PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF CURRICULUM

EARNING OUTCOMES

When you complete this module you will be able to:

- Define what is philosophy
- Define what is educational philosophy
- Compare and contrast the philosophical beliefs of perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism
- Explain the influence of the four educational philosophies on curriculum
- List the main features of the educational philosophies of Farabi, Confucius and Tagore
- Discuss the implications of the philosophies of Farabi, Confucius and Tagore on curriculum

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2.0 Introduction

In module 1, we discussed the different definitions of curriculum. We also briefly discussed the foundations of curriculum, the curriculum development process and the relationship between curriculum and instruction. In this chapter and the following two chapters, we will examine in greater detail the foundations of curriculum. In other words, how different traditional disciplines have influenced curriculum. A curriculum is developed based on certain beliefs and orientations, conceptions of learning and the demands of society. In this chapter, we will focus on the *philosophical beliefs* that influence curriculum and in Module 3 we will focus on the *psychological perspectives* that impact curriculum.

In Module 4 we will discuss the role of *society* in determining what is to be included in a curriculum as well as the legacy of significant historical events.
ACTIVITY 2.1
Read the newspaper report on ‘Consult Private Sector on Curriculum’
1. What do you understand by the phrase “equipped with knowledge that is useful to the nature of their jobs”? Give specific examples
2. “We cannot run away from supplying a workforce needed by industries for nation building”. To what extent do you agree that

2.1 What is Philosophy?

Let’s begin with philosophy. The word philosophy is a combination of the Greek word “philos” (love) and “sophia” (wisdom) which translated means “love of wisdom”. Philosophers are people who seek after wisdom and curious about the world seeking to understand the nature of things. Oftentimes, the result of philosophy is not so much putting forward new philosophies or propositions but making existing philosophies or propositions clearer. Philosophers study the works of other philosophers and state anew what others have put forward as well as proposing new philosophies. A philosopher can be a person who knows philosophy even though he or she engages in little or no philosophising. Philosophy also refers to the collective works of other philosophers. It can mean the academic exploration of various questions raised by philosophers.

For centuries philosophers have been interested with such concepts as morality, goodness, knowledge, truth, beauty and our very existence. Among the questions philosophers ask are:
- What is truth? Why do we say a statement is correct or false?
- How do we know what we know?
- What is reality? What things can be describe as real?
- What is the nature of thought and thinking?
- What is special about being a human being?
- Is there anything special about being alive at all?
- What is ethics?
- What does it mean when something is right or wrong; good or bad?
- What is beauty?
- How do beautiful things differ from others?

Philosophers use certain methods of inquiry. They often frame their questions as problems or puzzles about subjects they find interesting and confusing. Popularly, the word philosophy may also refer to someone’s perspective on life (philosophy of life) or the underlying principles or method of achieving something.
2.2 Philosophy of Education

Now, let’s examine a branch of philosophy, namely; philosophy of education. What is philosophy of education? Philosophy of education is the study of questions such as ‘What is education?’ ‘What is the purpose of education?’, ‘What does it mean to know something?’ ‘What is the relationship between education and society?’ The philosophy of education recognises that the development of a civil society depends on the education of the young as responsible, thoughtful and enterprising citizens which is a challenging task requiring deep understanding of ethical principles, moral values, political theory, aesthetics and economics; not to mention an understanding of children themselves.

Most of the prominent philosophers in the last 2000 years were not philosophers of education but have at some point considered and written on the philosophy of education. Among them are Plato, Aristotle, Rousseau, Dewey, Adler, Confucius, Al Farabi, Tagore and many others [we will discuss their contributions to education later in the chapter]. These philosophers have been key voices in philosophy of education and have contributed to our basic understanding of what education is and can be. They have also provided powerful critical perspectives revealing the problems in education.

2.3 Philosophy and Curriculum

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 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, organisation and implementation of the curriculum in the classroom.

Philosophy helps us answer general questions such as: ‘What are schools for?’ ‘What subjects are of value?’, ‘How should students learn the content?’ It also helps us to answer more precise tasks such as deciding what textbooks to use, how to use them, what homework to assign and how much of it, how to test and use the results.

