Designing of an experiential curriculum: a phenomenological approach

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Abstract

The present study embarks upon the designing of an experiential curriculum based on a phenomenological approach. In this theoretical study, attempts has been made to decode and analyze the text messages using library sources and then design a new model emphasizing the views held by Van Manen and Ted Aoki. The levels of this model include: Expected Curriculum, Imaginal Curriculum, Concealed curriculum, Interactive curriculum (Pedagogical Action, in loco Parentis, Covered Curriculum) Pedagogical Influence and Self- Reflective. Serving as a research model offering the various planes of the experiential curriculum and focusing more sharply on the dimensions of curriculum than the formal plane, the present study is recommended to the decision-makers of education curricular system.

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1. Introduction

Increasing technological development and rapid social changes have placed a variety of demands on curriculum. Should instructors ignore this and fail to notice the social dynamics they live in, they will jeopardize their curriculum. Today, the demand is for curriculum that not only indicates the social reflexes but also serves as an authorization to involve people in the continual social change (Ornstein, Hunkins, 1998). For this purpose, focus on students' motivations, interests, attitudes and experience, as the basic agent in this process is the principal responsibility of the curricular system in higher education. Focus on individual differences facilitates the teaching-learning process. This is in conflict with the prevalent approach to the curricular domain, i.e. the traditional approach which aiming to provide resources is deeply influenced by managerial thinking. Rather than attempt to better understand and explore the complex elements in education and struggle to maximize its efficacy, the traditional approach has added to the number of areas of control over learners and over the process of education, treating learners as some raw materials that must be converted into finished products fulfilling a variety of

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expectations. The principles of efficiency, control, prediction and emphasis on care in stating the curricular goals in terms of observable and measurable behavior play the central role.

This approach looks upon the curriculum as a written document, a technical or technological process seeking to implement all the elements and stages of teaching into a set of predetermined decisions (Ornstein, Hunkins, 1998). Most teachers and students view curriculum in this light (Nel noddings, 1990).

The re-conceptualistic approach levels a new challenge and criticism at the fundamental hypotheses of curricular theorizations. Such theorists as Macdonald, Huebner, Greene, Pinar, and Apple played a significant role in renovation of concepts, subjects and methods of educational research (Geroux, Penna and Pinar, 1981). This approach is in conflict with the positivistic and conservative nature prevalent in curricular theory and practice that addresses man as the most important agent, showing concern about exploring man's inner experience. Viewed in these terms rather than in terms of studying the changes in behavior and making decisions for the classroom, understanding the nature of educational experience becomes the focus of attention (Painar, 1975. p.209).

The present study embarks upon the designing of an experiential curriculum in higher education based on a phenomenological approach. This study proceeds to study and search for phenomenological teachings linked up with the lived experience, is capable of increasing the influenceability coefficient of the curriculum and goes on to design an experiential curriculum model by giving them a pivotal role.

2. Research Questions

1. What is the significance and history of experiential curriculum?

2. What are the nature and the various dimensions of an experiential curriculum at each level?

3. What are the implications and recommendations of phenomenological theorists for an experiential curriculum?

4. Based on the findings of the study, what, with a view to phenomenological approach, sort of experiential curriculum model can be proposed?

This requires abandonment of individuality and absence of living high-spirited individuals in the process of curriculum. In contrast, the curriculum taken as a lived experience consists of the real world in the curriculum taken as life, or what has been lived and what teachers have experienced. This is exactly what has been neglected (Aoki, 2005 p.203-204).

Van Manen (2006) finds children different. Every child is unique, manifesting inclinations, sensitivities and idiosyncratic modalities, which shortly surface in their activities. The child's pedagogical intent is valued for what it is and what it can be. He believes that most educational literature is focused on parents or teachers and ignores children. It is always focused on such questions as how teachers should think, act, feel and interact with students. However, such a focus ignores the important fact that the adult fails to see in the same way that a child sees specific situations, worldly experience of their home, school and society. Pedagogically, the important question is always how the child's experience in a specific situation is related to the events. In fact, the nature of child's relationship in specific situations is important (Van Manen, 2006: pp 19-27).

