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A REVIEW OF CRITERIA FOR CONTENT SELECTION IN PRIMARY EDUCATION CURRICULUM. (IN IRAN)

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ABSTRACT: Content as an element of the curriculum plays a very important role in achieving the goals of education in society and is viewed as a key element in all approaches and perspectives. In view of the importance of content in curriculum decision-making, different criteria and measures have been offered by experts for its selection and development. This article was aimed at reviewing and analyzing these criteria and measures along with providing a set of practical criteria to select curriculum content in primary education. In this paper, after analyzing the content of books and articles available, criteria for content selection based on scientific principles of curriculum development was presented under three categories as consolidated content criteria.In philosophical criteria, appropriateness of content with the values and goals, scientific disciplines, and valid knowledge, in psychological criteria,overall growth including physical growth,etc., attention to specificlearning problems, interests and talents, and the needs of learners, in social and cultural criteria, cultural heritage, issues and needs of the local and national community, ethnic and cultural characteristics and appropriateness withglobal issues and communications,and in economic criteria, fitness ofcontent with the facilities available in the school and the region, appropriateness of content with the budget and operating costs have been recognized andpresented as criteria for the appropriateness of content selection.

Keywords: Content, Content Selection,CurriculumPrinciples

INTRODUCTION

The problem and the aim of this paper are to pay attention to the importance of content and the criteria for its selection in curriculum planning, particularly in elementary course, and providing integrative criteria based on the qualities of learners and the structure of society. Therefore, by integrating the present criteria and paying attention to the scientific principles of curriculum planning, particularly economic principles, to which there has been no attention paid in the books or essays, we can present some criteria. The main question of this paper is that whether we can present some criteria according to the present criteria and the scientific principles of curriculum planning which are undoubtedly effective in choosing and developing the content. Therefore, to present a number of integrative criteria in choosing the content, first, a list of present books concerning the subject were extracted and then, according to the present criteria in the books, lack of attention to this subject made us analyze the introduced criteria in many books and essays so that we could introduce a number of comprehensive criteria to develop the content of curriculums.

To reach the goal of this study and to present it to a number of criteria for choosing the content, we chose the following three books as samples according to the fact that to choose these three sources, there was much emphasis on the criteria in selection. These books include *Principles and Concepts of Curriculum* by FathiVajargah, *Curriculum Development: Practice Guide* by Hasan Maleki and *Procedures and Revisions in Curriculum Development* by the experts in the center for international scientific studies and collaboration of Ministry of Education. This study was performed in a review form and a comparative way and finally, considering the different views and contemplating the scientific principles of this field of study, some criteria were presented according to philosophical, social, psychological and economic principles.

THE CONCEPT OF CURRICULUM

In this section, to enlighten the place and the importance of curriculum as well as its elements, particularly the element of content, some views and definitions are explained.

Eisner (1994), a leading curriculum theorist, believes that the origin of the word "curriculum" lies in the Latin word "currerer" which means race or running course. He also believes that the elements of curriculum include aim, content, various opportunities of learning, organizing the content, the style of presentation, answering and evaluation.

The origin of the word "curriculum" is from the Latin root of "Race course" and has its roots in a course of action or the distance which needs to be travelled to reach the intended goal. According to Zeiss, the elements of curriculum include aim, content, learning activities and evaluation methods. (FathiVajargah, 2009, p. 14: Zeiss)

Using a simile between a race course and the curriculum in both of the above-mentioned views explains the two qualities attributed to curriculum. (Mehrmohammadi, 2011, p.11) First, like race courses which have definite starting and ending points, curriculums require beginnings, endings and definite and predetermined routes. The second discernible quality of the word "curriculum", based on its root, is that as there are obstacles in the way of course runners which make it difficult for them to proceed, the curriculums gradually get more difficult too. This issue is clearly evident in students' textbooks that the selection of content and the way it's organized can cause its difficulty.

