

Curriculum: Context, Change and Development

Professor David Carr

Aims

- 1 To examine curriculum differences and developments in terms of educational aims, traditions, values, and processes.
- 2 To enhance students' understanding of different educational curricula in different parts of the world, and to look at reasons for such curricular differences.
- 3 To enable students to appreciate the social context of curriculum change, and to evaluate curriculum development in the light of diverse social perspectives on knowledge and learning.
- 4 To enable students to understand the philosophical, social and ethical implications of curricular policies and decisions.

Many of the examples will be drawn from learning in schools, but these themes and topics are relevant to other educational contexts, and previous course participants have included those working in Higher Education and in fields such as nurse education and community health.

Teaching

10 x 2.5 hour sessions = 25 hours

This course is serviced by a team of tutors from a range of different educational backgrounds and disciplines. It will include formal presentations by tutors, as well as opportunities for seminar discussion. Students are encouraged to bring their experiences of a particular education system to the general discussion.

Assessment

One essay of 4500 words. Students are asked to consider a particular field, area or topic of education, in a context with which they are familiar (such as music education, pre-school curriculum in Scotland, health education, foreign language studies in China). The students will examine their chosen topic in terms of some of the issues covered on the course.

Content

The course will consider questions such as:

- 1 How are decisions made about what to teach and learn? By whom? (e.g. the state, teachers, pupils, the influence of parents)
- 2 Why is the curriculum different in different countries, and why does it sometimes change? Are there different conceptions of 'history' or 'science', for example?
- 3 What, for example, do we mean by 'literacy'? Does literacy mean the acquisition of basic skills, the ability to read for pleasure, critical understanding or media literacy?
- 4 Since schools can't teach the whole of human knowledge and culture, how should one prioritise? Should one emphasise vocational skills, citizenship, or personal growth? What is the educational value of leisure, or ethics, or political belief?

- 5 How should curriculum be defined: in terms of product, process, content or skills, as broad aims or detailed objectives? What is the relationship between curriculum, context, pedagogy and assessment?
- 6 How might we conceive the relationship between cognition, emotion, social association, and physical skill?
- 7 Should the curriculum consist of a set of separate subjects, or might knowledge be conceived in a more 'integrated way'?
- 8 What are the political aims of the curriculum: how does it serve to shape the type of society we live in to moral or social purposes. Is there a place in the curriculum for the explicit teaching of religion or politics? How does the curriculum relate to economic considerations?
- 9 Is the primary purpose of education to reproduce existing values and social structures or develop critical thinking? How do we reconcile the need to pass established knowledge and skills on to a new generation with the need for critical evaluation of past traditions?
- 10 How should education respond to social inequalities? How can schools better meet the needs of working-class children, the rural poor or indigenous peoples? How might racism or sexism be resisted? How should the curriculum be adapted to individual needs?
- 11 How might we design a curriculum for the future? What do we mean by the 'information society'? What is the role of Information Technology? What is the impact of globalisation on the curriculum? How do we respond to problems of ecology, poverty, or war?
- 12 How is curriculum presently adapting (if at all) to all these issues? What might we learn from good examples of curriculum reform across the world?

Selected Reading

- Apple M (1990) *Ideology and curriculum* London: Routledge
- Barnes D (1982) *Practical curriculum study* London: RKP
- Carr D (2003) *Making Sense of Education: An introduction to the Philosophy and Theory of Education*, London: Routledge
- Goodson I (1985) *Social histories of the secondary curriculum* London: Falmer
- Goodson I (1998) *Studying school subjects* London: Falmer
- March C (1997) *Key concepts for understanding curriculum* London: Falmer
- Moon B and Murphy P (eds) (1999) *Curriculum in context* London: Chapman
- Paechter C ed (2000) *Changing school subjects: power, gender and curriculum* Buckingham: Open University Press
- Pring, R. (2004) *Philosophy of Education: Aims, Theory, Common Sense and Research*, Continuum
- Scottish Education Department (1977) *The Structure of the Curriculum in the third and fourth years of the secondary school (The Munn Report)* Edinburgh : HMSO
- White, J.P. (ed) (2003) *Rethinking the School Curriculum*, London: Routedge/Falmer