The focus of the insider's experience is the individual's interest, attention, and understanding the impressions and senses that individuals living in a situation make (Aoki, 1988a. p.410). In Ted Aoki's view, (1988) the basis of curriculum is the individual and their experience. Put more explicitly, the knowledge and experience that the agent has of the situation constitutes the focus of activities.
3. Lived Experience for the Origin of Curricular Phenomenology:

Phenomenology is another vista having broken through new barriers, opened up new arenas in curriculum studies and paved new grounds for further exploration. Phenomenology is the study of phenomena and their manifestations in conscious, wakeful experience. Edmond Husserl (1859-1938) was the first to introduce phenomenology as a method of description. He views phenomenology as a method for the analysis of phenomena, i.e. analysis of our conscious knowledge of how objects and events manifest themselves in our experience (Gooteck, 2001). He introduced the live world, i.e. the world of the immediate and natural experience.

In this context, by lived world is meant how the individual experiences and perceives his world as real and meaningful. Put otherwise, lived meaning is expressive of aspects of a situation experienced by the person placed in it. Phenomenological study is a kind of "interpretive inquiry" whose focal point is man's impression and experience. Phenomenological study looks into people's various impressions and into the results and their descriptions in such a way that people's impressions surface directly (Pinar, 2004).

Phenomenology is a systematic careful effort to profoundly and properly comprehend experience. Although it has its roots in the real world, this study is a kind of poetic activity, namely an aesthetic way of expressing and presenting experience (Willis quoting Pinar 2004, 1981). Huebner, an authority on curricular studies with novel, revolutionary views shaking the foundations of curricular studies, brought the concept of training experience (Pinar, 1975., p. 206) into focus. Huebner(1975) believes that learning has been recognized as relating to educational psychology and the experiential-analytic tradition in whose wake it has developed into a term suggesting "control" (Huebner, 1975b). This language for learning and its aim must be put away and new questions must be posed. To this end, the curriculum must be directly confronted with the reality and not through the limited cognitive frameworks of a particular linguistic system (Tyler technical system). The reality of curriculum must be admitted (Pinar, 2004).

As it stands, the existing curricular language is too constrained to address and settle the problems and the complexities related to language and the import of classroom. The instructor must release himself of the constraining plans so that he can re-listen to the world, which seeks remove, the existing intellectual obstacles. The current methodologies governing the curricular thinking must open up the way for this new concept (Pinar, 2004).

4. Proposed Phenomenological Model of Curriculum:

In this theoretical study, attempts has been made to decode and analyze phenomenological teachings linked up with the live experience and the experiential curriculum model introduced by Fathi-Vajargah and Zimitat (2007). According to this model, the experiential curriculum comprises the following levels:

4.1. Expected Curriculum: This curriculum states the audience's expectations and predictions of curriculum and of what they will learn. Basically, the topic of each course has a particular meaning to the learners which leads up to the development of the target curriculum. In fact this curriculum states the audience's views of the target curriculum and what they believe they will learn.

4.2. Imaginal Curriculum: This curricular level comprises an image formed by the student's or professor's past experience or other professors' past experience with similar courses presented prior to entering the classroom, other students' value judgments of the intended course lecturer, behavioral and academic characteristics of the course lecturer and the socio-cultural structure of the society. This image of the curriculum will affect the learners' views, attitudes and subsequent learning.
4.3. Concealed Curriculum: This curriculum comprises the student's previous learning, presuppositions, experience, learning styles and whatever the student brings to the classroom that affects their subsequent learning.

