

The Presence of the Past:
Ivor F. Goodson's Invocation of Time¹

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“In the modern era,” Goodson reminds, “we are essentially dealing with the *curriculum as subject*.”² That was not always the case. While starting in the 1850s, this conception became “institutionalized” in the 1904 Secondary Regulations listing of subjects,³ updated in 1917, from which date, Goodson adds, “curriculum conflict began to resemble the existing situation in focusing on the definition and evaluation of *examinable* knowledge.”⁴ The contemporary conception of curriculum - subject-centered and examinable⁵ - was “strengthened” after the 1944 Education Act.⁶ “The birth of secondary *examinations* and the institutionalization of curriculum *differentiation* were,” Goodson concludes, “then almost exactly contemporaneous.”⁷ What emerged was an “alliance between academic subjects, academic examinations and able pupils.”⁸ As the curriculum becomes increasingly defined as a series of “subjects,” he notes, “the role of the universities becomes more and more important.”⁹

What this history reveals, Goodson suggests, is that “the school curriculum is a social artefact, conceived of and made for deliberate human purposes,”¹⁰ indeed, a “particular mode of social relations.”¹¹ Decidedly no “given,” Goodson emphasizes that curriculum represents a “process of social construction”¹² that, as a concept, curriculum becomes “slippery because it is defined, redefined and negotiated at a number of levels and in a number of arenas.”¹³ Goodson emphasizes its “preactive” or “written” reality,¹⁴ asserting that it would be “folly to ignore the central importance of the redefinition of the

written curriculum.”¹⁵ That requires “a dynamic model of how syllabuses, pedagogy, finance, resources, selection, the economy, all interrelate.”¹⁶

Goodson’s conception is expansive; it is also contextualized in time. Curriculum history is conceptualized as both external (“develop a cumulative understanding of the historical contexts in which the contemporary curriculum is embedded”¹⁷) and internal (“curriculum history should be concerned, perhaps above all, with understanding the ‘internal’ process of curriculum definition, action and change”¹⁸), the two poles bridged as they are personified in the lives of those who lived them.¹⁹

Such a historical investigation, Goodson argues, “can develop our understanding of contemporary curriculum issues and can test the elaboration of curriculum theory.”²⁰ It also contests the “obsessive contemporality”²¹ of our time, in our field “allied with a belief that past curriculum traditions could, given conviction and resources, be transcended.”²² There has been a refrain of “innovation,” he notes, almost endless endorsements of “radical change in education,” repeated promises of “revolutionizing classroom practice,” all animated by constant confidence in “redrawing the map of learning.”²³ Not only is the past effaced in such phraseology, so is the present, including the diminished power of the teacher, rhetorically inflated to ensure the teacher’s culpability should standardized test results disappoint.²⁴ These circumstances have histories.

Goodson reviews “Acts and Facts”²⁵ in his history of school subjects, personifying these histories biographically, locating the overall project in his own life history,²⁶ emplaced first in Leicestershire.²⁷ He points to historical context as life history’s – and scholarship’s – structuring feature, suggesting that “In the new order, we

‘story the self’ as a means of making sense of new conditions of working and being,” thereby linking the narrative turn to historical moment (e.g. “new”) and socio-political structure (e.g. “order”).²⁸

Note, in that quoted phrase, the definitional emphasis on “making sense” (through specific forms of reason) of “conditions” (“new” ones) of “working and being” (the conjunction indicating their interrelation, what elsewhere he terms “intersection”²⁹). These three concepts – reason, conditions or context, and working-being - demarcate three features of Goodson’s *oeuvre*: (1) invoking forms of reason associated with life history³⁰ research as conducted in social science, specifically in sociology³¹ and anthropology,³² (2) attentiveness to context,³³ those historical, ideological, and organizational conditions³⁴ in which curriculum is made,³⁵ teachers teach³⁶ and students learn,³⁷ and (3) the convergence of these methods and topics in the “life themes”³⁸ of practitioners,³⁹ suggesting that “that the teacher’s previous *career* and *life experience* shape his/her view of teaching and the way he/she sets about it,” that the teacher’s *life outside school*, his/her *latent identities and cultures*, may have important impact on his/her work as a teacher,” the three contributing to the teacher’s “central life interests” and “commitments,” that the “teacher’s *career* is a vitally important research focus,” and concluding that “we must ... seek to locate the life history of the individual within ‘the history of his time’.”⁴⁰

