CURRICULUM THEORY POSITION PAPER

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Introduction

Any country aspiring to bring about development undoubtedly views education as an important tool for change. As education encompasses all aspects of life, its political and economic spheres to its technological and social structures, the need to direct education to address all these is paramount. Yet, despite attempts to focus and redirect educational practice to achieve all developmental goals, there is a chink somewhere which needs to be addressed. In this paper, I shall attempt to state a theory position as to where I stand in all this maelstrom of educational issues in order to explore and to discover for myself where I would like education to go in the future.

Humanistic Approach

The last two decades have heralded into our midst strong debate about what education is all about as well as where it is heading. This debate has been given impetus through many theoretical approaches, not the least the humanistic approach which its advocates perceive to be clearly distinct from all other approaches. The change sought was a de-emphasis upon the rationalising and mechanising of the educative process in order to more affectively sort, select and shape students to meet the various requirements of a growing nation (Lilleford, 1979: 57). Implicit in the traditional approach to education which the humanists have endeavoured to counter, is the role of humans as passive spectators who have to adjust to an objective and quantifiable reality they have no part in making. In the light of this view, other dimensions of human experience are by-passed in the search for quantifiable performance.

Roberts' (1975) seven major goals sum up what the humanistic movement aims to achieve. These include:

personal development, where students becomes more in tune with themselves and know what they are capable of;

creative behaviour, where originality, imagination, new interpretations and new meanings are valued;

interpersonal awareness, focusing on how people influence each other;

subject orientation, which focuses on students' feelings about a whole subject;

specific context, which looks at both the affective and the cognitive learning of a specific course content;

method of teaching, which refers to affective possibilities for teaching and learning; and

teachers and administrators, where the educator is seen as a developing person and as a model for students.

Several writers (Fairfield, 1971; Eisner, 1978, 1979, 1984, 1985; Cunningham, 1979, Littleford, 1979) have come up with a series of ideas on how to implement these humanistic goals. They see the need for education to be relevant to the needs of students and the problems of society. Consequently, teachers should teach students and not subject matter. They also see the need to

encourage educational curricula that are open to experimentation and innovation. Furthermore, opportunities should be made available to students to enable them to participate and share in all spheres of school life. The approach highlights the fact that efforts should be made to overcome the dehumanising and alienating features of impersonal educational systems. Moreover, the basic and the foremost aims and goals of education should be the development of students' intellectual abilities and the fulfilment of human potential.

I uphold the view advocated by the humanistic educators as it touches on issues which have to be faced if society is to move that extra step forward. Vico, cited by Littleford (1979), believes that modern pedagogy is to be found in his broad, inclusive view of humans as developing and self-transforming beings. His vision includes all dimensions of human experience and knowing, and can be used to protect us from seeing only one side of our educational aims. I believe that this is significant because unless we can break away from the 'traditional' ways of thinking and conventional educational practice which we have been confined to in the past, whether willingly or not, then there is very little room to challenge, develop and improve on past performance. However, despite all that has been written in favour of the humanistic approach, it has not persuaded administrators and educators to make the desired changes.

Conclusion

Although there are drawbacks to the humanistic approach in terms of selection, organisation and evaluation of knowledge, there is no doubt in my mind that the intention is not to advocate it for control purposes, but rather to interpret it in order to provide greater grounds for understanding. As MacDonald (1982:57) has written, 'The test of **"good"** theory in practice is thus, not centrally that it works... but that in the engagement of theory and practice we are emancipated from previous misunderstandings and are then freed to reinterpret situations and reach greater understandings.'

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