4.4. Interactive Curriculum: This curriculum comprises three stages:

4.4.1. Pedagogical Action: Pedagogical Activity is not simply pure behavioral principles and techniques or methods capable of being taught. It must be noted that certain aspects of teaching cannot be learned as specific techniques and methods. Some skills such as telling stories, leading class discussions or organizational skills including designing an interesting lesson plan or identifying qualifications and skills such as evaluation of students' cognitive abilities, etc can be taught. However, in the process of teaching and meeting with learners, being equipped with teaching skills and the technical and professional aspects of teaching is not sufficient. Put more precisely, the
pedagogical content calls for an inspiring quality and a story structure which lead to critical thinking and the capability for introspection. The pedagogical activity is normal and criterion-based preparing the Student for living. Pedagogical activities are aimed at the pedagogical intent and objectives. The intent and objectives are identical with the potential of students for being and "becoming". The important point is that there is a difference between situations of pedagogical intent and objectives and situations devoid of them. Situations devoid of pedagogical content are not useful for student. Pedagogy makes reference to oriented activities and interactions which the teacher and student push toward being and becoming positive and constructive for the student 4.4.2. In loco Parentis: Educational thought and belief taken as a living process is perceived when it is caused by personal involvement of a teacher or an adult parent with a young male or female student. Such an educational belief or thinking may be destroyed in an autocratic and rigid environment. How can education influence human behavior and replace it with valuable cultural behavior? This perspective and approach is seemingly abnormal in a parenting friendly relation, i.e. loco parentis, in the process of education. This relation thought of as a source for educational discovery and inference provides holistic visions in the life of instructors and students. Instructors and teachers deal with children exposed to a variety of forms of experience, backgrounds and situations. A basic need of educational institutions is to increasingly adapt to the parenting criteria, norms and relations which parents themselves seem to have forgotten. This issue poses the need for a profound relation between the essence of teaching and parenting, one that seldom receives attention.

4.4.3. Covered Curriculum: The facts that teachers and student relate from their meaningful educational experience and which seem to have occurred marginally within or outside the programmed daily class experience are referred to as covert curriculum. In the center of the students' interactions with one another and with their teachers in the process of education, marginally or outside the classroom, some experience is gained for which there is no preprogramming but which affects learners and leads to learning. In fact, the curriculum makes reference too many daily activities and hasty behaviors that might have had positive or negative effects on the learners that have been neither predicted nor intended.

4.5. Pedagogical Influence: Because of the emphasis which phenomenologist particularly Van Manen place on pedagogical effects, this level of curriculum has replaced the acquired curriculum in the basic model. The pedagogical effect is a behavioral, realistic, normal and communicative situation whose consequence is self-reflective. The meaning of pedagogical influence is not simply responsibility; rather, it is the ability to respond. Acts as such virtually represent responsibility, moral responsiveness and justify ability in certain pedagogical perspectives. The influence of a concept is intriguing. Originally, this term refers to ethereal emanation from e metaphysical source effective in becoming human. Influence is something we have acquired, something we dominate, like our body and thought. It can be something between one individual and another with who the individual is in contact. It can exist in the heart and the center of interactions and specific situations and the communications between the instructor and the student as well as between parents and the child. Obviously, the influence among people is not always essentially pedagogical. Every student and teacher is under the daily influence of others, cultural traditions, language, his or her biographies, and socio-natural environments. However, only one influence between the teacher and student having a proper orientation is inspiring, the kind aimed at pedagogical intent and objectives. This intent and objective is the potential resources available to student for being and becoming. The important point is that there is a difference between situations with pedagogical intent and objectives and those devoid of them. Situations devoid of pedagogical intent are not useful for student.

4.6. Self-reflective: The terminal level is an experienced curriculum that replaces the curriculum institutionalized in the base model. Self-reflection is a pedagogical activity playing a central role, constantly making us think out the best possible alternatives. There is a difference between an activity and reflection. In addition, there is a difference between the learners' active involvement with teaching and failure to reflect upon the past, present and future situations. Reflection is a basic concept in educational theories that carries implicit meanings in education: deliberation, the reasons for choices and decisions concerning alternative methods and techniques is an activity expressed in such propositions as reflective practice and reflection in action. Self-reflection is a reflective conversation with the situation while reflection is a reminding activity. Pedagogy calls for reflective orientation in living and life.

