“Philosophical Foundations of Curriculum”

Professional Presentation for Course:

EDCI 547 Foundation of Curriculum Studies

By

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Philosophical Foundations of Curriculum

- A curriculum is developed based on certain beliefs and orientations, conceptions of learning and the demands of society.
- What is the connection between philosophy and curriculum?
- For example, when you propose the teaching of a particular body of knowledge, course or subject, you will be asked, “What is your philosophy for introducing that content?” If you are unable to answer the question, you may not be able to convince others to accept your proposal.
Philosophy

- Study of wisdom (Love of wisdom)
- Philosophy fundamental question:
  - Metaphysic - What is real? (Deals with Reality)
  - Epistemology - What is truth? (Deals with Knowledge)
  - Axiology - What is of value? (Deals with Values)
“Philosophy is the beginning point in curriculum decision making and is the basis for all subsequent decisions regarding curriculum” – John Goodland

As cited on page 31
Philosophy is the starting point in any curriculum decision making and is the basis for all subsequent decisions regarding curriculum.

Philosophy becomes the criteria for determining the aims, selection, organization and implementation of the curriculum in the classroom.

Hopkins, Goodlad, and Dewey proposed that philosophy drives, or should drive all curriculum.

The values that are weighed when decisions are made about even the smallest and most apparently insignificant portions of curriculum development are grounded in a philosophy, whether it is hidden or conscious.
• Values and decisions are reflections of a philosophy, even if it is not consciously formulated.

• To the extent that this is indeed true, is the extent to which every individual educator should have a working philosophy.

• In the absent of a philosophy, an educator may be acting from prejudice, improper acculturation, ill-formed conscience or misconception without realizing it.
Tyler’s view of philosophy in relationship to school purpose

- Studies of Learners
- Suggestions from Subject Specialists
- Studies of Contemporary Life
- Use of Psychology of Learning
- Use of Philosophy

School Purposes
Before we proceed further, let us ask ourselves a question.

(a) What insights do we gain from the discussion on the philosophical foundations of curriculum?

- Foundations of curriculum do not arise in a vacuum.
- As curriculum development is heavily influenced by philosophy, those involved in such planning should be clear about contemporary, dominant philosophy.
- If we are unclear about our philosophy of education, our curriculum plans and teaching procedures will tend to be inconsistent and confused.
Further, we need to be constantly open to new ideas and insights that may lead to a revision or refinement of our philosophies.

Our position should be that no single philosophy, old or new, should serve as the exclusive guide for making decisions about curriculum.

What we, as curriculum specialists, need to do, is to adopt an eclectic approach, in which there is no undue emphasis on one particular philosophy.

In essence, what we need is a prudent philosophy-one that is politically and economically feasible and that serves the needs of students and society;
Philosophy and Curriculum

1. Philosophy provides educators, teachers and curriculum makers with framework for planning, implementing and evaluating curriculum.

2. It helps in answering what educational institutions are for, what subjects are important, how students should learn and what materials and methods should be used.

3. In decision-making, philosophy provides the starting point and will be used for the succeeding decision-making.
4. Study of philosophy helps us deal with our own personal systems of beliefs and values, i.e., the way we perceive the world around us and how we define what is important to us;

5. As philosophical issues have always influenced society and institutions of learning, a study of the philosophy of education in terms of Curriculum development is essential.

6. In essence, a philosophy of education influences, and to a large extent determines, our educational decisions and alternatives.
7. Those who are responsible for curricular decisions, therefore, should be clear about what they believe.

8. If we are unclear or confused about our own beliefs, then our curricular plans are bound to be unclear and confusing.

We shall now look at four major branches of philosophy and see how they are implicated in curriculum:
Idealism

Chief Representatives:
Socrates, Plato, Fitche, Hegel, Hume, Kant Nunn and Ross:

1. The doctrine of idealism suggests that matter is an illusion and that reality is that which exists mentally.
2. Reality exists as it is experienced.
3. Truth is same today as it was yesterday
4. It emphasizes moral and spiritual reality as the chief explanation of the world and considers moral values absolute, timeless and universal.
5. If we apply this view to education what would be the implications for the role of teachers and curriculum in education?
6. They believe that human behaviour is rational, when it conforms to the laws of nature and is governed by social laws.

