

Conceptualizing Curriculum Design and Renewal

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ABSTRACT

In this article, an attempt has been made to connect the values and principles of classical humanism and reconstructionism with the product approach, and the characteristics of progressivism with the process approach to curriculum. A framework for an eclectic approach to curriculum design and renewal has also been attempted by taking the best features from each of the value systems. This article falls into three parts: the first part deals with the Tyler's product approach to curriculum design and its association with Skilbeck's two value systems –classical humanism and reconstructionism, while the second part deals with Stenhouse's process approach to curriculum design and its association with Skilbeck's third value system, viz. progressivism. The last part of the article tries to present an eclectic model for curriculum design and renewal.

Introduction

The conceptual framework for curriculum design set out by Skilbeck (1982) plays a vital role in understanding the progressive tradition of curriculum design. In this framework, he has identified three broad educational value systems such as *classical humanism*, *reconstructionism* and *progressivism*. Over the ages these value systems have contributed much to theories of knowledge, different socio-political ideologies, intrinsic and extrinsic values of education and influenced curriculum development and renewal in academic institutions. These three educational value systems represent a particular group of socio-political and philosophical beliefs in curriculum design.

Classical humanism gives an elitist view, concerned with generalizable intellectual capacities and with transmission of knowledge, culture and standards from one generation to another (Clark, 1987, p. 91). **Reconstructionism** is society-oriented and focuses its attention on bringing about social change through the educational system and on achieving a social consensus on common goals and planning it rigorously to achieve them (*ibid.*). **Progressivism** is concerned with the development of the individual as a whole person, with personal and group responsibility, with promoting natural learning processes through various stages of development, and with fostering a capacity for learning how to learn (*ibid.*).

If we tried to examine the two approaches

to curriculum design, namely the *product approach* (Tyler, 1949) and the *process approach* (Stenhouse; cited in White, 1988) in the light of these three value systems, then we would realize that there is a clear association between the three value systems and the two approaches to curriculum design. An analysis of the two approaches and the three value systems reveals that these approaches are partly suitable for the present educational context. As a result, there is a strong need for an eclectic curriculum model, which in turn would help in learners' development.

Part I

The first two value systems and the product approach seem to follow a similar pathway in curriculum design. First, these have a predetermined set of objectives for curriculum. For instance, in both classical humanism and reconstructionism, in order to change learner behaviour there is a predetermined syllabus with specific objectives. In the same way, Tyler's product approach believes in having a predetermined set of objectives for a curriculum. Second, their syllabus content has a linear, cumulative approach to learning. For instance, the structures taught in classical humanism are sequenced from simple to complex and similarly the situations to be selected in reconstructionism range from the more useful to the less useful, and the most generalizable to the most difficult one. Activities and tasks designed in the product approach move from controlled practice through guided work to free communication.

Third, the teacher's role in the two value systems matches largely with the teacher's role in the product approach. For example, the teacher's role in these three frameworks is that of a knowledge-giver as the main resource. Furthermore, the teacher is not involved in curriculum development and is asked to teach whatever is prescribed by the authorities. Fourth, we can find that these three frameworks to curriculum design expect mastery of objectives from the students. For example, classical humanism looks for mastery of structures, reconstructionism of situational language use and the product approach of grammatical items. Fifth, curriculum renewal in these frameworks follows the same approach in redesigning the curriculum (i.e., top-down model). For example, in classical humanism, the examination board set by the university carries out the curriculum renewal; in reconstructionism, expert committees set by the government carry out the curriculum renewal: and the same thing happens in the product approach as well. Sixth, all these three frameworks to curriculum design follow skill-oriented teaching/learning activities. For example, classical humanism focuses on developing skills such as memorization, analysis and classification through the content. Reconstructionism focuses on social interactional skills through situations, and the product approach focuses on memorization, analysis, classification, etc. Therefore, we can say that the two value systems (classical humanism and reconstructionism) are linked with the product approach.

