

Curriculum and Schooling

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Since the era of the early Greeks, intellectuals have been questioning the purpose of education. Many now agree that the term “curriculum,”—which translated from Latin means to run, and in Roman times referred to a course of action or a chariot race—best captures what schools attempt when educating young people. Others submit that curriculum in education systems can be fully understood only when examined under the lenses of educational philosophy, general philosophy, and educational psychology. In addition, we may conclude that any attempts to ascertain the purpose and benefits of schooling must also be pursued within the framework of the subcomponents of curriculum theory, curriculum development, curriculum implementation, and curriculum evaluation.

Traditionally, education in Trinidad and Tobago has sought to develop the mind, intellect, and character. Today, our education system still seems to be preoccupied with this purpose. The cold war between the USA and Russia after World War II shifted this type of perspective on schooling in 1957 when the USA was forced to analyse why Russia (then the Soviet Union) managed to beat it in the race to explore outer space. US thinking on schooling began to be articulated by many in terms of the extent to which schooling can help to discover and expand society; in terms of how the democratic way of life can be promoted. Later on, other intellectuals introduced their perspective of human capital theory, which argues that schools should help to contribute to the economic development and social modernisation of society. Information in our educational archives reveals that this type of thinking heavily influenced the motives for building our junior and senior secondary schools in the early 1970s. Unfortunately, the traditionalist approach to schooling did not allow this new philosophy of education to blossom. Even to this day and in spite of what is being articulated, it cannot be said that, in action, our philosophy of education and our use of educational psychology in schools have changed.

Futuristic thinking on curriculum now demands that we link plans for schooling to the evolving trends on the global landscape. Indeed, the majority of futuristic thinkers on curriculum are insisting that we consider the implications of the economic, social, and cultural trends which have been emerging since the beginning of the 21st century. These trends include: the changes in occupational profiles in the world of work; the need to address deepening social inequalities and increasing marginalisation and violence; the need to recognise the diversity of individuals and communities as a valuable resource; the need to educate individuals so that they are able to actively participate as citizens in the life of a democratic society; the increasing juxtaposition of the advantages and disadvantages that emerge from the impact of technological progress on the environment and the quality of life.

Curriculum specialists are also beginning to reconsider their views. Many are now willing to accept that the traditional approach to curriculum developed at state level and transmitted to schools for implementation seems no longer to be functionally valid. They

are, as a result, calling for curricula that are produced by schools and the teachers in them. The main rationale in support of such a recommendation seems to be that each school should be allowed to modify the national core curriculum to suit its peculiar needs.

From the Greeks to modern society, to what extent has curriculum served mankind? “Very little” can be the only honest answer to the rational mind. Assumptions in this regard are that since curriculum should help us generate nationalism; civic pride; economic, political, and social progress; and survival, the following questions should be critical: Where are the great civilisations of ancient Greece and Rome today? How has education eradicated poverty and oppression? What is education doing for the Palestinian problem? Why does the USA continue to be a sick society, although so much has been written there on education in general and curriculum in particular? How are the changes in education helping us as a society? How have we been able to develop our young people psychologically and socially? Is the state of politics and multiculturalism in our society the result of how we have developed and organised curriculum since independence?

Researchers have been saying for some time now that the time has come for new thinking on curriculum throughout the world. They cite Japan as a case in point. At one time, according to them, Japanese children studied hard, driven by the need for social mobility. Now that the economic bubble has burst, surveys are revealing that Japanese youth are increasingly becoming indifferent to learning and intellectual and social affairs. A cloud of hopelessness seems to have descended on youth in Japan. Is Trinidad and Tobago headed this way?

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