Philosophy of Curriculum: Final Paper

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28 April 2017

Philosophy of Curriculum: Part I

My philosophy of curriculum begins where I research theorists who I want to build my framework around. After thoughtfully considering who to relate to, I compared and contrasted two key theorists that have influenced American curriculum: Ralph W. Tyler and Maria Montessori. I asked, “What is curriculum? Why is it important? How should we teach it? When (if ever) will we have a concrete answer for how to stimulate students’ learning to meet the demands of society?” It is imperative to research these questions as it is our obligation to expand our understanding and adapt to the needs of our learners. That is why I chose these two theorists who provide ways we can meet these needs and who theorized what we know today as curriculum. I learned how both of these individuals have their own philosophy of curriculum and how this has impacted our classrooms. Most importantly, I learned how history is shaping my beliefs and values when looking at my own philosophy.

As I compared and contrasted Tyler and Montessori, I learned of the various similarities and differences. Montessori’s approach viewed teachers as guides and students as independent learners, which is similar to the approach of Tyler (Montessori, 2013). Here is where I truly connect to these theorists as I, too, believe that we are guides to our learners. Further, both individuals focused on the mastery of steps as a key to development. Whereas Tyler focused on mastery of process, Montessori supported mastery of the environment (Tyler, 2013; Montessori, 2013). Additionally, these two theorists also believed that students should be self-reliant and independent, as this is how they will learn best. Not only did these two in history relate in these areas, they further agreed that curriculum should prepare students for life outside of the classroom. Tyler discussed how what the students learn should prepare them for certain areas in which they will explore, and Montessori stressed the importance of allowing students the opportunity to become responsible citizens (Tyler, 2013; Montessori, 2013).

I then studied how these theorists differ. Where we see contrast is in the models the theorists created. Though both Tyler and Montessori had similar goals and outcomes in mind, they contrasted on how those outcomes should be met. Tyler focused on a step by step process where Montessori supported freedom and an explored environment (Tyler, 2013; Montessori 2013). The two agreed that students learn best independently so they can become self-reliable; however, the theorists had different means to that end. Tyler created guiding questions and a route for teachers to follow: objectives of most importance, leading to instruction, and evaluating the students’ understanding (Tyler, 2013). From Montessori, we gained the use of manipulatives and how we can adhere to her method by allowing our students to work freely (Montessori, 2013). What is also interesting is how Tyler and Montessori agreed that students learn best through hands-on activities (Tyler, 2013; Montessori, 2013). We can explore this in today’s classrooms as we enter and see how the theorists speak back to each other. Our classrooms entertain centers, games, utensils, and other means of activities and manipulatives that allow students to interact and learn so that they better grasp the world around them, step by step.

I learned in this response that, though in different times of our history, I can better see how Tyler and Montessori have influenced the American curriculum. These individuals have made significant impacts on our educational system as we can see by their philosophies of education. Both aimed to encourage students through the learning process, as we can view in the methods and models left for teachers to use today. Tyler left us with four simple principles that are found across public schools and lesson plans, which have played an important role in assessments (evaluations) in regards to standardized testing (Tyler, 2013). Montessori left behind her influence of using learning centers (student interests), using hands-on tools and manipulatives, as well as allowing students to explore (Montessori, 2013). In regards to my exploration, it was a learning experience for me to see where these theorists place the teacher and student in the classroom, as guides and active learners. This research allowed me to see how history has created a foundation for curriculum as well as how we continue to build upon that. As I learn more, I also continue to build my understanding, application, and own philosophy of curriculum.

Throughout this course, my understanding of these two theorists’ ideas changed, but not dramatically. As I learned about other theorists and how they have impacted today’s curriculum, I added and altered my way of thinking, my lens if you will. The two people I chose to compare and contrast were two individuals who were in the first and second generations of curriculum theorists. Over time, the world has changed. People have changed. Our classrooms have changed. As Jerome Bruner states, “men everywhere are humans, however advanced or “primitive” their civilization. The difference is not one of more or less than human, but of how particular human societies express their human capacities,” (Bruner, 2013). Though so much has changed and continues to transform in our world, we are all still just human; for each person something works and other things do not. I can pick out elements and ideas from these theorists when I study classrooms. I can see what works for our students and what doesn’t. Truly, I see how it really depends upon the teacher what theorists’ ideas are incorporated, whether directly or indirectly. It is so interesting how curriculum is influenced by everyone involved as it continues to mold into better versions of itself; yet, it is also fascinating how we tug on our roots to move forward. I have learned from these theorists that it’s perfectly acceptable to change my views and understanding as I learn and change myself.

Philosophy of Curriculum: Part II

As I studied the theorists presented in this course, I was also presented with several issues in our curriculum. Studying these issues allows me to see where our curriculum has been, where it is, and where it should be headed. The more I learn about our education system, the more I am able to prioritize these issues; the more I know what our students need, the better I can decipher what is most important to them. One problem in particular that I researched and responded to was the importance of teaching and learning life skills in the classroom. Though there are several issues with our education system, learning life skills in the classroom is one of today’s controversial curriculum concerns.