Time implies place. Each is eviscerated in late modernity by globalism and technology. “In times of rapid global change,” Goodson suggests, “we stress the ‘sense of place,’ of local identity, that we know.”⁴¹ In our time “space” threatens to replace “place,” the former empty and ahistorical, like an “environment” presumed to be a “clean

slate,” full of possibility, a state of mind associated with the 1960s,⁴² a period that also took place in schools.⁴³

While “place” has been reclaimed – made even into a rallying cry with calls for “place-based education”⁴⁴ – historicity remains faint: even “many contemporary interactionist and ethnographic studies were similarly a-historical.”⁴⁵ Goodson critiques the “a-historical aspect of philosophy” – treating curriculum as a “given” - that “has defused its capacity to act as an antidote to the transcendent and immersed immediacy.”⁴⁶ The upshot is “biography and historical background have continued to be neglected.”⁴⁷

Goodson has led the charge to correct “the thorough-going historical amnesia of the curriculum field,”⁴⁸ studying the histories of several subjects - Geography,⁴⁹ Biology,⁵⁰ European Studies,⁵¹ Science,⁵² Environmental and Rural Studies⁵³ among them – as well as establishing and directing a book series of Studies in Curriculum History.⁵⁴ “Historical studies,” Goodson knew, “can develop our understanding of contemporary curriculum issues and can test the elaboration of curriculum theory.”⁵⁵ “To aid understanding of fundamental curriculum issues,” Goodson specifies, “should stand as the ‘litmus test’ for those undertaking curriculum history.”⁵⁶

These decisive moves to place and time,⁵⁷ their institutionalization in specific schools,⁵⁸ in school subjects,⁵⁹ and their personification in human subjects.⁶⁰ Goodson acknowledges “both the promise and perils of the turn to subjectivity,”⁶¹ the latter associated with withdrawal from the political: “Sole reliance on narrative becomes a convenient form of political quietism.”⁶² Yet an exclusive emphasis upon the political won’t do either: “total belief in the ‘world-changing’ properties of curriculum as practice is, I think, untenable.”⁶³ The two are intertwined: “My own personal project or vocation

of searching for the voice of the disempowered in myriad ways clearly links to my ancestral hinterland.”⁶⁴ Emphasizing the reciprocal relation between subjectivity and political engagement recasts the political from its modernist affirmation of intervention to a calling from the past, to right wrongs through representation of the dead rather than manipulation of the living.

The latter appears to be the *raison d'être* of curriculum, conceived historically to contradict chaos⁶⁵ – historically associated with rioting impoverished people - “moral panic,” as Goodson puts it, after the French Revolution.⁶⁶ “From this date,” Goodson asserts, “the school curriculum was often overlaid by social control concerns for the ordinary working populace.”⁶⁷ Adult education in Georgian England, especially for the working classes had featured “respect for life experience in curriculum.”⁶⁸ During this period, “the idea of curriculum [was] as a two-way *conversation* rather than a one-way transmission.”⁶⁹ By 1870, however, such education for the working classes had been “driven out.”⁷⁰ For the “other classes,” however, “this overlay of closely structured, sequenced and presented curriculum as not always deemed necessary.”⁷¹ By the end of the twentieth century, curriculum, Goodson concludes that “schooling and curriculum do remain successful disciplinary devices, managing populations and subjectivities with considerable dexterity.”⁷²

