

## **The Aims of the Curriculum: Russell, Dewey and Makiguchi**

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### **Introduction**

This paper discusses the aims of the curriculum, drawing the seminal literature and the education theories developed by Bertrand Russell, John Dewey and Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. After briefly introducing the literature search strategies that were adopted for the critical literature review, the existing definitions of the curriculum will be considered in order to define the concept of the curriculum. The paper revealed that one of the commonalities between Russell, Dewey and Makiguchi on the aims of education was that they did not regard the aim of education as merely acquiring or transferring knowledge and that there has been an academic agreement that the aims of education ought to seek the development of children's intrinsic nature, their well-being, and utilising knowledge. An issue in curriculum theory in relation to the aims in the curriculum, which is the incoherence between the contents of the curriculum and the aims of education, will then be argued. This paper concludes with some reflections on the curriculum in the international context.

### **Approach to Searching and Reviewing the Literature**

Literature was screened by inclusion and exclusion criteria. According to the Evidence for Policy and Practice Information and Co-ordinating Centre (EPPI) (2007), explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria specify which literature is to be included in the review (p.4). Adopting inclusion and exclusion criteria also enabled the researcher to establish the logical justification for the selection of the literature for the present study. It was necessary for the researcher to set inclusion and exclusion criteria with the following elements: which language or languages to search; what is the timeframe, i.e. how far back the researcher needs to search; and what subject areas might be relevant to search when conducting a literature review (Hart, 1998, p.32). English was the main language used to search and at an earlier stage of the literature review, the timeframe was set out as 'work published to the present'. Unpublished literature was also included if they were in the form of conference papers or doctoral theses. Regarding the subject areas, the topics such as the curriculum; aims of education; and knowledge in the curriculum were selected.

In the actual process of the literature search, the following search engines of information were used: British Educational Index (BEI); University College London (UCL) Institute of Education (IOE) Repository; UCL IOE Library Catalogue; Education Recourses Information Centre (ERIC); London University Online Library; Web of Science; System for Information on Grey Literature (SIGLE); Citation Information by National Institute of Informatics (CiNii); UK E-Theses Online Service (EThOS); and Google Scholar.

Thus, the literature review was conducted based on the inclusion and exclusion criteria. While reviewing the literature, a visual tool called 'concept mapping' (Maxwell, 2005, p.47) was often used in order to identify significant works, debates, and their relationships to each other. The ways of organising the ideas or debates using circles and arrows had been used before the strategy had its name. Although the search engines, databases or software enabled researchers to deal with an enormous amount of literature in a very short time, the idea of reviewing literature - that is weighing the literature and reading their arguments critically in order to identify the issues to be addressed in a thesis - would remain the same regardless of technology.

## **Defining the Curriculum**

When discussing the definitions of the curriculum, it would be necessary to note that the definitions of the curriculum can vary depending on its central focus. The focuses include those who learn through the curriculum (learners); those who teach the curriculum (educators); and the process of teaching and learning. Also, the definitions of the curriculum are differentiated depending on its format because the conceptions of the curriculum often include ethos, vision and philosophy that underpin a curriculum, whereas the curriculum can take a formally written form.

One of the early curriculum theories that focused on learners was developed by Franklin Bobbitt. Bobbitt (1918) argued that the curriculum ought to have strong links to the society and correspond to the needs of the individual child. Bobbitt defined the curriculum as "the entire range of experiences that aims to unfold the abilities of the individual" (p.43). Rugg (1927) also focused on learners and emphasised the importance of curriculum planning in advance of designing a curriculum. He defined the curriculum as "a succession of experiences and enterprises having a maximum lifelikeness for the learner ... giving the learner that development most helpful in meeting and controlling life situations" (p.8).

