



Chapter 2: Philosophical Foundation of Curriculum

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Philosophy and the Curriculum Worker

There are two major issues that influence the curriculum worker.

- ▶ Conflict – Curriculum workers can be very passionate in their views about curriculum. If the curriculum worker is too inflexible with their philosophy it will be very difficult to work together with others who do not share the same ideals.
- ▶ Lack of clear philosophy – If the curriculum worker is not clear on what exactly they believe in. The specialist would be too easily influenced by the philosophies of others and therefore would have difficulty making important curricular decisions.

A good curriculum worker should be clear about what philosophies they believe in but also be able to adapt their views when presented with information that may question their original principles.

Philosophy, the main curriculum source

In order to develop curriculum one must begin with a basic philosophy or set of beliefs in which to govern the curricular decisions.

According to our text Ornstein&Hunkins (2013), Dewey had the idea that one's philosophy is the starting point in curriculum development. And although Tyler believed that philosophy was one of a five component system in creating curriculum he places more emphasis on philosophy and refers to it as "the first screen" in curriculum development. Goodlad's ideas were that one must first reflect upon the social order before curriculum development can occur but Dewey reminds us that even the idea of thinking about the social aspect of education versus the individual has been a philosophical issue in it's self. So, just the idea of beginning with the nation-state already had philosophical ideals at heart.

Major Philosophies

Paradigms on the basis of which we interpret and understand the world

Idealism

Realism

Pragmatism

Existentialism

Major Philosophies

- ▶ they shape and influence educational philosophies
- ▶ how/what we believe about what is real and valuable or the meaning of life shapes who we are as teachers
- ▶ how/what we believe about how knowledge is acquired shapes our approach to teaching
- ▶ our beliefs about what is right/good/beautiful/valuable impact the learning in our classroom

Idealism

Knowledge

- ▶ timeless ideas & concepts
- ▶ rethinking latent ideas
- ▶ abstract
- ▶ gained through reasoning, intuition and religious revelation

Values

- ▶ absolute & eternal
- ▶ based on conformity to ideals
- ▶ can be classified and ordered into a hierarchy

Realism

Knowledge

- ▶ physical objects & matter
- ▶ concrete
- ▶ gained through senses and the exercise of rational thought

Values

- ▶ absolute & eternal
- ▶ based on conformity to nature

Pragmatism

Knowledge

- ▶ based on one's experiences
- ▶ process
- ▶ gained through the use of scientific method & trial and error

Values

- ▶ situational & relative
- ▶ subject to change & verification
- ▶ determined by norms established by society

Existentialism

Knowledge

- ▶ life-long goal
- ▶ gained through personal decisions and perceptions

Values

- ▶ freely chosen
- ▶ determined by one's responsible choice and reflection

Educational Philosophies

- ▶ They emerge from one or more of the four major philosophical traditions.
- ▶ They range from traditional and conservative to contemporary and liberal.

Perennialism
Essentialism
Progressivism
Reconstructivism

Perennialism - stems from realism

Content

- ▶ universal curriculum
- ▶ one for all the students
- ▶ subject-based: language, literature, mathematics, sciences are the context for developing intellectual skills
- ▶ stresses the 3 Rs: reading, writing, arithmetic

Method

- ▶ Socratic method: explicit teaching, oral exposition, explication
- ▶ teacher-centered

Essentialism - stems from idealism and realism

Content

- ▶ core skills, essential facts and concepts
- ▶ solid subjects aligned with high-stake tests
- ▶ subject-centered: English, mathematics, history, science
- ▶ stresses the 3 Rs: reading, writing, arithmetic
- ▶ clear measurable goals

Method

- ▶ Socratic dialogue
- ▶ discussion
- ▶ lecture
- ▶ recitation

Progressivism- stems from pragmatism

Content

- ▶ need-based and relevant
- ▶ relates to students' personal lives and experiences
- ▶ skills to cope with change
- ▶ interdisciplinary and interactive
- ▶ emphasis on how to think (affective outcomes), not what to think (cognitive outcomes)

Method

- ▶ problem solving
- ▶ scientific method
- ▶ cooperative learning
- ▶ projects: students interact with nature and society
- ▶ experiential methods

Reconstructionism- stems from pragmatism with some views linked to existentialism

Content

- ▶ focus on present and future trends and issues of national and international interests
- ▶ global
- ▶ skills needed to identify and ameliorate society's problems
- ▶ emphasis on personal expression and reflection

Method

- ▶ discovery
- ▶ community based learning
- ▶ critical thinking, praxis
- ▶ social research

Reconstructionism - in what way are reconstructionists both realistic and idealistic? Mainstream and radical?

Reconstructionists want to improve and reform the society through education. They question everything and everyone in order to create change rather than conform or adjust to norms.

- ▶ Reconstructionists are idealistic because they take a holistic view at the world. They set an idealistic goal to fix its problems, but you cannot fix everything through education.
- ▶ Reconstructionists are realistic because they aim to educate students about problems in the world and look for ways to change and fix them. Their aim is to understand the world.
- ▶ Reconstructionists are mainstream because they want students to have an international background and understanding. There is an overall tendency nowadays to bring the outside world into the classroom.
- ▶ Reconstructionists are radical though in their approach to curriculum. Solving the problems of the world is not always an achievable goal.

Equality Versus Excellence

Reaffirming the Best & Brightest

- ▶ Essentialist model values cognitive development over students' social and psychological needs
- ▶ Ignores the concept of the uneven playing field
- ▶ Does not promote equality because it does not consider students' individual circumstances, needs, and special talents.

Humanistic Curriculum

- ▶ Rooted in the Progressivism model.
- ▶ Emphasizes emotionally healthy outcomes over cognitive outcomes
- ▶ Respects students' individuality and personal circumstances.
- ▶ Relies on subjective assessments of progress rather than objective data of academic achievement.

Equality versus Excellence

Promoting equality and excellence at the same time is impractical and unrealistic. That is not to say that both are not important, but in order to achieve one the other will go lacking.

As the previous slide shows, different philosophical models have conflicting goals. Some models favor cognitive ability over students' social and psychological issues. While other models nurture the whole child but at the expense of academic growth and achievement.

The Contradictory Philosophy

The reconstructionism model appears to be the most contradictory model for mainstream education. Education has been deeply rooted in certain traditions for generations (teacher as the authority, grading practices, content-specific classes). The reconstructionism model radically changes those traditions and shifts the focus to social change by way of emphasizing social sciences and social research methods.

Currently, social sciences are not a focus in curriculum with the push being towards science and math. In order to adopt the reconstructionist model, significant shifts would have to occur in the design of the educational system.

Philosophy of the Future

It is very difficult to see past the current essentialist philosophy in education because that is very much where curriculum and instruction is presently living. However a claim can be made that the model of progressivism will emerge as the most influential school of thought in the curriculum field. In order to compete a global society, students will need to be able to problem solve and use scientific inquiry.

Additionally, it will be imperative that students see the interconnectedness of the different content areas if they are to compete in the global market. Finally, students will need to have strong social and interpersonal skills in order to work with people of other cultures and backgrounds. Therefore, students' social and psychological well being can no longer be excluded from the classroom. With all that said, it appears that the curriculum field will be best served by the influences of the progressivism model.

Reference List

Hunkins, F.P., & Ornstein, A.C. (2013). *Curriculum: Foundations, principles, and issues*. Boston: Pearson.