

Culture and Curriculum: An Historic Overview.

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この論文はカリキュラムと文化がどのように結びついているかを全般的に説明したものである。先ず何故カリキュラムの歴史を勉強することが重要であるかを説き次に日本史とアメリカ史の主要な変化を概観しながらそれに対応するカリキュラム政策の変化に言及する。大事なことは国家が採り上げるカリキュラム政策の形成に如何にその時代の出来事と文化が相俟って影響しているかを理解することである。

Abstract

This paper offers a general explanation of how culture and curriculum are linked. The author begins with an explanation of why it is important to study curriculum history. Then, by looking at an overview of major changes in Japanese and American history, corresponding changes in curriculum policies are noted. The main point is to understand how current events and culture combine to shape the curriculum adopted by national governments.

Introduction

Culture and curriculum are related in many ways. Each of them evolves and changes over time. It is obvious that educators must know about curriculum in order to know aspects of what and how to teach. However, an understanding of the curriculum is necessary for teachers not only to hold a firm grasp on the subject matter, but also to understand the reasoning behind its creation and allow them to contribute to the evolutionary process of curriculum.

In this paper, the author will describe why the study of curriculum history is important to educators, and in doing so, give a brief overview of the curriculum history of Japan. This will be followed by a discussion of the relationship between culture and curriculum, as linked to the ideological components the national curriculum. Finally, there will be an explanation of some possible directions curriculum will take in the future in both Japan and the US.

The importance of studying curriculum history to educators

The philosopher George Santayana (1981) is often quoted on something he originally published in 1905: He said, “Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it.” In other words, we must learn from the past and improve on the present. We should make every attempt not to make the same mistakes twice.

American Intercontinental University’s syllabus of curriculum studies (n.d.) says this clearly and in no uncertain terms: “Learning the history of curriculum is important so we can build on the successes and learn from the mistakes.”

For educators to come to terms with this, a definition of curriculum must first be established. However, one who does research on this topic will soon discover that finding a simple and concise definition of curriculum is no simple task. According to one theorist, more than 120 definitions of curriculum appear in professional literature of this age, and part of this, at least, reflects the evolutionary aspects of curriculum (Portelli, 1987).

Marsh and Willis (2003) offer some help here when they point out that if we want to find a sound and practical definition of curriculum, 3 points should be considered:

- * The subject matter being taught
- * The nature of society
- * The nature of the individual

Therefore, in order to complete an accurate and in-depth study of the history of curriculum, educators must look at these aspects and analyze how they have changed and evolved over the course of time.

The example of Japan’s modern curriculum history

Japan’s history is very long, but can be divided into major eras. Between 1868 and 1912, the government was headed by the Emperor Meiji. So, this period of Japanese history is called The Meiji Era. This period of history in Japan was marked by sweeping reforms, in almost all aspects of society, designed to bring the country out of a turbulent, feudalist period and into a more modern and civilized time. The term “Meiji Restoration” was coined to mark the drastic reforms that the government took to give

birth to a new Japan.

The importance to curriculum history can be seen in the creation of Japan's first Ministry of Education and Culture. This was the first time that Japan had seen the formation of such a bureaucracy. This body was assigned the task of the development of the national curriculum, and the office that was originally formed in that era still exists today. From the beginning of its history, the Ministry of Education and Culture based its curriculum on western cultures (National Textbook Research Center, 1984). They developed a 12 year system with 6 years allotted to elementary school, 3 years to junior high school and 3 years to senior high school.

At this time in history, especially, Japan came to realize that the west was more advanced technologically than itself. For this reason, much of its curriculum was based on information that was being studied in the west. In order to retrieve information from the west, curriculum designers of the day decided that English would be the important language to be taught in Japan's schools. However, the country was still apprehensive to let foreigners within its boundaries. So, the idea was to build a curriculum that involved the study of English simply as a means to read foreign books. It should be noted that this period was marked by a fierce policy that there would be no two-way exchange of information, and educators in Japan at the time would only focus on having students study by means of acquired foreign literature (Mizuhara, 1997).

One of the outstanding next major changes in curriculum policy came about at the onset of World War II. The driving force for Japan during this war was a focus on the Japanese Imperial system. As is often the case in war, these were very nationalistic times. Japan focused inward, and on things that were "Japanese." This led to a renunciation of outside influences on culture. The west and any association thereto were frowned upon by many aspects of the society. This can be seen in the curriculum changes of the day. One of the most notable changes was that the majority of Japanese schools eliminated all English instruction. Moreover English was often not allowed to be spoken in many parts of society. At the same time, a new focus was placed on "moral education." This new school subject for the era was to focus on a study of the imperial

system and its history (Mizuhara, 1997). This reflected the wartime reverence placed on the Japanese emperor.

