

Curriculum Design

Philosophies and Design Dimensions

By Sara MacDonald and Gordon Laffin

Philosophical Curriculum Perspectives Overview

Traditional Curriculum Constructs

Idealism → Essentialism

Broad Fields Design

Realism → Perennialism

Subject Centred

Correlation Design

Contemporary Curriculum Constructs

Pragmatism/Progressivism

Discipline Design

Process Design

Child Centred Design

Experience Centred Design

Humanistic Design

Reconstructionalism

Romantic (Radical Design)

Life Centred Design

Reconstructionalist Design

Idealism and Essentialism

Gottfried Leibniz was perhaps the most famous idealist with his **idealism** categorized by what one can know a priori and a posteriori (before and after experience). Idealists like Leibniz postulated that we can only know things through our experiences of them.

For Teachers this means that learning requires, “*active participation*,” (Hill, 38) of both the teacher and the learner. Idealists, like Leibniz, who himself was known as a, “*universal genius*” (Look) believed in holistic experiences as he himself dabbled in, “*metaphysics, epistemology, logic, philosophy of religion, as well as mathematics, physics, geology, jurisprudence, and history.*” (Look)

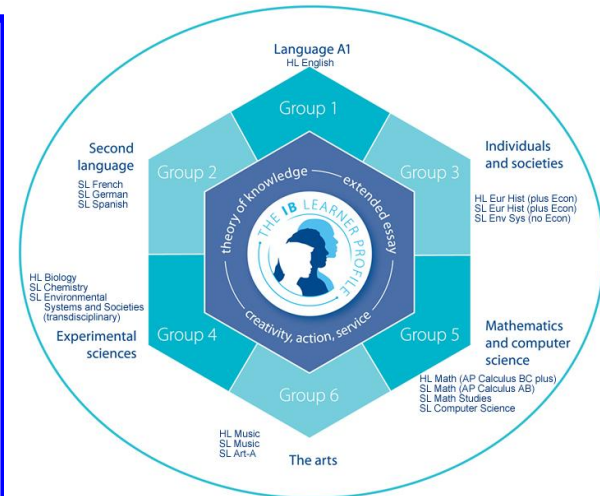
Like Idealism, **Essentialism** promotes individual self-discovery and growth. It focuses on the, “*academics*” and the “*mastery of concepts and principles.*” (Ornstein, 105) Like idealism, it allows for and seeks learners to master a variety of subjects.

However, unlike idealism essentialism positions the teacher as an, “*authority*” (105) in their subject area.

Curriculum Focus:

The 3 R's, but a mastery in a number of subject areas. (Ornstein, 105)

Note: This can be likened to the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program.



Realism and Perennialism

Realism was characterized by Hume and Descartes as the, “*search for truth in the physical universe.*” (Hill, 39) **Hume** postulated that ideas are interconnected and that one can use inquiry and experience to search for and postulate absolute truths. Descartes, on the other hand, formulated the scientific method whereby through experience truth can be discovered or realized. Truth then for the realist is absolute, knowable and, “*fixed.*” (40)

Teachers then through their expertise impart truths on students who act like sponges soaking up knowledge poured upon them.

Perennialism then believes in rational education focusing on the, “mastery of facts and timeless knowledge” (Ornstein, 105)

Teachers then should be helping teach students to think in a Socratic manner whereby, “*the classroom experience is a shared dialogue between the teacher and students.*” (Denman)

Characteristics of the Socratic Method Include:

- Questioning and dialogue of values and beliefs
- A focus on moral education
- Useful in terms of discussing subjective truths about the world (Denman)

A more detailed discussion of the Socratic Method can be found at [Stanford University](#)

Curriculum Focus: Classical Subjects, literary analysis (Ornstein, 105)

Pragmatism/Progressivism

Pragmatism: “*Education based on individual’s experience.*” (Hill, 40) Charles Sanders Pierce depicted it as, “*to know what we think, to be masters of our own meaning.*” The emphasis placed here on both the individual their experience.

Pragmatism deems learning valuable if the experience in and of itself is, “*worthwhile,*” and has, “*influence upon later experience.*” (Hill, 40 - 41)

Teachers use this to focus on: child - centered education and morality. feedback, “*learning by doing,*” (Miller, 201 via. Hill, 41), project and place based learning.

vs.

