

# EXPERIENCE - BASED CURRICULUM: THE MEANS AND GOAL OF EDUCATION

*Akuma, N.*

## ABSTRACT

This paper tries to show, how experience based curriculum is the means and goal of education. The meaning, of "Experience" and "Education" as stated by some liberal scholars are put down. The contributions of experience to life processes have also been highlighted. Man is always involved in various activities to build up life experience which later lead him on to other areas of life. These experiences are to be continuous to achieve success. This in line with the principle of experiential continuum. For education to be worthwhile therefore the curriculum should consist of those activities that are essential to life. Experience they say, is the best teacher. Finally learning through the problem-solving method brings the learner into close contact with a lasting experience. The impression made is lasting since he applies principles and facts to find a solution to a new phenomenon.

## INTRODUCTION:

Philosophers are interested in concepts. The concepts that are in use in every day life are taken up and sharpened in philosophy. By clarifying concepts philosophy not only gives us better insight into the meaning of what we are doing but enables us to do it better and understand the terms and other things related to them. It is on this premise that Aristotle feels that for any discussion to be followed all the related terms/concepts must be properly clarified.

In view of this it becomes necessary for purposes of clarity and better understanding of this paper to explain the concepts: "Experience", "Education", and curriculum. Good (1959), outlines various meanings of experience thus:

- (a) The acquisition of knowledge, attitudes or skills through one's own perception and participation; or knowledge, attitudes, or skills so acquired.
- (b) The context of the life process as distinct from the order of things in themselves or the realm of essence or reality, the absolutely real; the process of a human being interacting with a physical and cultural environment, doing certain things and having certain things happen to him.
- (c) Experience as the basis or context of all knowledge involves the process of seeing relationships between what one does or plans to do and the connections may be used in guiding subsequent experiences.

Okafor (1984) sees experience in its contextual meaning as the result of interaction between the environment and man's needs, desire, purposes and capabilities. Put simply, experience is the interaction of the individual with his environment.

It is within the context of this interaction that the essence of education has to do with the individual's ability to solve the problems confronting him in life.

On the other hand "Education"<sup>11</sup> is interpreted by John Dewey (1959) as "the scientific method by means of which man studies the world, acquires cumulatively knowledge of meanings and values, these outcomes, however, being data for critical study and intelligent living". In Hornby's view (1971) "Education is the systematic training and instruction (especially of the young in school, college etc.) knowledge and abilities, development of character and mental powers, resulting from such training". Good (1959) also sees education as:

- (a) the aggregate of all processes by means of which a person develops abilities, attitudes and other forms of behaviour of positive values in the society in which he lives.
- (b) the social process by which people are subjected to the influence of a selected and controlled environment (especially that of the school so that they may attain social competence and optimum individual development).

Wheeler (1967) opines that "education may be thought of as an important social institution, the totality of structures and roles, processes, relations and material instruments built up around society's interest in the enculturation or socialization of the young",

Ryan (1972) cited by Chollom (1994) writes that education is:

a process of human growth by which an individual gains greater understanding and control

over himself and his world it involves our minds, our bodies and our relation with the people and the world around us - Education is strictly a process, an activity characterized by continuous development and changes. The end product of the process of education is learning.

From the above views all agree that education especially the formalised type has to take place in a school. Other agencies no doubt make certain aspects of education available to the young, but that of the school is systematically planned with series of relevant experiences built into the curriculum. This is why Wheeler (1967) defines curriculum as "the planned experiences offered to the learner under the guidance of the school" or in the words of Onwuka (1985) "a total experience with which the school deals in educating young people. It is deliberate, systematic and planned attempts made by the school to change the behaviour of members of the society in which it situates." The ultimate task of education is to bring about learning. The learning takes place as a result of interaction with varied experiences. It now becomes imperative as far as education is concerned, there has to be varied experiences to carry the young through the activities that will enable him be well educated. Any such activities that have't the relevant planned experiences should be jettisoned for they are bound to be counterproductive in the education of the young.

#### THE EXPERIENCE PROCESS AND ITS CONTRIBUTION TO THE LIFE PROCESS.

Man alone can have true experience because he alone can engage in self-conscious activity. Man and the lower animals are alike in striving to get what they wish, but man in his own struggles knows what he is about and is quite aware that he is doing it. It is this ability of man to see what is going on, both as a whole and its various relations, himself and others, which distinguishes him from the other animals, and it is this difference which gives to man his peculiar privilege of true experience. Experience can be related to a specific kind of life content the interaction with the environment. A person under a certain situation is impinged, he responds actively first by feeling stirred, then by sizing up the situation, and by deciding goals and means of controlling the situation finally brings it under control. Dewey (1917:12 -13) states. "We live in a world where changes are going on whose issues means our Weal or woe". Experience is thus "a future implicated in the present and success and failure are primary categories of life". Experience helps us to learn and shape our further conducts. It is then, in a sense a kind of life in which the early stages pervade, then leaving the later stages to shape these further efforts.