Implications for Curriculum

a) Teachers are expected to act as role models of enduring values.

b) And the school must be highly structured and should advocate only those ideas that demonstrate enduring values.

c) The materials used for instructions, therefore, would centre on broad ideas particularly those contained in great works of literature and/or scriptures.
d) Since it is based on broad ideas and concepts, idealism is not in line with the beliefs of those who equate learning with acquisition of specific facts.

e) Curriculum should aim at inculcation of three spiritual values: Truth, Beauty and Goodness, theses three values determine three types of activities- intellectual, aesthetic and moral.
Realism

**Features:**

1. Concerned with world of ideas and things that are fixed within established subject matter.
2. Theory and principles come first in learning experience, application and practice follow. 'Realists' consider education a matter of reality rather than speculation.

**Implications for Curriculum:**

a) The paramount responsibility of the teacher is to impart to learners the knowledge about the world they live in. What scholars of various disciplines have discovered about the world constitutes this knowledge.
b) However, like the idealists, the realists too stress that education should reflect permanent and enduring values that have been handed down through generations, but only to the extent that they do not interfere with the study of particular disciplines.

c) Unlike the idealists, who consider classics ideal as subject matter for studies, the realists view the subject expert as the source and authority for determining the curriculum.

d) Textbooks and other written materials prepared by experts are important media for helping children learn what they should learn.

e) Curriculum should include essential knowledge, not the ‘fads and frills’
Pragmatism

**Founder**: John Dewey

**Features:**

1. Unlike, i.e., idealism and realism, Pragmatism gives importance to change, processes and relativity.
2. It suggests that the value of an idea lies in its actual consequences.
3. Whatever fulfils one’s purpose and develops one’s life is to be considered as true.
4. Considers learning as an active process, rather than a passive acceptance of facts.
5. Has no absolute values.
6. Knowledge is not at all immutable in a changing world: what is valid today may not be valid tomorrow.

7. Analyses the interests of the child into four groups: communication, enquiry, construction, expression.

Implications for curriculum

a) Curriculum should teach the learners how to think critically rather than what to think.

b) It should be child centered.

c) What is to be included must have practical effect on students.

d) Teaching should, therefore, be more exploratory in nature than explanatory.
e) And, learning takes place in an active way as learner solves problems which help them widen the horizons of their knowledge and reconstruct their experiences in consonance with the changing world.

f) The role of the teacher should simply be to disseminate information but to construct situations that involve both direct experience with the world of the learner and opportunities to understand these experiences.

g) Curriculum should be based on: Utility, Natural interests of children, Child’s own experiences, and integration;
Existentialism

Features:

1. Existentialism has gained greater popularity in recent years.

2. Today, many educationists talk about focusing on the individual, promoting diversity in the curriculum and emphasizing the personal needs and interests of learners.

3. This philosophy emphasizes that there are no values outside human beings, and thus, suggests that human beings should have the freedom to make choices and then be responsible for the consequences of those choices.
4. Existentialists suggest complete autonomy of learner. According to this philosophy, learners should be put into a number of choice-making situations, i.e., learners should be given freedom to choose what to study.

5. It emphasizes that education must centre on the perceptions and feelings of the individual in order to facilitate understanding of personal reactions or responses to life situations.

6. Of primary concern in this process is the individual. Since life is based upon personal meanings, the nature of education, the existentialists would argue, should be largely determined by the learner.
7. What might have been relevant in a particular situation need not necessarily always be so. In essence, social changes demand changes in the existing pattern of education.