Life skills are defined as a “comprehensive set of universal cognitive and non-cognitive skills and abilities, connecting behavior, attitudes, and knowledge, which youth can develop and retain throughout their lives. Life skills increase young people’s well-being and help them to develop into active and productive members of their communities” (Torney-Purta, 2015). In other words, life skills support students during school, childhood, and throughout the future. The issue is whether or not we should be explicitly teaching these skills to our students. The stance I took and still take on this is that life skills should be explicitly taught. This is because many issues can result from not learning these skills such as not having the following: communication skills, conflict-resolution skills, problem solving skills, critical thinking skills, creativity and imagination skills, as well as collaboration and teamwork skills. Thus, awareness of the importance of teaching these life skills has become a consideration, which current curriculum seems to be both for and against.

**Throughout my response on this issue, I asked and answered important questions using theorists and curriculum articles to support my stance. To summarize, I discussed one of my fondest curriculum theorists, Maria Montessori, who** believed that teachers are presented with developing learning activities within the context of the learning environment and should teach in response to children’s development and needs (Montessori, 2013)**. Integrating these skills into learning activities is an essential response to our students’ development and needs in regards to society’s expectations.** Throughout history, curriculum has been determined by the needs of the world, the needs of society. Ralph Tyler is another theorist whose views expressed that curriculum is meant to prepare students for certain areas of life, determined by the needs of the world (Tyler, 2013). **O**ur curriculum is transitioning, and so is the structure of our schools, roles of our teachers, and standards we use to guide our instruction. Mortimer Adler discussed how social equality equals same quality of life for all, and that should be our goal when determining action in the classroom (Adler, 2013). The curriculum should be broad, beyond the core subject material the students should learn. Students should have opportunities to work in teams, engage in project-based learning, and the students’ learning should be front and center. In these ways, students learn how to respond to others so that they are prepared for world outside of school.

My stance on this curricular issue is supported by several theorists throughout our history. The interpretations I take away from their ideologies influence me more so in that our curriculum should meet the needs of our students, not the other way around. During the weeks since I wrote the response summarized above, I have realized that I have put another issue above it. Though my stance has not changed, and I still believe teaching life skills is very important, I also consider teaching a multicultural education to be just as vital for our students’ learning and development. In a way, I add life skills into a multicultural curriculum because teaching multiculturalism prepares students for their communities, societies, and world around them. Christine Sleeter discusses how our main goal should be to promote positive relationships among the students in our schools so that we can eradicate stereotypes and encourage tolerance and unity (Sleeter, 2013). I know we are just scraping the tip of the iceberg and that we can do so much more on a regular basis to teach our students what they truly need.

Philosophy of Curriculum: Part III

My philosophy of curriculum focuses on not the old or the new, but it serves as a guide for how I should make decisions for my students. My approach is diverse as I have built my framework on theorists I’ve studied and experiences I have had, both as a student and as an educator. I am now also integrating my views as a parent since our first little one is due in September. My goal with my philosophy is to be a part of a movement that pushes our curriculum in the right direction so that we are serving the needs of our students, our children, and our society. My philosophy is built upon the reality of our world, the knowledge our students should have, and the values our children should hold. This is my philosophy of curriculum.

John Dewey’s idea on pragmatism focuses on one aspect of my philosophy that reality must be experienced (Dewey, 2013). Our students should have opportunities to interact with the environment in order to adapt and to learn, and we, as educators, must understand and practice this. As a student growing up (and to this day) I learn best when experiencing the reality. Now as a teacher, I understand even further how we need to be the facilitators of these experiences so that our students continue to learn in authentic learning environments and have the freedom to express their ideas. "Life is a self-renewing process through action upon the environment;" if people are not a part of the environment and not doing their part, they may not be learning what is imperative to survive and flourish (Dewey, 2013). Dewey further discusses the idea of how education is the "fundamental method of social progress and reform." This idea is vital for educators to understand and practice so that the students can become active citizens of society to the best of their abilities. The foundation builds in the classroom to foster the growth the students need social progress and reform. Further, what we teach should revolve around the individual and community goals. While my focus is on the students' growth of character, it is also in how they will impact the institutional or community life around them (Dewey, 2013).

