APPROACHES AND VALUE SYSTEMS IN LANGUAGE TEACHING CURRICULUM –A CASE FOR INTEGRATED APPROACH AND PROGRESSIVISM

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Abstract

Curriculum development is one of the booming fields in the educational arena. Curriculum Designers have a very crucial role to perform in the outcome of the learners. Several new approaches and value systems in teaching and curriculum designing have also cropped up and it is equally important to choose the right approach and types. This paper attempts to explore the process and product approach and try to appraise the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. And identify these approaches with the different educational value systems such as Classical humanism, reconstructionism and progressivism. as a result the paper argues that who can be a good curriculum designer and what approaches and value systems such a person should adapt.

Introduction:

Curriculum development is one of the booming fields in the educational arena. Designers have a very crucial role to perform in the outcome of the learners. A good first step to begin in curriculum or materials production would be to understand the various definitions available for the word 'curriculum'. Several new approaches in teaching and curriculum designing have also cropped up and it is equally important to choose the right approach. The second section of this essay would deal with two new approaches and try to appraise the strengths and weaknesses of these approaches. The final section would try to identify these approaches with the different educational value systems.

Curriculum - Definition:

The word 'Curriculum' may be used in different contexts and it might mean very differently according to the context in which it is used, just like many words in the English language. The explanation offered by the Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary should not be considered as the only possible explanation for this word. There are almost 120 possible definitions for the word curriculum according to Portelli. He attributes this phenomenon to the necessity of the authors to either delimit or establish new meanings that are associated with the word. But what is certain about this phenomenon is that none of the definitions are all-inclusive or authoritative. Every explanation has a certain amount of truth in it and each of them lacks something that the

other tries to encompass. However, let us take a few examples and try to analyze them carefully before coming to a conclusion.

According to David Nunan,

> *Curriculum refers to the principles and procedures for the planning, implementation, evaluation and management of an educational programme. Curriculum study embraces syllabus design (the selection and grading of content) and methodology (the selection of learning tasks, and activities).*

This explanation, although not exactly the same, falls in line with the one that is offered by OALD. However, it differs from the latter in that it includes the implementation, evaluation and management. This idea has been contradicted by the explanation of curriculum in A View of the Curriculum produced by the Department of Education and Science, London. According to that,

> *Curriculum comprises all the opportunities for learning provided by a school. It includes the formal programme of lessons in the timetable….and the climate of relationships, attitudes, styles of behavior and the general quality of life established in the school community as a whole.*

In this explanation we see that they have tried to encompass the whole of school life in to curriculum, meaning that everything right from syllabus, teaching, teacher – student relationship, student – student relationship and other aspects of school life are labeled as curriculum. This kind of an explanation might seem like the right explanation at first glance. But a careful analysis will let us know that it is highly impractical as one cannot control every factor that takes place in a school.

Coming back to the explanation in question, we should evaluate it only from the perspective of a lexicographer. In any lexicon it is impossible to give all the meanings of a word. However, the lexicographers organize the meanings in their order of frequency to help reduce the learning burden of both the native and non-native. For the word 'curriculum', the most common meaning would be the one that has been given in the OALD. So it cannot be denied that the explanation offered by the OALD for the word is satisfactory. Moreover, the dictionary is not a specific purpose dictionary, like that of a medical dictionary or an ELT dictionary, so as to give a complete definition of the words that occur in such fields. If one needs a perfect explanation of a term related to his or her field he should look in a specific purpose dictionary and not in OALD as it is meant for the general public.

Product Approach vs. Process Approach:

Ralph Tyler's Product Approach and Lawrence Stenhouse's Process Approach are two major approaches available for curriculum designers. While most of the curriculum designers around the world lean towards the process approach, there are still some traditional designers who prefer product approach over the more revolutionary process approach. However, it is not advisable to decide which approach to take out rightly. Both these approaches have to be placed under thorough scrutiny before deciding on which one we should rely on.