The operation of learning gives simultaneous^ both greater complexity of character to the learner and greater complexity to the outside world.

The learner then becomes more of a person within, and for him, the world at the same time takes on more character without. This is a distinctive contribution made by learning from experience to the life process.

In these various ways, the factor of self conscious experience makes the following contributions outlined by Kil-Patrick (1959:24) to the life process.

(i) the person involved is not only active but he knows what he is doing, and why and how. (ii) the person also relates what he is how doing with pertinent matters previously experienced so as to use these for

better control of the situation at hand-Cm) from similar experience, man from time to time has invented or discovered or contrived significantly new ways

of managing life, the accumulation of which when put to work constitute exactly civilization. Butler (1927:329) wisely pointed out that "even day and every hour we are engaged in accommodating our changing selves to our changing and changable surroundings. The life process, he says, is in fact "nothing else than this process of accommodation; when we fail in it a little we are stupid, when we suspend it temporally we sleep, when we give up the attempt altogether, we die:. In some lives, the strain of these accommodation is small, in others great. This process of accommodation because we are conscious of it, we call experience.

#### **EXPERIENTIAL CONTINUUM**

Continuity is a type of cumulative learning- It refers to the reinforcement and reiteration of certain major elements. These elements include the skills, facts, attitudes and values that education tries to enable

learners acquire. The task of continuity is to ensure that over time, teachers provide opportunities for the students to practise, reinforce and improve upon the types of knowledge, skills and attitudes that they are expected to acquire. It is the role of the teacher as an educator to bring different kinds of knowledge or skills into continuous operation. All the learning activities have to be continuous. The learner's reading, listening, thinking and practising have to go on simultaneously in an Experiential continuum.

The principle of the continuity of experience is very necessary in the field of education. It is involved in every attempt to discriminate between experience that are worth while educationally and those that are not. A present experience takes up something from those which have gone before and modifies in some way the quality of those that come after.

Onwuka (1981:225) is of the view that the school experience should be continuous with real life problems, so that what is done in schools does not stand out as an isolated event unconnected with out-of-school life. Continued experiences are very vital especially when the course of study is based upon the need and purposes of the learner. In such a situation Burton (1944:93) agrees that "learnings valuable in later life are recognised to be the same as those not necessary". In adult life there is argumentation, criticisms and analysis of ideas. But children in lower classes do ask for simple evidence in order to arrive at conclusions. Burton therefore, affirms that "continued experiences in and out-of-school nature present understandings and abilities into adult form and use.

Every experience influences in some degree the objective conditions under which further experiences are based. For example, a child who learns to speak has a new facility and a new desire, He has also widened the external conditions of subsequent learning. When he learns to read, he similarly opens up a new environment. Every experience acts like a moving force. It is then an important assignment for the educator to watch carefully in what direction an experience is heading. It then follows that education will be intelligently conducted upon the basis of experience.

## **EXPERIENCE AND EDUCATION**

Experience has been thought of as the interaction of the individual with his environment. It is the result of the interaction between the environment and man's needs, desires, purposes and capacities, it has been noted that it is within the context of this interaction that education will help the individual to solve the problem of life, since living involves the ability to solve problems. And for a man to get on in the solution of his problems, he has to be involved in thinking. Pragmatism as a philosophy has experience as its "wheel base", Okafor (1984:63) brilliantly states that thought finds its fulfillment only in action and hence cannot be valid except when it passes through the crucible of experience and is tried out tested in the public forum of activity. In the process of doing and undergoing. John Dewey was among the pragmatists who articulated to the position of pragmatism and the process of man's knowing. According to him, instrumentalism (pragmatism) is "a behaviourist theory of thinking and knowing" knowing is literally something which we do, analysis is ultimately physical and active, that meanings in their logical quality are stand points, attitudes, and methods of behaving toward facts, and that active experimentation is essential to verification. (Dewey 1916:331-332). This simply implies that we know in the process of doing and we do in the process of knowing,

Dewey (1900) again makes us to understand that 'growth' is the sole end of education, and growth is realised in the domain of experience - when the individual is acquiring the ability to see the relationships and inter-connections between various experiences in the divergent aspects of learning process.

