



Curriculum Theory : A Brief Description

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CURRICULUM THEORY: A BRIEF DESCRIPTION ABSTRACT This is the theoretical concept paper in education about curriculum theory. Curriculum theory is the backbone of all education theories. Theories provide a clear vision about the real world. Theory always play a vital role in framing and developing the curriculum. This paper helps curriculum planners for investigating and implementing an educational curriculum.

Abstract

This is the theoretical concept paper in education about curriculum theory. Curriculum theory is the backbone of all education theories. Theories provide a clear vision about the real world. Theory always play a vital role in framing and developing the curriculum. This paper helps curriculum planners for investigating and implementing an educational curriculum. This concept paper provides a complete guideline to the curriculum planners for construction of an appropriate curriculum. This paper can also discuss research in theory development, theory in curriculum and provide valuable information to the teachers and educators for making appropriate curriculum design. This paper is very useful to the teacher, students, educators specially curriculum makers for knowing the value of curriculum theory in modern education system.

Key Words

Curriculum Theory, Curriculum Development, Theory Development, Theory Function, Theory Categories.

Introduction

Theory is a set of principles or ideas which intend to investigate and interpret the facts. Theories provide a clear vision and facts or phenomena about the world. The process of education and particular field of curriculum are attached in theory. Theory is the tool in the hand of curriculum planners. Curriculum theory is the study of development, enactment and reconstruction of curriculum. It provides a complete guideline for planning, development, implementation, supervision and evaluation of curriculum. It encompasses the elements of curriculum e.g. objectives, selecting and

sequencing the content, learning experiences and methods of evaluation. Curriculum theory is very useful in the process of curriculum design in the modern-day education system.

Concept of Theory

The term 'theory' has been derived from the Greek word "theoria" meaning "wakefulness of mind". Merriam Webster's Learners Dictionary defines "a theory as an idea or set of ideas that is intended to explain facts or events". The Oxford Dictionary defines "a theory as a set of principles in which the practice of an activity is based".

Different scholars have attempted to define a theory in different ways. Some important definitions are follows;

According to Kerlinger (1973) "a theory is a set of interrelated constructs (concepts), definitions and propositions that present a systematic view of phenomena by specifying relations among variables, with the purpose of explaining and predicting phenomena."

Beauchamp (1982) defines a theory as "a set of related statements that are arranged so as to give functional meaning to a series of events".

Ornstein and Hunkins (1998) defines "a theory is the device for interpreting, criticizing, unifying, established laws, modifying them to fit data unanticipated in their formation and guiding the enterprise of discovering new and more powerful generalizations".

Concept of Curriculum

The term 'curriculum' has been derived from a Latin word "Currere" which means a "race course" or a runway on which one runs to reach the goal. Curriculum is the total structure of ideas and activities of an education system.

Merriam Webster's Learners Dictionary defines "curriculum is a set of courses constituting an area of specialization offered by an educational institution."

A curriculum is broadly defined as the totality of student experiences that occur in the educational process. (Wikipedia)

Cunningham defines "Curriculum is a tool in the hands of the artist (teacher) to mould his material (pupils) according to his ideas (aims and objectives) in his studio (school)." (S. Gupta J.C Aggarwal's book 'Curriculum Development, 2005)

Concept of Curriculum Theory

Curriculum theory is the study of development, enactment, reconstruction and implementation of curriculum. Different scholars have been defined curriculum theory in different ways.

Beauchamp (1982) defines a curriculum theory as "a set of related statements that gives meaning to a school's curriculum by pointing out the relationships among its elements and by directing its development, its use and its evaluation."

Glatthorn, Boschee and Whitehead (2006) define a curriculum theory as "a set of related educational concepts that affords a systematic and illuminating perspective of curricular phenomena".

Hewitt (2006) opines that a curriculum theory is "a set of propositions, observations, facts, beliefs, policies and procedures proposed or followed as a basis for curriculum action."

Marsh and Willis (2007) assert that "curriculum theories are assets of principles and methods sufficiently worked out and rationalized to provide a guide for creating curricula."

In this paper, curriculum theory encompasses the elements of curriculum such as the objectives, selecting and analysing content, learning experiences and methods of evaluation.

Characteristics of Curriculum Theory

An effective curriculum theory should empower various characteristics which as follows:

1. An effective curriculum theory has four criteria; (i) Validity –soundness, accuracy, logical and factual (ii) Theoretical power – basic understanding; (iii) Serviceability - the use of theory in resolving central curriculum problems; and (iv) Morality - clarifies underlying values. (Walker, 2003)
2. An effective curriculum theory should have clear set of events, clear accepted values, proper curriculum design, essential processes for making curriculum decisions. (Beauchamp,1982)
3. A curriculum theory must consent deductions and generate laws which is experimental and empirical.
4. A curriculum theory must be consistent with both observation and previously validated theories.
5. A curriculum theory must be stated in simple language and explains the concept in the simplest way.
6. A curriculum theory should have operative, explanatory and predictive potential.
7. A curriculum theory should be productive in the field of education and research.
8. The test of the curriculum theory must be replicable and reproduceable.
9. A curriculum theory should begin by investigating how the curriculum is properly constructed and how the curriculum is implemented by the teachers in different field of education.
10. A curriculum theory should contain various principles like Power, logical explanation, an appropriate plan, and style of presentation.

