

## PSYCHOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

By providing a basis for understanding the teaching/learning process, educational psychology deals with how people learn. By implication, it emphasizes the need to recognize diversity among learners. However, it is also true that people share certain common characteristics. Among these are basic psychological needs which are necessary for individuals to lead a full and happy life. In this section, we shall be talking about the major learning theories and their contribution to curriculum development. Besides, we shall touch upon the basic psychological needs of individuals and reflect on their translation into curriculum.

We shall at this juncture remind ourselves that our main thrust will be on the contributions made by the theories of learning for curriculum development. Let us therefore make it clear that we are not, right now, interested in studying the theories of learning in detail, which has already been done to some extent in earlier courses on distance education.

Learning theories and curriculum

For the sake of convenience we have classified the major theories of learning into the following groups:

- i) Behaviorist theories** which deal with various aspects of stimulus- response and reinforcement scheme;
- ii) Cognitive theories** which view the learner in relationship with the total environment; and
- iii) Phenomenology** which emphasizes the affective domain of learning.

Let us take up each of them in the given order and examine its contribution to curriculum development.

### **i) Behaviorism and curriculum**

The behaviorist school, which represents traditional psychology, is rooted in a corresponding philosophical speculation about the nature of learning. It has particularly dominated psychology in the first half of the twentieth century. After a few decades of being in the wilderness It has recently gained currency once again with the advent of individualized education.

Without going into the details we shall touch upon the main, characteristic features of the behaviorist school of thought.

Essentially, learning is considered a habit-formation and teaching is regarded as arranging learning experiences in such a way as to promote desirable behavior. Further, behaviorism maintains that what is learnt in one situation can be transferred to other situations as well.

Broadly, behaviorists advocate that: behavior is likely to be influenced by the conditions under which learning takes place; attitudes to and abilities of learning can change or improve over time

through the application of proper stimuli; learning experiences can be designed and controlled to create desired learning; selective reinforcement is essential; and rote learning and memorization of knowledge are unnecessary.

Having thus touched upon the crux of behaviorism, we shall now turn our attention to its contribution to curriculum development. It provides the following significant guidelines.

A curriculum, according to behaviorists, should be based on the following concerns:

- i) Remedial measures, acquisition of skills, considerations of basic or advanced learning;
- ii) Well-defined, short-term and long-term objectives;
- iii) Appropriate instructional materials and media to suit the learner's abilities;
- iv) Shaping behavior through prescribed tasks, phase by phase activities, close supervision of activities and positive reinforcement; and The Field of Curriculum
- v) Diagnosing, assessing and reassessing the learners' needs, objectives, activities, tasks and instruction with a view to improving the curriculum.

We can observe manifestations of these guidelines in the theories, principles or trends related to: individualized education (and to some extent, open system of education); instructional design and systems; teacher-training techniques such as simulation teaching, microteaching, competency-performance based teacher education; educational technology including programmed instruction (which provides, with modifications, a base for self- instructional materials in use in the distance mode of teaching/learning).

## **ii) Cognitivism and curriculum**

Today most psychologists explain the phenomenon of human growth and development in cognitive, social, psychological and physical terms. They also note that learning is primarily cognitive in nature. Growth and development refer to changes in the structure and function of human characteristics. Most cognitivists believe that growth and development occur in progressive stages. One example is Piaget's (Piaget, 1950) description of cognitive development in terms of stages from birth to maturity. Most curriculum specialists tend to show greater adherence to cognitivism than to behaviorism. This might be because the cognitive approach leads to logical methods for organizing and interpreting learning; and the cognitive approach is rooted in the tradition of teaching based on subject matter.

Even contemporary behaviorists incorporate cognitive processes in their theories of learning. Because learning in schools/colleges emphasizes the cognitive domain, it follows that most educationists feel that learning is synonymous with cognitive development. As a corollary, a problem solving approach in teaching-learning gains currency.

But, if we take an actual teaching/learning situation into consideration we tend to realize that this learning model is incomplete and that something is lost in its processes of actual transfer in

the classroom. In reality, the teaching/learning process boils down to the teacher talking predominantly and students mostly responding to what is said by the teacher.

### **What should be of concern to the curriculum specialists?**

They should be aware of the fact that a school/college should be a place where students are not afraid of asking questions, making mistakes, taking cognitive risks and playing with ideas. Further colleges/schools should be more humane places where students can explore and fulfill their human potentials. Obviously, curriculum has to play a vital role to actually realize this objective.

