Ideal Curriculum Project

"Middle Years Multimedia and Technology: An Ideal Perspective"

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Abstract

In this paper I have examined my view for an ideal curriculum based on the multimedia and technology middle years program that I teach in a public school in the province of Manitoba. Through this process I have outlined how the program will function with an emphasis on students creating projects, developing their own understandings of concepts, and planning school and community events. The program has been designed from a constructivist perspective that views the teacher as the facilitator of student learning with a focus on infusing multicultural and Indigenous perspectives. In this paper, I have outlined the philosophy and theory behind this approach, while describing aspects including the physical environment, development of curriculum, pedagogical structure, approach to technology, and classroom management.

Introduction

My approach to this project has been to take a course that I am currently teaching in my school, reflect on it, and provide an ideal curriculum perspective on how it should be designed and how it should function. The course is a multimedia production class that I teach in a middle school to students from grade six to eight. The topics of this class include but are not limited to filmmaking, photography, web design, computer science, and audio recording. For this project, I have chosen to disregard limitations that exist for a class like this that include class time and financial resources, while following an ideal outline of how the class would be implemented. In this paper, I will examine the potential aspects of this course including its structure, philosophy, physical environment, approach to curriculum development, its pedagogical structure, its approach to technology, and its approach to rules and classroom management.

Defining Curriculum

The United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) breaks down curriculum into multiple sections. These include the *official* curriculum which is the written curriculum presented in official documents, the *implemented* curriculum which is what is actually delivered in the classroom, the *learned* curriculum which is what the learners are really learning, and the *hidden* curriculum which includes the unintended learning of beliefs, values, and unforeseen aspects of the learning process (2017). There is also the consideration of the *null* curriculum what is defined as what is left out from a curriculum which has implications as it attaches a judgement of what is important for students to learn, and what is deemed not important (Flinders, Noddings, & Thornton, 1986). Working on the notion that curriculum is more than just a content document of educational outcomes, this project has been developed to

extend beyond a written list of content, to include other educational factors that relate to the descriptions above.

General Program Overview and Context

The program being described is a middle school multimedia and technology program that exists to teach students about a variety of topics including video production, photography, sound production, and basic computer science. The course is targeted towards middle school students between the ages of 11-14. Grade level groupings will vary for each group of students that attend a class, and thus the program has been designed so that it adapts to the interests and ability levels of the students within. This program is being designed to exist within a Canadian school. Thus it will aim to address suggestions and questions from Chambers (1999), which include the need to reference our identity as Canadians, while including Canadian content and perspectives, focusing on local Canadian spaces, and addressing topics of relevant importance in Canada, such as Indigenous languages and perspectives. The program is being taught in the province of Manitoba.

Program Outline

The foundation of this class is that students will plan and produce their own multimedia productions based on their own interpretations of related concepts and theories after receiving instruction on the technical uses of equipment. There are no specific outcomes, but there are general goals which include:

- Students will create and produce multimedia projects that use skills such as photography, audio recording, computer science, and filmmaking.

- Students will develop, present, and share their own understandings of concepts related to areas such as media literacy, digital literacy, critical thinking, social justice, multicultural perspectives, and different ways of knowing.
- Students will plan, produce, and participate in community and school events that include film festivals, live school podcast recordings, school film productions, and more.

This program is designed to be an open ended class where students will attend for half a day twice a school cycle. A typical project could introduce students to a theoretical concept such as "Montage" filmmaking, which would be followed with instruction about camera use, and culminating in the planning and production of a montage film created by groups of students. This program will use a partnership model between student and teacher to drive the focus of the course, where the teacher will continually work with students to co-construct teaching units, project assignments, and assessment criteria. Assessment for this class will be done through the use of student portfolios and a teacher narrative summary based on student observations and conversations.

Philosophy and Theory

Learning and Knowledge

This course functions with a focus on constructivism as outlined by Ültanır (2012) that draws upon the work of Dewey, Piaget, and Montessori, which suggests that learners construct their own understandings through their interactions between their experiences, activities, prior knowledge, and ideas that they come into contact with, while the teacher is the facilitator, guide,

and co-explorer who encourages learners to question, challenge, and create their own understandings. Within this program, student learning can be further developed through the experience of creating a multimedia production project, which would represent the ideas of Piaget that learning is a discovery process where creativity plays an important role in the construction of knowledge (as cited in Ültanır, 2012, p. 207)

Through the facilitation of the teacher, students will develop their own understandings and interpretations of topics such as film editing, graphic design, and narrative structure, while examining and discussing topics questions such as *what makes a good photograph?* or *what is the difference between a good short film and a bad one?*. Different viewpoints will be shared and discussed, while students will be encouraged to develop their own understandings. These understandings will be further applied to various multimedia production projects which provides learners with the experience of creating something in a constructivist learning environment (Weaver, 2008, p. 51).