SELF-TEST 2.1
1. What do philosophers?
2. List the concepts philosophers have been interested in.
3. What is philosophy of education? How is it related to the curriculum of a school system?
Would you believe that the above statement was written more than 2000 years ago by the Greek philosopher Aristotle and we are still debating the same issues today. Sometimes one wonders whether we know what we want! We lament about the poor level of basic skills of students and call for a return to the basics. At the same time we want students to develop critical thinking skills and call for lesser emphasis on rote learning. Through the centuries, many philosophies of education have emerged, each with their own beliefs about education. In this chapter, we will discuss four philosophies, namely; perennialism, essentialism, progressivism and reconstructionism proposed by Western philosophers. Also, discussed are the viewpoints of three Eastern philosophers; namely, al-Farabi, Tagore and Confucius. Each of these educational philosophies is examined to see what curriculum is proposed and how teaching and learning should be conducted.

### 2.4 Perennialism

#### 2.4.1 What is Perennialism?

Perennial means "everlasting," like a perennial flower that blooms year after year. Perennialism, the oldest and most conservative educational philosophy has its roots in the philosophy of Plato and Aristotle. Two modern day proponents of perennialism are Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler. The perennialists believed that humans are rational and the aim of education is “to improve man as man” (Hutchins, 1953). The answers to all educational questions derive from the answer to one question: What is human nature? According to them, human nature is constant and humans have the ability to understand the universal truths of nature. Thus, the aim of education is to develop the rational person and to uncover universal truths by training the intellect. Towards developing one’s moral and spiritual being, character education should be emphasised.
Perennialism is based on the belief that some ideas have lasted over centuries and are as relevant today as when they were first conceived. These ideas should be studied in school. A list of the ‘Great Books’ was proposed covering topics in literature, art, psychology, philosophy, mathematics, science, economics, politics and so forth. Examples of such books are: *Robinson Crusoe* written by Daniel Defoe, *War and Peace* written by Leo Tolstoy, *Moby Dick* written by Herman Melville, Euclid’s book *Elements* on geometry, Newton’s book on *Optics*, *The Sexual Enlightenment of Children* written by Sigmund Freud, *An inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations* by Adam Smith and many others. The book selected had to have contemporary significance, that is, it should be relevant to the problems and issues of present times. The book should espouse ideas and issues that have occupied the minds of thinking individuals in the last 2000 years. The book should attract people to read it again and again and benefit from it.

The perennialists believed that these are history's finest thinkers and writers. Their ideas are profound and meaningful even today as when they were written. When students are immersed in the study of these profound and enduring ideas, they will appreciate learning for its own sake as well as develop their intellectual powers and moral qualities.

### 2.4.2 The Perennialist Curriculum

Based on the beliefs of perennialism, the curriculum proposed had the following characteristics:

- The ‘Great Books’ programme or more commonly called the liberal arts will discipline the mind and cultivate the intellect. To read the book in its original language, students must learn Latin and Greek. Students also had to learn grammar, rhetoric, logic, advanced mathematics and philosophy (Hutchins, 1936).

- The study of philosophy is a crucial part of the perennialist curriculum. This was because they wanted students to discover those ideas that are most insightful and timeless in understanding the human condition.

- At a much later time, Mortimer Adler (1982) in his book the *Paideia Proposal*, recommended a single elementary and secondary curriculum for all students. The educationally disadvantaged had to spend some time in pre-schools.

- Perennialists were not keen on allowing students to take electives (except second languages) such as vocational and life-adjustment subjects. They argued that these subjects denied students the opportunity to fully develop their rational powers.

- The perennialists criticised the vast amount of disjointed factual information that educators have required students to absorb. They urge that teachers should spend more time teaching concepts and explaining how these concepts are meaningful to students.
Since, enormous amount of scientific knowledge has been produced, teaching should focus on the processes by which scientific truths have been discovered. However, the perennialists advise that students should not be taught information that may soon be obsolete or found to be incorrect because of future scientific and technological findings.