“Curriculum retains its power to serve as a litmus test of political intervention and intention,”⁷³ even “a process of inventing tradition.”⁷⁴ The tradition Goodson himself invents is curriculum as the study of “the intersection of individual biography and social structure,” encompassing “individual lives and biographies as well as of social groups and structures.”⁷⁵ He explains: “What is needed is to build on studies of participants

immersed in immediate process, to build on studies of historical events and periods but to develop a cumulative understanding of the historical contexts in which the contemporary curriculum is embedded.”⁷⁶ Crucial to this undertaking is the concept of “location ... the process whereby we come to understand our own individual life in its cultural and historical settings,”⁷⁷ providing us “with a sense of understanding as to why as individuals tell their story in this way at this moment.”⁷⁸

Such stories are personal but not solitary. Goodson’s includes his “ancestral voices,” allowing him to understand - within the currents of the era, within the “postmodern fashion” for “multiplicity” and “hybridity” - “certain continuities and coherences.”⁷⁹ For Goodson, “ancestral voices and autobiographical memory are closely interlinked and allied.”⁸⁰ Moreover: “Getting in touch with our ancestral hinterland and voices is a major stepping stone in self-understanding and collective understanding.”⁸¹ Goodson concludes: “The realization that ‘memory work’ is part of an ongoing process of reconstruction and learning has substantial implications for those involved in all pedagogic endeavours.”⁸²

“It is time to place history study at the centre of the curriculum enterprise,”⁸³ Goodson affirms, a move that incorporates History into life history and vice versa. “Goodson awakens the past in the present,” Hargreaves appreciates.⁸⁴ “For Goodson,” Hargreaves continues, “curriculum history records, returns to and reinstates the past within the context of the present. It also recreates the present within the remembrance of the past.”⁸⁵ Such reactivation of the past promises the reconstruction of the present, inviting the subjective reconstruction of the one – the person - within whom the past has been recreated.

Goodson invokes Bruce Springsteen's *Devils and Dust*, a moniker of "the move from grand narrative linked to political engagement towards individual life narratives and, more specifically, focused on life politics."⁸⁶ This "seismic shift toward narrative politics"⁸⁷ privileges "narrative" over "cultural and symbolic capital,"⁸⁸ one that risks "de-contextualizing," requiring a return to "the historical context of life stories," their telling "in relationship to time and periodization."⁸⁹ The conjunction implies distinction as well as association, evident in Goodson's enumeration of "broad historical time," "cyclical time," and "personal time."⁹⁰ The three converge in the timeless achievement of Ivor F. Goodson.

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Endnotes

¹ Pinar, William F. 2020. The Presence of the Past: In Time for Ivor F. Goodson. In *Storying the Public Intellectual: Commentaries on the Impact and Influence of the Work of Ivor Goodson*, edited by Pat Sikes and Yvonne Novakovic (110-118). London:

Routledge

² 1995, 29.

³ The 1904 listing shows up again in 1987, Goodson (1995, 204) points out, contradicting the Conservative government's rhetoric of "a major new initiative." The political point was clear: "This is to seek to draw a veil over the whole experience of the 1960s," Goodson (1994, 20) appreciates, "to seek to forget that many curriculum reforms were developed to try to provide antidote to the perceived failures and inadequacies of conventional subject teaching." As a consequence, "It is now difficult to reconstruct the optimism and commitment of curriculum debate and reform initiatives at that time" (1994, 28; see also 1994, 96-99, 103-104).

⁴ Ibid. "In Britain," Goodson (1994, 44) reports, "there was a discernible tendency in the history of school subjects to move away from an early stage when the content of the subject was oriented towards fulfilling practical and vocational aims. Because the material and professional conditions of school teaching were tied closely to its status as an examinable school subject ultimately defined by university specialists scholars, teachers were subtly encouraged to characterize their subject matter in ways that stressed academic and abstract features, divorced from the interests and upbringing of most students."

⁵ "Examinable" is not new, as Goodson (1994, 106) makes clear: A major experiment in state control of school curricula was conducted in the years 1862 to 1895. The teachers were made subject to a system of 'payment by results': teachers' pay was linked to pupils' results in school examinations."

⁶ 1995, 30.

⁷ 1995, 28.

