

THE LABYRINTH OF THE CURRICULUM CONCEPT

Mihai STANCIU¹

e-mail: mstanciu@uaiasi.ro

Abstract

Any scientific approach must start with the explanation of the basic concepts. Our communication has in view the real labyrinth of the curriculum concept which is a key-concept of the contemporary pedagogy (J.C. van Bruggen, 1992) used more and more in the contemporary pedagogic debates as well as in the educational practices. The concept comes from the Latin word *curriculum* (singular) and *curricula* (plural) which means race and run. The curriculum concept in the educational context was first used by the teacher Petrus Ramus (1515-1572) in his work *Professio Regia* (1576). The meaning in the educational field was changed in the second half of the 16th century: the term appears for the first time in the documents of Leiden University (1582) and in the ones of Glasgow University (1633). The term was consecrated mainly due to the American pedagogy in the first half of the 20th century: John Dewey (1902), John Franklin Bobbitt (1918), Ralph W. Tyler (1949) and Hilda Taba (1962). The francophone literature was initially reticent to the curriculum term and preferred the syntagm *plan d'études*, it was the sociologist Jean-Claude Forquin (1989) the one who imposed the term in French. The contemporary literature faces a new conceptualization of the curriculum concept (Jonnaert, Ph., 2015) and we shall insist on it within our communication). The systemic paradigm of the curriculum (S. Rassekh and Ge. Văideanu, 1987; John P. Miller, 1988; M. Stanciu, 1999; Mușata Bocoș, 2007) answers the conceptual demands as well as the methodological ones

Key words: curriculum; new conceptualization of the curriculum; the systemic paradigm.

Notions are “the icon of the units, aspects and elements noticed in the world, not as they appear in the middle of the intuition at a given moment but as they are themselves, in any case, as they always appear to the impersonal conscience of all the people” (Petrovici, 1925, p. 52).

Hegel emphasized the unity among the universal, the particular and the singular while defining the concept. For the German philosopher, “the concept as such includes the **universality** moment, the determination in which the universal remains untroubled, identical to itself and the **singularity** moment while reflecting the determinations of the universality and of the particularity, a negative unit which is also the determinant **in and for itself** and at the same time, the identical with itself or the universal” (Hegel, 1962, p. 291). Just as Noica would say it, a concept is “a wrapping” of the universal, of the determination and of the individual.

The key concepts of a field have integrating characters, leading to the **conceptual web**, the logical “tree” of the subordinated notions (J.-P. Astolfi, 1990, *apud* V. De Landsheere, 1992, p. 199).

The curriculum is a key concept of the contemporary pedagogy (J.C. van Bruggen, 1992) and comes from the Latin word *curriculum* (singular), *curricula* (plural), that means race,

running. It was about the horse races and fighting chariots. The Romans also used different metaphoric phrases: *curriculum solis* (“the circular movement of the sun in the sky”), *curriculum solis* (“the circular race of the night star”) and *curriculum vitae* (“the circular race of life”, which takes place between birth and death) (Negreț-Dobridor, 2008, pp.18-19).

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Notions are thinking facts by means of which the people reflect in the knowledge process the general traits of the objects, processes and phenomena. Notions represent “the raw material” with which the people build piles of ideas in the knowledge process. Therefore, the fact of borrowing the language of a certain field of the scientific knowledge represents an important direction of the teaching-learning process.

If it is about learning and borrowing the curriculum concept, the problems are more complicated due to this real conceptual labyrinth.

That is why, in our communication, we have made a real case study related to the evolution in time of the semantics of the curriculum concept. The approach has a theoretical importance but also a methodological one, to guide the reform

¹ „Ion Ionescu de la Brad” University of Agricultural Sciences and Veterinary Medicine, Iași

practices of the curriculum at all the levels of the educational system.

Our methodological pleading is circumscribed to the systemic approach of the curriculum (S. Rassekh and Ge. Văideanu, 1987; John P. Miller, 1988; M. Stanciu, 1999; Mușata Bocoș, 2007).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The curriculum term was first used in the educational context by professor Petrus Ramus (1515-1572) in his work *Professio Regia*, published posthumously in 1576 the University of (Elveția) (Hamilton, 1989, p. 44). While enumerating the seven liberal arts, Ramus uses the curriculum term.

