diversity of content and emphasis found in this book of readings. But for an introductory course that *may* be a desirable feature.

On the positive side, the essays are well written. Each author's viewpoints and discussion are, taken at their face value, generally clear, to the point, and unambiguous. Professor Bhattacharya's introduction is particularly worth reading. The immense compass of the issues raised by him could easily and usefully occupy a class or a graduate seminar for a full term. Possibly because of my own biases three of the essays particularly recommended themselves to me. They were "Rethinking Multiculturalism," K. Mazurek; "Competency in Writing," S. Warter; and "Education Counselling and the Crises in Personality Psychology," C. Violato. K. Mazurek argues cogently against popularized multiculturalism in education, S. Warters lucidly puts the case for intervening in the student's psychological *process* of communicating through writing rather than merely correcting errors already made, and C. Violato clearly sets out (mostly for educational psychologists) weaknesses attaching to the predictive value for student achievement of current personality theories.

The other essays are not without their value. With the extreme diversity in content and emphasis there is probably *something* for everyone.

<div style="text-align:center">

Norman Coppin
University of Calgary

</div>

The Politics of Curriculum Change

Tony Becher and Stuart Maclure, *The Politics of Curriculum Change*, London: Hutchinson, 1978, Pp. 192.

Politics as a study deals with the exercise of power. Over the past fifteen years, the number of disparate groups attempting to gain some control over the curriculum has increased dramatically. This is as true in Canada as it is in Britain. So a new dimension of educational research has opened up. Spurred by controversial papers collected in *Knowledge and Control* (1971) by Michael Young, researchers have investigated the forces which influence curriculum decisions. Writers such as Ivan Illich and Edgar Friedenberg have stimulated the public debate. Studies of the curriculum have thus acquired a political dimension.

Given the current climate of controversy, *The Politics of Curriculum Change* is an arresting title. It promises insights into the forces behind new movements: programmed self-instruction, work-oriented programmes, recurrent education, competency testing. Alas, book titles now tend to be chosen primarily for their market value. In fact politics is not the central concern of Tony Becher and Stuart Maclure, the authors of *The Politics of Curriculum Change*. As they themselves state, the book is "an attempt to sort out the variety of materials which make up the present patchwork of curriculum development." (p. 9) Many of these materials do relate to issues of power and its exercise, and the connections are discussed. But the authors concentrate on describing curriculum changes in terms of their educational significance and effectiveness.

Does any theme unify the "patchwork"? Certainly the very broad political issue of where control over curriculum development should be located is threaded through the discussions. Yet as the momentum of argument for decentralization builds, the authors more and more overtly express their preference for centralized control. Let us trace the steps by which Becher and Maclure are propelled into contradiction.

The bias in favour of centralized control over the curriculum by elected officials intrudes subtly in the definitions set forth in Chapter 1. We are advised that a public curriculum is "those aspects of the curriculum which embody an education system's shared assumptions, however formulated, about the main things which pupils should and do learn at school." (p. 16) Implicit is the belief that in a democracy one should, indeed must have a public curriculum as opposed to a private one. The curriculum must represent a consensus of opinion, and specify what pupils are to do in school. In brief, there must be a significant degree of centralized curriculum control and development.

Now it is just this centralized control which Britain seems to lack but a variety of European countries, whose educational systems are described in Chapter 2, to varying degrees have. In particular, Sweden is admired by the authors; it has a centrally determined curriculum which embodies social values in harmony with those of other state institutions. (A telling quotation from one rather disillusioned researcher (p. 24), notes that in this system the only really radical innovations originate at the school level.)

Yet the view that centralized systems are necessarily superior to decentralized ones in ensuring uniformity is a thesis on which the discussion of Britain's approach casts doubt. For in Chapter 3, "Patterns of Control", Becher and Maclure demonstrate that academic standards and a degree of curriculum coherence are maintained in Britain through such groups as examination boards, government inspectors and the Schools Council. But the control systems are rather fragmented. The bureaucrat who yearns for a tidy system with detailed specifications of tasks

and responsibilities is repelled by this disorder. For the authors, Britain's public curriculum, if it can be said to have one at all, is "shrouded in mystery and changed by stealth." (p. 35)

It is clear from the emotive language employed that Becher and Maclure decry the procedures by which curriculum is changed in Britain. In Chapter 4, in which they discuss agents of change, they try to show that teachers and professional educators have had a disproportionate amount of power in setting and designing curricula. Yet they do not offer any vigorous arguments for sharing control. Their primary objection to the decentralized power of educators is that a national programme cannot be mounted under such conditions.