Both of the definitions formulated by Bobbitt and Rugg focused on the individual

learner, whereas Caswell and Campbell (1935) defined the curriculum as “composed of all the experiences children have under the guidance of teachers” (p.66), which highlighted the existence of educators, and also emphasised the process of how the curriculum ought to be enacted. Tyler (1957) referred to the role of learning institutions in his definition, saying “[the curriculum is] all the learning experiences planned and directed by the school” (p.79). Although there are different focuses in the definitions, the common concept that was emphasised in all the definitions of the curriculum was ‘experience’.

This tendency of highlighting the concept of ‘experience’ in the definitions of the curriculum can be linked with *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902) by John Dewey. Dewey argued, based on the philosophy of pragmatism, that education ought to be tied to children’s experience rather than abstract thought. However, experience can be described as the action that the learner undertakes during the learning process; therefore, the concept of experience does not appear to define the curriculum well in terms of what the curriculum is when it is formally written as documents. Kelly (1977/2009) distinguished the conceptions of the curriculum that schools offer and what is laid down in syllabuses (the planned curriculum) from the curriculum that the children actually experience (the received curriculum) (p.11).

Regarding the received curriculum that the children actually experience, Tanner and Tanner (2006) defined this as “[the curriculum is] the reconstruction of knowledge and experience that enables the learner to grow in exercising intelligent control of subsequent knowledge and experience” (p.189). Their definition included even the next phase for the learner after acquiring knowledge through experience by saying, ‘in exercising intelligent control of subsequent knowledge and experience’, which can overlap the concept of aims of education. Silva (2008) also highlighted that the purpose of the curriculum ought to be beyond what the curriculum merely offered, as “an emphasis on what students can do with knowledge, rather than what units of knowledge they have” (p.2).

This emphasis on the process of teaching and learning through the curriculum, categorised as ‘implemented curriculum’, which was conceptualised by van den Akker (2007), focuses on the pedagogical aspect of the curriculum. He also defined the received curriculum as “learning experiences as perceived by learners” (p.38), which would normally be assessed by educators in a learning institution. Van den Akker’s definition of the received curriculum suggested that the curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in discussions in relation to the curriculum are closely linked to each other.

With regard to the curriculum as official documents, McBrien and Brandt (1997) defined

the planned curriculum as ‘a written plan’. However, the essence of the curriculum is not always ‘written’. The curriculum that is not written such as ‘the hidden curriculum’, ‘the unstudied curriculum, and ‘the implicit curriculum’, can also influence learners’ values, perceptions and behaviours (Glatthorn, et al., 2015, p. 25).

Among the curriculum theorists, Stenhouse (1975) defined the curriculum as, “the essential principles and features of an educational proposal” (p.4), which appeared to include the concept of unwritten form of the curriculum such as ‘ethos and mission’. Thus, a number of definitions of the curriculum have been formulated by curriculum theorists from different perspectives and there is no single coherent academic definition in agreeing the concept of the curriculum. Glatthorn, et al. (2015) suggested two criteria for evaluating a definition of the curriculum: a) it should reflect the general understanding of the term as used by educators; and b) it should be useful to educators in making operational distinctions (p.4). There seems to be several factors that makes it difficult to reach a coherent academic definition of the curriculum, for example, the format of the curriculum (written or unwritten) and the focus of parties who utilise the curriculum (educator or learner).

Given that, for the present study, the following definition of a planned curriculum was formulated: the curriculum is a plan, which is enacted by educators in learning institutions, which outlines the body of knowledge and the related experience for the learner in order to support the learner’s development.

### **Aims in the Curriculum**

The aims of education, and the aims of curricula, often share concepts in terms of developing children. Discussions in relation to developing children have built mainly on the two concepts, ‘acquiring knowledge’ and ‘developing children’s character’, and which aspect of developing children should be prioritised. Bertrand Russell (1926) argued the aims of education distinguishing the concept of acquiring knowledge from developing children’s character, and claimed that developing character of children ought to be superior to acquiring knowledge when considering developing children.