8. To plug the gap between the needs of the learner, the society and the curriculum content, rethinking in the area of curriculum development appears to be unavoidable.

9. Seldom talk of curriculum goals because they tend to reject universal or widely acceptable standards.

10. Chief concern is to free the child so that he/she can do his/her own thinking/things.
11. Want children to find their own identities and set their own standards.

12. Tries to free children to choose for themselves what they are to learn and to believe.

Implications for Curriculum:

a) Individual learners should not be forced into pre-determined programmes of study.

b) Whatever the learner feels he/she must learn should be respected and facilitated by the system.

c) An existentialist curriculum, therefore, would consist of experiences and subjects that lend themselves to philosophical dialogue and acts of making choices, stressing self-expressive activities and media that illustrate emotions and insights.
d) The teacher should have a non-directive role. The teacher should view himself/herself as a partner in the process of learning.

e) As a professional, the teacher should serve as a resource facilitator, rather than imposing some predetermined values or interests on learners.
Educational Philosophies:

Although aspects of educational philosophy can be derived from the roots of idealism, realism, pragmatism and existentialism, a common approach is to provide a pattern of educational philosophies which derives from the major schools of philosophy some of which have been touched upon above.

Here, we shall be looking into the following four educational philosophies for their implications in the area of curriculum and curriculum development.

i) Perennialism

ii) Progressivism

iii) Essentialism, and

iv) Reconstructionism

Let us discuss each one of these in that order:
# Four Educational Philosophies Relating to Curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Philosophy</th>
<th>Area of Focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perennialism</td>
<td>The focus in the curriculum is classical subjects, literary analysis and considers curriculum as constant.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Progressivism</td>
<td>The curriculum is focused on students' interest, human problems and affairs. The subjects are interdisciplinary, integrative and interactive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Essentialism</td>
<td>The essential skills of the 3 R's and essential subjects of English, Science, History, Math and Foreign Language is the focus of the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reconstructionist.</td>
<td>The focus of the curriculum is on present and future trends and issues of national and international interests.</td>
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Perennialism

- **Features**

1. It advocates the permanency of knowledge that has stood the test of time and values that have moral and spiritual bases.
2. The underlying idea is that education is constant, absolute and universal.
3. Believes that Cement of education is the common nature of man, and therefore wants to cultivate reason, and intellectual powers.
4. Obviously, "perennialism" in education is born of "idealism" in general philosophy.
Implications:

a) The curriculum of the perennialist is subject-centered. It draws heavily on defined disciplines or logically organised bodies of content, but it emphasizes teaching leaning of languages, literature, sciences and arts.

b) Want to teach subjects in their separate form, e.g. History as history, and Chemistry as chemistry.

c) Only that subject matter which is considered to be hard is admissible for inclusion in curriculum.

d) Emphasize ability to read the classics and other difficult materials.
e) The teacher is viewed as an authority in a particular discipline and teaching is considered an art of imparting information knowledge and stimulating discussion.

f) In such a scheme of things, students are regarded immature as they lack the judgment required to determine what should be studied, and also that their interests demand little attention as far as curriculum development is concerned.

g) There is usually only one common curriculum for all students with little room for elective subjects.

h) According to this point of view putting some students through an academic curriculum and others through a vocational curriculum is to deny the latter genuine equality of educational opportunity
Progressivism

Features:

1. This emerged as a protest against perennialist thinking in education.
2. It was considered a contemporary reformist movement in educational, social and political affairs during the 1920's and 30's.

Implications for Curriculum

1. According to progressivist thought, the skills and tools of learning include problem solving methods and scientific inquiry.
2. In addition, learning experiences should include cooperative behaviour and self-discipline, both of which are important for democratic living.
3. The curriculum, thus, was interdisciplinary in nature and the teacher was seen as a guide for students in their problem-solving and scientific projects.