### **iii) Phenomenology and curriculum**

Phenomenologists point out that the way we look at ourselves is crucial for understanding our behavior and that we respond to an organization or pattern of stimuli and not to an isolated stimulus.

It emphasizes that learning must be explained in terms of the "wholeness" of the problem. Here you can draw a parallel with cognitivism. But what differentiates phenomenology from cognitivism is that the former stresses the affective and the latter the cognitive aspects of learning.

Because each individual has specific needs and interests related to his or her self-fulfillment and self-realizations, there can't be a generally prescribed humanistic curriculum. Humanistic learning may enhance the mental health of the learners, harmonize personal feelings among students and teachers, and improve various aspects of human awareness among students, teachers, and curriculum specialists, yet its processes rely mainly on personal experiences and subjective interpretations that leave them open to criticism. Therefore, there is a great need to examine and understand what is relevant in humanistic curricula.

Please note that most textbook writers tend to be cognition-oriented. However, one should propose that behaviorist components are needed for planning and developing a sound curriculum. Further, humanistic components of teaching and learning must also be incorporated into the curriculum. Let us say, therefore, that each theory of learning has something significant to contribute towards explaining various aspects of human behavior and learning.

#### **Basic human needs and curriculum**

Physical well-being and health are generally recognized and frequently dealt with through various programs such as those on fitness, nutrition and health problems. Mental health needs such as those pertaining to acceptance, belonging, security and status have been widely studied but little emphasized in the area of curriculum.

In this sub-section, we shall touch upon just two points which concern the topic under consideration:

- i) Self-actualization and
- ii) Developmental tasks.

Here, we shall discuss these and draw inferences as to how each one contributes to the enrichment of a curriculum.

### **i. Self-actualization**

The notion of self-actualization characterizes individuals' need for self- fulfillment in life by actualizing/achieving their own potential. A curriculum should therefore provide learning activities that allow students to identify themselves with those things they can do well. It should also assist them to succeed in other activities that are difficult for them. Learners are thus helped to find personal meaning in the learning experience.

Those responsible for curriculum development must pay attention to the concept of self-actualization. We all recognize the importance of school/college and community based goals for learners. Self- actualization on the other hand includes satisfying the desire to know and understand in relation to personal needs and interest. Moreover it has been noticed that when personal purposes are ignored, learners seem to be less successful in meeting the set goals. If curricular plans reflect a balance between institutional and personal needs, the impact on both may be substantially enhanced.

### **ii) Developmental tasks**

We can define a developmental task as a task which arises in relation to a certain period in the life of an individual, success in which leads to his/her happiness and to success in later tasks, while failure in it leads to unhappiness in the individual and difficulties in subsequent tasks. This fact is regarded as one of the most specific considerations in organizing tasks. The needs of individuals are governed by the stage of development and age they have reached, and also grow out of their need to respond to societal expectations. The implication is that educators/curriculum planners should understand behaviors manifested by a learner indicating her/his readiness and need to deal with a particular developmental task.

As we facilitate the learners' success in these need tasks, their overall success can be ensured.

Further, in developing a curriculum, the development of an environment in which learners feel genuinely secure should be ensured. When a curriculum develops such an environment, learning takes place smoothly because the needs of students and what has been provided by the curriculum are complementary to each other.

In our discussion of the psychological foundations, we dealt with the contribution made by learning theories towards curriculum and also tried to see how much more effective a curriculum may be framed if we consider the nature of basic human need while forming it.

## **TRENDS IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT**

To understand contemporary curricular problems and proposals, it is ideal that we acquaint ourselves with the history of curricular thought and practice that stretches back to antiquity. However, let us start this section with the assumption that we rarely find histories that focus exclusively on curriculum and, therefore, turn to an overview of general histories of education in an effort to get a few glimpses of the history of curriculum.

The curriculum field may be viewed as a formal area of academic inquiry, but as a basic human interest, its concerns are perennial. Parents and other members of society throughout history have wondered how best to help their young ones grow and mature. Their response to this problem constitutes an unwritten history of informal curricular thought and action. As societies became more formal and as institutions developed within them to meet specialized needs, schools/colleges evolved to help students grow more efficiently, to introduce them to the ways of their society and to help them acquire an understanding of their cultural heritage.

If we recall the earlier sections, curriculum has always been and continues to be influenced by educational philosophers, besides societal needs. In the ancient times, though a formal curriculum (of the shape it has obtained today) did not exist; young people were oriented towards meeting cultural and social demands. Depending on the influence of educational philosophies, however, curriculum-content for such orientations varied from one period to the other. Tracing the historical antecedents of curriculum may give us a framework of its gradual growth. However, for our immediate purposes we shall restrict ourselves to an overview of the twentieth century curriculum and a speculation of the possible future trends in curriculum development.