Occasionally, student creations will require learning of procedures to use man made technology and production equipment. This would manifest in ways such as students learning to use equipment such as a DSLR camera which would have specific buttons that need to be manipulated to take a photo. These would also be explained by the teacher to emphasize that the equipment being used is man-made and has been designed to be used in a certain way based on what someone thought would be an ideal and intuitive way to use it. When students make mistakes or errors in their use of equipment such as a DSLR camera or with a computer programming environment, constructivist principles will be encouraged such as ideas outlined in Liberato Cardellini's interview with Ernst Von Glaserfeld (2006) which includes the suggestion

that when students make errors, there will be the goal to retrace their steps trying to find the train of thought and encouraging trial and error.

Social and Historical Influences

This "ideal" course admits its own existence within twenty-first century North America, and acknowledges that it is influenced by two of the four major schools of thought that influenced American curriculum, according to Kliebard (1994), which are: the child study movement which focused on a reformed curriculum that was tied to the course of child development and the interests of the child, and the social meliorists who saw schools as a force for social change and social justice (1994, p.23-25). This is embodied through the teacher, as they will be able to tailor the course for the individual developmental needs of the students and will encourage them to explore social justice perspectives and initiatives through their projects which could include examples such as producing a short film or graphic design project, aimed to inform viewers about a social topic that may need addressing.

Multicultural Perspectives and Indigenous Knowledge

This program will acknowledge ideas such as Rosa and Montero's descriptions of Vygotsky's idea that psychological activities and higher mental processes can be different characteristics in different cultures and that when different social groups are faced with problems they will devise a means of solving it by creating a new rule or rule system (1990, p. 61-62). Further, considerations will also be made to Bruner's (1991, p.2) notion of different cultural tool kits represents different domains that constitute different realities, principles, and procedures. In addition, the challenges as outlined by Chambers (1999) suggest the need of Indigenous content, languages, and perspectives within Canadian curriculums. These along with multicultural works

and perspectives will also be included through the viewing, discussing, and creation of multimedia projects such as short films that feature Indigenous languages and perspectives such as those available from the Winnipeg Film Group in their collection *Finding Focus Framing Canadian Metis and First Nations on Film*. These approaches will allow students to see the potential subjectivity as well as pros and cons of each perspective or viewpoint, with the aim to legitimize non traditional ways of knowing in the eyes of students, while still maintaining critical thought of scientific principles to help understand and determine what is a fact or truth, and how to distinguish between more robust facts and those that are fiction. This will be addressed by looking at and discussing content from other cultures and countries, as well as the implementation of recommendations from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada.

Intrinsic Motivation

As students will be pursuing personal learning and designing and producing their own projects. Intrinsic motivation will be an important trait for student success. Thus the implementation of self-determination theory developed by Ryan and Deci (2000) which focuses on the importance of autonomy, relatedness, and competence, will be emphasized by the teacher in this program. In terms of autonomy, students will have the freedom to choose projects that cater to their own interests. Competence will be addressed as there will be an emphasis on identifying and communicating a student's strengths which will be celebrated in program based events. Connections with other students in the form of group projects and social events, as well as program opportunities to bring in families for different projects and activities, will be used to foster relatedness for students on an ongoing basis.

Technology and Learning

The program will also embrace George Siemens theory of connectivism (2004) as a way of looking at learning in today's technology infused world. This theory follows that technology is in a sense rewiring our brains and that learning is a continual process where learners may venture into multiple unrelated fields throughout their life. Connectivism begins with the individual and views personal knowledge as a network between different nodes that could be internal or external sources of information. Connectivism views the capacity to learn more within shifting realities and that the ability to see connections between different fields, ideas, and concepts, is a core skill. Barnett, McPherson, and Sandieson (2012), liken connectivism to Schwab's ideas of milieus and emphasize that connectivism represents knowledge as the making of connections which is more than just remembering facts and concepts. Although it is debatable whether or not Siemens theory is truly a learning theory, the ideas present represent a model that can be used to foster intellectual growth, development, and capability in students. Students will not be asked to complete memorization tests at this school, and instead will be challenged to develop their own capacity to learn. This will be embodied in the classroom by the avoidance of traditional tests, while having teachers promoting research and digital literacy skills that students will develop in research based projects. There will also be a student research exhibition event where students will have the opportunities to share their personal learning and research in a public forum to the school and community.

How the Program Functions

Physical Environment

The classroom will feature large windows that look out to the school yard and nearby green space. Inside the classroom there are projectors, laptop computers, student artwork, large

classroom libraries that consist of books from multiple genres, many art supplies, and more. There is also a production studio connected to the class that features a sound stage, green screen, and audio recording area. The class will occur in these spaces but will frequently venture outside the school into the nearby greenspace or community spaces. Students will have their own laptop computer equipped with a variety of multimedia editing software. There is a treaty land acknowledgement when the students enter the building. The goal here is to provide the viewpoint that what students learn is not just limited to school but the world outside..

Class size will be no more than 20 as this has been shown to allow teachers to have more interactions with students and allows teachers to create learning centres that can facilitate student interactions and encourage students to explore, interact, and speak more often (Lackney, 1999). The classrooms will be spacious and built for more than 20 students in order to ensure that there ample space to move around and so that multiple centres can exist in a given classroom. This is decision has been made in consideration of Weinstein (1979) research review which indicated that higher density classrooms were more prone to dissatisfied students, nervousness, less social interaction, and more aggressive student behaviour.

