LOOKING BACK IN ORDER TO MOVE FORWARD

The Position of Technology Education in Past Swedish Curricula

Being a fairly young school subject, technology education has yet to attain a firm position in the curriculum. Therefore, there is a need for a retrospective look at earlier developments in order to understand why and how the current position was achieved (cf. Karlsson, 2004). David Layton suggests that the subject of technology in the school has developed by balancing “a range of competing influences”, and that a number of “stakeholders” have been and still are important for its evolution (Layton, 1994, p. 13). By talking of stakeholders, Layton questions a traditional view of the development of subjects, namely that they are more or less copied from corresponding academic disciplines. The stakeholder perspective, on the other hand, implies that school subjects develop by means of a school-oriented logic, in the interplay between different societal actors – stakeholders (cf. also Layton, 1972, 1973). Within the same tradition one finds Thomas S. Popkewitz, who claims that “the history of school content is an intersection with social, cultural, political and economic interests” and that much of the research on school subjects is too narrow and limited in perspective (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 3):

Most histories of the formation of the school subjects ignore these relations by locating the broadening of the curriculum . . . to the formal functioning of professional committees and administrative problems of schools . . . (Popkewitz, 1987, p. 3–4).

Ivor F. Goodson has studied the development of several school subjects, for instance, biology, geography, and technology (Goodson, 1988, 1994), and his arguments are similar to those of Layton and Popkewitz:

It would seem that, far from being timeless statements of intrinsically worthwhile content, subjects and disciplines are in constant flux. Hence the study of knowledge in our society should move beyond the a-historical process of philosophical analysis, towards a detailed historical investigation of the motives and actions behind the presentation and promotion of subjects and disciplines (Goodson, 1988, p. 165).

Research in technology education as a means of strengthening technology in the school curriculum could thus benefit from Goodson’s creed of “detailed historical investigation”. Research on the historical background to technology as a knowledge domain and practice in the school is still in its infancy, and most of this research is carried out within the fields of the history of education, curriculum
history, and technology education. In the latter field, this research was initiated only in recent years. In UK and US technology education there has been historical research for a while and it has essentially been aimed at sketching a background to and shaping the identity of technology in schools. It has not been unusual for researchers – including David Layton, Edgar Jenkins, John Pannabecker, Stephen Petrina and others (see, for example, Layton, 1973; Jenkins, 1979; Pannabecker, 2004; Petrina, 2002) – to have connections both to technology education and the history of education, which has strengthened both the educational and historical linkages to technology in the school.

To a great extent, the positive effects of such linkages for present-day technology education have yet to be seen. However, the aim of this chapter is to explore three possible areas in which historical research on technology education could strengthen the position of the present subject in the school curriculum – knowledge base, teachers, and external stakeholders. The chapter will also give an analysis of a Swedish historical case, technology in civic education. Three main questions are posed: How should technology curriculum be studied as a historical phenomenon? Why and how did civic education come to include technology in the Swedish continuation school curriculum in the 1920s and 1930s? What are the possible benefits of historical studies for the present technology curriculum?

THE NATURE, METHODOLOGY, AND HISTORIOGRAPHY OF SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY

Goodson (1994) writes that “subjects are not monolithic entities but shifting amalgamations of subgroups and traditions which through contestation and compromise influence the direction of change” (Goodson, 1994, p. 42). Consequently, if one is looking for the nature of a school subject it is not easy to find a clear-cut answer, since a subject is amorphous and could be defined on various levels and from different perspectives. Depending on what aspects of a school subject are to be studied the theories, methods, and histories will therefore differ.

If the technology curriculum is seen as the manifestation of the subject in the school, there are three areas or aspects of the curriculum in particular that are important in order to historicise the technology subject. First of all, there is the knowledge base. This has been termed “technological literacy” in recent years and refers to the knowledge in and about technology that students should learn, which also often includes some notion of how they should learn. Technological literacy cannot only be restricted to a subject called “technology” because there is potential technological knowledge embedded in most school subjects. This is particularly true of historical periods prior to the introduction of technology in general education. In order to pinpoint technological knowledge in other subjects one needs to be guided by a fairly broad and timeless philosophical definition of what technology is (although a philosophical definition is naturally also built upon historically accepted views of technology). A wide, comprehensive definition of technology, sufficient for the purpose of this study, is taken from Ginner (1996). He claims that technology is everything that humans put between themselves and