Tyler's product approach is widely used in curriculum planning. Product approach is criticized as being idealistic as it is based on four basic questions: 1) What is my educational purpose?, 2) What will I teach in order to achieve these objectives?, 3) How will I organize my teaching?, and 4) How will I determine whether these purposes are being attained?. Product approach treats the teachers like novices who are just good in their subject but not in understanding the psychology of students and doesn't give much scope for them to research. It

demands the curriculum designers to research before the designing of the curriculum so as to prevent the teachers from experimenting in the classroom. It also retards student growth to an extent as it does not cater to their respective needs but treats them as a whole. On the brighter side, it defines a clear cut path where the learners and teachers don't get lost. The aim and objectives are standardized and there is no possibility of the learner to get the wrong ideas about a particular curriculum.

Stenhouse's process approach is more open. It is not an idealistic method of curriculum designing and it just recommends the teachers to undertake certain measures and research the rest for themselves. The basic contention that Stenhouse has about product approach is that it is fit only for skill based teaching and not for knowledge based teaching. Stenhouse argues that for a better teaching and learning experience the teachers and learners should be let free to experiment rather than being tied down by a prescriptive curriculum. Research, Stenhouse says, should be done by the teacher in a classroom, instead of the curriculum designer as proposed by Tyler. Each student would have a specific need or skill set. It is for the teacher to analyze such aspects and formulate methods that would stimulate learning in students. Tyler says that a particular country or school should have a particular kind of curriculum whereas Stenhouse argues that each student is as unique as each school is. Process approach makes the teachers accountable and treats them as an advanced learner teaching a group of upcoming learners, in contrast with product approach which treats them as the un-understanding authority in their subject. However there are certain problems with the process approach. To begin with, it takes for granted that the teachers are well equipped to understand what the students need. It also is a bit impractical in countries where the teachers themselves are as backward as the students are. If such a teacher is to experiment with his/her students then it would spell disaster for both of them. To explain this scenario better let us take the example of a traditional Indian village classroom. It is a well known fact that most teachers who are employed in the village schools think teaching as a business more than as a profession. Such teacher would most probably not act as the professional that Stenhouse expects them to be. For them the knowledge that they hold seems to be more than what they really need to make a living. It would be like asking too much of them, if they were to research in their classrooms. It is just like what Tyler says, the teachers would find it very difficult to be a teacher, learner and researcher in their own classrooms. In contexts like these, the product approach seems to be the best possible solution available. But it is not to say that the process approach is entirely impractical. It is in the hands of the teacher more than the curriculum designer to select the approach that they want to adhere to. As Stenhouse himself says, curriculum plans are not just for the students but a teacher development process as the teacher adapts to it in his/her own classroom. It is for the teachers to decide whether they want to be the teachers or just a facilitator or mediator in the learning process of their students.
So, it would only be wise if we find equilibrium between both the product approach and process approach and design our curriculum accordingly.

Three Value Systems:
Classical humanism, reconstructionism and progressivism are three educational value systems that has been developed over the time of the human civilization. While each value system argues for different methods of teaching and curriculum development, their value in today's world seem to be limited. As in any man-made entities these value systems are time bound and have outlived their time.

Classical humanism argues for the promotion of generalized intellectual capacities. It is one of the first value systems that humans had developed in terms of teaching and curriculum designing. However there are still some valid points that keep it alive. It advocates the maintenance of cultural traditions of the past and has a linear progress from simple to tough. This means that the knowledge handed down from previous generations is maintained. But it might also mean that things that are outdated might be passed on to the students and students might just get confused. The linear approach is really worthwhile since it becomes easy for the learners as they start with simple mental exercises and progress on to the tougher ones. It promotes excellence through education and lays emphasis on artistic, literary or cultural bias. But, values like the subject driven approach discourages learned modern day teachers from taking this value system. Subject driven approach is considered to be useless in the present scenario since it would mean privileging one subject over the other. The classrooms based on this approach are usually teacher centered and students are classified in to homogenous groups. It also propagates that the agencies of change lie outside the classroom just like the product approach of Tyler. Classical humanism is, in a way, similar to modern day behaviorism. Behaviorism argues for stimuli, response and reinforcement. Similarly, classical humanism doesn't give scope for either the teacher or learners to interpret the text. Teachers are expected to just transmit the information that they know and the learners are expected just to learn what they have been taught. The emphasis that classical humanism lays on teaching of grammar and other form related subjects makes it obvious that it doesn't worry much about the real world application of the subject learnt.

