UNIT 5   CURRICULUM: MEANING AND ITS DIMENSIONS

Structure

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Education of individual takes place both in natural and contrived environments. Although, the learner is the key player in any kind of learning environment, the role of both the learner and the teacher assumes greater significance in a contrived environment.

Both the learner and the teacher act equally in the educational process to mediate their interaction with the help of certain pre-decided learning experiences. These learning experiences are usually the third dimension of the teaching-learning process and in pedagogic terms, is called curriculum.

In this unit, we-will understand about this third dimension, its purpose and how it affect students and teachers. Since, this is the first unit of this Block, the concepts discussed herein will set the stage for discussion for the other Units. We will try to understand curriculum through various definitions and also through its approaches, which reflect a person's viewpoint encompassing the foundations of curriculum.

The unit will also emphasize the role of various representative groups in ensuring a socially relevant curriculum. The significance of in-built monitoring and feedback mechanism has been also emphasized.

Hence, in this unit you will gain an understanding of the different interpretations of curriculum, its genesis and growth, and the underlying processes and criteria that facilitate curriculum changes. You will understand the role of curriculum in making education more purposeful and geared to meet ever-changing societal needs, and also to achieve the objectives of teaching - learning.

5.2 OBJECTIVES

After going through this unit, you should be able to:

- define 'curriculum';

- explain the different interpretations of the concept of curriculum;

- defferentiate between the various approaches to curriculum;

- explain the curricular processes and criteria; and

- illustrate the role of curriculum in effective teaching and learning.

5.3 MEANING OF CURRICULUM

According to Smith (1996, 2001) 'the idea of curriculum is hardly new-but the way we understand and thorize it has altered over the years - and there remains dispute as to meaning'.

The Latin meaning of the term 'curriculum' is a 'racecourse' used by chariots. Hence, it can be understood as any path or course of study which to be undertaken by an educational institution, to be covered in a specified timeframe. The course of events can take place both inside and outside the school. Hence, while defining curriculum as 'course of events', one need to elaborate, 'which course of events'. It encompasses "the total experience provided to the learners in and out of school'.

There are many definitions abound in the literature, which will help in broading our understanding.

Marsh and Stafford (1988) highlight three dimensions of curriculum

- curriculum includes not only list of contents but also the aims and objectives, learning experiences and evaluation;

- curriculum comprises of planning learning; and

- curriculum and instruction can not be separated.

Dewey (1902) defined Curriculum as a continuous reconstruction, moving from the child's present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies . . . the various studies . . . are themselves experience— they are that of the race. (pp. 11–12)

Carter V. Good (1959) describes curriculum as "a systematic group of courses or sequences of subjects required for graduation or certification in a major field of study.

According to Wiles and Bondi (1988), "a curriculum can be called as a plan for learning, which contain assumptions about the purpose of education in our society, it also has a definite structure through which the vision of the planners can be translated into learning experiences for the learner. Hence, any curriculum, comprises of two major dimensions: a vision and a structure. Tanner and Tanner (1980) define, "Curriculum is the reconstruction of knowledge and experience systematically developed under the auspices of the school (or university), to enable the learner to increase his other control of knowledge and experience". Doll (1986), defined the curriculum of a school as the formal and informal content and process by which learners gain knowledge and understanding, develop skills, and alter attitudes, appreciations, and values under the auspices of that school.

According to Brown D.F (2006) curriculum include all student school experiences relating to the improvement of skills and strategies in thinking critically and creatively, solving problems, working collaboratively with others, communicating well, writing more effectively, reading more analytically, and conducting research to solve problems.

Thus, a curriculum is neither a document nor a sequence of experiences. It is a plan of facilitating learning for the learner. This plan starts from where the learner is, enumerates all the aspects and dimensions of learning that are considered necessary, gives reasons why such learning is considered necessary, and what educational aims it would serve. The plan also defines stage-specific objectives, what content to teach, and how to organise it. It also recommends general principles of teaching methods and evaluation and criteria for good teaching–learning material. Such a plan, of course, is almost always set in a document or a set of documents and implemented through organised experiences for children under teachers' guidance; but perhaps conceptually the plan should remain in focus, while the document remains a contingent reality and the course of experiences as implementation of a plan. (National position paper, NCERT, 2006 Curriculum).