Whitehead (1929), who was a private tutor for Russell, discussed the aims of education focusing on the significance of ‘knowledge’. However, Whitehead recognised the difference between acquiring knowledge and activating the acquired knowledge, and claimed that the aim of education is the acquisition of the art of the utilisation of knowledge. Although Whitehead highlighted the importance of knowledge in relation to the development of children, both Whitehead and Russell valued less the concept of

acquiring knowledge.

Although Russell used expressions such as ‘to give [children]’ or ‘to help [children]’ in his argument of the aims of education, to ‘develop children’ did not always mean to ‘teach children new things’. Russell (and his wife Dora Russell) recognised that children already possessed the ‘intrinsic nature’, and this is something to be developed. They discussed this intrinsic nature using a simile as “[recognising intrinsic nature] regards a child as a gardener regards a young tree i.e. as something with a certain intrinsic nature, which will develop into an admirable form given proper soil and air and light” (Russell and Russell, 1923, p.266). Their recognition of the intrinsic nature appears significantly important in relation to the aims of education. If one recognises this intrinsic nature, that is the unlimited possibility or ability in every child, the aims of education ought to be prioritise and maximise this intrinsic nature, especially at primary level.

Maximising or developing the intrinsic nature in children cannot be discussed separately from children’s lives. Russell (1938) continued to argue the aims of education focusing on human lives and claimed that the ultimate aims of education would be to create wise citizens for a community with the sense of liberty in order for the citizens to lead their lives that splendour (p.251). John Dewey seemed to have similar opinions on these humanistic concepts in relation to the aims of education.

Dewey (1916) proposed the characteristics of good educational aims in *Democracy and Education*, saying that an educational aim must be founded on the intrinsic activities and needs such as original instincts and acquired habits of the individual child. Along with Russell, Dewey regarded the intrinsic nature in children significant for the aims of education.

Although Dewey highlighted the importance of methods of the activities and educators for children in the discussions of the characteristics of good educational aims, he deliberately did not refer to specific contents for children to learn. This can be seen from his fundamental claim of education, which was that learning should be tied to the learner’s experience. Dewey’s argument on the importance of experience in learning revealed an issue in curriculum design, which was incoherence between the aims of education and the contents in the curriculum. He claimed in his work *The Child and the Curriculum* (1902) that subjects and resources in the curriculum should closely be connected to children’s experience in learning in order to accomplish the theme of the curriculum and the aims of education. Dewey (1938) pointed out the causes of this issue as a lack of understanding of children and over- focusing on the contents in the curriculum.

This criticism towards curriculum design derived from Dewey’s other main argument, which was that the lives of children in schools separate from lessons had

significant influence on their learning. Dewey (1900) highlighted the importance of interacting with others and expressing themselves and claimed that learning in schools ought to follow children's natural interests such as communicating with others, knowing the nature of things or enjoying artistic expression, referring to the concept of the 'child-centred curriculum'. He also emphasised the significance of everyday life activities when discussing citizenship and society as, "the things in civilization we most prize are not of ourselves; they exist by grace of the doings and sufferings of the continuous human community in which we are a link" (Dewey, 1934, p.87). Thus, Russell and Dewey both recognised the significance of the intrinsic nature in children and concerned the development of children into good citizens in the real world.

The philosophical concerns of Russell and Dewey in relation to the curriculum and the aims of education were situated in a Western context. There are some similarities and contrasts with the non-Western educator context for philosophy in the work of Tsunesaburo Makiguchi. Makiguchi, a Japanese educator and philosopher, developed the theory of value creation and the principles of humanistic education in the time of Japan's militarisation in *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy* (Makiguchi, 1930/1979). Makiguchi also took a position that the main aim of education was not to acquire knowledge but that one of its aims was "the provision of keys to unlock the vault of knowledge" (translated by Bethel, 1989, p.168). This is similar to the claim made by Whitehead; both of them stated that the aim of education ought not to be acquiring knowledge but it must be utilising the knowledge.