⁸ 1995, 31.

⁹ Ibid. "The process of becoming a school subject," Goodson (1994, 42) concludes, "features the evolution of the subject community from one promoting pedagogic and utilitarian purposes to one defining the subject as an academic 'discipline' with ties to university scholars." See also 1994, 49-50.

¹⁰ 1994, 16.

¹¹ 1995, 36.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ 1994, 17.

¹⁴ "Curriculum as practice," Goodson (1995, 14) notes, "rather gives precedence to contemporary action.... This has often led reformists to seek to ignore preactive

definitions.” He does so to expose the “interests and influences” in play as well as how educational values and purposes are inscribed in the curriculum and the “manner in which preactive definition may set parameters for interactive realization and negotiation in the classroom and school” (1995, 16).

¹⁵ 1994, 19.

¹⁶ 1995, 54.

¹⁷ 1995, 53.

¹⁸ 1995, 55.

¹⁹ See, for instance, the story of Patrick Johnson: 1995, 100ff.

²⁰ 1995, 50. Indeed: Goodson (1995, 51) is sure that “historical study has a valuable role to play in challenging, informing and sometimes aiding in the generation of theory.”

²¹ 2014, 55. Elsewhere he uses “presentism” (1995, 55) to denote the ahistorical character of our era and of the curriculum field.

²² 2014, 515. He locates the genesis of this ahistorical confidence in the 1960s and 1970s, when “critical studies of curriculum as social construction pointed to the school classroom as the site wherein the curriculum was negotiated and realized.” Positioning the classroom as the “centre of action,” the only or primary “arena of resistance,” Goodson characterizes as “myopia” (1994, 18).

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ As Goodson (2014, 516) notes.

²⁵ 1995, 41, 44, 48.

²⁶ The historical strand of his project Goodson (1988, 1-2) traces to his “initial doctoral work at the London School of Economics” where he conducted “a fairly conventional piece of historical research in economic and social history – looking at the social and educational assimilation of Irish immigrants in Victoria England.” The biographic strand includes “a fairly detailed family history,” including his “great, great grandparent” (Goodson & Gill 2014, 108). “Ancestral voices and autobiographical memory,” Goodson affirms, “are closely interlinked and allied” (Goodson & Gill 2014, 119). Indeed: “Getting in touch with our ancestral hinterland and voices,” he adds, “is a major stepping stone in self-understanding and collective understanding” (Goodson & Gill 2014, 120-1).

²⁷ In 1970, Goodson (1988, 2) reports, “I found myself leaving the working class community in which I had lived for most of my life to go and work in a radical comprehensive in Leicestershire. Here was a school trying to give a full education to *all* students: in particular this meant seeking to extend modes of learning and instruction, once reserved for the middle and upper classes, to a predominantly working class community very similar to the one I had just moved from.” Goodson saw the school, he continues, “more through the eyes of the pupils than I did through the eyes of the teachers,” and what he saw made a “deep and unforgettable impression.” That impression was “intractability of form and irrelevance of content: the curriculum, especially the curriculum for examination” (1988, 3). He adds: “No amount of pedagogical re-orientation or schools-based reorganization could do much to erode this” (1988, 3).

²⁸ 1998, 4. The macro-political order of course (see, for instance, Goodson 1994, 19), but also that within schools and subjects. For example, Goodson (1995, 190) points out that “the subject community should be seen as comprising a range of conflicting groups,” indicating that curriculum change is a “political process” (1995, 193).

²⁹ “Exploring curriculum as a social construction allows us to study, indeed exhorts us to study, the intersection of individual biography and social structure” (Goodson 1994, 23).

³⁰ “The methodological turn to subjectivity,” Goodson (2018, 10) “has once again prioritised this method and led to a widespread rehabilitation of life history studies.” And, I suppose to the renewed interest in autoethnography. Autobiography – a literary art, born of the humanities rather than social science – antedates both: see, for example, Weintraub 1978.

³¹ At one point Goodson (1994, 100) attributes the “decline of history” to “social studies and sociology.”

