

A Review of Different Curriculums for Effective Teaching Practices [In English]

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ABSTRACT

As a teacher of more than 20 years and as a curriculum developer, I found out that there are many commonly used teaching methodologies that are not related to our students. This does not mean that what we explain to them is useless. No, but it is that our students do not see the use of information presented to them which leads them to think of it as irrelevant to their lives especially with the new technologies and growing globalization world around us. In this article, I will introduce the two most common types of curriculum instructions which are: linear and holistic approaches in education. I will start with a short introduction to each approach and will present some explanation and discussion platform towards the characteristics of each methodology. Later, I will introduce some best practices that can be utilized in holistic approach classes to help teachers in developing their daily teaching practices. In this article, best practices refer to in-class teacher's activities, methods or approaches used to improve students' academic abilities, ways of thinking and desired outcomes. These methods will help students to connect what they learn with their daily lives.

Key words: Linear, Holistic, Curriculum, Instruction, Socratic, Jigsaw

Introduction

The word “curriculum” can refer to different concepts. One of the most popular meanings is the materials taught in schools. Most modern successful nations have a kind of national curriculum, for which they either use the same educational materials or have a standardized exam system. For example, England designs its curriculum with specific details, Japan has national standards that all schools utilize as a base for planning their curriculum, while Singapore circulates detailed syllabi for each major course or subject. As for Canada, several regional education departments worked together to develop “pan-Canadian” curriculum, starting with science (Finn & Meier, 2009). School curriculums in Norway, Greece, and the Middle East are controlled by the government. In these nations, methods of instruction are not controlled by the country, but textbooks are. Teachers must teach the textbooks provided to them by the government. In the United States, there is no one curriculum that is used in all schools or colleges. However, there are subjects that are taught in all schools all over the world, including math, science, history, geography, and languages. In addition, there is one common element between all schools all over the world, which is that they all agree that school curriculums have two main goals: The first is to promote the development of students’ moral, spiritual, and cultural growth, while the second is to offer them the chance to discover and accomplish. In other words, the purpose of school is to prepare students for life.

Another commonly used concept for curriculum is methods of teaching or instructions. In this article, curriculum refers to the definition used by the Indiana Department of Education in 2010: “Curriculum means the planned interaction of pupils with instructional content, materials, resources, and processes for evaluating the attainment of educational objectives.” In other words, curriculum refers to the teaching methodologies used by teachers to communicate required materials to students.

Additionally, and before going into details, it is a good idea to start with a definition of best educational practices. “In July 2019, a Google search for this phrase identified 1,230,000,000 web pages. Adding the word definition to the previous search phrase helped slightly; Google identified 713 million web pages” (Arendale, 2020). Most teachers are looking for new effective best practices. Although it is an important task, however, it is essential to keep in mind the purpose and effectiveness of these methods. “The term ‘Effective Practices’ has been used to describe ‘what works’ in a particular situation or environment. When data support the success of a practice, it is referred to as a research-based practice or scientifically based practice” (Arendale, 2020).

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Therefore, the term used here refers to teaching methods that are used by teachers and are proven to have an impact on students' learning and achievements. Students feel more connected to school when they are engaged academically and feel their teachers' care and support. When teachers set high academic standards, they implement different and flexible teaching practices. To manage a class successfully, teachers need to do their best to design effective lesson plans. It is recommended that they put in some time and effort before meeting students .

Now let us read about the most common types of educational strategies: linear and holistic approaches to education

Linear Approach

There are numerous frameworks for curriculum instruction and one of the most popular ones is the linear approach. Linear approach refers to a very direct educational method. It is described as a controlled educational environment with pre-determined content. The teacher is the center of the class and all students do is sit and listen. Information is delivered by teachers using the lecturing style or sometimes by showing a video, without looking into the fact that students in all classes have diversified backgrounds, abilities, and learning styles. The whole educational operation is systematic, standardized, mass produced, and scheduled. In almost all textbooks, teachers cannot proceed to unit two until unit one is finished. The most important part is for teachers to preach the information and learning will simply follow. There is no flexibility in teaching.

In a linear approach, teaching is intended to convey information in a monitored structure that results in eliminating students' participation and not listening to their opinions. It ignores the fact that education is about making sense and relating or connecting this information to real-life situations .

I was surprised when I first read Freire's description of the linear education approach as a banking system. His description made me realize that in many classrooms, teachers deposit information into students' minds and students repeat the information several times to be able to memorize it in order to pass exams .

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to 'fill' the students with the contents of his narration. (Freire, 1998, p. 54)

Thinking for a minute, an educator will realize that this banking system denies learners' right to have an active role in their own learning. In this

approach, there is almost no relationship between teachers and students. The only communication they have is through narration, which makes the content lifeless and as if it is coming from a different world.