The assessment technique that classical humanism uses is norm-referenced. That is it compares students in terms of their marks and allots them a rank order to differentiate between good learners and slow learners. This thoroughly demotivates the slow learners and promotes the elite guardians of knowledge, which classical humanism argues for. These values make it look even more out-of-fashion, as it does not care about the interests of the slow learners and sidelines them. Classical humanism will thus fall under the product approach category. Just as product approach works towards achieving a specified goal unmindful of the varied interests of students and their needs, classical humanism works only for the creation of elite guardians of knowledge leaving other learners in the dark. This directly contradicts the fifth hypothesis of Krashen which says that the affective factors of students should also be considered while teaching them.

Reconstructionism is fairly a new value system in comparison with classical humanism. It focuses more on student experience and their future application of the subjects that they learn. Social change, achieved through education, is one of the primary goals of reconstructionism. It becomes much similar to the product approach in that it lays emphasis on the practical relevance of the curriculum to the social goals of the nation. It is goal centered and relies on an ends-means approach similar to the product approach. The objectives for teaching the students are derived from an analysis of the objective behavioral needs of the students. It promotes the working together for a better future for everyone in a particular country. It also has drawbacks in the form of mastery learning, since it might leave the fast learners in trouble as they would be expected to teach the slow learners, which would help the slow learners but is of no benefit to them. The importance given to experts, and not the teachers, in curriculum renewal is one another aspect which places reconstructionism in the product approach category. On the other side teachers treated as model native speakers, is also wrong with reconstructionism. Avoidance of errors and not taking them as an opportunity to learn from can only lead to more such errors. These aspects make reconstructionism a undesirable value system.

However there are some very compelling values in this value system that identifies itself with process approach. One such value is that, there are no stereotypes in the classes and students are treated equally. They're also taught in a more communicative approach unlike classical humanism. There is also in-service assistance for teachers and the teaching is of linear progress. The assessment method used in reconstructionism is that of the criterion-referenced assessment, which is both formative and summative. These points make it a good contender against classical humanism. Although reconstructonism is a mixed bag of product and process approach oriented values, it can only be placed under the product approach category since most of its values are strictly in contrast with the process approach.

Progressivism is a value system based on the teachings of Jean Piaget and Rousseau. The heralding point of this value system is that, the focus should be more on the learners than on the teacher or the subject of study. It argues that people learn best through experience and discovery. This seems to be one with the cognitive approach that motivates learners to use their mental faculty rather than just learning what is being taught. Here the learners learn how to learn, which is in direct opposition to instructivism. It encourages the teachers to take the process driven approach to teach in the classroom. This is in line with the process approach which places the learners at the centre instead of a teacher centered classroom. It treats teacher as a facilitator in the learning experience of the students and accepts the errors committed by students. The teacher takes the constructivism route to teach. Curriculum development is not seen as a separate entity here, but as a teacher development process.

However, it cannot be denied that too much preference on individual preference would lead to a distracted classroom. That is to say that it is too idealistic and it would be impossible for a teacher to be innovative at all times and evolve different methodologies to teach varied learners in a single classroom. Learner centeredness might also mean that the learners wander away from the aim of learning and fossilization of errors might also take place.
Progressivism clearly falls under the process approach category. Though there are a few glitches with progressivism, it seems to be the best of the three value systems. However, it would be advisable to take the positive aspects of all the three value systems and try to inculcate in teaching and curriculum development.

Conclusion:
The essay has attempted to define on who can be a good curriculum designer and what approaches and value systems such a person should adapt. Any good curriculum designer should work for the betterment of the community or the country he/she works for. Curriculum development should not just be for the sake of learning but should motivate social change and include subjects that can be put to practical use.

Reference
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