The meaning change in the educational plan occurred in the second half of the 16th century when – under the influence of the ideological and social movements in Europe – the themes of the university studies were standardized (D. Hamilton, 1989). The curriculum term was first used in the documents of Leiden University (1582) in the context in which it is emphasized that “having completed the curriculum of his studies”. It was also used in the documents of Glasgow University (1633), precisely in *Glasgow Grammar School*, where it has in view “referred to the entire multi-year course followed by each student, not to any shorter pedagogic unit” (Hamilton, *op. cit.*, p. 45) (see also Negreț-Dobridor, *op. cit.*, p. 161).

The consecration of the term was mainly due to the American pedagogy in the first half of the 20th century: John Dewey (1902), John Franklin Bobbitt (1918), Ralph W. Tyler (1949), and Hilda Taba (1962).

The study called “The child and the curriculum” written in 1902 by the American teacher and philosopher J. Dewey (1859-1952) marks an important moment in the consecration of the term.

By making reference to a real revolution in the educational plan like Copernicus's, the curriculum is focused on the child so that the latter “becomes the sun around which all the pedagogical devices rotate; the child is the center around which they are organized” (Dewey J., 1977, p. 123). Having in view that the school is different from life, the child cannot use at school the experience gained elsewhere. On the other hand, the child cannot in the daily activity what was learnt at school (*ib.*, p. 123). “It is 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» (Dewey 1902: 11 – 12).

John Franklin Bobbitt (1876-1956) is considered to have brought the message of the modernism in the educational plan, especially in the curriculum field (Hunkins F. P. & Hammill P.A., 1994, p.6). In the work called *The Curriculum* (1918), Bobbitt was “the first one who proposed a formal method to express the objectives” (De Landsheere V. și G, 1979, p. 11).

The starting point was the objectives that resulted from the need analysis of the pupils. The curriculum included the entire range of direct and indirect experiences, carefully designed by the school in order to complete and perfect the pupils' skills.

The curriculum can be defined in two ways: (1)«(...) the entire range of experiences, both undirected and directed, concerned unfolding the abilities of the individual» “or (2) the series of consciously directed training experiences that the schools use for completing and perfecting the unfoldment (Bobbitt 1918, 43).

Bobbitt proposed a curriculum planning and organizing approach in six consecutive stages (Bobbitt, 1924) (*apud* Negreț-Dobridor, p. 164):

1. **Eliminate-** to eliminate from the 800-objective list the ones that are not practical or unreachable.
2. **Emphasize-** to set out the objectives necessary to the adult's life
3. **Avoid-** to avoid the objectives that might affect the community life in which the pupil will live as an adult.
4. **Involve-** to involve the community in the process of setting out and achieving the objectives.
5. **Differentiate-** to set out the objectives for all the pupils (*for all*) or for each pupil or group of pupils (*for some*).
6. **Sequence objectives-** to make a **EȘALONARE** in time of the objective achieving process.

Ralph W. Tyler (1902-1994) made the first modern expression of the curriculum theory (De Landsheere, V. 1992), under the influence of Bobbitt's ideas. His book *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction* (1949) is considered the Bible of the curricular development (Pinar, 2009, p. 267). In order to shape the curriculum, Tyler starts from four fundamental issues:

1. What educational purposes shall the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain those purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?

4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (Tyler, 1949, p. 1)

In order to set out the objectives, we have to take into consideration several factors: the analysis of the society; the one who learns; the contents; the control of the compatibility with the education philosophy and the learning theory to which we adhere.

"Curriculum is all of the experiences that individual learners have in a program of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives, which is planned in terms of framework of theory and research or past or present professional practices." (Tyler, 1957, p. 79)

Hilda Taba (1902-1967), of Estonian origin, proposed, under Tyler's influence, a model in seven steps to develop the curriculum:

1. To diagnose the needs ;
2. To express the objectives;
3. To select the contents;
4. To organize the contents;
5. To select the learning experiences;
6. To organize the learning experiences ;
7. To evaluate and the evaluation means.

"Decisions leading to change in curriculum organization have been made largely by pressure, by hunches, or in terms of expediency instead of being based on clear-cut theoretical consideration or tested knowledge. The scope of curriculum has been extended vastly without an adequate consideration of the consequence of his extension on sequence or cumulative learning. The fact that these perplexities underlying curriculum change have not been studied adequately may account for the proliferation of approaches to curriculum making." (Taba, 1962, p.9, *apud* Wiles, J., Bondi, J., 2007, p. 6).

Hilde Taba's model is an inductive one that emphasizes on the teaching - learning units (Lunenburg, F., 2011a). The model includes an organization and relationships among five interactive elements: objectives, contents, learning experiences, teaching strategies and evaluation measures - so that they could represent a teaching - learning system (Lunenburg, F., 2011, p. 2).