4. Opposition to the following traditional attributes and practices:
   a) The authoritarian teacher;
   b) Excessive dependence on textbook methods;
   c) Memorization of factual data and learning by excessive drilling;
   d) Static aims and materials that reject the notion of a changing world; and
   e) Attempts to isolate education from individual experiences and social reality.
Conclusion:

a) Although the major thrust of progressive education waned in the 1950's with the advent of "essentialism", the philosophy has left its imprint on education and educational practices of today.

b) Contemporary progressivism is expressed in several movements including: Movement for a socially relevant curriculum, and a match between subjects taught and student needs.
Essentialism

Features:

1. This philosophy, rooted partly in idealism and partly in realism.
2. Evolved mainly as a critique of progressive thought in education.
3. Yet, the proponents of essentialism do not totally reject progressive methods as they do believe that education should prepare the learner to adjust to a changing society.

Implications:

Thus, in essentialism learning should consist in mastering the subject matter that reflects currently available knowledge in various disciplines.
Teachers play a highly directive role by disseminating information to students. According to this viewpoint, the main arms of the institution (be it a school or a college) get side-tracked, when, at the expense of cognitive needs, it attempts to pay greater attention to the social and psychological problems of students.

Conclusion:

In recent years, the essentialist position has been stated vociferously by critics who claim that educational standards softened during the 1960s and early 1970s.
The most notable achievements of the essentialists have been:

a) the widespread implementation of competency based programmes,

b) the establishment of grade-level achievement standards, and

c) the movement to reemphasize academic subjects in schools/colleges.

In many ways, the ideas of essentialism lie behind attacks on the quality of education by the media and by local pressure groups, which includes, to a good extent, attacks on distance education.
Reconstructionism

Features:
• It views education as a means of reconstructing society.
• Put school in the forefront in remaking society. Believe that as school/college is attended by virtually all youth, it must be used as a means to shape the attitudes and values of each generation.
• As a result, when the youth become adults they will share certain common values, and thus the society will have reshaped itself.

Implications:
1. As for the curriculum, it must promote new social, economic, and political education.
2. The subject matter is to be used as a vehicle for studying social problems which must serve as the focus of the curriculum.

3. The following gives us a view of the reconstructionist programme of education:

   a) critical examination of the cultural heritage of a society as well as the entire civilization;
   b) scrutiny of controversial issues;
   c) commitment to bring about social and constructive change;
   d) enhancement of cultural renewal and internationalism.

4. Teachers in this school will break precedents if necessary, to rebuild the culture.

5. Involve students, parents and community in planning to fuse sources of formal education with political, social and economic resources to better human life and conditions.
6. Curriculum advocated by deconstructionists emphasizes the social sciences-history, political science, economics, sociology, psychology and philosophy-and not the pure sciences.

7. Thrust is on developing individual self-realization and freedom through cognitive and intellectual activities, and thus, on liberating people from the restrictions, limitations and controls of society.

8. The idea is that we have had enough of discipline-based education and narrow specialization, and that we don't need more specialists now, we need more "good" people if we want to survive. Group life should be a centre of school experience as groups can better achieve the purpose of reconstruction of society.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philosophy</th>
<th>Perennialism (Realism)</th>
<th>Essentialism (Idealism, Realism)</th>
<th>Progressivism (Pragmatism)</th>
<th>Reconstructionism (Pragmatism)</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Aim</strong></td>
<td>To educate the rational person; cultivate the intellect</td>
<td>To promote the intellectual growth of the individual; to educate the competent person</td>
<td>To promote democratic and social living</td>
<td>To improve and reconstruct society; education for change and social reform.</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Knowledge</strong></td>
<td>Human nature is constant; curriculum is subject centered; mastery of facts and timeless knowledge</td>
<td>Essential skills and academic subjects; mastery; reaction to progressivism</td>
<td>Curriculum should be human centered; living-learning process; relevant</td>
<td>Reconceptualists have brought in mystical, spiritual, intuitive ways of knowing into the curricular conversation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Values</strong></td>
<td>Rooted in the past, cherished values of society: Constant, absolute, universal; Socratic; help students think rationally</td>
<td>Not so much rooted in the past; concerned with contemporary scene; excellence, not adequacy; traditional values</td>
<td>Protest against perennialism. Reform. Students taking an active role in their own education.</td>
<td>The needs of society more than those of the individual; Marxist in that students and teachers must become agents of change</td>
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<tr>
<td>Perennialism (Realism)</td>
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<td>Content Curriculum</td>
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<td>Methods</td>
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<td>Leading Thinkers</td>
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### Philosophy
- **Perennialism** (Realism)
  - Subject centered; "liberal education;" the liberal arts; great books, great thinkers