Progressivism however, places great emphasis on the experience paying less attention to the individual. Hegal and more recently Fukuyama depicted progress as being the focal point (and if not the ending) of history and social identities. (Fukuyama, 35)

Progressivism is often used to promote democracy. Learning is a process to which there is active student participation through, “*problem solving and scientific inquiry.*” (Ornstein, 105)

Student involvement in the curriculum is tantamount, but differing with pragmatism, the student is not the focus of the learning. **Progressivism deals with the how**, while **pragmatism deals with the how and the who.**

Curriculum Focus: A focus on student interest and student centered learning.

Reconstructionalism

The emphasis placed on reconstructing society by Freire in the accompanying video is one of critical thought. Freire, Brameland, and Counts advocated for education that fosters critical thinking in order to challenge conventional wisdom and socially accepted norms. (Hill, 42) They feel that education is the fundamental tool that should be used to encourage such thought. This follows political thinkers like [Noam Chomsky](#) in the questioning of neoliberal agendas.

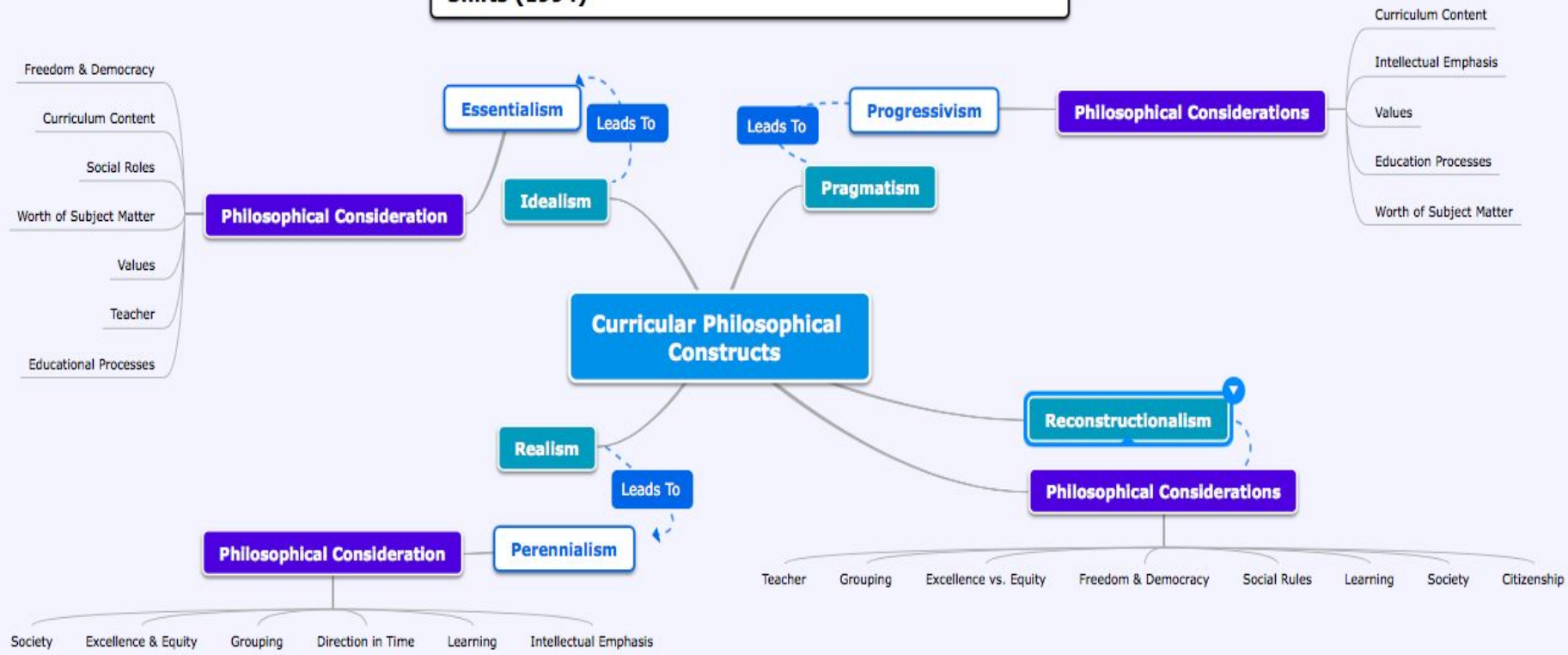
Ornstein points out that reconstructionalist teacher's role is to, "*serve as an agent of change and reform,*" (105) in order to facilitate learning environments whereby critical thinking surrounding, "problems confronting humankind," are explored.