At the secondary and university level, perennialists were against reliance on textbooks and lectures in communicating ideas. Emphasis should be on teacher-guided seminars, where students and teachers engage in dialogue; and mutual inquiry sessions to enhance understanding of the great ideas and concepts that have stood the test to time. Student should learns to learn, and not to be evaluated

Universities should not only prepare students for specific careers but to pursue knowledge for its own sake. “University students may learn a few trees, perennialists claim, but many will be quite ignorant about the forests: the timeless philosophical questions “ (Hutchins, 1936)

Teaching reasoning using the ‘Great Books’ of Western writers is advocated using the Socratic method to discipline the minds of students. Emphasis should be on scientific reasoning rather than mere acquisition of facts. Teach science but not technology, great ideas rather than vocational topics.

Perennialists argue that the topics of the great books describe any society, at any time, and thus the books are appropriate for American society. Students must learn to recognise controversy and disagreement in these books because they reflect real disagreements between persons. Students must think about the disagreements and reach a reasoned, defensible conclusion.

School should teach religious values or ethics. The difference between right and wrong should be emphasized so that students will have definite rules that they must follow.

SELF-TEST 2.2
1. Identify the main features of the perennialist curriculum.
2. According to perennialism, what should be emphasised in the classroom?
ACTIVITY 2.2

The Great Books

The Great Books refer to a curriculum and a book list that came about as the result of a discussion among American academics and educators, starting in the 1920s and 1930s. It was initiated by John Erskine on how to improve higher education by returning to the western liberal arts tradition of broad cross-disciplinary learning. Notable among the academics and educators was Robert Hutchins and Mortimer Adler.

They felt that the emphasis on narrow specialisation in American universities and colleges had harmed the quality of higher education by failing to expose students to the important products of Western civilization and thought.

The Great Books started out as a list of 100 essential texts which were selected based on the criteria that it had relevance to present problems and issues and it is relevant to a large number of the great ideas and great issues that have occupied the minds of thinking individuals.

The Great Books covered topics including fiction, history, poetry, natural science, mathematics, philosophy, drama, politics, religion, economics and ethics. Examples of the books are:

- Homer’s The Iliad and The Odyssey
- Works of Aristotle and Plato
- Archimedes Measurement of a circle, On Spirals, Treating Mechanical Problems
- Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales
- Shakespeare’s complete works
- Descartes The Geometry
- Isaac Newton’s Mathematical Principles of Natural Philosophy
- Karl Marx’s Das Kapital
- Leo Tolstoy’s War and Peace
- William James’ The Principle of Psychology

The Great Books was criticised as being elitist and giving importance to ‘dead white males’, while ignoring the contributions of females and minorities (such as Afro-Americans). Another harmful criticism was that the books were more to create the illusion of being cultured without any real substance behind it.

[Source: Great Books of the Western World,.www.answers.com]

1) What other books of The Great Books do you know?
2) What were the main arguments put forward by the perennialists for using The Great Books?
3) Do you agree with the criticisms of The Great Books?
2.5 Essentialism

2.5.1 What is Essentialism?

Essentialism comes from the word ‘essential’ which means the main things or the basics. As an educational philosophy, it advocates instilling in students with the "essentials" or “basics” of academic knowledge and character development. The term essentialism as an educational philosophy was originally popularised in the 1930s by William Bagley and later in the 1950s by Arthur Bestor and Admiral Rickover. When it was first introduced as an educational philosophy in American schools, it was criticised as being too rigid. In 1957, the Russians launched Sputnik which caused a panic in educational circles as Americans felt they had fallen behind the Soviet Union technologically. A rethinking of education followed that led to interest in essentialism.

Essentialism was grounded in a conservative philosophy that argues that schools should not try to radically reshape society. Rather, they should transmit traditional moral values and intellectual knowledge that students need to become model citizens. Essentialists believe that teachers should instill traditional virtues such as respect for authority, fidelity to duty, consideration for others and practicality. Essentialism placed importance on science and understanding the world through scientific experimentation. To convey important knowledge about the world, essentialist educators emphasised instruction in natural science rather than non-scientific disciplines such as philosophy or comparative religion.

2.5.2 The Essentialist Curriculum

Based on the beliefs of essentialism, the curriculum proposed has the following characteristics:

- The ‘basics’ of the essentialist curriculum are mathematics, natural science, history, foreign language, and literature. Essentialists disapprove of vocational, life-adjustment, or other courses with "watered down" academic content.