Nature of Curriculum Theory

Gorge Beauchamp (1975,1982) said that all theories are derived from three broad categories of knowledge. These are as follows:

- i) **Humanities** – Philosophy, theology, music, arts and literature.
- ii) **Natural Sciences** – Physics, chemistry, botany, geology, zoology etc.
- iii) **Social Sciences** – History, Sociology, Psychology, and Anthropology.

In this manner, curriculum theories may be considered as the heart of all education theory. It composes from philosophy, sociology and psychology. Curriculum theory consolidates information from various disciplines and set up rules and regulations for using the reign of humanities, natural sciences and social sciences.

Functions of an Effective Curriculum Theory

An effective curriculum theory has four main functions; i) Description, ii) Prediction, iii) Explanation and iv) Guidance

i) **Description Function**

Descriptive function of the theory is an exact and accurate explanation and classification of knowledge on a particular field. Curriculum theories should describe curriculum phenomena e.g. the elements of curriculum (objectives, content, learning experiences and evaluation) and the processes of curriculum (planning, development, and implementation).

ii) **Prediction Function**

A theory can predict the indication of an unobserved events or facts in accordance with explanatory principles interwoven in the theory.

iii) **Explanation Function**

Explanation is a justification given for an action or belief. Theory should address the question of Why? A theory should also point out the relationship between phenomena and mention the reasons for the relationships.

iv) **Guidance Function**

Guidance provides advice or information by an experienced person to solve a problem or difficulty. A theory helps the researchers to collect and analyse the relevant information about a phenomenon.

Categories of Curriculum Theory

According to the domain of inquiry curriculum theories can be categorized into the following ways:

I) **Structure Oriented Theory**

Structure oriented theories are primarily concerned with analysing the components of curriculum and their structure. They are descriptive and explanatory in nature. Structure oriented theories examine the following questions; What do you mean the term curriculum? What are the essential components of curriculum? What principles govern the process of content selection, organization, and sequencing?

II) **Value Oriented Theory**

Value oriented theories are primarily eager with analysing the value and impersonation of curriculum makers and their products. Their intent is primarily critical in nature. They examine the following questions; how schools liberate individuals and how does schools restrict such liberation? how schools prepare learners to take up their roles in the society? and what constitutes legitimate knowledge? Value oriented theory emphasise their inquiry level on psychological, philosophical, historical analysis, and political theory.

III) **Content Oriented Theory**

Content oriented theories are primarily concerned with the selecting, analysing and organizing of curriculum contents. Many curriculum theorists comply on three major sources of curriculum content. These are i) Child-centred curriculum ii) Society-centred iii) Knowledge-centred.

IV) **Process Oriented Theory**

Process oriented theories are primarily concerned with describing and consulting how a theory is developed in systematic way. They are descriptive and prescriptive in nature. These theories provide guidelines on an effective curriculum developmental process e.g. Taba's model, Tyler's Model and Oliva's model.

Ornstein & Hunkins (1998) also mention two major categories of curriculum theories:

- i) Design theories which address the basic idea of curriculum design and
- ii) Engineering theories that explain, describe, predict or even guide curriculum development activities.

Importances of Curriculum Theory

Curriculum theory is very important in the following ways:

1. Curriculum theory provide a conceptual framework for curriculum design. Tyler's (1949) and Taba's (1962) models of curriculum development are very useful in the process of curriculum design.

2. When stating the curriculum objectives, selecting and organizing the content and learning experiences as well as the methods of evaluation, curriculum planners depend on curriculum theories and models.
3. Curriculum theory possesses the teachers for quality outcomes in the implementation process of curriculum.
4. Curriculum theory provides a complete guideline for planning, development, implementation, and evaluation of curriculum.
5. Teachers depend on theory in research about the school curriculum.
6. Curriculum theory is essential in the development and implementation of curriculum changes and innovations.
7. Educational supervisors and leaders depend on theory in their curriculum supervisory duties.
8. Curriculum theory helps the curriculum planners to solve the problems and leads to furthering new knowledge in curriculum work.
9. Curriculum theory helps the teachers to modify their style of presentations.
10. Curriculum theory combines knowledge or information from various disciplines and set up new rules and procedures for using the reign of humanities, natural sciences and social sciences.

Conclusion

From the above discussion it may be clear that curriculum theory is the heart and soul of all educational theories. They provide a clear and real vision about the world. Curriculum theories combine knowledge and information from various disciplines which helps the curriculum planners to connect the realm of humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. Without curriculum theory a proper curriculum design cannot be developed. Curriculum theory provides a complete guideline to the maker of the curriculum in constructing a suitable curriculum to the learners. Henson (2001) warns that no curriculum theory can be perfect, and no curriculum model can be totally adequate until a satisfactory theory of education has been developed. In spite of these statements, this paper holds that teachers and educators can make use of the curriculum theories in research and other curriculum activities for quality educational purposes.

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