³² See Goodson (2018, 11-22) concerning the “rise of life history,” emphasizing Park and Dollard, Becker and Denzin. See also Goodson 1995, 61, 71-81.

³³ For Goodson (2018, 9), “contexts re-work and re-position our life narratives.” Earlier: “we need a theory of context that underpins action” (1994, 38).

³⁴ Among these are “the intractable nature of the examination curriculum” (Goodson 1988, 3), “team teaching” (Goodson 1995, 145), as well as curriculum content (as when “the science of common things” was “reorganized” in Victorian Britain “in a way which undermined real efforts to educate the lower orders” (Goodson 1994, 44; see also 1994, 20-1, 44). Any “analysis of organizational structure,” Goodson (1994, 61) qualified, “must be linked to a broader analysis of the legacies of status and resources, of curriculum and examination policy, if schooling is to be analyzed and improved.”

³⁵ “The process of development for school subjects,” Goodson (1995, 177-178) suggests, “can be seen not as a pattern of disciplines ‘translated’ *down* or of “domination” *downwards* but very much as a process of ‘aspiration’ *upwards*.”

³⁶ “Curriculum research and theory,” Goodson (1994, 37) argues, “must begin by investigating how the curriculum is currently constructed and then produced by teachers in the ‘differing circumstances in which they are placed.’ Moreover, our theory needs to move towards how those circumstances are not just ‘placed’ but systematically constructed; for the persistence of styles of practice is partly the result of the construction of persistent circumstances.”

³⁷ “Curriculum history,” Goodson (1994, 41) explains, “seeks to explain how school subjects, tracks and courses of study have constituted a mechanism to designate and differentiate students.”

³⁸ Goodson suggests that “our ‘life themes’ harmonize our social imagination and understanding with our ongoing social purposes” (Goodson & Gill 2014, 146); the concept functions, he continues, as “a spine for their ongoing definition of their life story” (2014, 147). Their “interrogation” constitutes a “major undertaking in the person’s narrative work” (2014, 161).

³⁹ “Above all,” Goodson (1995, 112) asserts, “the strength of beginning curriculum research from life history data is that *from the outset* the work is firmly focussed on the working lives of practitioners.” In the Learning Lives project, Goodson and his colleagues conducted over 750 interviews with 150 adults to show “how life history can elucidate learning responses” (2018, 19). Such interviews, Goodson (2018, 7) reports, “force a confrontation with not only other people’s subjective perceptions but our own also,” adding: “This confrontation sits at the heart and is the central aspiration of life history work.”

⁴⁰ 1995, 84.

⁴¹ 1998, 5.

⁴² 2014, 515. “One might characterize curriculum reform in the 1960s,” he suggests, “as a sort of ‘tidal wave’” (1994, 17). That scale of reform seems repeated in the 1980s, when, he notes: “Throughout the Western world there is exhortation of but also evidence about a ‘return to basics’” (ibid.) That reform erased the earlier one, as Goodson (1994, 106) records: “The structure of the 1960s, where teachers were judged to have superior expertise in assessing the educational needs of their pupils, has been rapidly dismantled.”

⁴³ “One of the most radical of the reforming comprehensive schools,” Goodson (1995, 14) reports, “was Countesthorpe Upper School in Leicestershire. The school was deeply committed to the education of all its pupils and stressed above all the ‘autonomy’ of its pupils.” This commitment, he continues, “led to some practitioners arguing for a wholesale ‘reconstruction of knowledge’ and to new internal experiments” (1995, 15). The situation there and then seems to suspend the more general rule Goodson (1995, 188) elaborates, namely that “the material interests of teachers – their pay, promotion and conditions – are intimately interlinked with the fate of their subjects.” Then and there the reform seemed in service to the pupils more than the school subjects or material benefits.

⁴⁴ See, for example, <https://promiseofplace.org/>

⁴⁵ 2014, 515. Goodson criticizes Jackson’s *Life in Classrooms* as “depersonalized” and “anti-historical” (1995, 81). Perhaps it was too empirical, something missing, Goodson (1995, 162) points out, in Michael Young’s work.