- Elementary students receive instruction in skills such as writing, reading, and measurement. Even while learning art and music (subjects most often associated with the development of creativity) students are required to master a body of information and basic techniques, gradually moving from less to more complex skills and detailed knowledge. Only by mastering the required material for their grade level are students promoted to the next higher grade.
● Essentialist programs are academically rigorous, for both slow and fast learners. Common subjects for all students regardless of abilities and interests. But, how much is to be learned is adjusted according to student ability.

● It advocates a longer school day, a longer academic year, and more challenging textbooks. Essentialists maintain that classrooms should be oriented around the teacher, who serves as the intellectual and moral role model for students.

● Teaching is teacher-centred and teachers decide what is most important for students to learn with little emphasis on student interests because it will divert time and attention from learning the academic subjects. Essentialist teachers focus heavily on achievement test scores as a means of evaluating progress.

● In an essentialist classroom, students are taught to be "culturally literate," that is, to possess a working knowledge about the people, events, ideas, and institutions that have shaped society. Essentialists hope that when students leave school, they will possess not only basic skills and extensive knowledge, but also disciplined and practical minds, capable of applying their knowledge in real world settings.

● Discipline is necessary for systematic learning in a school situation. Students learn to respect authority in both school and society.

● Teachers need to be mature and well educated, who know their subjects well and can transmit their knowledge to students.

**SELF-TEST 2.3**

1. What are THREE main features of the essentialist classroom?
2. Identify the strengths and weaknesses of an essentialist curriculum?

### 2.6 Progressivism

**2.6.1 What is Progressivism?**
Progressivism is a philosophical belief that argues that education must be based on the fact that humans are by nature social and learn best in real-life activities with other people. The person most responsible for progressivism was John Dewey (1859-1952). The progressive movement stimulated American schools to broaden their curriculum, making education more relevant to the needs and interests of students. Dewey wrote extensively on psychology, epistemology (*the origin of knowledge*), ethics and democracy. But, his philosophy of education laid the foundation for progressivism. In 1896, while a professor at the University of Chicago, Dewey founded the famous Laboratory School to test his educational ideas. His writings and work with the Laboratory School set the stage for the progressive education movement.

According to Dewey, the role of education is to transmit society’s identity by preparing young people for adult life. He was a keen advocate of democracy and for it to flourish, he felt that education should allow learners to realise their interests and potential. Learners should learn to work with others because learning in isolation separates the mind from action. According to him certain abilities and skills can only be learned in a group. Social and intellectual interaction dissolves the artificial barriers of race and class by encouraging communication between various social groups (Dewey, 1920). He described education as a process of growth and experimentation in which thought and reason are applied to the solution of problems. Children should learn as if they were scientists using the scientific method proposed by Dewey (1920):

1. To be aware of the problem (eg. plants need sunlight to grow)
2. Define the problem (eg. can plants grow without sunlight)
3. Propose hypotheses to solve it
4. Test the hypotheses
5. Evaluate the best solution to the problem

Students should be constantly experimenting and solving problems; reconstructing their experiences and creating new knowledge using the proposed five steps. Teachers should not only emphasise drill and practice, but should expose learners to activities that relate to real life situations of students, emphasising ‘Learning by doing’.

### 2.6.2 The Progressive Curriculum

- Progressivists emphasise the study of the natural and social sciences. Teacher should introduce students to new scientific, technological, and social developments. To expand the personal experience of learners, learning should be related to present community life. Believing that people learn best from what they consider most relevant to their lives, the curriculum should centre on the experiences, interests, and abilities of students.

- Teachers should plan lessons that arouse curiosity and push students towards higher order thinking and knowledge construction. For example, in addition to reading textbooks, students must learn by doing such as fieldtrips where they can interact with nature and society.
• Students are encouraged to interact with one another and develop social virtues such as cooperation and tolerance for different points of view.

• Teachers should not be confined to focusing on one discrete discipline at a time but should introduce lessons that combine several different subjects.

• Students are to be exposed to a more democratic curriculum that recognises accomplishments of all citizens regardless of race, cultural background or gender. addition,

• By including instruction in industrial arts and home economics, progressivists strive to make schooling both interesting and useful. Ideally, the home, workplace, and schoolhouse blend together to generate a continuous, fulfilling learning experience in life. It is the progressivist dream that the dreary, seemingly irrelevant classroom exercises that so many adults recall from childhood will someday become a thing of the past. Students solve problems in the classroom similar to those they will encounter outside school.