Beane et. al.(1986) have grouped- most of these definitions under the following four categories, which clear indicate the nature of curriculum , which are as follows:

* Curriculum as a product

* Curriculum as a programme

* Curriculum as intended learning outcomes

* Curriculum as planned learner experiences

Let us understand them.

a)   Curriculum as a Product

The definition of curriculum as a product is derived from the idea that the school or university prepares a document which would consist of a list of courses and syllabi of those courses. These documents are the result of curriculum planning and development.

b)   Curriculum as a Programme

Here, a curriculum regend as to the courses of study offered by the school. It could also, mean a student's choice of courses within a given program of the school. Such a definition of curriculum is most widely accepted by schools. However, the broader interpretation of this definition relates to the broader purpose of the school i.e. learning and hence here, curriculum is the means of achieving that purpose and it will denote sources of learning other than just the courses the study. It acknowledges the learning that occurs in several school settings like cultural events, sports activities, in the cafeteria, in the bus, in the principal's office, etc. apart from the prescribed course of study that takes place through various activities.

c)   Curriculum as Intended Learning Outcomes (ILOs)

Here, curriculum is defined as 'what is to be learned'. This definition of curriculum clearly demarcates what is to be learned from and how it is to be learned. The question of why something is to be learned is not considered. Curriculum in this context refers to knowledge of content, skills, attitudes and behaviour that learners are supposed to learn in school or college. Learners go through planned leaning experiences by interacting with their peer group and teachers in the school environment, in general. However, proponents of this definition believe that such sources of learning then characterize "instruction". There is considerable debate over the meaning of the terms 'curriculum' and 'instruction'. Some curriculum designers see a distinct difference between what and how of learning. Their definition limits the idea of curriculum to the former. Curriculum as intended learning outcomes prescribes the result of instruction and not the means, i.e. the activities, material even the instructional content. The advantages of this definition are:

i)   Outcome is directly linked to the objectives, and

ii)   The basic plans of learning and its implementation or transaction are kept as distinct entities.

The disadvantage of this definition is that it does not take a comprehensive view of learning. The what and how of learning are treated separately and this leads to fragmented planning.

d)   Curriculum as Planned Learning Experiences

The three definitions of curriculum discussed above have in common the idea that curriculum is something which is planned prior to the teaching - learning situations. The fourth category of definitions differs from the above as it refers to curriculum as experiences of the learners which is an outcome of the planned situations. The proponents of this group firmly believe that what happens is not

always in accordance with what was planned. Hence the above definitions, in their opinion, constitute only the curriculum plans, whereas the actual curriculum is the learning that occurs in the students after going through different experiences.

In their opinion the outcomes of the planned situations of the course contents are more important than the course content itself. In other words, learning experiences must be well planned. A curriculum should include as analysis of the learner's learning experiences. To illustrate this definition, imagine that a teacher conducts a monthly project activity, with the goal of fostering team spirit and cooperation among the members. However, every month the teacher assigns poor grades to the shy and quiet members and high grades to the bold, talkative, and dominating members. As a result the former group would gradually get demotivated and resist any such activity. They will also learn that it is the high grades that matter and will not be able to include the intended qualities of team spirit and cooperation. Hence the course of events, which emerges, is different from what was intended. The advantages of this definition are:

i)   It is learner-centric and focuses more on learning than teaching.

ii)   It imparts a complex and comprehensive meaning to the term 'curriculum'.

5.3.1   Differentiating Between Curriculum Framework, Curriculum, Syllabus and Text Books

Most often, there is confusion in the terms curriculum framework, syllabus and curriculum itself. Let us try to understand the difference among these terms.

Curriculum Framework: It is a plan that interprets educational aims vis-a-vis both individual and society in order, to arrive at an understanding about the kinds of learning experiences to be given to the learner in the schools.