Part II

Progressivism and the process approach follow the same path in designing curriculum. First, the curriculum in progressivism and the process approach is process-driven, contextualized and open-ended, where the content is based on principles and derived from research into language learning development. Second, the syllabus content in these two approaches is recommended and not prescribed. Thus, curriculum in these approaches is flexible and provides rough specifications of contexts intended to promote learning. So both the approaches do not impose syllabus on teachers; instead, they recommend rough specifications for the classroom. Third, both the approaches to curriculum design believe in the principle that learning happens through the process of understanding and awareness through experiential learning. Fourth, the methodology followed in these two approaches is learner-centered where conditions for spontaneous learning are provided. Fifth, the teacher's role in these two approaches is to mediate the learning process, where the teacher works with the learners to help them in the learning process. Similarly, he also acts as a responder to learner needs and encourages learners to take responsibility for their own learning. Sixth, insiders such as teachers carry out curriculum renewal in both the approaches. In the process of curriculum renewal, teachers come together with their experiential knowledge and decide on what to teach, how to teach, and so on.

Part III

An Approach to Eclectic Curriculum Design and Renewal

Features of classical humanism to include in an eclectic model:

The methodology employed by classical humanism which focuses on conscious awareness of rules and patterns, and their subsequent application from controlled to more open contexts would be a useful feature for an eclectic model. If the learners develop conscious awareness of rules and patterns through their curriculum, it would help them consolidate their language use. In addition, their confidence level would increase. This feature should be included at the beginning level curriculum because at that level students need to be familiarized with the rules for learning to happen. Second, summative exam would be another feature of classical humanism to be included in the eclectic model because the summative exams grade learners based on their achievement in a particular course. It would satisfy societal as well as academic need for some principled basis to select learners for a particular vocation or for higher education. Third, the content to be taught and learnt is sequenced from simple to complex. This sequencing would help students in their learning by gradually consolidating their knowledge and they will not face many difficulties in coping with the content during the leaning process.

Features of reconstructionism to include in an eclectic model:

First, the methodology associated with reconstructionism places great emphasis on deliberate practice of skills and this feature should be included in an eclectic model because the deliberate practice of learnt knowledge would help learners in internalizing it. For example, the conscious use of certain words in certain situations would help learners to internalize those words. Hence, the more situations the learners encounter, the more they internalize. Then the egalitarian view of curriculum is very important for society, where every individual will get equal opportunities in learning and no learner will be considered superior or inferior in education. That is why pupils should learn in mixed ability groups.

Features of Progressivism to include in an eclectic model:

One of the important features of progressivism that we should include in an eclectic model is its design, which is research-oriented, open-ended and experimental in nature. Teachers and learners will then have freedom for teaching and learning. Another feature of progressivism to be included in an eclectic model is flexibility in syllabus content. That

is, the curriculum in an eclectic model should be flexible and should provide only rough specifications of contexts intended to promote learning and not a fixed content. Teachers would be able to help learners towards achieving their goals. Yet another feature of progressivism to be included is its learner-centered approach to curriculum that attempts to promote every pupil's development as an individual with intellectual and emotional needs, and as a social being, where the teacher is seen as a creator of an environment. This feature leads learners towards self-actualization and helps them in knowing how to learn things in their own way. One more feature of progressivism to be included is the developing, open, speculative view of knowledge in learners. Learners will be able to question reality. They will always look for evidences for every possible situation. Then there should be concern for learners becoming responsible for their own learning, just as teachers have to become responsible for their own classroom practices. This feature will encourage the teacher to observe, study and reflect upon their classroom practices to diagnose problems and address them. In progressivism curriculum renewal process is bottom-up; that is, teachers carry out curriculum renewal.

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Table 1: An outline of the Eclectic Curriculum Design and Renewal

Features of Classical Humanism	Features of Reconstructionism	Features of Progressivism
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design tasks or activities, which would create conscious awareness of rules and patterns in the learners' mind. Organize these tasks or activities from controlled to more open contexts. 2. See that the content to be taught and learnt is sequenced from simple to complex. 3. To determine learners' progress, conduct summative exams. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Design or renew curriculum by emphasizing the deliberate practice of skills. 2. Design or renew curriculum with the egalitarian view. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The process of curriculum design or renewal should be based on current trends in ELT research (open-ended and experimental in nature). 2. The approach to curriculum should be learner-centered and there should be scope for learner autonomy. 3. Try to build flexibility in the syllabus content and follow a bottom-up approach in curriculum design and renewal.

Conclusion

To sum up, we can say that no curriculum is perfect. We should look for an eclectic model of curriculum and renewal, which will not only help learners in their learning process but will also consider their needs while designing a new curriculum.

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