Paulo Freire

Curriculum Focus: Social Sciences and Humanities, Social and Political Issues (Ornstein, 105) (cross-curricularly could be employed to tackle issues in any discipline from maths to sciences).

A Mind Map Representation of Ornstein's Philosophical Considerations and Hill's (1990/1991) Philosophical Shifts (1994)



Curriculum Design

Components of Design

Curriculum design is concerned with the nature and arrangement of four basic parts: objectives, content, learning experiences, and evaluation. (Ornstein & Hunkins, P. 151)

- When designing curriculum consideration must be given to how all parts interrelate.
 - ◆ Philosophy
 - ◆ Learning Theory
 - ◆ What should be learnt?
 - ◆ How do people learn?
 - ◆ How should the acquired knowledge be utilized?
 - ◆ Our basic beliefs

 - Consideration should be given to these questions:
 - ◆ What should be done?
 - ◆ What subject matter should be included?
 - ◆ What instruction strategies, resources, and activities should be employed?
 - ◆ What methods and instruments should be used to appraise the results of the curriculum?
- (Ornstein & Hunkins, P. 151)

Sources of Curriculum Design

...designers must clarify their philosophical, social, and political views of society and the individual learner-views commonly called the curriculum sources. (Ornstein & Hunkins, P. 152)

SCIENCE AS A SOURCE...

- Scientific method
- Problem solving
- Learning how to learn

SOCIETY AS A SOURCE...

- School is an agent of society
- Socialization is a key function of school
- Collaboration among learners

MORAL DOCTRINE AS A SOURCE...

- Looks to the past
- Content driven by subject
- Appreciation for great thinkers of the past

KNOWLEDGE AS A SOURCE....

- Teaching valued knowledge
- Stimulation and development of the minds of learners
- Primary source of curriculum

THE LEARNER AS A SOURCE...

- Derived from knowledge of learner
- Learner primary source of curriculum
- Consideration for values and interests of learner

Sources of Curriculum Design

1. Science - problem solving methods and scientific methods
2. Society - social situations
3. Moral doctrine - enduring beliefs and truths
4. Knowledge - what is written
5. Learner - interests and general knowledge

Design Dimension Considerations

- ✓ **Scope**...the breadth and depth of content
 - ◆ “...refers to the breadth of the curriculum at a given time - the horizontal organization of content [Goodlad & Su, 1992]” (Sowell, P. 52)
- ✓ **Sequence** (and continuity)...cumulative and continuous learning
 - ◆ “...ensures that ideas, themes, and skills are dealt with more than once in school curricula [Goodlad & Su, 1992]” (Sowell, P. 53)
- ✓ **Integration**...bringing concepts, skills and values together
 - ◆ “...refers to linking all types of knowledge and experiences contained within the curriculum plan” (Ornstein & Hunkins, P. 158)
- ✓ **Articulation**...vertical and horizontal planning of curriculum
 - ◆ “...the ways in which curriculum components occur...in a program’s sequence...” (Ornstein & Hunkins, P. 158)

“Curriculum design addresses relationships among curriculum’s components.”

(Ornstein & Hunkins, P. 151)

CURRICULUM DESIGNS: Subject Centered

Subject-Centred Design

- Popular and widely utilized
- Emphasizes standards and accountability
- Direct instruction, lecture style teaching
- Focus on essential knowledge
- Textbook, material driven

Discipline Design

- Fosters learners to think and utilize information
- Stresses understanding of structures and processes of the discipline (subject)
- Learners “think like a historian or biologist”



Rooted in Academic and Systematic Conceptions of Curriculum.