Partnerships and collaborations will be established with local businesses, parks, care homes, universities, and community centres, to develop local place-based education opportunities similar to what is outlined by Sobel (2004) where students can connect their learning from inside to outside the school and vice-versa, while applying their learning to future daily life by engaging in experiences that could include local marketing for a business, taking photographs for a local senior's home, or by creating a film about a relevant social justice issue in the community.

Curriculum Development

The school itself will develop a curriculum committee for this class. The committees will consist of approximately five or more members who will each represent one of the five bodies of experience outlined by Schwab (1973) which include a subject matter expert or scholar, someone familiar who can represent knowledge of the learner, someone who represents the milieus or community, an experienced teacher, and someone with experience designing curriculums. In addition to these bodies of experience, there will also be representation on these committees that will include experience related but not limited to Indigenous education and multicultural perspectives. The duty of these committees will be to establish a direction for class content and resources that can be used throughout the school that will be consistent with the schools pedagogical and philosophical beliefs.

As the program exists within a Canadian school, calls to action from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission report (2015) will be implemented. These include suggestions relating to Aboriginal languages, treaty education, age appropriate curriculums on residential schools and Aboriginal peoples' contributions to Canada, and integrating Indigenous traditional knowledge in the class. Students will be exposed to films produced by Indigenous directors and writers. Students will also be encouraged to produce films that will feature narratives focusing on topics such as residential schools and contributions to Canada made by Indigenous people.

Technology and Critical Thinking

As outlined in the goals, topics revolving around technology and critical thinking will be focuses within this course. In the twenty-first century, the advent and increase use of social media has spurred multiple issues for schools ranging from cyber-bullying to obsessive video

game use. More recently, with the American 2016 election, concerns have been raised about the distribution of fake news through social media platforms (Allcott & Gentzkow, 2017). Technology and social media have created a new and dynamic landscape for education and learning, and this ideal school will address this through pedagogy, philosophy, and critical thinking. Students will be allowed to bring in their own device for they will be encouraged to use them using the guidelines provided by Durkin and Conti-Ramsden in regards to constructive use strategies for accommodating, supporting, and building on young people's activities with media, which would help reflect the child's developmental needs and interests, while promoting social interactions (2014). In addition the school will consider ideas such those of the late Canadian professor Marshall McLuhan who in his book *The Medium is the Message* suggested that the message of any form of media is not necessarily in the content, but in the way that the media is used within society (1964). Within this program the aim to address that it is not only the content of the technology, but rather the form and method of using it, that changes the pattern or ways that we engage in an activity. The example in this class, is that we would embrace the use of smartphones or tablets for learning purposes, while also engaging students in discussions about how we can use them constructively for positive purposes rather than developing rules as some schools do, where all devices are banned.

Rules, Relationships, Motivation, and Morals

This program will look to abandon traditional behaviour and training approach such as those written about by Michel Foucault in his book *Discipline and Punish*, which described the "Ecole Militaire" as a mechanism for training, a tool of observation, and conceived to "Train vigorous bodies, the imperative of health; obtain competent officers, the imperative of

qualification; create obedient soldiers, the imperative of politics; prevent debauchery and homosexuality, the imperative of morality" (1977, p.172). The focus instead is on intrinsic motivation, socially constructed morals and rules, the establishing of caring relationships between the students, faculty, and community, as well as the embracing of multiculturalism, diversity, and different sexual orientations.

Ryan and Deci (2000) identify competence, autonomy, and relatedness, as three factors that encourage enhanced motivation, mental health, and well-being among students. Within the program, staff will work using positive reinforcement to foster a sense of competence among students. Within the class, students will have the opportunity for autonomy in learning as they will often be given the freedom to pursue topics of their own interest within their projects. Relatedness will also be embraced by the school, by having a variety of family friendly events where students parents, siblings, grandparents, etc; can come to the school and participate in a variety of activities. This would take the form of a *bring your parents to school day*, a *classroom family film festival*, etc.

Rules in the class will be developed through co-construction between teacher and students. Morality and values will not be explicitly taught by the teacher, but classroom problems and difficult situations will be explored through an approach similar to "philosophy for children" as described by Wendy Turgeon (2011) which focuses on the social discussion of exploring theoretical and practical ways of thinking when problems arise. This approach will be used if there are any student behaviour incidents that need to be addressed. This approach will allow students to socially construct solutions to problems and will involve them in the process of

classroom management. This continues the extension of the teacher being a facilitator of learning, rather than a figure of authority who is the master of student discipline.

Conclusion

The descriptions above describe my ideal way as to how a middle school multimedia and technology program would be designed and would function in a Canadian school. The view of curriculum addressed here is not just the content of official school documents, it is a more holistic approach that includes program content, classroom management, philosophical approaches, multicultural perspectives, and the role of technology in learning and knowledge. The approach outlined is my own and references my own beliefs and opinions, and should not be taken as any type of official statement or beliefs of any organization or company.

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