

## ROLE OF PHILOSOPHY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF CURRICULUM

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### Abstract

This article critically examines the role of philosophy in the development of curriculum. It argues that Philosophy is at the heart of curriculum development. Philosophy helps educators in formulating beliefs, arguments, and assumptions and in making value judgments. Philosophy develops a broad outlook, and it also helps in answering what schools are for, what subjects are important, how students should learn, and what materials and methods should be used. Philosophy provides the starting point in decision making about education in its totality.

**Keywords:** Philosophy, Curriculum, Education, and Development

### Introduction

Philosophy is considered by many to be the study of basic ideas about knowledge, truth, right and wrong and the nature of meaning of life. According to Doll (1992), philosophy has the multifaceted effect of helping us to; indicate in general what we mean, make what we mean more specific and definite, and develop what we mean into a useful construct. Thus, philosophy is a crucial determinant of curriculum trends and the curriculum development process by helping clarify our thought process. And because philosophy deals with the process of the mind, there are a variety of philosophical thoughts that need consideration. All the philosophical issues that are pertinent to the educative process have ramifications in the curriculum. All of them have curriculum implications, it is through the curriculum that every philosophy of education finds its fulfillment and actualization. On the one hand, the significance of today's education in addressing today's problems and to assist the young to acquire the knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that will enable them to be responsible and effective citizens in the world of tomorrow depends largely on the educators and the society's approaches to the curriculum. On the other hand, the content of the curriculum and the nature of its implementation will depend on such philosophical perceptions regarding the nature of man and society and the issues relating to human values and human dignity.

### Philosophy and Education

Philosophy refers to the beliefs that make up the society and constitute the meaning of educational philosophy. Omoregbe (2013) defines Philosophy as a set of definite guiding principles regulating human conduct and human values. It points out to the society what they aspire to be achieved through education. Education is an act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual. It is also the process by which society deliberately transmits its accumulated knowledge, skills and values from one generation to another through institution. According to Okafor (2006), in the broad sense, the term education embraces all those experiences of the individual through which knowledge is acquired, the intellect enlightened or the will strengthened. Informal education is covered by this approach. In the strict sense, the term education is employed to designate the consciously planned and systematically applied formal education or training, carried on through the various social agencies of education, especially the school. In this sense, teaching and discipline are employed. Here, teaching implies the art of transmitting to the individual the intellectual content of civilization. Discipline, on the other hand, implies the introduction of the individual to the moral life of the community and the techniques of self-control.

### The Concept of Curriculum

Curriculum can be seen as all the experiences which are provided to the students under the direction of the school. This does not imply that such experiences be attained within the school's physical environment. It does mean however, that the experiences must come as a result of planning and purposive direction, which should have an inbuilt flexibility. Kearney (1998) holds that the curriculum is a complex of more or less planned conditions under which students learn to behave and do behave in their various ways. In it, new behaviour may be acquired, present one maybe modified, maintained or eliminated; and the desirable behavior may become both persistent and viable. Those who plan educational experiences must account for the effects upon the learners of all aspects of the community, the home and the school. It is the function of the curriculum to give direction to the educative process. Hence, the curriculum must have the energizing principle, general and specific aims of education.

The concept of curriculum and all the school experiences therein, are rooted in philosophical progressivism and constructivism. A lot of literature abounds of authors who viewed curriculum from this

direction. For instance, the early curriculum experts (Dewey, 1913, Stratemeyer, 1918, Tyler, 1949) have expressed the necessity of harmonizing and relating the content of the learner, as well as goals, needs and values with that of the society. Furthermore, the concept of curriculum as the experiences of the learner, including those utilizing organized subject matter, was advocated as a means of making the curriculum more relevant to the life of the learner. Dewey popularized the concept of curriculum based on the interest, needs and experiences of the learner, hence the name child centred curriculum. This concept is the brain child of progressive educators. They advocated that all school learning activities should be centred on the needs and interests of the child. Thus, the child should be the starting point, the centre and the end of school 'activity'. Promoters of Dewey's progressive education, like Wheeler (1967), views curriculum as the planned experiences offered to the learner under the guidance of the school. Caswell and Campbell (1935) have also earlier conceptualized it as all the experiences children have under the guidance of teachers. In his own contribution, Bonser (1920) asserts that the curriculum is the experiences which pupils are expected to be engaged in school and the general order of sequence in which these experiences are to come. Giles, McCutchen and Zechiel (1942) moved a step further by seeing the curriculum as the total experience which the school deals with in educating young people.