It then follows that for an experience to have educational value it must further grow. Henderson (1947:278) believes that "the criteria by which one may judge the worth whiteness of experience for education are the categories of continuity and interaction". An experience should lead on to other experiences, and those to still others, in such a way as to arouse curiosity, strengthen initiative and set up desires and purposes, that are sufficiently intense to carry

a person over dead places in the future. (Dewey 1959:31). If the above condition is satisfied then the experience has value for education. For education to go on, there must be a curriculum to guide.

Curriculum therefore should consist of these activities that are concomitants of life. Put succinctly, the school Curriculum should consist of the experiences of living which the pupils undergo under the guidance of the school. Even though the school subjects like geography, history, mathematics and sciences prepared the young for life, but their fault lies in the compartmentalisation and abstractness in their presentation to engender growth. The experimental curriculum needs to be learner-centered for it to achieve the goal in education. Interest of the learners and flexibility so as to take care of individual differences should be the concern of such a curriculum. Extra-curriculum activities (games, sports etc,) add much to the wealth of experience of the learner. The pragmatists realized this aspect of education and incorporated it into their school curriculum. The curriculum development centres should visit the school curriculum always for inclusion of new ideas and expunge outdated areas. These ideas must be related to the needs of the society which will be of benefit to the learner.

### **TEACHING METHODOLOGY AND EXPERIENCE**

We have already established the fact that experience is taken as the interaction between the organism with its environment.

The test for the validity of learning must be done within the same frame of reference which is experience. Based on this therefore, learning has to involve action. It has to involve doing things. The type of action that should be connected with learning is in line with one of the definitions of education by Dewey (1966:88-90) which states that education is characterised as:

"that reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience".

This implies that every act of reconstruction and reorganisation has to do with problem solving and learning cannot be separated from problem-solving. This is the highest level of learning as seen in the hierarchy proposed by Gagne (1970). It involves the application of principles and facts to explain and solve new phenomena or predict consequences from known conditions. This should be brought into our classroom lessons. The progressivist emphasizes on this. In problem-solving, the teacher advises and guides the pupils. But these roles must be adequately performed to make the method more meaningful. Teacher's prominence in the activities is not pronounced. The child works according to his felt needs. The children happily participate in project work in group thereby cultivating the good habit of working with one another. They thus learn by doing which is in agreement with the philosophy of experience. Although learning by this way has its limitations, most often it makes knowledge when acquired much more meaningful.

### **CONCLUSION**

Basic to Dewey's education philosophy is his concept of experience. "On the active hand, experience is trying -on the passive, it is undergoing". When we experience something we act upon it, we do something with it, then we suffer or undergo the consequences. The measure of the value of an experience lies in the perception of the relationship or continuities to which it leads up.

An experience is always what it is because of a transaction taking place between an individual and what, at the time, constitutes his environment. The environment in other words, is whatever conditions that interact with personal needs, desires, purposes and capacities to create an experience. Even when a person builds a castle in the air, he is interacting with the objects which he constructs in fancy.

The two principles of continuity and interaction are not separate from each other. They intersect and unite. Continuity and interaction in their active union with each other provide the measure of the educative significance and value for experience. The important characteristic to emphasize about continuity is that learners should have frequent and systematic opportunities to practise any curriculum elements that have been presented to them. Teachers on the other hand must not forget that their lessons have to be built upon previous learning. What was done at a lower stage should be used as foundation upon which to build subsequent experiences for experience is well known to be the best teacher.

When one meets a problem, the solution of which seems impossible only then does one think. For this

reason Dewey advises about developing intelligence by having the curriculum grow out of those problems which the learners meet in their experiences and which meet the criteria of continuity and of interaction. Thinking and action are parts of the same process. Thinking guides action, action tests thinking.

It is for this reason that the pragmatist in his philosophy, attaches so much importance to experience. He strongly feels that what matters in respect of reality is the overt phenomena. That is to say that man's needs and goals are explained away only in terms of physical and social realities. It is not enough, they should also be explained in terms of metaphysical or the supernatural. Since some of the problems that affect us as human beings cannot have full solution or explanation in the domain of experience, they should be traced to the supernatural or the supreme being.

Experience should always be changing, and lead on to genuine understanding. So for education to accomplish its ends both for the learner and the society, it must be based upon experience. Experience is then the means and goal of education.

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