Well, should one want a national programme? Becher and Maclure think so, for they believe it will act as a social cement, will make society a cohesive unity. More important, and contrary to the evidence which they themselves provide, they suggest that without centralized curriculum directives effective curriculum development is impossible: "Curriculum development can only take place within a framework of public education policy." (p. 47)

This is a quasi-empirical, quasi-normative statement. The data provided in Chapters 5 to 9 simply do not vindicate the empirical side of the claim. Research into subject and system based curriculum development, on efforts to integrate, disseminate and evaluate innovation, points to one conclusion: curriculum development which does not involve the classroom teacher cannot allow for the most critical element of educational success, *viz.,* the unique features of the physical and social setting in which individual teachers teach and individual students learn. The real issue concerns spheres of influence; to what extent and in what way can teachers most effectively be involved?

In Chapter 5 various styles of subject-based development are described. The authors tentatively observe that given the tension between the centre (bureaucratic and/or political officials) and the periphery (teachers), "the answer . . . could well be for the centre to develop a variety of solutions to common problems, which allow the periphery to make the final choice but leave ample scope for local adaptation." (p. 79) Yet their own survey suggests that there are very few serious common problems, and that what few there are probably cannot be solved at the centre.

In examining efforts to introduce broad changes in education systems in Chapter 6, the authors note of the middle school experiments in the Netherlands that "this readiness to locate some of the essential development work at the school face may in the end prove the most significant aspect of the plan." (p. 84) Of the progressive movement in England which is described as an "internal" form of system-based change, the authors observe that the movement began at the grassroots level. The development was essentially unplanned. But because it originated with teachers, "it inspired a high level of personal commitment" in many of them. (p. 87) Becher and Maclure suggest that it would be a good idea to "harness the critical energy of activists within the educational system more efficiently . . . and to organize system based curriculum change on a more coherent pattern." (p. 89) But will the energy be available when the activist is harnessed? It is surely doubtful.

The virtues of internally originated change are acknowledged by Becher and Maclure. They note that they have "one great advantage over external ones: they are embedded in the reality of the classroom rather than in the rhetoric of reformers." (p. 89) The point is that if teachers don't accept an ideal, they can simply appear to comply with a request to adopt it. So the conclusion seems inescapable, even if the authors try to side-step it: the major role in curriculum development must be retained by teachers.

This view gains support from the discussion of Chapter 7, "Fragmentation and Integtration". It is noted that "attempts to work from general goals to specific objectives have seldom given rise to a well-integrated curriculum." (p. 91) And again, "It is . . . as if education's vital spirit necessarily evaporates in the curriculum analyst's crucible." (p. 91) Moreover, as the authors note, although Britain's is a decentralized system, it shows "no signs of breaking down" (p. 91) and indeed "conceals a sizeable consensus." (p. 95) At this point then, it is conceded that the system is working rather well.

Attempts to introduce uniformity through an overt common core curriculum for all secondary students are, the authors suggest, likely to fail. "It is the sheer relativism of curriculum building, in a society which allows few absolutes, that is likely to bring an end to the argument about a common core curriculum." (p. 105) The only promising avenue for integration is through a "coherent" approach and "organizing framework" for curriculum. (p. 106) Just what is meant by this is rather obsure. Concern with the student's sense of self-worth and the provision of "initial access to the main areas of intellectual understanding" (p. 106) are floated as possible tactics.

The difficulties of actually getting new curricula implemented are examined in Chapter 8, "Responsiveness to Change". In fact the distinction between disseminating information and translating that information into practice, or implementing a proposal, tends to be muddled in the discussion. As a result, the critical issue of how to overcome what has been called "the teacher's veto" is inadequately treated. It may be that the authors wished to underplay the tangled problems of implementation. Certainly the difficulty or impossibility of feeding curriculum change from a central authority into a teacher's classroom is cast in sharp relief by implementation studies.

