in both the Official and Pedagogic fields. Whilst noting that the framework has limitations and frustrations (Power.2006) its use, it is hoped, will offer a means by which to better identify both the 'gatekeepers' and 'licensors' of the new published curricula and the extent of the range of prospective Pedagogic Identities (PIs) on offer.

One major player in the provision of new curricula in Cornwall for the compulsory education sector has been the Local Authority's (LA) 'Sense-of-Place' project. The Project has published a number of alternative National Curriculum Units for use in phases ranging from Foundation to KS3. Using examples drawn from this provision it will be possible to examine the different projected Pedagogic Identities that result from the project. The PIs would appear to range from ones that do not significantly challenge the status quo, for example by requesting recognition of Cornish contributions to the Industrial Revolution i.e. what Olneck (2001) sees as the 'we were there too' approach, to a more strident call for a reworking of the accepted national historical narrative on the Tudor period. The paper will examine possible links between the projected PIs of the SoP project and the range of political positions being voiced in the devolution debate including those created by the LA in its role as 'gatekeeper'.

Published curricula from the post compulsory sector offer further insight into other social factions at play within Cornwall during the period. Two key factors helped to create space for new curricula: the awarding of Objective One status by Europe allowing for an expansion of HE provision and the new Foundation Degree (FD) qualification which

required providers to provide courses that met the specific needs of the local population. Unlike the situation in the compulsory sector the 'gatekeepers' and 'licensors' are more dispersed with employers, Professional Bodies and validating authorities all having a degree of input into the final product. Examples from FD curricula as diverse as Tourism and Applied Literary Studies will illustrate how different relationships between the 'gatekeepers', 'licensors' and the producers of the curricula in the post compulsory sector further extended the projected PIs occurring in Cornwall.

In concluding, the paper will argue that Bernstein's PI Classification model has been useful in providing a framework for clarification of the links between the 'gatekeepers and licensors' of Cornu-appropriate curricula and the resulting projected PIs available to students and teachers. Pedagogic Identities that, as this paper suggests, in the absence of a directive Cornish political assembly, are clearly competing in their aims, intentions and outcomes.

References

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