

CURRICULUM AND PEDAGOGY IN THE CLASSROOM

Every classroom teacher and every pupil is either intentionally or unintentionally concerned with curriculum and pedagogy. Curriculum is what is to be learned; pedagogy is how people organize learning and teaching.

CURRICULUM

Curriculum can be considered on a continuum between an 'imposed' curriculum at one extreme where all content is predetermined irrespective of particular learners, and an 'emergent' curriculum at the other extreme where all content arises from the people in a particular group.

<-imposed curriculum ----- emergent curriculum->

Curriculum becomes more imposed the more teachers have a rigid adherence to a predetermined document like the National Curriculum. Recently I was in a classroom where on asking the teacher of 11 year old children what they were going to be learning about 'ancient civilisations' he pointed to the textbook and said 'We'll be following this.' His view of curriculum was to rely on what people outside the classroom had previously decided ought to be taught.

Curriculum becomes more emergent the more teachers pay attention to the needs and interests of children. In a nursery classroom recently the children were focused on shadows because outside they had become fascinated with how their shadows changed over time and depending on weather conditions.

A teacher will have an orientation toward the curriculum that tends to be more imposed or more emergent. Every teacher to a greater or lesser extent pays attention both to what others say should be learned and what the children are interested in. However, there are enormous implications because of how much a teacher on the one hand allows prior decisions (either by him or by others) to determine lesson content and on the other hand how much a teacher addresses different issues in response to the needs and interests of the particular children in the room.

An imposed curriculum is apparent in language like 'this is what we have to cover' whereas an emergent curriculum is apparent in statements like 'what we are interested in.'

Curriculum can extend far beyond preordained knowledge, skills, and understandings to e.g. a social curriculum of learning to work together as a group which can to an extent be imposed by the teacher and emergent from the social needs of the children.

PEGAGOGY

Pedagogy can be considered on a continuum between a pedagogy of answers and a pedagogy of questions. Every activity will have more of an orientation toward one end of the continuum or the other in terms of how learning actually occurs.

<- pedagogy of answers ----- pedagogy of questions->

When pedagogy is more focused on answers then teachers and pupils are both concerned to find the 'facts' or the 'right' solutions to problems in any topic. Test-taking is most often concerned with getting the right answers. On the other hand, when pedagogy is more focused on questions then teacher and students focus on the exploration of a topic. Scientists and philosophers approach the world through very different disciplines but both do so more often through their

pursuit of questions than answers. Neither scientific experiments nor philosophical discussions have predetermined outcomes.

Every activity has more of an answer or more of a question orientation. A 'word search' worksheet is an activity that is answer-orientated. Finding out how many words you can make with 7 Scrabble letters is a question-orientated activity. The more activities tend to be answer-orientate the more classroom teaching and learning will be grounded in an pedagogy of answers. Vice versa for question-orientated activities.

A pedagogy of answers is grounded in metaphors of 'covering' a topic or 'delivering' the curriculum. A pedagogy of questions is grounded in metaphors of 'exploring' ideas and 'discovery' learning.

THE CURRICULUM-PEGAGOGY GRID

If the curriculum and pedagogy continua are made the axes of a grid we can create a diagram that can be used to consider the dominant qualities of any classroom. Classrooms will fit into one (or more) of four types (perhaps depending on day of the week or time of year or whether or not they are being observed). In addition it is important to note that many teachers change their orientations from when they first began in the profession.

In A classrooms you will tend to see teachers working from textbooks and lecturing pupils who will tend to work alone. In extreme examples everyone works to passing a test.

In B classrooms you will still see teachers mostly focused on other people's educational agenda but pupils will be learning in open-ended ways e.g. in discussion groups

In C classrooms pupils questions come to the fore and they are able to explore those e.g. in open-ended enquiry

In D classrooms pupils questions are used but only to cover a predetermined content.

Teachers can use the grid to self-assess and decide whether they want to change their dominant curriculum and pedagogy orientations.