It will be apparent that in speaking of curriculum development all stages of the process leading to change are embraced: the planning, preparation and testing of materials, conveying them to users, and seeing how they are

used. In addition, evaluating the results is seen as a development task. A survey of methods used in evaluation and the controversies surrounding the evaluator's role are provided in Chapter 9. Here, as elsewhere in their account of the relevant research, the authors seem to come down on the side of techniques which accommodate, and indeed are designed to highlight, the unique settings in which curriculum plans become a reality. They opt for the case study of individual learners as "the most rapid and inexpensive [method] of all." (p. 148) They see it as a method which "may bring about a greater *rapprochement* between new-style evaluators and their traditional counterparts." (p. 147) And they concede that "Its distinguishing characteristics are the central role of the teacher and the unusually close partnership demanded between developers, teachers and evaluators." (p. 146)

The advantages of designing, testing and assessing curricula at the school level are overwhelming. Indeed, it seems obvious that to do otherwise is to court failure and to waste money and energy. Is there some role for non-teachers in this process and is there some role for a central national educational authority? There may well be, but the ones suggested by Becher and Maclure seem retrogressive.

In Chapters 10 and 11 the authors attempt to bolster their view that curriculum development *should* be tied to centralized governmental control. The message is not clearly articulated and argued. Qualifications and a shifting back and forth between what are seen as the only two possibilities tend to obscure the position taken. It is said that although teachers have *de facto* control over what happens in school, "The public interest in the curriculum as a whole . . . must, quite properly determine the limits within which teachers exercise this control." (p. 156) But what is the nature of these limits and how are they determined? It is obvious that they must be very broad. But if that is so, in what sense will their introduction bring about any change? Given the ineffectiveness of efforts to centrally exercise control through highly precise curriculum materials, as Becher and Maclure document in their chapter on subject-based development, how can "a framework" have any impact?

It appears that the authors are aware of the problem. They note that "It would certainly be hard to show conclusively that some specific alternative recipe would be more efficient than the present muddled consensus." (p. 168) Yet they worry about "scandalous innovations" and the school's tendency to ignore society's need for engineers and entrepreneurs. So they advocate "clearer national guidelines." They don't want a "rigid centralization" (p. 173) but they do want the coherence which could result from government prescribed "core" subjects "to occupy . . . at least half of the school timetable up to the leaving age." (p. 173) (This of course is in direct conflict with the conclusion reached in Chapter 7 concerning the feasability of a core curriculum.) This "core" might be ineffective, "But the gesture would signify a shift in the conventional wisdom." (p. 173)

The complex problem of spelling out spheres of influence and powers is not attempted in *The Politics of Curriculum Change.* But the authors have picked out a key curriculum issue in their book. Maurice Kogan, in *The Politics of Educational Change* (1978), shares their worry about curriculum control. He states that "In some way or the other, central government has to be able to set the framework for progress whilst respecting the organic continuities of education in institutions which have a right to a life of their own." But Becher and Maclure tend to underplay the rights of educators and also the important point, noted by Kogan, that devising an appropriate framework "is a matter of art as well as of administrative and political science."

What would be a reasonable proposal regarding control of curriculum change, given the data surveyed by Becher and Maclure? As I have suggested, their answer seems both unhelpful and contradictory. If genuine control cannot be exerted from a central government agency, why propose it? If the research shows that the most effective and innovative curriculum changes have been developed at the school and classroom level, why try to develop them elsewhere? Surely the answer is to have a reciprocal relationship between government officials and educators in which the language of centralization and decentralization, of distinctly alternative centres of power, is quite inappropriate. Rather, the notion of overlapping spheres of power in which recognition is given to the educators' skills and *de facto* influence, as well as the politicians' power and *de facto* responsibility, is required. In some measure this conception has gained acceptance in Ontario. Teachers and ministry personnel have written, and are accountable for, new guidelines and support documents for a compulsory core of courses at the intermediate level.

It seems that Becher and Maclure are so steeped in an either/or outlook that they fail to see any alternative to almost total decentralization or the centralized control of the past. They ignore the many evils which former arrangements embodied. And they seem to forget that the greatest achievements in curriculum development of the last fifteen years would have been impossible without teacher involvement and commitment.

Had Becher and Maclure looked beyond England and Europe, they might have perceived some alternatives to the dualism which has so constrained their vision. Their book would then have been rather more than a useful survey of recent and current curriculum development in Britain.

Catherine Beattie
McMaster University