SELF-TEST 2.4
1. What are the main arguments of the progressive movement?
2. List some of the main features of the progressive curriculum
3. What are the main differences between the progressive curriculum and the essentialist curriculum?

2.7 Reconstructionism

2.7.1 What is Reconstructionism?

Reconstructionism was a philosophy uniquely popular in the U.S. during the 1930's through the 1960's. It was largely the brain child of Theodore Brameld from Columbia Teachers College. He began as a communist, but shifted to reconstructionism. Reconstructionists favor reform and argue that students must be taught how to bring about change. Reconstructionism is a philosophy that believes in the rebuilding of social and cultural infrastructures. Students are to study social problems and think of ways to improve society. Another proponent of reconstructionism was George Counts (1932) who in a speech titled Dare the School Build a New Social Order suggested that schools become the agent of social change and social reform. Students cannot afford to be neutral but must take a position.
Most advocates of reconstructionism are sensitive to race, gender, ethnicity and differences in socioeconomic status. Related to reconstructionism is another belief called critical pedagogy. It is primarily a teaching and curriculum theory, designed by Henry Giroux and Peter McLaren, which focuses upon the use of revolutionary literature in classrooms that is aimed at "liberation." Radical in its conception, critical pedagogy was based on Marxist ideology which advocates equality in the distribution of wealth and strongly against capitalism. More recent reconstructionists such as Paulo Freire in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1968) advocated a revolutionary pedagogy for poor students in which people can move through different stages to ultimately be able to take action and overcome oppression. He argued that people must become active participants in changing their own status through social action to change bring about social justice.

### 2.7.2 The Reconstructionist Curriculum

- In the reconstructionist curriculum, it was not enough for students to just analyse interpret and evaluate social problems. They had to be committed to the issues discussed and encouraged to take action to bring about constructive change.

- The curriculum is to be based on social and economic issues as well as social service. The curriculum should engage students in critical analysis of the local, national and international community. Examples of issues are poverty, environment degradation, unemployment, crime, war, political oppression, hunger, etc.

- There are many injustices in society and inequalities in terms of race, gender, and socioeconomic status. Schools are obliged to educate children towards resolution of these injustices and students should not be afraid to examine controversial issues. Students should learn to come to a consensus on issues and so group work was encouraged.

- The curriculum should be constantly changing to meet the changes in society. Students be aware of global issues and the interdependence between nations. Enhancing mutual understanding and global cooperation should be the focus of the curriculum.

- Teachers are considered the prime agents of social change, cultural renewal and internationalism. They are encouraged to challenge outdated structures and entrusted with the task of bringing about a new social order which may be utopian in nature.

- In general, the curriculum emphasised the social sciences (such as history, political science, economics, sociology, religion, ethics, poetry, and philosophy), rather than the sciences.
ACTIVITY 2.3
Identify the Educational Philosophies

Which of the following statements reflect the four philosophical traditions that have been discussed? Mark:

- ‘E’ for essentialism,
- ‘P’ for progressivism,
- ‘PN’ for perennialism and
- ‘R’ for reconstructionism.

