

Philosophy of Curriculum

Katie Kerian

School of Education and Human Sciences

University of Kansas

Professor Lauri Herrmann-Ginsberg, EdD

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Introduction

Curriculum theory is a topic that has been debated and discussed. Theorists and ideas range that from William Bobbit who viewed curriculum as being a highly scientific process, to Maria Montessori who saw curriculum and learning being led by the student with the teacher as an observer. Issues in curriculum are also debated include whether it plays a role in deculturalization of a group of people, or if the assessments and standards are promoting the success of one ethnicity or race over another.

Part I

When considering curriculum theory, there are many perspectives and roles to consider. For instance, the role of the teacher and the role of the students are often the who main elements of education that are often discussed when considering curriculum. Maria Montessori and Franklin Bobbit are two curriculum theorists that hold different view of the role of teachers and students in education.

Maria Montessori places the learner at the center of the learning experience. The child, student is the individual who leads the way in what they want to learn. Flinders and Thornton write that Montessori held the belief that the school “must permit the free, natural manifestations of the child for their (the Masters) observation”. The example she gives of a practice that goes against this idea of a free, natural child is that of stationary desks. The students are seen as scientists who are conducting experiments and searching for “the truth of life” (Thornton). The master, the teacher, is simply an observer of the child learning. Maria Montessori criticized the way the School of Scientific Pedagogy mostly consisted of work and research done by medical professionals who were more focused on their science than on education.

In contrast, Franklin Bobbit viewed education and curriculum as a process that could be measured. More specifically, he believed that a level of scientific technique could be applied. In Bobbit's writing, he states that curriculum must prepare children for human life. He believes that children first learn from undirected training. It is only when errors are made in learning that the teacher steps in. In his theory, Bobbit positions the teacher as the "curriculum-discoverer" who determines what goal the students need to achieve in an area of study. The teacher is also the individual who directs training and corrects any errors the students have made. One way this can be seen in practice is when a teacher administers a pre-assessment and uses the results to determine where the errors are in student knowledge. The based on that information the teacher would create lessons and activities to correct that knowledge and understanding.

When this course began, I thought I understood Montessori's philosophy of education. I knew from previous studies that her approach was very students centered, and that she positioned the teacher as simply the observer. At the time, this was an educational philosophy that all teachers, especially in the lower grades, incorporated some of her ideas into their teaching naturally. However, as the course progressed, I came to realize that students centered curriculum was not as common as I had thought. I realized that much of the curriculum philosophy that I learned under and that is still very alive today is closer in line with Bobbitt's beliefs about curriculum and education. His idea that there is an element of scientific measurement in teaching is still present to some degree in the curriculum today.

Part II

A curriculum issue that I took a stance on was that of students who have been diagnosed with a learning disability in math not being able to use a calculator on their school assignments. I

took a stance on this because I regularly work the students who are struggling to keep up with the grade level mathematic expectations. The school I teach at has the goal of students learning all their basic math facts by the end of their third-grade year. However, for an individual who struggles to grasp the abstract concepts of mathematics, this often takes longer to achieve. The struggle comes when the skills and objectives become more complex. Now the students not only struggle with basic facts but also with the multistep processes of completing a problem. With this struggle, I have seen these students become increasingly convinced that they cannot do math. Furthermore, as they continue to feel incapable of success in this area of their academics, students can carry this feeling and lack of confidence into other areas of their learning.

In the second response paper, I noted that in a video interview Paulo Freire stated that educators have a duty to be tolerant. He even refers to tolerance as a virtue. Add the belief that critical pedagogy requires educational stakeholders to not only be aware of an issue, but to also act upon that awareness. The content area teachers I work with have generally come to an awareness of the students struggle and are willing to work to find a middle ground solution to the issue. The issue still lies in convincing the administration that the use of the calculator would be beneficial for all stakeholders. My recommendation to reconcile the theory and practice is to allow students to use a calculator on assignments and assessments that are not specifically assessing fact fluency.

In the weeks since I wrote the second response paper, my stance on this curriculum issue has not drastically changed. It has however become stronger. William Doll noted that the role of the teacher is to “present the curriculum in just enough of a challenging controversial, ‘chaotic’ manner so that self-organization (learning) will be stimulated” (Doll, 284). The knowledge that for students with a learning disability in math, the task of completing math problems, especially complex problems is already “chaotic”. The phrase of “just enough”

from Doll caused me to wonder if the use of a calculator can help to find the right balance of chaos in their learning experience. For this reason, Doll played a part in solidifying my stance on this curriculum issue.

Part III

The framework for my philosophy of curriculum is one that pulls from various points of views and considers several factors. I believe this comes from not only my educational experience which was very varied in style and curriculum. As a student, I attended schools that included the public school system, homeschooling, parochial, and private schools. This variety of settings and philosophies have shaped how I view education. I also think the fact that I am trained and have teaching experience as a special educator has played a role in defining my philosophy of curriculum and education. The need as a special educator to see each student as an individual with unique strengths and needs has further shaped my philosophy of curriculum.

The role of curriculum is to prepare individuals to be productive members of society. The challenge is that this idea of a productive member of society doesn't always look the same for all individuals. Because of this, the purpose of curriculum and the objectives in it are often a challenge to define clearly. For someone who may not have the ability to meet the demands of a traditional, heavy standardized academic based curriculum they will need an education that may be vocational skill based. For an individual who excels with the traditional book academics the standardized curriculum may be just fine for their education. The goal of these two seemingly opposing roles of curriculum is for the individual students to learn the ways they can function effectively in their surrounding community. In essence, my philosophy resembles characteristics of Maria Montessori's and Elliot Eisner's view of curriculum.

In my philosophy of curriculum, the teacher is positioned as a guide in the learning process. The teacher knows his or her students' needs and abilities. They also know where the curriculum needs to go and what the students' need to learn in order to be a caring productive member of society. The teacher works with the student to learn and master skills necessary to eventually contribute positively to the community tin which they live. Whether this is through holding a paying job, or through volunteer work the teacher guides the student in discovering ways they want to and can contribute to the society in which they are living. In this philosophy the student is positioned as the learner who engages with the teacher in the creative process of learning (Thornton).

Elliot Eisner states, "If the child is viewed as an art product and the teacher is the critic, one task of the teacher would be to reveal the qualities of the child to himself and to others" (Thornton). This quote summarizes my philosophy of curriculum and education. It is the work of an educator to identify, or assist the student in identifying, their "qualities". The qualities that they then can in turn to become active contributors to their community and society at large.

References

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