Makiguchi's argument of the aims of education was built on the value system, which was proposed by Emanuel Kant. Makiguchi argued that the components of the value system, 'cognition of truth' and 'creation of value' contributed to 'a life of happiness'. He highlighted that there are two types of happiness in a human life, 'relative happiness' and 'absolute happiness'<sup>1</sup>. In his theory of value-creating pedagogy, children would be able to pursue the absolute happiness in their lives through "learn[ing] and deriv[ing] wisdom from knowledge in order to create meaningful value in and from any (positive or negative) situation" (Goulah, 2012, p.13).

Unlike Dewey, Makiguchi (1903/1971) discussed the subjects in the curriculum, emphasising the importance of geographical understanding in *The Geography of Human Life*. He argued that learning Geography would enable children to recognise the connections between themselves and the world. Garrison, Hickman and Ikeda (2014) had

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<sup>1</sup> 'Relative happiness' concerns the things in our environment that might make us happy (eg. friends, family, jobs or income) whereas 'absolute happiness' draws on our own inner resources so that we establish a resilient state of life which is not swayed by anything (Harrap, 2014).

a dialogue based on Makiguchi's argument in relation to learning Geography and agreed that children would be able to place themselves in a global context through learning Geography, and this was also an important element for children to grow into global citizens.

In fact, many of the Makiguchi's earlier works were related to the subject of literacy in schools. He focused on a systematic connection between the teaching of reading and writing in particular (Makiguchi, 1898; 1899; 1921). Makiguchi's views towards the aims of literacy can be described as, "to empower learners to be able to write with full autonomy and independence on any subject of their choosing" (Goulah, 2013, p.3). Makiguchi (1936) also pointed out that one of the issues in the teaching of writing in primary schools was that the approaches of writing adopted in Japan were suitable only for a handful of elite students who already possessed a certain level of writing ability. Although there was a contrast between Dewey and Makiguchi with regard to the approach to the subjects in the curriculum, they seemed to have similar perspectives towards the significance of connections between human lives and their community, and the idea of the 'child-centred' curriculum.

There are some limitations with Makiguchi's theory of value-creating pedagogy. First of all, translation of the original Japanese version, *The System of Value-Creating Pedagogy*, is not yet completed. The original version has four volumes with forty-two chapters in seven parts whereas the English translated version entitled *Education for Creative Life* (Bethel, 1989) has only selected chapters from the original version. Also, there have been few empirical studies based on Makiguchi's theory of value-creating pedagogy, although there are some pioneering pieces of research on the theory itself. So, there is much room to explore Makiguchi's value-creating pedagogy in theory and practice.

Thus, one of the commonalities between Russell, Whitehead, Dewey and Makiguchi on the aims of education was that they did not regard the aim of education as merely acquiring or transferring knowledge. They set out the aim of education as utilising knowledge rather than acquiring knowledge, arguing that the intrinsic nature in every individual child ought to be developed so that they would be able to lead a life of happiness in the society. One of the issues in relation to the discussions on the aims of education is that the agreed concept of the aim of education may sound idealistic, and therefore it has been difficult to actualise the aim through teaching based on the curriculum in practice.

Since Dewey pointed out the issue of incoherence between the contents of the curriculum and the aims of education, this issue has not yet been solved. Reiss and White

(2013) still pointed out the incoherence between the aims of education and the contents of England's national curriculum. They argued that the aims of education have been less prioritised and were added as an afterthought in the subject-based national curricula in England, and that many other parts of the world that teach subject-based curricula had the same situation.

