

Chapter 3

Becoming Aware: Connecting Curriculum With Lived Experience

ABSTRACT

This chapter begins with a discussion on the paradigm of the centrality of the learner-student to every educational endeavor by highlighting the relationship between learners and teachers and the connections that exist between classroom learning, lifelong learning, and economic development of the individual learner. The two-fold purpose of teaching, at any level of education, is to ensure that all learners learn how to acquire knowledge and then attain the understanding of how to apply what is learned to their own lives outside of the classroom. In Section 1, the literature review highlights the concepts and connections between ‘becoming aware’ and self-directed learning. Section 2 gives an in-depth look at integrated curriculum, noting the principles, methods, benefits, and types of integrated curriculum; making connections between learning and life skills; and negotiating class-room content with life outside of school.

INTRODUCTION

Why not establish an intimate connection between knowledge considered basic to any school curriculum and knowledge that is the fruit of the lived experience of these students as individuals? ~ Paulo Freire, Pedagogy of Freedom)

The two-fold purpose of teaching, at any level of education, is to ensure that all learners learn how to acquire knowledge and then attain the understanding of how to apply what is learned to their own lives outside of the classroom. John Dewey was a proponent of a pragmatist theory which placed the learner, rather than the teacher, as the focus of educational endeavors. Dewey argued that ‘*learning is life*’, not just ‘*preparation for life*’ (Gravells & Simpson, 2013). In *Experience and Education*, continuity and interaction are two essential, inseparable concepts for Dewey.

As an individual passes from one situation to another, his world, his environment, expands or contracts. He does not find himself living in another world but in a different part or aspect of one and the same world. What he has learned in the way of knowledge and skill in one situation becomes an instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations which follow. The process goes on as long as life and learning continue.... A fully integrated personality, on the other hand, exists only when successive experiences are integrated with one another. It can be built up only as a world of related objects is constructed (p. 44).

Education and Lived Experience

“Paulo Freire’s insistence on situating educational activity in the lived experience of participants has opened up a series of possibilities for the way educators can approach practice (Smith, 2002).” Freire’s emphasis on active dialogue, incorporates the duality of both respect and collaboration. In other words, people working cooperatively with each other rather than ‘acting on’ one another. Dialogue, a co-operative activity which enhances community and builds social capital, is a primary tenet of Freire’s educational philosophy.

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