### Essentialism
- The fundamentals, the essentials, "back to basics" Content, not process

### Progressivism
- How to think not what to think; curriculum is interdisciplinary

### Reconstructionism
- Society reform strategies. Internationalize curriculum.

### Content
- **Methods**
  - The teacher is an authority; developing intellectual skills
  - Teach specific information in all levels; don’t less process overshadow subject matter

### Leading Thinkers
- **Horace Mann**
- **John Dewey**
- **Carl Rogers**
- **Abraham Maslow**
- **Charles Silberman**
- **John Holt**
- **A.S. Neill**
- **Ivan Illich**
- **Paul Goodman**
- **George Counts**
- **Theodore Brameld**
- **Alvin Toffler**
- **Harold Shane**
- **Mario Fantini**
- **Kenneth Boulding**
- **William Pinar**
- **Michael Apple**
- **Pablo Freire**
As to which of these orientations holds the most promise for influencing the future for education and the curriculum, depends on one's view of the future.

Example: As the economic downturn overtakes America, there will be a conservative reaction. Some sort of state-imposed traditionalism will take over the field.
In educational circles there are two major philosophic strands:

- **Traditionalist philosophies** which can be further subdivided into **perennialism** and **essentialism**, as are **idealism** and **realism**;

- **Contemporary philosophies** which can be further subdivided into **progressivism** and **reconstructionism**, as are **pragmatism** and **existentialism**.
While it could be said that there is a close relationship between realism and perennialism, that essentialism is derived from idealism and realism, and that progressivism is pragmatic, it might be better to simply say that all eight of these categories are simply attempts to create a taxonomy for various philosophical, educational, and ultimately historical ideas.

A taxonomy, by its nature, is ideal and not actual. A more realistic way to convey these philosophies would simply be to take the major thinkers who are mentioned in the chapter—Hutchins, Dewey, Bloom, Maslow, and others—and summarize what they taught.
The educating of elementary and secondary children and youths in our nations’ schools have created many questions for educational professionals:

a) Who shall be educated?

b) Is education meant for all children and for all the people?

c) What types of educational experiences should be provided to given group of learners?

d) Is it possible for schools to go too far in providing educational experiences for learners?
4) Have the schools gone far enough in offering varied experiences?

5) How much can our nation afford to spend for education?

6) To what extent should people sacrifice to educate their own children and the children of others?

7) Are the schools as good as they used to be?

8) What are the major virtues and defects we find in schools today?

9) What shall be the organizing center of the curriculum? Subject matter? Learners? Teachers?
10) To what extent shall the curriculum be made uniform within the school district, county, and nation?

11) Are there identifiable minimum essentials to be mastered by all learners at given stages of their development?

12) How can the needs of individual learners be met?

13) Are there feasible ways of organizing or grouping students to achieve individualization in teaching and learning?

14) Is improving the curriculum worth the effort?