The next major change happened at the end of World War II when US occupation forces took over the government for 5 years. Again, this was an era of drastic reform for Japan, with the US occupation forces, under the leadership of Gen. Douglas MacArthur, going as far as writing Japan's constitution (which is still in effect today). They also reorganized the curriculum to follow along the same basic lines that the US curriculum followed. Still, the importance of English was noted and students were required to study English from junior and senior high school (Mizuhara, 1992).

It is interesting to note that the next major changes in the Japanese curriculum do not start to take place until around 1989. At this point, Japan became a dominant power economically and it was determined that curriculum did not allow for them to stand face-to-face with many of their western counterparts. At this point, Japan began relations with many foreign countries and a stronger emphasis was placed on not only English, but also a variety of other foreign languages. While English would remain predominant, other languages were finally perceived as being worthwhile (Mizuhara, 1997).

The relationship between culture and curriculum linked to ideology

Marsh and Willis (2003) point out that "curriculum sufficiently reflects a broad range of cultural, political and economic characteristics." All of these are related to culture and all of these aspects vary to some degree across national borders. We see from Japan's example that during times of national strife, such as World War II, aspects of curriculum fall along the lines that governments dictate they should.

The American example of curriculum changes and their link to ideology can be seen in the US reaction to the cold war with the Soviet Union, and exemplified by what came to be known as the "space race." In October 1957, the Soviet Union launched the first artificial satellite and seemed to prove their technological superiority over their American counterparts. Marsh and Willis (2003) point out how American curriculum designers had previously been convinced that a single curriculum was desirable,

but knew that it was neither feasible nor possible due to the fact that the national government had no legal powers to make a national curriculum.

The response to the Sputnik satellite, however, was to try and make fundamental curriculum changes that would be standardized across the US, in order to bring that country into a superior position over its political rivals, the Soviets. As a means to this goal, the national government had no administrative power. However, they used a tactic that has been repeated many times since: They use control over allocation of federal funds to states, in order to convince them to change their curriculum to follow national (and often ideological) lines of thinking.

Following the tenets outlined by Jerome Bruner, a major theorist in the field of education and curriculum studies in the late 50's and early 60's, the US persuaded states to take on "curriculum packages" that focused on Bruner's idea of "discovery learning." This philosophy was marked by having students first learn the structure of an academic discipline and then leading them to discover the major principles of that structure by themselves (Bruner, 1960). This became the guiding force in curriculum development of that era. It is also an example of how the US government has used ideology and governmental policy at the national level in order to effect broad changes in curriculum.

The future for curriculum expansion in the US and Japan

A Nation at Risk clearly outlines the direction that the US government is now headed toward in order to reform the curriculum. An updated list of topics for reform include the following points :

- * Graduation requirements should be strengthened so that all students establish a foundation in five new basics: English, mathematics, science, social studies, and computer science.
- * Schools and colleges should adopt higher and measurable standards for academic performance.
- * The amount of time students spend engaged in learning should be significantly increased.

* The teaching profession should be strengthened through higher standards for preparation and professional growth (North Central Regional Education Library, 2004).

Japan, on the other hand, has a unique problem that it is trying to solve. The country has a long tradition of rigorous university entrance exams that keep its curriculum pointed in one direction: That goal has seemed to be only indirectly having students acquire knowledge. Rather, schools have had to prepare students to pass the university entrance exams.

Since 1989, when the most recent reforms started, schools had actually avoided sticking to any real curriculum changes because even though the government ordered K-12 schools to change, there had been no reform of the university entrance exam system (Mizuhara, 1997). However, major changes in this direction are on their way. In 2000, most of major universities willingly made a new system where students can choose the subjects they want to test for to enter the university. This is a start, but by all means, the changes in the university entrance exam system will continue, and there will certainly be a trickle down effect to all levels of education.

Conclusion

It cannot be denied that educators need to study curriculum in order to become contemporary in the field of pedagogy. Moreover, a good way to study curriculum is to examine another country, such as Japan, and make comparisons. Then, one can easily see the link between curriculum and things like culture and ideology. Finally, an analysis of these and other factors help us look toward the future of curriculum design.

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