Check your answers for your score. Since the statements are subjective, it is possible that you may disagree with the classification. Support your argument.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>A school curriculum should include a common body of knowledge that all students should know</td>
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<td>2.</td>
<td>The curriculum should focus on the great ideas that have survived through time and related to present day challenges.</td>
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<td>3.</td>
<td>Schools should prepare students for analyzing and solving the social problems that they will face as adults.</td>
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<td>4.</td>
<td>Each student should determine his or her individual curriculum, and teachers should guide and help them.</td>
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<td>5.</td>
<td>Students must be taught about change and how to bring about change.</td>
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<td>6.</td>
<td>Teachers and schools should emphasise academic rigour, discipline, hard work and respect for authority.</td>
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<td>7.</td>
<td>Students must be questioned and probed until they discover the truth in the texts selected.</td>
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<td>8.</td>
<td>Schools should develop students’ ability to think deeply and analytically rather than focus on temporary issues such as social skills and current trends.</td>
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<td>9.</td>
<td>For a country to be competitive in the global marketplace, schools should seek to produce more competent workers.</td>
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<td>10.</td>
<td>Since students learn effectively through social interaction, schools should plan for increased social interaction in the curriculum.</td>
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<td>11.</td>
<td>Students are too immature to decide what they need to learn and so the school should decide for them.</td>
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<td>12.</td>
<td>Teaching should emphasise relating what is learned to the real-world through field trips and internship.</td>
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<td>13.</td>
<td>Education is not primarily concerned with producing future workers but should emphasise learning for its own sake and students should enjoy reading, learning and discussing interesting ideas.</td>
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<td>14.</td>
<td>Education should enable students to recognise injustices in society, and schools should promote projects to redress social inequalities.</td>
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<td>15.</td>
<td>Students should be active participants in the learning process, involved in democratic class decision making and reflective thinking.</td>
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<tr>
<td>16.</td>
<td>Students should be taught to be more sensitive to race, gender, ethnicity, and differences in general.</td>
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Al-Farabi (872-950 AD) was born in Wasij, in the province of Farab in Turkestan, of a noble family. To understand the universe and humankind he undertook the meticulous study of ancient philosophy (particularly Plato and Aristotle) which he integrated into his own Islamic-Arabic civilization whose chief source was the Qur’an. Al-Farabi used a number of terms to describe education: discipline (ta’dib), training (tahdhib), guidance (tasdid), instruction (ta’lim), exercise or learning (irtiyad) and upbringing (tarbiya) (quoted in Ammar al-Talbi, 1993). He believed that the first aim of knowledge was knowledge of God and His attributes. He emphasised the need for unity of society and the State to be achieved by unity of thought, wisdom and religion.

2.8.1 Al-Farabi on Education

- According to him the whole activity of education is the acquisition of values, knowledge and practical skills leading to perfection and the attainment of happiness. The perfect human being (al insan al kamil) is one who has acquired
  - theoretical virtue (intellectual knowledge) and
  - practical moral virtues (moral behaviour).

- Virtue is the state of mind in which the human being carries out good and kind deeds such as wisdom, common sense, inventiveness, cleverness, temperance, courage, generosity and justice (Al-Farabi, Talkhis, cited in Ammar al-Talbi, 1993).

- Theoretical and practical virtue can only be obtained within society, for it is society that nurtures the individual and prepares him or her to be free. Thus, one of the goals of education is the creation of the ideal community, ‘the one whose cities all work together in order to attain happiness’ (Al-Farabi, Mabadi ahl al-madina al-fadila, cited in Ammar al-Talbi, 1993).

- Another aim of education is to educate political leaders, because ignorance among them is more harmful than it is in the common person.
• He considered the method of dialogue or debate as important in instruction. The method of argument and the method of discourse which can be used orally or in writing. For the common people, the methods used must be closely related to what they can grasp and understand.

• He also emphasised on the need for scientific discourse; that by which the knowledge of something is obtained either through asking questions about the thing, or from the replies obtained, or by resolving a scientific problem (Al-Farabi, Kitab al-huraf, cited in Ammar al-Talbi, 1993).

• In this book Al-Alfaz, Farabi argues that there are two types of learning: learning through *speech* and learning by *imitation* (observing other people’s actions with the intention of imitating or applying them).

• The method of instruction must be appropriate to the level of learners. For example, the method of imagination is encouraged for teaching the hard to grasp concepts to common people. The educator resorts to metaphors and illustrations in teaching especially for people who are reluctant to learn (Al-Farabi, Tahsil, cited in Ammar al-Talbi, 1993).

• According to Al-Farabi, understanding is better than memorization because the former deals mainly with details which could go on forever and hardly useful. But the action of understanding concerns meanings, universals and laws which are valid for all.

### 2.8.2 Al-Farabi on Curriculum

• Al-Farabi classified the sciences and learning not just for the sake of listing them, but with an educational objective in mind.

