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Philosophical perspectives towards curriculum

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Abstract

The curriculum is the backbone of the education system of any country. Philosophy and curriculum are interrelated, philosophy provides guidelines for curriculum development and it helps to select the valid and significant content, appropriate instructional methods, materials, teaching-learning activities, and evaluation process in the curriculum. This is a knowledge-based article and descriptive. In this article, I have discussed the four major philosophies and four major educational philosophies related to curriculum. In preparing for this article I have used published books, and online documents for the study sample and data collection tools.

Keywords: *Curriculum, Philosophy, Re-constructionism, Relevant curriculum, curriculum worker*

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Introduction

Philosophy

Philosophy is a combination of two Greek words *philos* and *Sophia*. The term *philos* means love and *Sophia* means wisdom. Therefore etymologically philosophy denotes the love of wisdom. It refers to the search for wisdom, truth, or fact and the relationship among ideas. Philosophy is the foundation, the mother, and the engine of all disciplines. Philosophy is the truth or wisdom gained out of human knowledge and experience as consequences of his interaction with the enfolded fact of nature. It is an attempt to answer the ultimate questions of life and the universe. Philosophy is a set of views or beliefs about life and the universe, a system of beliefs about reality. It always seeks to search for reality. What is real? What is the universe? In conclusion, it is an integrated view of the world.

Curriculum

Defining the word curriculum is no easy matter. Perhaps the most common definition derives from the words Latin root which means 'racecourse'(Marsh, 2004). In this race course, students are run for the achievement of educational goals. The curriculum is the 'plan for learning'(Taba, 1962). Curriculum as experience (Dewey, 1916). The curriculum is concerned with four fundamental questions of curriculum, namely: what to teach? How to teach? When to teach? What is the impact of teaching? (print, 1993). A curriculum is a written document or written plan which helps to achieve the educational goals of any country.

Objective of the study

1. To analyze the philosophical perspectives about the curriculum.

Methodology

This research article is based on only secondary sources of data. In the context of preparing for this research article, I have used published books, library documents, and online documents for the sources of data and sample this article is based on descriptive research design.

Analysis

Philosophy and curriculum

Philosophy is the backbone and beginning point in the curriculum development process which directs the educators and curriculum workers for developing and organizing curriculum. It helps to clarify education's goals, suitable content, teaching and learning process, and the experiences and activities that schools should emphasize. It helps the curriculum worker to determine what schools are for, what subjects have value, how students learn, and what methods and materials to use. Philosophy provides a basis for deciding which textbooks to use, how to use them and how much homework to assign, how to test students and use the test results and what courses or subject matter to emphasize results and what courses or subject matter to emphasize (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018). Philosophy has entered into every important decision that has ever been made about curriculum and teaching in the past and will continue to be the basis of every important decision in the future.

Four major philosophies and curriculum

Idealism. Idealists believe that the spiritual, non-material world is ultimately real, with spiritual essence or soul as the permanent element of human nature that gives individuals the power to think and feel (Ornstein and Levine 2008). Plato emphasizes that the curriculum should be based on intellectual development, aesthetic development, physical development, and moral development. Language, history, literature, geography, mathematics, astronomy, science, etc. Should be taught for intellectual development, arts, and poetry for aesthetic development, athletics for physical development, and religion, philosophy, and ethics for moral development (Ozmon, 2012). Idealists argued that the highest aim of idealism is the search for truth and enduring values. Plato believed that ideas could be integrated into universal concepts and a meaningful whole. According to idealism truth can be found through reasoning intuition and religious revelation. The curriculum is based on religious studies and spiritual studies (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018). Idealists give more importance to thoughts, feelings, and values than to child-centered activities in the curriculum while developing the curriculum. Realists emphasize those subjects and activities in the curriculum which enable the child to achieve the fullest development of his innate power (Ravi, 2015).

Realism. Realism is one of the oldest philosophies in Western culture and dates back at least to ancient Greece. Because of its respectable age, realism has had a variety of proponents and interpretations as diverse as classical and religious realism and scientific, natural, and rational realism. Because of this confusing array of variations, it seems most threads have been interwoven throughout its long history. (Ozmon and Craver, 2003).

Although realists have different views about what subject should constitute the curriculum, they agree that studies should be practical and useful. Locke approved of such practical studies as reading, writing, drawing, geography, astronomy, and studies in dancing, fencing, and riding (Ozmon, 2012). In perusing Locke's writing one finds two

types of curricula in his system: one for the rich and one for the poor. Locke proposed that all children between ages 3 and 14 whose parents were on relief should be sent to a work school for as long as they resided with their parents. They should earn their way at this school so as not to burden the local government financially. While there, they should have a "belly –full of bread daily" and in cold weather "a little warm water gruel "They were to be taught the manual skills of spinning, knitting, and some other part of woolen manufacturing" and be given some sense of religion. A historical feature of the realist curriculum has been the great attention given to the use of didactic and object studies in education (Ozmon and Craver, 2003).

Pragmatism. Pragmatism is a philosophy that prefers flexible educational methods and curricula. (Ozmon, 2012) The root of the word pragmatism is a Greek word meaning "work". It means it focuses on the action-oriented education and activity-oriented approach to education. Pragmatists reject separating knowledge from experience and fragmenting or compartmentalizing knowledge (Ozmon and Craver, 2003). Pragmatists believe in a diversified curriculum they advocate problem-centered learning as the proper approach to curriculum organization. It focuses the learning by doing or an action-oriented and child-centered curriculum. Pragmatist educators advocate meeting the needs of interests of the child and they believe that the material for any project must be appropriate for the age of the students and the teacher must provide direction to keep the activities within reasonable limits (Ozmon,2012). Pragmatists focus on the principle of utility, interest, experience, integration, flexibility, and child-centeredness while curriculum development (Ravi, 2015, Ozmon and Craver, 1999).