Broad-Fields Design

- ❖ Provides a broad understanding of all content areas
- ❖ Brings together well-accepted fields of study (e.g. Social Studies [Geography, History, Political Science])
- ❖ Holistic curriculum
- ❖ Most promising for future as it allows for hybrid forms of content and knowledge

Process Design

- ★ Focus on development of intellectual character
- ★ Emphasis on procedures in which knowledge is derived

Correlation Design

- Identifies areas where subjects can be connected while maintaining separate identities
- Example: Science and Mathematics

CURRICULUM DESIGNS: Learner Centred

Child-Centred Design

- Students are active in their learning environments
- Based on students' needs and interests
- Learners actively construct understanding
- Hands-on exploration in classroom
- Social, emotional, and logical knowledge included in learning

Experience-Centred Design

- Curriculum is created “in the moment”
- Cannot be preplanned as learning is derived from the learner's experience at the that time
- Emphasis on learners interest, creativity and self-direction in curriculum

Romantic (Radical) Design

- ❖ Individuals learn to critique knowledge
- ❖ Designed to break societal norms and barriers
- ❖ Views society as deeply flawed and educational institutions serve as a means of control

Humanistic Design

- ★ Self directed learning
- ★ Learners draw on their own resources to improve understanding
- ★ Environment fosters empathy, respect for self and for others



Rooted in the Humanistic Conception of Curriculum.

CURRICULUM DESIGNS: Problem Centered (Society Culture Based)

Life Situation Design

- Three fundamental assumptions:
 1. Dealing with life situations is crucial and it makes educational sense to organize curriculum as such
 2. Students see the relevance in content presented
 3. Students study social/life situations
- Focuses on problem solving procedures
- Emphasis on real or authentic situations in curriculum learning

Reconstructionist Design

- ❖ Fosters social action
- ❖ Promotes social, political and economic development for society
- ❖ Engaged in critical analysis of communities (local, national, global) to address humanity's problems



Rooted in the Social Reconstruction Conception of Curriculum.

Connections to Curriculum Design

Curriculum Designs

Subject Centred Designs

- Subject Design
- Discipline Design
- Broad-Fields Design
- Correlation Designs
- Process Design

Academic & Systemic

- Essentialism
- Perennialism
- Progressivism

Learner Centred Designs

- Child Centered Design
- Radical Design
- Humanistic Design

Humanistic

- Progressivism
- Reconstructionism
- Existentialism

Problem Centred Designs

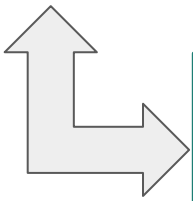
- Life-Situations Design
- Reconstructionist Design

Social Reconstruction

- Reconstructionism

Underlying Philosophy

Conceptions of Curriculum



Works Cited

Denman, Mariate. The Socratic Method: What is it and How to Use it in the Classroom. *Speaking of Teaching, Stanford University*. (2003). Vol 13. No. 1. Retrieved from: <http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/tomprof/posting.php?ID=810>

Fukuyama, Francis. The “End of History” 20 Years Later. *New Perspectives Quarterly*. Vol 27. No. 1. (2010) pp. 7 - 10.

Hill, A. M. Perspectives on philosophical shifts in vocational education: From realism to pragmatism and reconstructionism. *Journal of Vocational and Technical Education*, (1994) Vol. 10 No.2, pp. 37-45.

Look, Brandon C. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. (2013). Retrieved from: <https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz/#MedKnoTrulde>

Ornstein, A. C. . Philosophy as a basis for curriculum decisions. *The High School Journal*, (1990/1991) Vol. 74, pp. 102-109.

Ornstein, A. C., & Hunkins, F. P. (2013). *Curriculum: Foundations, principles, and issues (6th ed.)*. Boston, MA: Pearson.

“Paulo Freire - An Incredible Conversation” YouTube, Uploaded by LiteracyDotOrg, Dec. 30, 2009, https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=179&v=aFWjnkFypFA

Pierce, C.S. Illustrations of the Logic of Science. *Popular Science Monthly*. (1878) Vol. 12. Retrieved From: WikiSource. https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/Popular_Science_Monthly/Volume_12/January_1878/Illustrations_of_the_Logic_of_Science_II

Sowell, E. J. (2005). *Curriculum: An integrative introduction (3rd ed.)*. Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson.

Images Used

IB Hexagon. Retrieved from: <http://www.tshughes.com/ib/at-sig/signatures-hexagon.html>

Rooted. Retrieved from: <http://rootedthinking.com/>

Sources of Curriculum Design. Retrieved from: <https://www.haikudeck.com/curriculum-design-education-presentation-opuYtCspJx>