5. Conclusions:
When reference is made to lived experience, it is not meant to say that the only source for determining a situation is individual experience. Rather than emphasize the various problems simply emphasis is laid on the role of individual experience, thus attaching absolute validity to it. The aim is to recognize individual experience and attend to the teaching and learning processes from the learners' perspective in order to understand something by which it would be possible to increase the curricular influenceability index in learners. This, in itself is a basic step in promoting the pedagogical process.

Ted Aoki (2005) believes that curriculum taken as a lived experience consists of the real world in curriculum taken as what has been lived and what learners and teachers have experienced; that is, living and being in direct contact with each and every student with unique interests, abilities and characteristics. This, in fact, is what has been overlooked in curriculum development.

The experienced curricular model emphasizes the fact that learning is something more than a collection of data and facts. Learning influences the path a person adopts to travel in future. It also influences their attitude and personality and becomes internalized in the process of experience (Rogers, 1990).

In the process of education, the principal question is always: how can education affect and change man's behavior into culturally valuable conduct? What experiences do students learn in classrooms? What sort of experience are curricula unique to each student and developed as a result of classroom interactions, based? How can curriculum affect them? Under what conditions is their learning institutionalized?

In response to these questions every effort has been made to prepare teachers in the course of teaching and dealing with learners to learn the skills of planning their lessons, managerial skills, classroom management, evaluation and presentation skills and whatever is technical and professional. However, this is not sufficient. Put more precisely, educational activities require a structure to create critical thinking and provide the ground for introspection and self-reflection. To achieve this purpose, it is necessary to review the curriculum from the point of view of students for whom the curriculum is conducted and from the viewpoint of the target community as well as of the major decision-makers for the curriculum. It is also necessary to see the image that we have formed of the higher education curriculum and has somehow affected the learning.

In the process of teaching and dealing with learners, being equipped with teaching skills only and whatever is technically and professionally required is not sufficient. Put more precisely, the pedagogical content calls for an inspiring quality along with a story structure leading up to critical thinking and the resources for introspection. A pedagogical activity is aimed at pedagogical intent and objectives. The intent and objective is the potential source available to student for “being and becoming” and self-reflecting. Self-reflective is a pedagogical activity that plays a central role in constantly making us reflect to think out the best alternative solutions. Pedagogy calls for reflective orientation of living and life (Van Manen, 2006).

A basic need of educational institutions is to increasingly adapt to the parenting criteria, norms and relations which parents themselves seem to have forgotten. This issue poses the need for a profound relation between the essence of teaching and parenting, one that seldom receives attention.

In the proposed model, parenting relations have been treated as a plane in the interactive curriculum. It is an open invitation for the curriculum decision-makers to closely and deeply study this neglected aspect or purposely excluded from higher education, the absence of which greatly influences the process of learning and self-reflection. In the proposed model, this plane of curriculum is null curriculum that has been ignored to attract the attention of higher education executives.

In this study, the aim was not to underestimate the technical and professional aspects; rather, it was to focus attention on neglected aspects of teaching which phenomenologists emphasize. The present study serving as a research model provides the opportunity for all planners and executors of higher education, who study all the aspects of higher education curriculum development and who do not simply rely on the official curriculum.

This is made possible when parenting relations destroyed in highly autocratic and rigid environments in the course of living are emphasized and thought of pedagogy as a process of caring, sympathizing and sharing our being with someone we love. This important aspect puts forward a profound relation between the essence of teaching and parenting which seldom receives attention. There is influence on the heart and the center of interactions and specific situations as well as on the communications between the instructor and student and on the parents and children that are aimed at "becoming" and self-reflecting. Self-reflection is a pedagogical activity that plays a central role in
constantly making us reflect to think out the best alternative solutions. Pedagogy calls for reflective orientation of living and life.

Pedagogical situations call for prompt responses. This is because instructors and parents have little time to make decisions and reflect on these situations in order to come up with prompt solutions. Often by participating or failing to participate in an activity by mentioning or not mentioning a problem, a mistake occurs resulting in consequences. An explicit study of these situations can bring about positive results for individual development, establishing constructive communications between the instructors and parents.

References