Another innovative element is the emphasis of the external factors (the local community; the school policies; the particular features of a certain school; the teachers' personal style, the particular features of the pupils and students), that have effects upon the internal components (*op. cit.*, p.3). Tyler's and Taba's points of view at relevant examples of an approach from the perspective of the modern paradigm. The francophone literature was initially reticent to the curriculum term and preferred the syntagm *plan d'études*). The one who

imposed the term in French was the sociologist Jean-Claude Forquin (1989). In an encyclopedic dictionary of education and training (1994), J.-C. Forquin makes a good synthesis of the curriculum concept (Champy Ph., Étévé Cr., Dir., 1994, p. 218-222). It involves first of all a plurality of cognitive contents; an ordered process in time; it involves a formal control of the education institution.

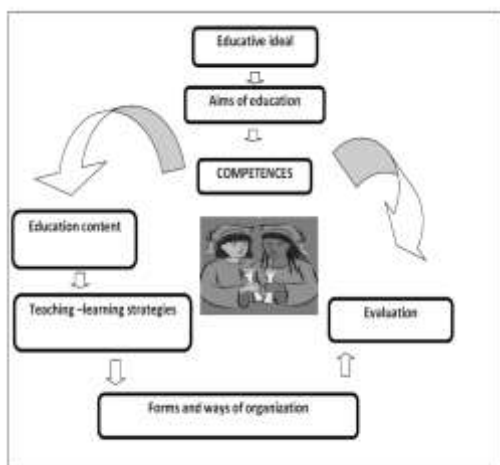
In spite of being in the centre of many contemporary debates regarding the educational reform, the curriculum concept has different meanings or even contradictory ones, according to some experts (Jonnaert 2015, Jonnaert și Therriault 2013; Ayotte – Beaudet 2013). The curriculum concept has many meanings and it is approached from the perspective of multiple theoretical frameworks (Pinar 2009 ; Breault and Marshall 2010) (Jonnaert, 2015).

Philippe Jonnaert compares the Anglo-Saxon and American theories about the curriculum and the ones of francophone origin (Jonnaert, 2011). In the Anglo-Saxon vision that was developed on Bobbit Tylor **filiera**, the curriculum is considered as a plan of pedagogical action, larger than a study programme (Jonnaert, 2011, p. 135). Under the influence of Dewey's pragmatism, the pupils' learning processes are considered very important. The curriculum becomes one of the essential means by which the educational system is adapted to a world full of permanent dynamics (*ib.*, pp. 135-136).

On the other hand, the French - European approach is focused more on setting the contents of the learning throughout the education (Reuter, Cohen-Azria, Daunay, Delcambre, Lahanier-Reuter, 2007) (*apud ib.*). Beyond two different logics, Ph. Jonnaert insists upon the complementarities of the two approaches.

Our plead supports the systemic paradigm about the curriculum (S. Rassekh and Ge. Văideanu, 1987; John P. Miller, 1988; M. Stanciu, 1999; Mușata Bocoș, 2007) since it corresponds to conceptual requirements as well to methodological ones. The holistic approach of the curriculum has in view the person's training not only from an intellectual point of view but also from the emotional, social, physical, spiritual and aesthetic one, that could allow the educated person to face the global economy (Miller, J.P., 2005).

We support the arguments of several theoreticians in the field (some of them are Tyler, D'Hainaut, Văideanu and Rassekh, V. De Landsheere) who have in view the multiple components of the learning process



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etences, contents, teaching-learning strategies, organization types, evaluation methods and instruments etc.), their articulation from the perspective of achieving the educational goal. Our approach is a holistic one but it emphasizes a path and a curricular trajectory which the school makes available for pupils and students.

The contemporary literature shows us a new conceptualization of the curriculum concept (Pinar, 2004) (Jonnaert, 2015). The curriculum concept is "the Gordian knot", an essential engine for the conception and the execution, the evaluation and the adjustment of the educational systems." (Jonnaert, 2015, p.16)

CONCLUSIONS

The understanding and the learning of the curriculum concept raises didactic problems with implications in the practical action plan.

The consecration of the curriculum term was made mainly by the American pedagogy in the first part of the 20th century: John Dewey, John Franklin Bobbitt, Ralph W. Tyler and Hilda Taba.

We brought arguments for the system paradigm upon the curriculum because it meets conceptual requirements as well as methodological ones.

The contemporary literature shows us a new conceptualization of the curriculum concept which is "a Gordian knot" and an essential engine of the educational reforms.

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