Curriculum: You have already studied various definitions as curriculum. It must be clear to you know that of Curriculum is planned activities which are designed to implement a particular educational aim includes the content to be taught and the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are to be deliberately fostered, together with statements of criteria for selection of content, and choices in methods, materials and evaluation.

Syllabus: Refers to the content of what is to be taught and the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are to be deliberately fostered; together with stage specific objectives.

Textbook: When as a teacher, you start working with children in classrooms; you have some 'content' that you have to teach, in other words, you have a syllabus. That syllabus is very often confined in the textbook. Thus, a textbook becomes an embodiment of syllabus—all that is in it has to be taught, and that is all that is to be taught. It becomes a methodological guide for all aspects of classroom practices —i.e. what has to be read, it also becomes the evaluation system—questions at the end of each chapter have to be answered orally and in writing, reproducing the text from the book itself. The possibility of providing enriched experiences to the children gets a little boost when teacher starts using textbooks as reflective guides.

Check Your Progress

Notes : a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit.

1) Define curriculum in your own words.

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2) What are the advantages of accepting the definition of curriculum as a programme of studies?

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5.4 TYPES OF CURRICULUM

Curriculum can broadly be classified into three main categories. These are:

i) Overt or Explicit Curriculum

ii) Hidden or Implicit Curriculum

iii) Null Curriculum

Let us understand each of these categories.

Overt Curriculum

Overt curriculum is also known as explicit curriculum and intended curriculum. This includes all those curricular and co-curricular, experiences, which are intentionally planned by the school, college or university organization to be provided to the learners. It consists of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values, which are overtly to be provided to the learners. Overt curriculum is designed keeping in mind the goals and objectives of the educational system. Thus, it is confined to those written understandings formally designed by curriculum designers and administrators.

Hidden Curriculum

Hidden Curriculum is unintended or unnoticed curriculum which is often unwritten. You know that curricular inputs are implicitly provided to the learner by the organization through various means. Learners learn a lot from the social environment of the classroom and the school. A teacher during her course of interaction with learners provide instructional inputs, which might not be planned and designed by her earlier. Through various non-verbal behaviour like gestures and postures, eye contact, appreciation of learner behaviour by nodding, the teacher conveys many things. A hidden curriculum also includes the value system of the school and its teachers. Hence, a hidden curriculum is as important as the overt curriculum. Learners learn 'appropriate' ways to act at school is the part of hidden curriculum.

Null Curriculum

It is physically not possible to teach everything in the schools, therefore many topics and subject areas are excluded intentionally. Eisner called them as 'Null Curriculum'; For example, life education, career planning, etc. are not fine part of overt curriculum but are important areas.

5.5 APPROACHES TO CURRICULUM

A clear understanding of any kind of curriculum depends on the approach the curriculum designers have adopted. The approach to curriculum provides the broad perspective, orientation or position a particular curriculum is based on.

Ornstein and Hunkins (1988) have provided the following features of curriculum approach:

- A curriculum approach reflects a holistic position, or a metaorientation, encompassing the foundations of curriculum, domain of curriculum, and the theoretical and practical principles of curriculum.

- It expresses a viewpoint about the development and design of curriculum, the role of the learner, teacher and curriculum specialist in planning curriculum, and the important issues that need to be examined.

Very often this broad perspective is based on different theoretical positions pertaining to how educational discourses in a school or college situation have to be designed, developed and implemented. Our intention here is to explicate some of these theoretical positions which have influenced the concept and the process of curriculum.

Although one can find different approaches to curriculum put forth by different authors, in our discussion, we shall touch upon five approaches presented by Ornstein and Hunkins (1988). These are discussed in the coming sections.