Additionally, Freire explained another problem with the linear approach. He wrote, "The more students work at storing the deposits entrusted to them, the less they develop the critical consciousness which would result from their intervention in the world as transformers of that world" (Freire, 1998, p. 55). The linear approach does not teach students to think for themselves, communicate, live in the real world, or participate in developing their own lives. It requires students to be passive and obedient and to accept whatever is introduced to them. Additionally, it avoids conversation or dialogue, discourages creativity, and is passive in nature.

Curriculum instruction must be orientated toward the future. It cannot be linear anymore because of the kind of life our students are living. The information we are teaching today becomes old and ineffective very fast, which should lead educators and curriculum developers to incorporate a vision to the future in their curriculum.

In other words, the linear approach focuses on content only and does not pay much attention to process. Teachers prepare students to answer only the "what" questions. They are not ready for the argumentation of "why" and to solve problems by discovering the best solutions for various situations. Curriculum in this approach was developed to encourage memorization and create minds like a typical machine, rather than being established through the use of human behaviors and thoughts. All correct answers are in the textbook and in order to succeed, students must memorize what the books say. School knowledge is pre-determined and delivered mostly in a linear format to a crowd of students (audience).

I cannot ignore that I am a product of the linear approach. However, reading about the characteristics of linearism makes me realize that the linear approach is a mechanistic approach in which schools create machines rather than develop thinking skills in students. Using the linear approach today, with its systemic, particularized, and pre-determined thinking, is irrelevant because of the fast social, cultural, and technological changes that we are living through. Following the linear approach would make young people face a life that they are not prepared for. The linear approach was appropriate for a certain time in the past, but not anymore. I agree with Dewey (1998) when he criticized customary education and curriculum for its lack of general understanding of students and society.

Holistic Approach

Instead of the banking method, holistic educators utilize problem-solving techniques. The holistic approach is person-centered, constructivist curriculum instruction. It facilitates integration and emphasizes how students learn rather than what they should learn. In 2012, Mahmoudi et al. described holistic education in their article "Holistic Education: An Approach for 21 Century" as:

an approach to pedagogy that can meet the needs of all types of learners, that can be a source of fulfillment and gratification for teachers, and that prepares future citizens who will contribute a concern and mindfulness for others, for their communities, and for the planet. (p. 185)

Students' needs are diversified, and a holistic curriculum provides for that. Students learn how to think, make decisions, develop problem-solving skills and, most importantly, connect their learning to the environments surrounding them, such as culture, geography, citizenship, and technology, among others. This encourages students to learn, be aware, and understand the value of information and how it affects their lives .

In holistic curriculum instruction, teachers work to develop critical, confident, and independent learners who are able to act in real-life situations. Students need to learn about themselves, their relationships with others, and resilience in order to face challenges and overcome difficulties. They need to learn how to succeed to realize and live in the world around them. In the holistic approach, teaching methodologies are developed through the partnership of thinking and action .

The best description of the holistic approach is that it is a student-centered approach. It takes care of the student and how they learn and introduces materials accordingly. Learning should be an interaction between students and the environment because this gives them confidence and the ability to make decisions

When you visit a large city for the first time, a guided tour can take you to places that you might be interested in visiting according to the tour's expectations and ideas, not your actual interests and choices (linear approach). A good guide introduces you to the specialties of the city, explains what to do or not to do, and gives you choices of places you might want to visit and ideas of things you might enjoy. This would be perfect for your visit (holistic approach). The same applies for teaching. When joining a new field, nothing is better than a teacher who gives a well-defined summary of the area of study and provides students with contexts, backgrounds and settings while encouraging thoughts and ideas .

The holistic approach has several important characteristics. First, it is built around the student, their community, and their history. Secondly, it is modified to construct a meaning and build relationships within school and society. Thirdly, it encourages learners to identify a purpose, be creative, and use imagination rather than just memorizing their textbooks. Fourthly, it is concerned with connecting human experience as an individual to community and the world. The holistic approach involves collaborative learning, problem-solving, and visualization strategies. It emphasizes the use of multiple approaches to education, allowing for interdependence and connectedness. Teachers are only facilitators of learning. They encourage students to use diverse materials and activities to learn. This is the goal of education all the time.

The holistic approach requires planning time, resources, and skillful teachers. Therefore, training teachers is very important. Teachers should be instructed on how to encourage conversations between and with students inside and outside the classroom, and on how to be a facilitator of learning. Teachers need to keep in mind that each student is different and possesses different skills, learning potentials, interests, and prior experience. Consequently, teachers' instruction should "provide multiple opportunities or spheres of learning" (Samaraset et al., 2006, p. 148). Teachers should support students' growth via discussion, curricular networks, hands-on activities, and research. This means providing students with numerous opportunities to learn and develop new knowledge according to their style of learning.