Reiss and White introduced the concept of the 'aims-based curriculum' in response to the 'subject-based curriculum', which has been the mainstream of national curricula. Reiss asserted the necessity of the aims-based curriculum in his interview as, "one that starts by asking what schools are trying to achieve. It therefore begins with the fundamental purpose of education and goes on from there to consider what the most suitable curriculum is" (Shaughnessy, 2013). The strength of the aims-based curriculum is that the curriculum is designed based on the solid concept of the aims of education, therefore, there is a coherence between the aims and the contents of the curriculum. Also, opportunities to accomplish the aims of education can be expanded to every individual child who undertakes compulsory education in an education system.

The definition of the ultimate purpose of education in Reiss and White's aims-based curriculum was to lead a life that is personally flourishing and to help others to do so (Reiss and White, 2013, p.1). Reiss explained a personally flourishing life as "it [a personally flourishing life] occurs when humans develop so as to maximise what is best about being a human, to develop one's potentials and to be thoughtful and respectful of the needs and desires of others" (Shaughnessy, 2013). Reiss and White also said that 'personally flourishing life' could be replaced by the term 'well-being' (op cit. p.5). There is little doubt that along with Russell, Dewey and Makiguchi, Reiss and White also considered the development of the inner potential in children and leading a life of happiness.

In order to apply the aims-based curriculum to schools in the countries, it may be necessary to establish new schools. Russell established the 'Beacon Hill School' in England in 1927 to practise his theory. Dewey also created a primary school called, the 'Laboratory School' on the site of Chicago University in 1896 to test his theory of experience in learning. The value-creating theory developed by Makiguchi has been practised in the Soka (value-creation) education system. There are Soka Schools in Japan and Brazil; Soka Universities are in Japan, India, and the US; Soka Kindergartens are in Japan, Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, and Korea. Another new Soka School, Soka International School Malaysia (SISM) will be open in 2023 in Malaysia to enact the value-creating pedagogy in the context of international curricula such as the International General Certificate of Secondary Education (IGCSE) and the International Baccalaureate



Diploma Programme (IBDP).

In the international education context, empirical studies suggested that the implementation of international tests can have a significant effect on the fundamental purpose of national curricula. Despite the fact that ‘well-being’ was raised as the purpose and priority of a primary education, and that there should be a coherence between the contents of the curriculum and the aims of education, the contents of national curricula were often changed based on the trend of international tests. Klieger (2015) revealed the influence of the ranking system of international tests such as the PISA and the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) on policy-making for the aims in the curriculum at primary and secondary levels in different countries. He conducted document analysis by collecting the science curricula from Taiwan, Australia, Slovenia, Germany, and Israel. He found that the contents of the science curricula from these countries had been changing according to the trend of the topics of the international tests. For example, when the international tests started to introduce new content, these topics were added to the science curricula. Further, in Israel, the education reforms introduced by the Ministry of Education and by the Head of Pedagogical Affairs were aimed at being in the top ten countries in the rankings in these international tests.

## **Summary**

The critical literature review with inclusion and exclusion criteria revealed that Russell and Dewey argued and experienced their educational theories in the Western context, whereas some ground-breaking education proposals and practices have been developed in Japan in around the same time by Makiguchi in order to address the issue of education policy-making. One of the commonalities between Russell, Dewey and Makiguchi on the aims of education was that they did not regard the aim of education as merely acquiring or transferring knowledge. There has been an academic agreement that the aims of education ought to seek the development of children’s intrinsic nature, their well-being, and utilising knowledge. Another significance was that the schools were created in order to practise of the education theories developed by Russell, Dewey and Makiguchi, and Makiguchi’s value-creating pedagogy has now being practised in the Soka education system in a number of countries and territories.

The aims of education and the aims of curricula can share core concepts, however, there was a critical issue in the application of the aims of education to national curricula. The issue was the incoherence between the contents of national curricula and the aims of education, which has not been solved in over a century. In fact, the national curricula in

some countries appeared to have been designed without a solid foundation of the concepts of the aims of education. The contents of the national curricula were often changed according to the trend of international tests, which would not help to accomplish the aims of education because the main purpose of the international tests is economic growth, not humanistic growth in the first place.

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