5.5.1 Behavioural - Rational Approach

This approach is based on a logical - scientific perspective, which has emerged out of researches done in behavioural sciences and dominated the thinking domain in the early twentieth century. This approach is also known as logical positivist, conceptual, empiricist, and experimentalist, rational - scientific and technocratic. The protagonists of this approach believe that curriculum making is a sequential and structured activity. They emphasize that any kind of activity has to start with goals and objectives, followed by sequencing of content or learning experiences and then evaluation of learning outcomes (student achievement/ performance) based on objectives, content and transaction of learning experiences.

Behaviourial approach is oriented to behaviourial objectives, which means objectives in the observable terms expected from learners after teaching. This approach is also criticised for the reason that precise specification is observable only at the lower level of learning such as addition, memorization etc. however for the higher order thinking skills (eg. critical analysis, sythethik thinking) it is impracticable.

5.5.2 Systems - Managerial Approach

According to this theory, the school is perceived as a social system. There are various components of a school systems which interact among themselves to achieve the intended objectives formulated by the schools. These components are teacher, student, curriculum specialist and others who interact with them according to certain norms and standards. Thus, this approach focuses on programmes, schedules, space, materials, equipment, personnel and resources. Consideration is given to committee and group processes, communication processes, leadership, methods and strategies, human relations and decision making (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1988). The focus of this approach, unlike behavioural-rational, is not on the objectives, contents and evaluation of learning experiences, but on the management and improvement of the school system based on policies, plans and people. It embodies both managerial and systems perspectives in curriculum design.

While the managerial perspective refers to organization of people and policies, the systems perspective looks at three major components i.e. engineering, stages and structures. Engineering constitutes those processes through which engineers like principals, directors, superintendents and coordinators plan the curriculum. Stages refer to development, design implementation and evaluation. Structure constitutes subjects, courses, units and lessons.

5.5.3 Intellectual - Academic Approach

This approach had its genesis in the intellectual work of John Dewey, Henry Morrison and Boyd Bode and became a popular approach during the 1930s and 1950s. It analyses major positions, trends and concepts of curriculum. It looks at schooling and education from a broader perspective and discusses education from a historical and philosophical angle.

It is usually scholastic and theoretical hence also referred to as 'traditional, encyclopedic, intellectual or knowledge - oriented approach (Ornstein and Hunkins, 1993).

5.5.4 Humanistic - Aesthetic Approach

As opposed to the behavioural - rational approach, this approach emphasizes the uniqueness of each child and the curriculum has to be designed and developed based on the needs, interests, and ability of children. It lays stress on self-actualization and self reflectiveness of the learners. Originating in humanistic theories of learning, this approach emphasize on valuing ego identity, freedom to learn and personal fulfillment. The curriculum focuses on active interaction among learners and teachers, on problem solving and on inquiry. Cooperative and collaborative learning, independent learning, small group, learning are some of the curricular strategies which have emanated from this approach. This approach also propagates for curriculum areas in arts, music, literature, dance, etc. which emphasise the development of human side of the learner more than on the development of his intellectual activities.

5.6.5   Reconceptualist Approach

Although reconceptualists have not contributed anything towards 'approach to curriculum' in terms of providing technical knowledge for developing curriculum, they have certainly provided a newer perspective, which is subjective, political, and ideological in nature. This perspective is rooted in the philosophy and social activitism of deconstructionists like Count, Rugg, and Benjamin. They challenge the traditional, scientific and rational views of curriculum and they lay emphasis on moral and ideological issues of education and economic and political institutions of society. A basic principle of reconceptialism is that the more learners understand themselves, the more they will understand their world. Thus, curriculum development must be connected with historical, economic, political and contemporary social frame of reference.

Check Your Progress

Notes : a)   Write your answers in the space given below.

b)   Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit

3)   What is null curriculum?

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4)   State the main purpose of the humanistic approach to curriculum development.

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5.6 CURRICULUM AND THE ROLE OF TEACHERS

Teachers determine to a large extent the manner in which the curriculum is executed in the classroom. Their role is defined in respect of curriculum transaction and evaluation. It is also believed that teaching-learning would be more effective if the teacher is involved in the process of the curriculum development. Their role could be instrumental in the overall improvement of the curriculum.