15) Is not a stable, tried, and tested curriculum to be desired and to be utilized in educating each new generation?
More precise definitions of the curriculum emphasize:

1. guided, preselected experiences to which children and youth should be exposed;
2. plans for learning;
3. ends or outcomes of being educated; and
4. systems for achieving educational production, for example, by concentrating on the attainment of behavioral objectives.
A poll of people's beliefs about what the curriculum is indicates:

- What is taught
- How it is taught
- Teachers' materials
- Students' materials
- School experiences
- All experiences

People have argued continually about the breadth or scope of the curriculum and then have become lost in arguments about the semantics of curriculum.
At the heart of purposeful activity in curriculum development is an educational philosophy that assists in answering the value-laden questions and making decisions from among the many choices.

- Philosophies can, therefore, serve curriculum leaders in many ways. They can help to
  - suggest purpose in education;
  - clarify objectives and learning activities in school;
  - define the roles of persons working in schools; and
  - guide the selection of learning strategies and tactics in the classroom.
Schools are designed to promote an education, but the designs of school curricula differ just as philosophies differ.

Schools represent a blueprint, or plan, to promote learning;

Because the ends sought by planners differ, all schools are not alike.

This section introduces the fifteen (15) dimensions of school design, dimensions by which schools can be compared and contrasted based on its guiding philosophy.
1. Community involvement
2. School buildings and grounds
3. Classroom spaces
4. Organization of knowledge
5. Uses of learning materials
6. Philosophy of education
7. Teaching strategies
8. Staffing patterns
9. Organization of students
10. Rules and regulations

11. Disciplinary measures

12. Reporting of student progress

13. Administrative attitudes

14. Teacher roles

15. Student roles

Historical events are often direct consequences of what people believe or, in a formal sense, of their philosophical positions.

Applying labels to philosophical positions sometimes proves dangerous.

Nevertheless, two major positions bearing definitive labels appear in the sweep of historical data and interpretations in the preceding sections of this unit. They are (1) the **Traditionalist** position, and (2) the **Progressivist** position.

The original progressives in education called themselves "Essentialists" or "Fundamentalists"
Traditionalists and Progressives hold different views concerning the four typical aim of education.

The following are the customary positions of both groups as well as their positions on authority vrs freedom, as well as the uses of subject matter:

What are some philosophical questions that come up in curriculum development?

- Should children be coddled or pushed?
- How important is it to achieve uniformity of behaviour or belief?
- Should individual differences be exalted or denied?
- Should students be able to choose what they learn?
- Should schools seek to change (improve) society or sustain it?
- Should tolerance and understanding outweigh nationalism and distrust? (What is the school’s role in this?)
• Should everything that is learned have practical or economic value?
• Should schools seek to further parental goals or goals defined outside the family?
• What are the relative values of reading, writing, figuring, playing, working, sweating, debating, talking, listening, agreeing, disagreeing, relaxing, persisting, resisting, conforming, participating, expressing, creating, problem-solving, thinking, experimenting?
What can curriculum developers learn from philosophers, and vice versa?

Philosophers can help curriculum developers:
- Be more explicit about assumptions
- Be more willing to challenge assumptions
- Understand more consequences of choices
- Expand sense of possibilities and alternatives

Curriculum developers can help philosophers:
- Focus on what is really important
- Understand the consequences of their ideas and theories
- Come out of the ivory tower
- See that philosophical analysis can make a difference in the world
Summary

- Educational philosophies are the heart of purposeful activity in curriculum development.
- Philosophies serve as value screens for decision making.
- Because educators today are confronted by multiple choices, it is vital that curriculum specialists understand their own values and beliefs about schooling.

- Over the years, schools have evolved from highly structured and traditional institutions to those with considerable flexibility.
Questions and discussion

- To get us started:
- Choose a partner
- Think for a minute about the last time you were involved in a dispute about curriculum in your school
- Describe your disputes to each other
- Choose one dispute to focus on
- Think about the philosophical issues underlying the dispute
- Did philosophy play a role in the resolution?
- How might philosophy have helped to resolve the dispute?
- Be prepared to share your discussion with the group
Question for Consideration:

Describe how the following current concerns in public/government schools are philosophical in nature: (a) school choice; (b) cooperative learning; (c) whole language reading.