The word "curriculum" which most of translators and experts have equalized with "curriculum development", was common in the past, but recently, it's translated as just "curriculum" since "curriculum development" is just one aspect of curriculum as a field of study and the only controller of planning process is "curriculum development" itself. (Mehrmohammadi, 2011, p. 11)

There are so many different definitions of curriculum according to different views and patterns of curriculum as a field of study. But what is important is that the definition must be comprehensive and logical. According to the present definitions of curriculum which are many in number, the most exact and comprehensive definition is that of Mr. Maleki's (2008) which is an average definition of the others: curriculum refers to formal and informal contents, content process and overt and covert instructions through which the learner gains the required knowledge, acquires the skills and changes his values and tendencies under the expert guidance of school.

According to Klein (1991), the elements of curriculum include aims, content, teaching strategies, learning, materials and resources of learning activities, methods of evaluation, the grouping of learners and time and place. (FathiVajargah, 2009, p. 129) Evaluation of other scholar's views (Ash, 1991), (Beauchamp, 1982), (Stark and Lattuca, 1997) concerning the elements of curriculum show that most of the views focus on its content and place among the elements of curriculum and regard them as the main and indispensable elements.

The reason for profusion of definitions of curriculum in field of education is different interpretations of the word "curriculum" itself and different views in field of curriculum.

CONTENT

After prioritizing learners' needs and choosing the goals, the content of curriculum is another element which needs to be chosen, designed and developed. The first step to achieve the goals is the selection of suitable educational content. (Maleki, 2008, p. 47) Therefore, in order to choose the suitable content and present the appropriate criteria for its development, we need to know the content. There are so many different definitions of content which some of them are as follows:

The content of curriculum refers to particular facts, opinions, principles and issues which are included in a particular subject matter. (Connelly & Lantz, 1991)

The content of a subject matter includes organized knowledge, terms, information, facts, rules, principles, methods, concepts, decisions, phenomena and the issues related to the same subject matter. (Ghoorchian, 1995)

To select the content, its subject matter and goals need to be determined so that we can choose the suitable content based on the goals and related subject. For instance, if our subject is empirical science education and the aim of empirical science education is to familiarize the students with different types of rocks, the content of curriculum can be chosen in written or oral form (FathiVajargah, 2009, p. 172) or in practical form, that is to say, the course concepts are explained on an excursion so it is called an observational or practical content by providing learning opportunities.

According to the fact that the content is an effective element in the process of curriculum development and its significance due to the qualities of learners in elementary course, particular criteria need to be considered in the selection of curriculum content. These criteria are different due to difference in perspectives and this paper aims

to examine some of these samples and finally, some criteria for the selection of curriculum content in elementary course will be presented.

Discussing the criteria for the selection of content, most of the researchers in this field of study have emphasized on the importance of "Proportion" criteria. (Fathi, 2004, p. 122) These criteria, which have been included in *The Principles of Curriculum Development* by FathiVajargah (pp 123-127), are as follows:

1.   The proportion between the content and the social factors and values
1.1   The proportion between the content and culture, ideals and social expectations
1.2   The proportion between the content and scientific and technological advances
1.3   The proportion between the content and issues and needs of national and practical society
1.4   The proportion between the content and global issues and relations
2.   The proportion between the content and the learners' qualities and needs
2.1   The proportion between the content and the students' abilities and learning   talents
2.2   The proportion between the content and the students' needs and
2.3   The proportion between the content and the students' real lives
2.4   The content needs to provide the context for the experiences and the future learning of students
3.   The proportion between the content and the lawfulness of curriculum
3.1   Content balance
3.2   Content coherence

In his book, *Curriculum Development: Practice Guide* (2008, pp 116-118), Mr. Hassan Maleki introduces the following criteria for the selection of content:

1.   Importance (the importance of content for solving the problems of life, enhancing the learners' subject knowledge, etc.)
2.   Validity (accuracy and validity of concepts, principles and generalizations)
3.   Interest (the learners should take an interest in their learning)
4.   Usefulness (useful function of content)
5.   Learning ability (the content should be intelligible for the learners and it needs to be within the limits of their own experiences)
6.   Flexibility (selection according to time, resources, staff, political climate, etc.)
7.   Attention to knowledge structure
8.   Full attention to protection and promulgation of cultural heritage and value system
9.   Improving the scientific level of students for constant and self-directed education
10.   Contact with life, everyday experience and current issues
11.   Providing good opportunities for activities and multiple learning skills