The implication of the above definitions of curriculum is that what children learn in school is not limited to the formal course of study. It is affected directly and indirectly by the total school environment, hence, the broad definition of curriculum as guided school experience. This is why the earlier definition of Caswell and Campbell (1935) implies that everything that influences the learner should be considered during the process of curriculum making. Some authors define curriculum as either all the aggregate of courses of study in the school or as a regular or particular course of study in a school or college. They view it as various forms of knowledge or subjects in the school. For instance, Page and Thomas (1979) view curriculum as organized course of study undertaken by a student in, or under the aegis of a school, college or university. This implies that curriculum is a set of studies organized for a particular group of students by a school or colleges. This definition reveals curriculum as limited to only organized courses of study. This connotes that accidental leaning and involvement in other activities in the school are not part of the school curriculum. Such a definition probably stems from the subject-centred approach to curriculum organization.

A similar view on curriculum has been expressed by Johnson (1967) when he states that curriculum is a structured series of intended learning outcomes. This implies that learning outcome outside the structured one, is not part of the school curriculum. His view is further elaborated upon by Onwuka (1981) who argues that curriculum embraces purposeful experiences, provided and directed by educational institutions to achieve predetermined goals. In the same vein, Barrow (1976) equates curriculum with syllabus, timetable, and scheme of work and course outline. The definition still emphasis the content aspect of the school curriculum. Many scholars, in the early years of curriculum theorizing, view curriculum as a discipline. They view curriculum as consisting of units of knowledge, or individual subjects that learners can study directly. For instance, Bruner (1966) emphasizes the necessity of studying a particular discipline or subject on its own in order to gain mastery of it. Beauchamp (1968) views curriculum as a written document that includes an outline of the subject matters to be taught. According to him, the subject matter embraces whatever is to be taught in the school or in selected disciplines or problem of living. This concept has been interwoven with those who view curriculum as consisting school subjects and subject matter to be learnt. However, this concept is still widely used to refer to the set of subjects or course offered in school hence the term 'science curriculum'.

Curriculum is also conceptualized from the standpoint of the school system, as the totality of what educational system tries to do in order to achieve predetermined objectives or some intended outcome. In this case, curriculum is a document of the school that contains the formal programme of study. For instance, Woods and Barrow (1975) view curriculum as the totality of planned learning experience an individual encounter under the auspices of the school and not what the administrators and ministry officials prescribe in a course of study. This definition connotes that since each learner's experiences are different, each learner has his or her own curriculum. The problem of this definition is that it does not clearly state if planned learning experiences include systematized knowledge since the administrators and ministry officials are not involved. However, they further argue that the curriculum should convey the educational aims to be achieved, the planning involved, how experiences are organized, the expected results from such experiences and the degree of the learner's involvement. In curriculum construction, Onwuka (1981) insisted that the following elements should be present; analysis of human needs, particularly the needs of students and the society; judicious selection from the vast array of content possibilities; judicious selection of the learning experiences which are best suited for the attainment of objective; proper organization and arrangement of the content materials and the learning experiences; adequate provision for measurement and learning; a general reference to the method of implementation. It is evident from the foregoing elements that there is bound to be some disagreement in this respect among educators, contingent upon their philosophical persuasions and configurations, especially in view of the complexity of contemporary social life and the varied interpretations of man's needs.

### **Philosophy and Curriculum Development**

The development of curriculum has been approached differently by various prominent educators. The idealist school placed emphasis on the individual rational perfection and hence insisted that the primary objective of schooling was to help the student to attain proper intellectual cultivation, enriched mind, refined sensibility, quietened appreciation, culture and discipline (Ozmon& Craver, 2003). In other words, the purpose of the school for the idealist, is to promote spiritual and intellectual development. Idealists believe that even though students may never fully achieve ultimate truth, the school can provide the educational environment that will improve the quality of their ideas and move them closer to the ultimate truth. The ideal school emulates Plato's model and is designed to produce competent and self-actualized adults who will become useful citizens of the state (Noddings, 1995).