Existentialism. An existentialist curriculum consists of experiences and subjects that lend themselves to individual freedom and choice, according to existentialist philosophy people continually choices and thereby define themselves (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018).

The below table shows the four major philosophies and their emphasis on learning and curriculum.

Philosophy	Proponents	Emphasis on learning	Emphasis on curriculum
Idealism	Emerson Frobel Hegel Plato	Recalling knowledge and ideas: abstract thinking.	Knowledge-based; subject-based, classic or liberal arts, hierarchy of subjects: philosophy, theology, and mathematics are most important.
Realism	Aquinas Aristotle Broudy Maritain Pestalogy	Exercising the mind; logical and abstract thinking.	Knowledge-based; subject-based; arts and sciences; hierarchy of subject; humanistic

			and scientific subject.
Pragmatism	Childs Dewey James Peirce	Methods for dealing with changing environment and scientific explanations	No permanent knowledge or subjects; appropriate experiences that transmit culture and prepare individuals for change; problem-solving activities.
Existentialism	Sartre Marcel Morris Soderquist	Knowledge and principles of the human conditions; the act of choosing.	Choices in subject matter, electives; emotional aesthetic, and philosophical subjects.

Source: (Ornstein and Levine, 2008, p.163), (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018, p.51)

Four Educational philosophy and curriculum

Perennialist advocates permanent studies and they focus on seven liberal arts; Quadrivium and Trivium (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1997, Wiles and Bondi,1993). According to Hunkins knowledge is truth, truth is everywhere the same. So education should be everywhere the same. Essentialists focus on essential studies like mother tongue, grammar literature, science, mathematics, history, and foreign language for the secondary level and 3Rs reading, writing, and reason for the basic level (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018, wiles and Bondi,1993). **Essentialist** also emphasizes the intellectual growth of individuals. **Progressivism** advocates the experienced-based curriculum. According to John Dewey, the curriculum should be based on the need, interests, and abilities of the child. It means the center of the curriculum is the child or learner while curriculum development. It focuses on learning by doing and interacting with the favorable environment of the child and interdisciplinary subject matter(Ornstein and Hunkins,2018). **Reconstructionists** emphasized the addressing of social questions and a quest to create a better society. The curriculum focuses on students taking social action in solving real problems and social reform.

Educational Philosophies and Curriculum

The below table shows the four educational philosophies, their philosophical base, curriculum focus, and related curriculum trend.

Educational Philosophy	Proponents	Philosophical base	Curriculum Focus	Related curriculum trends

Perennialism	Hutchins Adler Maritain	Realism	Classical subjects; literary analysis, constant curriculum	Great book
Essentialism	Bagley Bestor	Idealism realism	Essential skills(3Rs) and essential subject	Back to basic cultural literacy excellence in education
Progressivism	Dewey Kilpatrick Parker Johnson	Pragmatism	Student interest, address human problems and affairs, interdisciplinary subject matter, activity, and project	Relevant curriculum, humanistic education, Radical school reform
Reconstructionism	Theodore Brameld George counts	pragmatism	Emphasis on social sciences and social research methods, focus on present and future trends as well as on national and international issues	international education reconceptualize equality of educational opportunities

Source: (Ornstein and Hunkins, 2018), (Ornstein and Levine, 2008).

Concept of curriculum and emphasis area

The below table shows the educational philosophy, their concept of curriculum, and emphasis area.

Educational Philosophy	Concept of curriculum	Emphasis area
Perennialism	Curriculum as subject matter	Permanent knowledge
Essentialism	Curriculum as subject matter	Essential knowledge
Progressivism	Curriculum as experience	Learners' needs and interest
Re-constructivism	Curriculum as social reform	Social problems and affair

Source: (Taba, 1962), (print,1993),(Ornstein and Hunkins,2018).

Result and conclusion

Philosophy and curriculum are interrelated to each other. Philosophy guides the curriculum worker in the context of the curriculum planning and development process.

Every philosophy has its perspectives on curriculum. When someone wants to develop a curriculum first he/she must be cleared of philosophical bases for curriculum development. There are different philosophies and philosophical views about the curriculum. Idealists philosopher focused on spiritual and religious development subject matter in the curriculum and they also focused on intellectual, physical, moral, and aesthetic development content that should be selected and organized in the curriculum. They give more importance to thoughts feelings and values than to a child-centered curriculum. Realists advocate a practical, useful, and experience-based curriculum. They also focused on knowledge and subject-based curriculum. Progressivism emphasizes the flexible curriculum which is based on the child's needs, interests, and ability and learning by doing. It means a child-centered curriculum. Perennialist focused on permanent studies or permanent knowledge. They advocate the constant content and curriculum, there is no need to change content and curriculum. Essentialists focused on essential subjects of studies like 3rs reading, writing, and reasoning. They also emphasize essential subject matter like history, mathematics, language, science, computer literacy, etc. Re-constructivist focused on the reconstruction of knowledge to the students and advocates the social reform curriculum.

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