

Response Paper #3

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Foundations of Curriculum

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Curriculum has been thoroughly reviewed, theorized, and modified over the years of its study. Theorists presented their reasonings and beliefs for what curriculum should be, and how it should be effectively implemented. As a result of this differentiation, theorists have been able to either build upon previous theories in the field of curriculum. Although theories have been built upon one another, there are still theorists who believe that the best curriculum is not like any that had been previously described and used. In the modern era, curriculum has essentially been viewed as linear; however, the concept of curriculum can be further specified as being centripetal or centrifugal. Centripetal curriculum refers to past, foundational aspects of curriculum studies, while centrifugal curriculum looks to challenge the traditions of the past in order to come to a more diversified conceptualization of curriculum. The most promising vision for curriculum studies that I see is through the work of Hlebowitsh (2010). Hlebowitsh (2010) pushes for the integration of both centripetal and centrifugal studies of curriculum in an attempt to establish a more cohesive interpretation of curriculum and its implementation (Hlebowitsh, p. 506). This nonlinear view of looking from past to present, and consequently making connections between the two, is a very promising and efficient strategy to reaching successful student experiences through curriculum. Curriculum must lend itself to providing more inclusive and diverse content for a diverse and globalized student population.

One of the biggest issues in curriculum today was highlighted by Pinar (2004). He refers to globalization and its effect on curriculum studies and student achievement. Standardization is typical in constructing a holistic curriculum; however, this standardization should not completely erase the experiences of students. This is an issue, because students from different areas are familiar with different content knowledge. In order to fully reach every student

academically, curriculum must be structured in a way that is differentiated enough to reach students from different backgrounds and experiences. In other words, the traditional curriculum has not always been successful in allowing emergent bilinguals and struggling students the opportunity in engaging with the curriculum they are exposed to. Hlebowitsh (2010) proposes that we take the traditionalist views of curriculum and merge them with the reconceptualists' ideas of curriculum to form a more diverse and unique experience for students. He argues that the problem with looking at curriculum in theory with reconceptualists is that they are practicing more of a divergence, in the sense that ideas from the past are being forgotten and unused; thus, the interpretation that curriculum is viewed as diverse in reconceptualist theory is not true. He speaks to this idea of divergence versus diversity in the lines, "If, however, we replace the idea of divergence with the idea (or principle) of diversity, the discourse changes because the fundamental premise of diversity is inclusiveness" (Hlebowitsh, p. 506). Interpretations and suggestions made by Hlebowitsh (2010) give a more cohesive and inclusive educational curriculum for all students.

The work of Doll (1993) gives another viewpoint on curriculum effectiveness and rigor. Doll (1993) refers to the need of post-modern, non-linear curriculum to exhibit "The Four R's" which he describes as "richness, recursions, relation, and rigor" (Doll, p. 287). This article emphasizes that a quality, inclusive curriculum should detail these four characteristics in order to be fully functional. Out of these four characteristics, Doll (1993) exhibits the idea that rigor is the most important facet of a functional curriculum. Rigor essentially encompasses the other three characteristics, but more importantly sets a high level of expectations for curriculum construction. For example, Doll (1993) described the methodology of rigor as "to be severe and

strict in applying a procedure” (Doll, p. 292). Implications made by Doll (1993) tend to establish the means necessary for curriculum theorists to develop and understand the qualities needed to create and implement a functional, inclusive, and holistic curriculum.

The most encouraging aspect of modern curriculum is the need and want for education to be diverse and inclusive to all students. In my experience with curriculum as a second grade teacher, I have noticed the need for curriculum variance. The student demographics in my class include a variety of students, most of which are emergent bilinguals; however, all three second grade classes in my school are differentiated based on standardized testing. For example, students were assessed on multiple exams and placed into certain classes based on their “level.” The idea from administration is that this differentiation allows for instructional differentiation; although, being more familiar with the effects of such a system have started to hit me very drastically. For example, the students in the “low-performing” class are seemingly labeled as students not on grade-level. Most of these students do are under some sort of IEP or other academic intervention, but do not really get recognized for their abilities. These students have talents outside of academics, but have been disheartened by their inability to perform on these standardized assessments. The problem is, these students are challenged with work that oftentimes is not based on their academic level or needs. Our curriculum is arranged to allow for many assessments and data tracking, but it does not necessarily lend itself to differentiation based on student needs. There is not a genuine difference in curriculum based off of a student’s experiences and background. Ultimately, it is more challenging to “assess” these students, because the curriculum they are exposed to relies on more objective observations. Theorists such

as Hlebowitsh and Pinar, however, push against this mainstream curriculum that tends to leave outlying, and less exposed children, out of the loop.

What is encouraging about Hlebowitsh and his work, is that he emphasizes the need for differentiation among various groups of students, because essentially, this is the only true way to ensure all students have a successful academic journey. If we want to create a comprehensive, differentiated, and coherent curriculum we must be able to take into consideration the academic journeys of students from different cultures and contexts. With all theory comes criticism, and with all criticism comes defense, but if we focus on what is important to the development of all children and continue to push for what is best for kids, while keeping diversity and inclusion in mind, we can create a much better world where education is successfully attainable.

References

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