Another theorist I think back to as I lay out my framework is Maxine Greene. She expresses in that “Curriculum, from the learner’s standpoint, ordinarily represents little more than an arrangement of subjects, a structure of socially prescribed knowledge, or a complex system of meanings which may or may not fall within his grasp,” (Greene, 2013). Here, Greene puts herself in the students’ shoes, as we all should. She articulates how curriculum is no more than information we must teach students and that the students may or may not make connections to it. I am a firm believer that students learn better (even best) when they can connect to what they are being taught and form perspectives on what the material means to them as well as how they can apply it in their own worlds. Greene notes that learners are rarely given the opportunity to make sense and meaning by examining their own experiences (Greene, 2013). This is where my philosophy comes in; I want to provide experiences for my students to examine what they know and connect it to what they are learning so that they make sense of what is being taught. We must come to conclusions from various directions or standpoints and be able to comprehend or make sense of the material. As educators, we should integrate room for growth and exploration, as well as dialogue, reflection, and interactions among the diverse communities our classrooms provide. Every day is a new opportunity to combine learning with action and, ultimately, comprehension.

I base my framework on ideas such as these because I wholeheartedly believe that using these values as a guide will allow our students to become effective communicators, critical and innovative thinkers, and self-directed learners. How can we prepare our students for the world outside if they don’t have these abilities? I have chosen this curricular orientation based on my own experiences, my research, and what I have seen work in the classroom. We need to stretch our minds to become the best educators we can be. Christy Moroye puts my thoughts into words when she says we need to adapt to the times and continually redesign from the inside out; we need to “stretch” from within (Moroye, 2013). When I step back and see how children act today- in and out of the classroom- I think deeply about how we can ensure the success of our future. I still believe that core subjects should be taught, but I do not think there is a one-size-fits-all shoe that each school district should wear. It should be up to each community to determine what is best based on the needs of those students, the cultures present, the abilities and disabilities that exist, and the goals that will encourage students to be independent, open minded and innovative citizens. I know not one philosophy is right since we are all a blend of idealism, realism, pragmatism, and existentialism. However, regardless if which way we sway more, we should enable our students and give them the power! Christine Sleeter says, “If teachers plan and teach challenging and interesting curriculum and provide academic support as needed, students will tend to rise to the occasion,” (Sleeter, 2013). In other words, things change when the teachers and schools have faith they *can* change and act in a way that makes the change. When we plan, model, and teach our students’ curriculum that makes their gears twist and turn, we are doing something right. We are not setting them up for failure; we are setting them up to be agents of change, just as we all should be. Curriculum as praxis manifests action, and that leads to the ultimate goal and the center of my philosophy: our students will learn to work together to confront problems in the world and extending a commitment to think critically and impact our world.

References

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Instructions

Your philosophy of curriculum will consist of three parts. Parts I and II will be continuations of Response Papers 1 and 2. Part III will synthesize this learning and describe your orientation to (or beliefs about) curriculum.

**Part I (two to three double-spaced pages)**

Part I will draw on response paper #1 where you compared and contrasted two theorists. In Part I, you will summarize (in two to three paragraphs) response paper #1. Some of the questions that may have contributed to response paper #1 are as follows: How do the theorists position the learner, or child, in the theory of curriculum that they advocate for? How do the theorists position the teacher? The subject matter?

Are theorists “speaking back” to another ideology of curriculum? If so, how can you provide evidence of this?

Can you provide an example that characterizes the theorist? (A “real-life” example can be very effective.)

After you summarize response paper #1, you will devote the rest of Part I to writing a response to the following question: Has your understanding of the two theorists’ ideas changed? In what ways? As the course concludes, do you see these theorists in a different way than when you began the course?

**Part II (two to three double-spaced pages)**

Part II will draw on response paper #2 where you described a curriculum issue on which you take a stance. As you did in Part I, you will begin Part II of the final paper by summarizing (in two to three paragraphs) response paper #2.

After you summarize response paper #2, you will devote the rest of Part II to thinking about whether your stance on the curricular issue you described (your beliefs and attitudes; ideologies that influence your beliefs and attitudes) has changed during the weeks since you wrote response paper #2. If it has, in what ways has it changed?

**Part III (two to three double-spaced pages)**

Part III of your philosophy of curriculum will be your opportunity to provide a framework for your philosophy of curriculum. You may base your framework on ideas presented by theorists encountered in the course, but you should discuss in your own terms why you have chosen the curricular orientation you have. In other words, provide reasons for your position. Finally, you may use examples from your own practice that discuss how successfully you have been able to implement your beliefs. If you have difficulty practicing your beliefs, please elaborate on why the translation from theory to practice is difficult.

Guidelines

* In all three parts of the final paper, it is important to cite course readings. You should aim for at least three citations in each of the parts of the final paper (nine total citations). This will help you integrate course ideas and quotations throughout the final paper
* This assignment will be graded using the following rubric:[Final Paper Rubric](https://kuconnect.ku.edu/courses/867/files/197479/download?wrap=1" \o "c&t709-final-paper-rubric.pdf" \t ")
* Your final paper should be between seven to 10 double-spaced pages. This will include all three parts. If you are uploading a document to the drop box, be sure to include the following in your assignment title: LASTNAME-FIRSTINITIAL-CT709-FINALPAPER