Idealists consider the "ideal" curriculum as the one that stresses the eternal ideas of the past. As early as primary school and secondary school, students are encouraged to read, study, and reflect on the great works of literature, philosophy, politics, history, and the arts. And because the enduring truths and values are eternal and unchanging, the curriculum stresses the Great Books of the past. Mathematics (algebra, geometry and calculus) as well as the physical and natural sciences also occupy a prominent place in the idealist's curriculum. For idealists whose religion is an important aspect of their value orientation, the curriculum includes a variety of holy and sacred books (Gutek, 2004). The preferred methods of instruction for the idealist educator are lecture, discussion, reflection, and the Socratic Method. The Socratic Method or dialogue is a questioning process used by the teacher that was employed by Socrates, Plato's teacher. The teacher asks question to lead students to certain conclusions based on their own experiences.

The Realists argue that the purpose of schooling is to teach moral and intellectual virtue, to help the student to know, and to arrive at the causes of things (Spangler, 1998). In other words, Education should be geared towards assisting the child in discovering reality. Realists believe the school should provide an educational environment designed to develop students' power of reasoning and to help them master the principles of scientific inquiry. That is to say that the function of education is to develop the mind to know the truth as it is. If what we claim to know corresponds to reality, then our claimed knowledge is true. It is also their view that education should enable the child to be intellectually well balanced in harmony with his physical and social environment. Education should make provision for the child's interests and curiosity in other words, education should be child-centered. According to Jacobsen (2003), Realists advocate a curriculum that emphasizes the basics, including mathematics, science, language, literature, and history. Realists give theoretical subjects such as mathematics and the sciences a higher priority than they give "practical arts." The content of the curriculum is determined by authority figures or experts. They prefer a variety of instructional methods, including the use of deductive logic, observation, classification, and categorization; and the scientific method. For the Realists, all teaching should be carried out through appeal to experience and the child should learn by experience, contact with objects through pictures and representation. (Power, 1982).

The pragmatist, according to Ravi (2015), placed emphasis on vocational efficiency, and hence insisted that education should have a practical and pragmatic orientation - helping individual toward efficient practical action in a practical world. According to this view, the educated person is one who can function in all aspects of society and perform effectively the tasks of his vocation. He should therefore, be experience oriented and action oriented. Education therefore must be functional and the curriculum must reflect this philosophy. Also, Pragmatists consider the purpose of the school to be modeling a progressive democratic society. Dewey (1916) envisioned such a democratic community to be pluralistic in nature and include moral, economic, educational, and political goals. The primary purpose of education is to stress function or experience through problem solving and the scientific method. For them, education should serve as an end and a means, that is, education should improve man and serve as a means of doing things. In other words, education should serve as a tool for social mobility and instrument for practical and successful living (Chikwugozie, 1998). Unlike the traditional philosophies that stress a prescribed set of subjects, pragmatism favors a curriculum that integrates several subjects such as history, geography, and sciences. Dewey (1916) suggested that students should be allowed to a personally unified curriculum that makes sense to them in terms of human experience. Subjects such as geography and history are particularly relevant as they can be used as examples to explain human activity or solve social problems" (Noddings, 1995). The preferred instructional methods for pragmatists include learning by doing, problem solving, experimentation, hands-on activities, collaborative learning, and methods that incorporate deductive thinking. Pragmatists also place a high priority on instructional methods that involve social interaction and group activities. Existentialists on the other hand, hold that the school should prepare students to take responsibility for, and to deal with the results of their actions. The purpose of education is to foster self-discovery and explain the importance of the freedom of choice and the responsibility for making choices. Education should also be able to equip the individual to be able to adapt to the natural phenomena of life. The existentialists are supporters of open schools, free schools, and alternative schools (Webb, 2006). Unlike progressivism, which emphasizes group learning, existentialism emphasizes the individual and

personal learning. The curriculum is student - centered and provides a variety of existential situations that authenticate the student's own personal experience. For the existentialist, according to Webb (2006), the curriculum should be based on the social or cultural background of the learner. They recommend subjects in social sciences for knowledge of people and social interaction; science and technology for survival, and most important of all, the humanities especially literature. The favored subject matter is the humanities because it provides evidence of the suffering that accompanies the human condition. Existentialists assert that by concentrating on the unpleasant idea of meaninglessness or nothingness and its accompanying anxiety and absurdity, we ultimately create an affirmation of self and find a purpose in life. Such a curriculum awakens the learner to a subjective awareness called "the existential moment." Unlike the curriculum of the traditional philosophies, which stresses Absolute Truth, the curriculum of the existentialists fosters "personal truth." The existentialists preferred methods of instruction which engages students in cognitive discussions along with affective experiences. These so-called affective approaches are used in conjunction with the Socratic Method; the method existentialists believe will lead to self-knowledge and self-discovery. Others are role playing and drama and individualized teaching methods.