### **Twentieth century curriculum**

Early 20th century curriculum affirmed the shift in emphasis from sectarian education to liberal education. Traditionally, curriculum was confined to religion-related orientations and classics. Gradually, more and more subjects were added to the curriculum. As the focus was on mental discipline, social needs, student interest or capabilities were given little emphasis. Further, during this period, compartmentalization and not interdisciplinary subject matter was considered the norm. There was an unwillingness to recognize the values of arts, music, physical and vocational education. This was based on the theory that these subjects had little mental or disciplinary value. If we pause for a moment here and think, we shall realize that even though we offer vocational, industrial and/or technical programmes now, there is a tendency to consider traditional academic programmes superior to them.

Gradually, demands were made for curricular changes. Industrial development led a growing number of educators to question changes, as well as the authenticity of the traditional curriculum and its emphasis on mental discipline. This shift was also influenced by the scientific movement in child psychology (which focused on the whole child and learning theories in the 1900's).

The argument that classics had no greater disciplinary or mental value than other subjects eventually appeared and meant that mental discipline (which emphasized drill and memorization) was no longer considered conducive for the overall growth and development of children. In essence, societal changes and the emerging demands there from; the stress on psychology and science; and the concern for social and educational reform made evident the need for a new curriculum. Thus, the aims of education went hand in hand with the particular type of society involved: conversely, the society that evolved influenced the aims of education.

Thus, the early twentieth century was a period of educational reform characterized by the following:

- i) Idea of mental discipline was replaced by utilitarian modes of thought and scientific inquiry.
- ii) Curriculum tended not to be compartmentalized but to be interdisciplinary.
- iii) Curriculum tended not to be static but dynamic-changing with the changes in society.
- iv) Needs and interest of students came to be considered of primary importance. And now curriculum is viewed as a science with principles and methodology not just as content or subject matter.

### **Possible future trends**

Keeping in view the prevalent political, economic and academic climate, it is not difficult for us to visualize (of course, only to a certain extent) future trends and the influence they may have on education, particularly on curriculum development. (However, we should also confess here that such a speculation is fraught with risks that normally go with it.)

Although in this Unit we have been underlining the fact that social changes will have a vital role in determining a curriculum. If the present day growth of information is any indication the information flow will increase rapidly in the future. Clearly, the increasing flow of information negates the traditional notion of content-mastery. Students, therefore, will need to acquire critical thinking, and problem solving abilities rather than static and/or absolute knowledge and skills of factual recall.

Further, in the 21st centuries, the need for change will accelerate. For example, it took us more than one century to shift from an agricultural society to an industrial one. But it took hardly two decades to shift from an industrial to an information society.

### **What are the implications of these observations?**

Job patterns will constantly change dramatically and so workers will be moving frequently from one job to another. Accordingly, to keep them abreast with each task/job that they take up, we will need to give them periodic training. The speed of change we have been referring to suggests not only that fields will be dynamic, but also that new ones will emerge. By implication, education and orientation will, of necessity a lifelong process. In essence, unlike the past, we cannot

consider our education complete just because we have attended schools/colleges or graduated from an educational institution. Nor will we be able to enter a job or profession and expect to remain in it for life without regular training.

Traditionally, organizations have followed hierarchical structuring with power and communication flowing in a pattern from top to bottom. Increasingly, however, centralized institutions are being replaced by smaller decentralized units. Much of the impetus for this change has come from the inability of hierarchical structures to effectively solve problems. Rigid and efficient organizations are no longer as efficacious as fluid and flexible ones in which experimentations and autonomy call thrives. Applied to education, this kind of decentralization gives recognition to an individual's need for self-determination and ownership in the decision making processes.

### **What are the implications of the above discussion?**

In the main, there will be radical changes in the socio-academic ecology of school/college environment. Barring a few, if any, schools/colleges have so far been functioning as bastions of autocracy with little importance given to students' needs and teachers' competence. Because of the changing societal needs and greater awareness of the need for purpose-oriented education, the needs of every individual in the school/college will have to be recognized. In other words, there will be a change in the treatment of students as a homogeneous entity. Rapid growth in information will result in the emergence, every now and then, of varied curricula for purposes of reeducation and retaining. The number of consumers will obviously be more than the programmes available. In such a situation, the mode of the teaching/learning process cannot be the one which is prevalent now, i.e., face-to-face. Obviously, a viable alternative mode is distance education.