In short, the holistic approach is based on interconnectedness and fostering students. It treats students' minds, spirits, and emotions. It is comprehensive in that it uses a wide variety of learning approaches to meet students' each and every learning need. I think that this kind of curriculum is appropriate for all times and places and won't become out of date, because knowledge is gained through advanced research and new technologies. Many studies have confirmed that learning has a more-positive effect when communication between teachers and students is emphasized and concentrated on.

Discussion

The educational practices presented here show significant positive learning outcomes for students in different situations and living conditions. These practices, as all other techniques, may be planned then applied. In general, these practices are influential, reliable and support the essential aspects of learning. Students will attend class because they are active learners and enjoy the class, not just because they must take the class. In holistic approach

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methodology, the students' responsibility is to participate and engage, not listen to a lecture or watch a movie. Teaching methodologies are usually best learned by implementing first and reflecting later. Teachers also need to take notes for themselves on their experience, what was right or missed, students' reactions, what was successful, and what was not suitable for the class. Additionally, teachers may either ask students for their thoughts and ideas on the new technique or use an assessment to measure their learning .

There are several practices that can be considered the most effective or best practices, including: Think, Pair, and Share; Engagement Trigger; the Socratic method; and breaking directions into steps. Now, let us discuss each of these methods in more detail.

Think, Pair, and Share

As indicated from the name, it is an activity teacher can use by asking students to read a unit, an article or any class material, divide the class into pairs to discuss their thoughts ,

A very good example of Think, Pair, and Share may be used on the first day of class, when teachers meet students for the first time. On the first day of class, teachers usually present class syllabi, which include goals and objectives for the class. The syllabus introduces to students why the class is taught and how, what the requirements to succeed are, and what the tone of the class will be. Having a clear vision of what you want students to learn is a good first step. Determining if students have attained your course outcomes is also important and quite challenging if an outcome is not observable. The terms "learning" and "understanding" represent internal states and are, therefore, not observable or measurable. Using verbs that can be observed and assessed such as "apply," "identify," or "compose" is helpful to both instructors, who need to measure student attainment of outcomes, and students, who need to meet outcome expectations (Nilson, 2010, p. 19). It is true that students need foundational skills before they can build higher order thinking skills. However, as Nilson (2010) writes, "Although these lower levels furnish foundations for learning they are not the end of education" (p. 21). A key goal of almost all teachers is to develop critical thinking skills. Therefore, it is important to review course outcomes to ensure that there is a balance of outcomes focusing on foundational and higher order thinking skills.

On your first day of class, just handing the syllabus to students does not mean that they are going to read it. Therefore, to make sure students read the syllabus, learn what is expected, and understand how the material is going to be introduced, it is a good idea to have a fun introductory activity on the first

day of class. You could use the Think, Pair, and Share technique. When you hand out the syllabus, ask students to read through it individually and highlight three to five points that they think are essential to know. After 7 to 10 minutes, form small groups and ask them to share their selections and compare what they think is important. Give them 5 more minutes, then ask each group to share their selection with the whole class. Finally, generate a list of important facts or requirements and identify any information that was missed.

Through this activity, students are introduced to the syllabus and learn what is expected from them. Do not forget to encourage students to ask any questions they might have.

If your class is online, you can develop a pre-test in which you post a short, easy quiz asking about the due dates, expectations, and required assignments found in the syllabus. This is usually an easy procedure that gives students the chance to get full points while learning their responsibilities so they can plan accordingly.

Another time to use the technique is at the end of each class. Teachers usually ask students if they have any questions and often, no one asks anything. Try to end your class by asking students to write in pairs one to three things that they learned in today's class. You may also ask them to write if there are unanswered questions regarding the topic you presented. Ask students to share what they wrote and encourage them to respond on each other's questions when applicable. This will help students think of what they learned and will also help them to remember it. Some teachers like to add: What was the most surprising fact that you learned today? This depends on the material being presented. Instead of you summarizing what was presented, you are giving students the chance to reflect on what they learned, if your ideas were clear to them, and whether you achieved the objectives in mind. Encourage students to share their notes with each other so they learn from one another.

Engagement Trigger

Engagement Trigger allows students to participate in activities and present their own ideas and interpretations. In the Engagement Trigger methodology, students learn from each other more than they learn from us as teachers, especially when they see their classmates active and working hard.

Try to connect what students learn with their real-life activities and news from around the world. For example, one of the lessons in my class is talking about the weather. In preparation for the class, assign homework for the students. Each student is required to look for information about the weather in

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a different country. Assign a country to each student and ask them to use the new vocabulary or information they learned to share it with the class. With this, they learn about different countries' climates and practice what they learned. Then students can compare what they learned with the weather here in the U.S. or for the country they are living in.