Under the naturalistic school of philosophy, the aim of education is self-expression. Some naturalists consider man as a machine and they opined that the aim of education is to make the human machine as perfect and efficient as possible. Rousseau's statement of naturalistic aim of education is the most comprehensive and lucid. Education, he holds, should aim at the development of the child in conformity with his nature (Rousseau, 1962). According to Webb (2006), naturalists believe that Nature is the best teacher and its lap is the best school. The school environment should be completely free, flexible and without any rigidity. It should be helpful for the free and natural development of the child. It should be situated in the lap of Nature, far away from cities. There should not be any fixed time table and ready doses of knowledge. There should be no provision for punishment. Naturalists are in favour of co-education in educational institutions. The co-educational system will develop the right type of family and community life. Such a school develops the feeling of self-learning and self-discipline. It does not want to burden the child with examinations.

The Naturalists do not advocate a fixed curriculum. They consider the child as an important part of education. Thus, the curriculum must be child-centred so that he may have maximum opportunity for his natural development according to his inborn tendencies, interest, inclinations, aptitudes and capacities. As a result, the child may lead a happy life by fulfilling his present and future needs. In naturalistic education, every child is given the right to determine his own curriculum. He is expected to learn directly from nature through personal experiences. However, various naturalists have constructed curricula according to their perception of the aim of education and the needs, interests and abilities of the child (Webb, 2006). Naturalists lay emphasis on natural science subjects such as physics, chemistry, biology, arithmetic, zoology, botany and other scientific subjects. In their view literature, language, art etc. are subsidiary subjects. Mathematics and languages are included in the curriculum in order to facilitate the understanding of other subjects. History and social studies have been given importance to grasp the past experience of the race. Naturalists also lay stress on physical education and health training, and home science. Naturalists are against the traditional methods and bookish system of education. They want to keep the child active in the process of education. They follow different methods of teaching according to the interests, capacities and aptitudes of the child. Some of the methods they advocated are learning by doing: Naturalists believe that direct experience is the best teacher. Rousseau (1962) opposes the rote method of learning on the ground that knowledge acquired through actual doing or actual experience is permanent. He says, "Give your scholar no verbal lessons; he should be taught by experience alone. Teach by doing whatever you can; Book knowledge should be as little as possible". He is of the view that the child can learn better by direct experience, that is, learning by doing. Heuristic method: This method is emphasized in the teaching of science and mathematics in order to prepare the child to solve problems and involve himself in discoveries and inventions. Observation and excursion: History and Geography are taught with practical exercises through actual excursion and observation. Play-way method: This method is suitable to the nature of the child. It is also a direct experience that makes learning more interesting. Play-way method is regarded as the most natural and suitable method of creative education. It creates the spirit of joyful and spontaneous activity. Naturalists advocate this method of teaching to develop a better human society. A child requires social learning to enable him to take part in social activities

### **Summary**

Philosophy is indeed at the heart of curriculum development. It guides educators in formulating beliefs, arguments and assumptions, and in making value judgments. It also helps provide a broader outlook in answering what schools and what subjects are important, how students should learn, and what materials and methods should be used. This is, however, just a starting point. Since there is a strong political element involved in curriculum, it is important for us as educators to recognize what philosophy underlies the curriculum and to decide how curriculum in educating students who will become members and leaders in society.

## Conclusion

In educative process, there should be formal and universal dimensions to the curriculum development and the task of establishing these formal and universal dimensions of the curriculum is principally the task of philosophers of education. Although philosophy cannot prescribe every detail of each and every activity that can legitimately go on in a curriculum, nonetheless, it is the role of philosophy to specify the kinds of things that will count as valid curricular activities. The school curriculum must always be based on clearly defined educational goals and objectives.

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