• Content to be taught as suggested by Al-Farabi
  - Language and its structure (to express oneself and understand others)
  - Logic (*mantiq*) which includes verbal expression and intellectual procedures
  - Mathematics (he divided into 7 parts)
    - arithmetic (begin with numbers and proceeding to measures)
    - geometry (use of geometric shapes to stimulate imagination)
    - the science of optics
    - astronomy (study of instruments and observation skills)
    - music (making and listening to musical instruments)
    - dynamics (eg. momentum)
    - science of machines
  - Natural sciences
- Religion and scholastic theology (*kalam*)
- Political science/civics
- Jurisprudence (*fiqh*) and law (*qanun*)

- Mathematics called ‘the teachings’ (*ta’alim*) was given importance because it trains students toward the path of precision and clarity. The student is to begin with studying arithmetic (numbers) followed by geometry, optics, astronomy, music, dynamics and last of all mechanics. The student moves in stages from the immaterial and the immeasurable to what needs some matter. (*Al-Farabi, Ihsa’ al-’ulum*, cited in Ammar al-Talbi, 1993).

- On evaluation, Al-Farabi emphasised that the aim of an examination is to find out a learner’s level in the field being studied. He believed that the questions students ask could have either an educational or an experimental character. Educational is when students demonstrate that they have mastered something. Experimental is when students test themselves using instruments (such as compass, abacus, ruler, tables) to determine whether they know the rules.

- Al-Farabi drew attention to the purpose of educational games and the role of play in human activity. He recommended games that stimulate creativity. Play should be used appropriately to restore the learner’s strength to undertake more serious activity.

**SELF-TEST 2.6**

1. What are some of al-Farabi’s views on teaching? How relevant are they today?
2. What are main features of the curriculum proposed by al-Farabi?

### 2.9 Confucius

Confucius (551-479 BC), born in Quyi in the principality of Lu, is one of China’s most famous philosophers. He spent a lifetime learning as well as teaching. He stated that education plays a fundamental role in the development of society and of individuals alike. Education should seek to produce virtuous individuals which will alter human nature. By raising individual moral standard, society will become more virtuous and the country will be well-governed and its citizens law-abiding. He rejected feudalism in which the status of an individual was passed from one generation to the next based on birth which was prevalent during his time. His recommendations are in the *Analects* (*Lun Yu*) which is a
record of his speeches and his disciples, as well as the discussions they had. It literally means “discussions over words”. Confucian thought was not confined to China. It spread to Japan, Vietnam, North and South Korea, and parts of Southeast Asia.

2.9.1 Confucius and Education

- According to Confucius, education is to produce capable individuals (ziancai) whom he called shi (gentlemen) or junzi (men of quality) who combined competence with virtue. They would serve the government and bring about an ideal managed by men of virtue. The cultivation of virtue was to be through observation, study and reflective thought.

- Among the virtues given priority are: filial piety (xiào), respect for the elderly (tì), loyalty (zhòng), respectfulness (gōng), magnanimity (kuān); fidelity (xīn), diligence (mín), altruism (huì), kindness (liáng), frugality (jiān), tolerance (rǎng), wisdom (zhī) and courage (yǒng).

- Education was to be made available to all, regardless of socioeconomic status or social standing. He denounced favouritism and the passing of office from one generation of nobles to the next (Yang Huanyin, 1993).

- According to Confucius, ‘Study without thought is labour lost; thought without study is dangerous’. He saw learning as a process of observation of some type of subject matter, whether it be books, objects or people, followed by reflection.

- He saw learning as a highly personal and individual activity but when awakened by real learning would be repeated by the student. Teachers should be committed to their work and have good mastery of the knowledge to be imparted.

- A good teacher must love his students, know them well, understand their psychological uniqueness, give thought to ways and means of facilitating their access to knowledge (Yang Huanyin, 1993).

- A mistake is acting on premature knowledge based on insufficient observation and insufficient processing. A lie is having full knowledge and deliberately misrepresenting that knowledge.

2.9.2 Confucius on Curriculum

- Confucius stipulated that the main emphasis of the curriculum should be moral instruction and the imparting of knowledge. Moral education was thus for Confucius the means whereby his ideas concerning virtue might be realised.

- Content to be taught as proposed by Confucius
  - His six books; the Book of Odes, the Book of History, the Book of Rites, the Book of Music, the Book of Changes and the Spring and Autumn Annals –
which dealt with subjects such as philosophy, politics, economics, culture and musicianship.

- Music,
- The Code and Manner of Proper Conduct (Li),
- Poetry,
- Literature
- History.