Doll (1996) highlights three reasons why teachers could be effective improvers of the curriculum:

i)   Work in close proximate with the learners

ii)   Engaged in individual study and

iii) Interact with other teachers and share their curricular experiences.

These three factors enable them to develop insights and skills and can thus improve the quality of learning experiences, which they provide to the learners. Teachers strive to fulfill educational objectives by fostering understanding and

tolerance among students, awaken curiosity and stimulate independent thinking. The style of teaching also greatly influences the manner of curriculum transaction. Hence teachers must be involved in the process of curriculum planning, development, delivery, evaluation and review (Dewal, 2004). A teacher's style can either promote role learning, or, alternatively, it can awaken a child's curiosity.

Teacher's involvement and familiarization with curriculum development can make the teaching-learning process more relevant and authentic. Once the basis and the instructional role of curriculum are understood, the teacher can think in terms of alternatives. The evaluation mode and techniques shall, as a result, be more in agreement with the aims and objectives of curriculum.

Once the basis, the instrumental role, of curriculum is understood, the teacher can think in terms of alternatives. The evaluation mode and techniques shall as a result be more in agreement with the aims and objectives of the curriculum. A teacher of English or mathematics shall not limit his vision to mere teaching of the subject. He shall try to give the subject its proper place in the broader framework of a particular level of schooling. If the aim of teaching and learning is to construct meaningful patterns out of experience, then the teacher who believes in it shall help his students evolve a more dependable conception of reality. The teacher's is the central role in excellence in education and his involvement in and clarity about curriculum construction shall stimulate his ingenuity rather than further his indifference.

Check Your Progress

Notes : a) Write your answers in the space given below.

b) Compare your answers with those given at the end of the unit

5)   Why should a teacher study the issues related to curriculum planning and development ?

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5.7   LET US SUM UP

In this unit, we dealt with the definitions of the term "curriculum". Various interpretations of the term curriculum were also examined. Depending on the context, curriculum has been interpreted as- a programme of studies, a product, intended learning outcomes, and planned learning experiences .We explained the various approaches to curriculum, which designers adopt.

A curriculum approach reflects a curricularist's holistic perspective and viewpoint about the design and development of the curriculum. The approaches discussed were - Behavioural, Rational, Systems – Managerial, Intellectual - Academic , Humanistic – Aesthetic Reconceptualist

In this unit we also gave you an outline of the curriculum movement and its influence on the concept of curriculum. We further discussed the development of curriculum in the global and Indian perspective. The role of teachers as

executions of the curriculum was also highlighted. The unit ended with a discussion on the process of curriculum as change and how the change could be implemented of revision and improvement of the curriculum. The existence of an in built monitoring mechanism was emphasized to ensure that the curriculum was being transacted **as** visualized.

5.8   UNIT-END EXERCISES

1. Interview teachers, students, educational administrators and parents of students and find out from them what they mean by the word 'curriculum'.

2. Make an analysis of the National Curriculum Framework for School Education (2005) and find out its striking features. Visit http://www.ncert.nic.in for NCFSE (2005).

5.9   ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

1. It can be defined as set of planned activities which are designed to implement a particular educational aim- set of such aims - in terms of the content of what is to be taught and the knowledge, skills and attitudes which are to be deliberately fostered, together with statements of criteria for selection of content, and choices in methods, materials and evaluation.

2. The advantages of defining curriculum as a programme of studies are:

   a)   Curriculum can be described in context terms

   b)   Learning occurs in many different setting in the school other than the specified courses of study.

3. It refers to the curriculum, which is not taught. This means curricular matters are not consciously but are taught by our silence.

4. The main purpose of the humanistic approach to curriculum development is to enable the student to apply his knowledge in real life situations. Thus educational experiences gained in the school environment make him an effective human-being.

5. The study of the curriculum process helps the teacher have an understanding of the underlying concept of the curriculum achieve the intended objectives of the curriculum plan teaching-learning activities in more effective ways make his teaching more authentic and relevant.

5.10   REFERENCES AND SUGGESTED READINGS

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