Another activity would be to show a short video clip to students about extreme weather, either hot or cold, and ask them to close their eyes for 3 minutes and imagine that they are living there. Divide the class into groups and ask them to discuss how they will survive living in the severe condition presented to them. After 5 to 7 minutes, each group will present their survival techniques while other groups are encouraged to ask questions about what was presented to them. Students usually enjoy this experience much more than the teacher just presenting the information and asking questions. In my experience, students enjoy this activity while they learn, which is the goal of teaching. Instead of concentrating on how the words sound and if they are pronouncing them correctly, students focus on sentence formation and using new vocabulary. Their goal is to express how to survive and use sentences, rather than how to pronounce individual words.

The challenge with the Engagement Trigger activity is that some students will lead the conversation and decide what to present to the class without including their other group members. To solve this issue, you could assign a speaker for each group and call them the leader of the activity. You can keep personal notes on who has served as the leader in order to pick different students for the next activity and give all students a chance to participate.

Socratic Method

The Socratic method refers to starting a discussion with a general question, then moving to more-specific and more-complicated ones. Explain to students that they need to clarify their responses, find evidence, and then summarize what they have learned.

For example, one of the units I present to my students is about education. Therefore, to practice the new learned material, it is a good idea to start by providing educational statistics, then ask students for their opinion on whether the federal government should provide free college education for all of its citizens. Divide the class into two groups, one to argue in favor and the other to argue against. Both groups have to do research, ask questions, bring reason to their point, consider the alternatives to their choice, and support their answers with evidence from the real world. They also must reflect and write on

their own personal ideas, how their assigned viewpoint affected those ideas, and if they have always felt this way.

Students enjoy the Socratic experience, especially because it is like a debate and each group works to provide their own main points and evidence .

One of the challenges teachers might face using the Socratic method is that students might not be well prepared for the topic and may need more time to research. In this case, explain to students that they need to read and do some research on the topic before class. Announce to the class the next topic of discussion according to the units of the textbook, so they are prepared. Another solution is to divide the class into groups before the next class meeting, so they will know which side they are going to be on and what points they must be ready to present. Most of the time, discussions and activities like the Socratic method are successful. Last semester, when I asked students if they had any questions about the activity, one of the students said, “Can we do it again”?

Breaking Directions into Steps

Breaking directions into steps can be helpful while explaining each phase with details, providing examples for students, and asking them to practice and study what they learned in class .

Students in my Arabic 101 class find it very difficult to memorize and remember the Arabic alphabet, how the letters are written, and how they are pronounced. The Arabic language has 28 letters, which are written from right to left. Some of these sounds are not in the English alphabet. Each letter is written in three different ways, depending on its position in the word — whether it is at the beginning, middle, or end. Additionally, some letters can be connected with letters coming before or after them while others are connected with letters before them only. I call these one-way connector letters .

To teach the Arabic alphabet, I explain that we are dividing the task of learning the alphabet into four steps and we will do it one step at a time in class. In each class, I introduce between six and eight letters that share the same characteristics, whether it is their way of connection, the use of dots, or their sounds. Each class, students practice how each group of letters is written at the beginning, middle, and end of the word. I write the letter on the board while pronouncing it loudly; students are to copy it in their notebooks while they repeat it aloud. In our second class, I challenge the students to write words with the few letters they have learned so far and explain how proud I am of them for being able to write words in just our second meeting. Accordingly, they feel very encouraged and enthusiastic to learn the second set of letters .

One of the challenges teachers might face is that sometimes students do not practice at home and they come to class without doing their homework or studying the alphabets. This is very serious because if they do not do these tasks, they will not be able to read and write Arabic. Therefore, my next step is to start the next class with a test on the letters that we learned in the previous class. I explain the importance of learning their alphabet and state that is it a serious obligation that will affect their grades .

Another challenge teachers might face is that it is hard for students to remember how to connect letters and to write words. One solution is to use technology. Therefore, teachers may post YouTube videos or develop their own explaining how letters are written to share with students on their class site, so students can refer to them whenever needed .

Conclusion

In almost all countries, education is mandatory, and children have to attend schools. Teachers' jobs are very crucial because they build new generations and prepare them for the future. Therefore, it is extremely important to carefully consider our methods of teaching instruction. "Instruction is becoming more personalized: learner-centered, non-linear and self-directed. Social constructivist pedagogical approaches have introduced different (active, learner-centered and community centered) models and pose strong arguments against the structured knowledge consumption approach" (Koper & Olivier, 2004, p. 3). Our teaching practices should utilize the technological age that we are living in while developing students holistically in all aspects of life, including ethical and moral advancement. It is important for teachers to keep in mind the objectives of their teachings followed by the best practices to achieve these goals.

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