- His emphasis on political and moral principles led to ignoring the natural sciences, trade and agriculture.

- His curriculum served as the curriculum for 2000 years in feudal China and the following pedagogical strategies were proposed:
  - to match learning with the aptitudes of students (consider the age of learners)
  - to inspire and guide learners by stages
  - to instruct oneself while teaching others
  - to explain the present in the light of the past
  - to combine theory with practice
  - to encourage independent thought
  - to set a good example
  - to correct one’s errors and improve oneself
  - to welcome criticism
  - to curb evil and exalt the good.

SELF-TEST 2.7
1. What are the main features of the Confucian system of education?
2. How relevant are the ideas of Confucius in today’s schools?
Rabindranath Tagore (1861-1941) born in Calcutta, India was known for his socio-religious and cultural innovations. In 1901 he founded a school at Santiniketan (that developed into a university) based on the ancient forest schools which emphasised three basic elements of Indian culture, namely Advaita (non-duality) in the field of knowledge, friendship for all in the field of feeling, and fulfillment of one’s duties without concern for the outcomes in the field of action (Narmadeshwar Jha, 1994).

2.10.1 Tagore and Education

- Education should aim for the all-round development of the individual personality through interaction and union with the environment. Education should provide the individual with a satisfactory means of livelihood followed by fulfillment and completeness. Schools should be made more lively and enjoyable. They should be more attractive and productive.

- The ideal school should be established away from the turmoil of human habitation under an open sky and surrounded by the fields, trees and plants. Classes were held outdoor (whenever the weather permitted) so that students gained from being in a natural setting while learning (Tagore, Siksha cited in Narmadeshwar Jha, 1994)

- He was against bookish learning because it deprives one of learning from the real-world. Students should gather knowledge and materials from different sources of nature through their own efforts.

- On university education he suggested that it should be based on knowledge of economics, agriculture, health, medicine and other subjects that reflects life in the surrounding villages. Universities should attempt to push for the growth of rural areas (Narmadeshwar Jha, 1994)

- Emphasis should be more on self-motivation rather than on discipline, and on fostering intellectual curiosity rather than competitive excellence.

- He insisted on open debate on every issue and distrusted conclusions based on a mechanical formula, no matter how attractive that formula might seem in isolation.

2.10.2 Tagore and Curriculum

- He put great emphasis on the use of the national language as the medium of instruction at all stages of education. The younger generation should be aware of their
• cultural heritage but at the same time they should be exposed to the cultures of other countries and learn from them.

• He wanted women and men to be offered similar theoretical courses with separate practical courses for women, since their roles in life differed from those of men.

• In his view, education was not intellectual development alone. It should also develop a student’s aesthetic nature and creativity. The quest for knowledge and physical activity in an agreeable environment were integral parts of the process.

• Nature walks and excursions were part of the curriculum and students were encouraged to follow the life cycle of insects, birds and plants.

• Aesthetic development was important as intellectual development; if not more so. This would include music, art, literature, drama and dance which should be given prominence in the daily life of the school (O’Connell, 2003).

• He advocated a teaching system that analysed history and culture for the progress that had been made in breaking down social and religious barriers. Such an approach will integrate individuals of diverse backgrounds and narrow the gap between rich and poor (Narmadeshwar Jha, 1994).

• The curriculum was flexible. Class discussion would move from Indian traditional literature to contemporary as well as classical Western thought, and then to the culture of China or Japan or elsewhere.

SELF-TEST 2.8
1. What are the main aims of education according to Tagore?
2. What are the main features of the curriculum proposed by Tagore?

**Answer Key to ACTIVITY 2.3:**
Progressivism: 4, 10, 12 & 15
Essentialism: 1, 6, 9 & 11
Perennialism: 2, 7, 8 & 13
Reconstructionism: 3, 5, 14 & 16
DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Write down your personal philosophy of education and share it with others.
2. What is the current “status” of the essentialist orientation to curriculum? How widespread is this approach in curriculum planning at the elementary, middle, secondary, and higher education levels?
3. What is the current “status” of the progressive orientation to curriculum in primary and secondary schools?
4. To what extent do you agree with the reconstructionist perspective on curriculum?
5. Which ideas of al-Farabi, Confucius and Tagore are practiced in the school curriculum in your country?

READINGS