"*Procedures and Revisions in Curriculum Development*" (2001, p. 121) written by the experts in the center for international scientific studies and collaboration of Ministry of Education, presents the following items for the selection of content:

1.   For the selection of content, we need to scrutinize the structure of curriculum. Therefore to do so:
-       A set of basic concepts to describe the issues and phenomena should be determined within the limits of a subject matter.
-       A method, in which the stored knowledge in that subject matter is organized, should be determined.
-       A set of methods and basic rules which provide the required evidence in a subject matter, that is to say, the particular method of scientific researches should be determined. Since every field of study is seeking for a particular knowledge, it is clearly evident that a particular method is used to find out the accuracy of its findings.
2.   We need to provide an accurate list of key concepts and basic skills in that particular subject matter and then they should be divided into groups.
3.   The list of content culture, key concepts and basic skills should be selected according to the following principles:
-       It should pay attention to protection and promulgation of cultural heritage and value system.
-       An example of the latest fundamental, scientific and artistic information of that particular subject matter should be reflected in the list.
-       It should be a basis for constant and self-directed education.
-       It should be directly in contact with life, everyday experiences and current issues.

-        It should be regarded as a good opportunity for multiple educational activities and skills.
-        It should provide the context for international relationships.

INTEGRATIVE CRITERIA FOR CONTENT SELECTION

According to the importance of curriculum principles in curriculum development and selection of its elements and considering the qualities of elementary students, the criteria for the selection of curriculum content were based on scientific principles. Using various classifications which were developed from the criteria for content selection, the following criteria presented in the forms of integrative criteria for the use of curriculum designers are recommended. It is worth mentioning that this classification is presented as follows based on scientific principles of curriculum, i.e. philosophical, sociocultural, psychological, economic and political principles:
The proportion between the content and economic principles
It seems that in countries suffering from economic problems, addressing the issues concerning economic principles in designing the curriculum, particularly costly contents such as providing teaching and learning opportunities, experiment and workshop, research and excursion, performing costly scientific and practical works and attention to economic principles of curriculum, is necessary. (Parvand, 2008, p. 88) It's because sometimes so many interesting contents in different forms are produced for curriculums. But due to financial problems or since the schools cannot afford to execute the content, the execution of the plan confronts a lot of problems. In this issue, addressing the following items can be regarded as the appropriate criteria of economic principles. Since in the world today, the youth education is a sort of national investment and each country which is endeavoring more in this way shall enjoy more economic and social advancements in the future. (Emadzadeh, 2006, p. 33)
Education enhances the people's production and service capacity. Education has got economic benefits and investment in it will make people, their families and society benefit from its positive values. (ibid, p. 107) Therefore, according to the economic importance of education and the central role of the content in order to realize the goals of education as well as the importance of financial issues, expenditure and facilities In terms of quantity and quality in implementation and achievement of curriculum goals, the inclusion of economic principles in development and selection of content is necessary. The criteria for the proportion between the content and the scientific principles of curriculum are as follows:

The proportion between the content and economic principles:

-        The proportion between the content and facilities like workshop, laboratory, etc. in the area and school
-        The proportion between the content and allocated budget to the area or school
-        The proportion between the content and administrative costs

The proportion between the content and philosophical principle of curriculum:

-        Attention to ideological values in selection of content
-        The proportion between the content and the goals of curriculum
-        The proportion between the content and valid scientific fields of study

The proportion between the content and social and cultural principles:

-        Attention to culture and cultural heritage in selection of content
-        Attention to problems and needs of national and local society
-        The proportion between the content and global issues and relations

The proportion between the content and psychological principles:

-        Attention to physical, mental and emotional growth in selection of content
-        Attention to learners' specific learning problems and difficulties
-        Attention to interests and talents
-        Attention to the learners' needs

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