⁴⁶ 2014, 516. See also 1995, 163-4.

⁴⁷ 2014, 515.

⁴⁸ 1994, 112.

⁴⁹ Goodson 1995, 166.

⁵⁰ Goodson 1994, 43.

⁵¹ Goodson 1995, 147-151.

⁵² Science, Goodson (1995, 21) reports, was removed from the elementary curriculum after 1860, reappearing twenty years later, no longer the “science of common things” but “a watered-down version of pure laboratory science,” the version of which, he notes, “has persisted, largely unchallenged, to the present day.”

⁵³ 1995, 122ff.

⁵⁴ Launched in 1985, by 1995 Goodson counts “twelve volumes comprising *Studies in Curriculum History*,” each attending to “life history, collective and relational levels” (1995, 60).

⁵⁵ 1995, 50. Such testing appears empirical: “If curriculum theory is to be of use,” Goodson (1994, 32) asserts, “it must begin with studies which *observe* schools and teaching,” adding: “We need, in short, not theories of curriculum prescriptions but studies, and eventually theories, of curriculum production and realization.” (1994, 32).

⁵⁶ 1995, 53.

⁵⁷ “Historical context consists of at least two dimensions – place and time,” Goodson (1994, 59) notes, adding that “narratives then are best when fully ‘located’ in their time and place – stories of action within theories of context” (2018, 5).

⁵⁸ With Christopher J. Anstead and Ian R. Dowbiggin, Goodson (1994, 57ff.) provides a case study of the London Technical and Commercial High School in London, Ontario,

Canada, not only “an institutional case history, but a study of curricula set in a particular institution, at a particular time” (1900-40).

⁵⁹ “School subjects are never final, monolithic entities,” Goodson (1995, 10) reminds (see also 1995, 48; 1994, 42). They are also historical: “In the modern era we are essentially dealing with the *curriculum as subject*,” he notes (1995, 29), “strengthened,” he adds, “following the 1944 Education Act (1995, 30).

⁶⁰ Goodson (2014, 516) warns: “But the danger of such stress on personal potential – ‘actors always possess some degree of autonomy’ – is that historical linkages will remain undeveloped or, at any rate, underdeveloped.”

⁶¹ 2018, 3.

⁶² 1998, 10. For Goodson (2018, 6), “the personal life is an *individualising* device if divorced from context. Moreover it is a profound mistake to believe that a personal life story is entirely personally crafted for other forces also speak through the personal voice that is adopted.”

⁶³ 1995, 16.

⁶⁴ Goodson & Gill 2014, 112. Without recordings or diaries, ancestral voices remain in our recollection of them, and even that – one’s own – “memory work” is, well, work. “Looking back,” Goodson admits, “it is hard to re-evoked the feel of working-class culture in the 1950s” (Goodson & Gill 2014, 139).

⁶⁵ “The emergence of curriculum as a concept,” Goodson (1994, 23) argues, “came from a concern to direct and control individual teachers’ and pupils’ classroom activities.”

⁶⁶ 1995, 35.

⁶⁷ 1995, 35.

⁶⁸ 1995, 33.

⁶⁹ 1995, 34.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ 1995, 35.

⁷² 1994, 13.

⁷³ 1995, 7.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ 1995, 59.

⁷⁶ 1995, 53.

⁷⁷ Goodson & Gill 2014, 142.

⁷⁸ 2014, 163.

⁷⁹ 2014, 103. These become configured, Goodson suggests, as a “particular life theme” (Goodson & Gill 2014, 133).

⁸⁰ Goodson & Gill 2014, 119.

⁸¹ 2014, 120-121.

⁸² 2014, 125.

⁸³ 1994, 23.

⁸⁴ 1994, 10.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ 2018, 13.

⁸⁷ 2018, 15.

⁸⁸ 2018, 14.

⁸⁹ 2018, 18.

⁹⁰ 2018, 18-19.