

## **Enigmatic curriculum design: Flexible design for the creative mind**

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### **What is curriculum?**

The role of curriculum is to provide a playground for students to rummage through others' truths, realize they can fly, let them figure out how and relate their findings to others in their society. The idea that children can not fly needs to be left outside the classroom door, with other antiquated limitations, such as a flat world that is the center of the universe. Creating an environment that is big enough for limitless possibilities gives space to air-born ideas and new perspectives, such as a round world and a Sun-centric model based on observation and intuition, even in the face of widely accepted "truth". A curriculum is a design for an environment that is conducive to experiences, where children can try on old ideas and see if they fit, or even if they feel right, and change their own individual truths accordingly. The purpose of curriculum is to grow learners who ingest information, metabolize the data they need and grow ideas into innovative projects that build their society.

The nature of knowledge is constant flux – the only constant – as evidenced by the progression of the human body of knowledge that waxes and wans through construction and

subsequent deconstruction spinning the wheel of our understanding. Curriculum is not content. The super-information-highway drives the human body of knowledge into living rooms, cafés and commons at exponentially increasing speeds. The skill set for future citizens lies not in regurgitating an expired data set, but the ability to quickly assess the newest one. The direct transmission of content - beliefs, emotions and knowledge – required to maintain society is meaningless without the intermediary of the environment (Dewey 1916). Curriculum is experience, the experience to learn how to learn, and the critical thought to chose which truth to accept as their own.

As curriculum designers, we use this new paradigm of seemingly limitless information as a prompt to enhance our pedagogy and embrace the human creativity as a tool and not a hobby, as the goal and not distraction. Allowing independent student innovation and perspective in our curriculum design immediately enlists students as stakeholders in their own education, elevating tasks from rote and arduous to fun and exploratory; concepts are relevant because the students makes integral connections to formulate their own truths based on ideas from past prophecy and future possibilities.

### **Drawing from theory**

Two learning theories that may be used to redirect our current education system are existentialism and post-modernism. Where existentialism address the individuality of the student,

post-modernism allows that individuality to flourish without the unyielding restraints of previous truths.

Existentialism encourages individualism and allows for diverse perspectives to be held up and inspected by a community of learners (Hobbs, 2007). The teacher is the guide on the side and not the sage on the stage. No one model or representation of a concept is held as “the” truth, which empowers learners to find their own truth and be responsible for their decision. The combination of respect for their ideas, perspectives and opinions, as well as the expectation of responsibility for those views and beliefs, make the student stakeholder in their own education. As an active learner of concepts and not a passive receiver of content, the student is naturally engaged in higher thinking, devising assessment and value from the curriculum.

With high cognition and critical thinking comes the connections of concept to experiences and perspectives that is associated with deep comprehension and understanding. With a deeper understanding of concepts comes a better foundation to build new ideas. The student who is only armed with the data, denied time and method to make connections and find relevance, will not see the forest for the trees. Less likely to manifest models from their understanding, the data-only student is less an asset to their society.

Post-modernism alerts us to the implications and contingencies of our learning, allowing an escape from the constraints of the reductionist perspective (Rader & Rader, 1998). The industrial paradigm and metaphor for everything as product is coming to an end, as the production factory is

replaced by the idea laboratory, the laborer by the designer. Post-modernism accepts the dynamic interactivity of the global village and our tasks to exist and navigate through it. Our learners need to be aware of this grand network, but allowed to find their own way to connect into it; a way that is organic to them, most beneficial to their society, and most efficient because most natural.

Learner-initiated learning, narrative beds and use of metaphor are effective tools in a flexible curriculum that build the skill set necessary for success in a rapidly evolving globally connected landscape. The task is to design and orchestrate lifelike, enriching and appropriate learning experiences, which they can extract meaning (Rader & Rader, 1998). The teacher builds an environment conducive to experience and is available to hand out tools and instructions for their use, but does not demand the learner builds a replicate of past projects.

Existentialism and post-modernism coexist effectively, in that just as existence precedes essence (Sarte 1938), the eye by seeing learns to see. Existence precedes essence alludes to the idea that we are born and then exist, then we ourselves freely determine our existence, and this affords the diversity of thought that calculates many solutions – some even useful. The eye by seeing learns to see alludes to our miraculously learning through the conflicts within that are engendered by the images of the conflicts from without (Cowan, 1993). Existentialism allows us first individuality of thought and perspective, and post-modernism allows taking those perspectives and fusing new influences to develop new perspectives and understandings. Both philosophies open the potential for new learning wide open.

The advantage of existentialism is individual development, which compliments the post-modern connectivism with its potential disadvantage of assimilation. The disadvantage of existentialism is the potential fracturing of community, but this is addressed with post-modernism globalist search for connection. Both learning theories work well in concert with inclusion of other theories such as humanism and progressivism, using many tools for a constantly evolving pedagogy.

### **The teacher's role**

The teacher of a flexible curriculum may not be from an education program, as their skill set to facilitate learning, although grounded in a firm understanding of pedagogy, is not to reproduce themselves in the same manner they were created by the university box. The teacher of a dynamic existential post-modern curriculum uses their social skills to connect student with society, and through a horizontally integrated discourse, connects the student to the greater community through experience learning that revolves around a relevant network. The teacher develops these experiences through expert testimony and demonstration from the learner's community, orchestration with other faculty's resources and expertise authorized by the administrators and reinforcement at home by the relevant knowledge base of the parents.

All subjects are of value as what is used today as a core curriculum will comprise the basic functions of calculation, research, communication and representation. There will not be a math class

per se, but the discourse on the origin of man will include mathematical modeling of scientifically created data, which culminates in an essay and multimedia Web project, as a presentation option.

In a time when we are misguided in our attempts to increase educational efficacy through reductionist assessment, we are at risk of losing Humanities in our education system. To get paid, the schools teach to the test, which is not a cliché, but a natural proclivity when faced with starvation. This type of education confuses process with substance (Illich 1971), where test taking skills are valued more than concept understanding. An existential post-modern assessment measures reasoning and problem-solving, trading a focus on filling in the bubbles of a standardized test for a focus on how a bubble maintains its shape and why.

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