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The Evolution of Curriculum Development in the Context of Increasing Social and Environmental Complexity

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ABSTRACT

The history of curriculum development has been characterized and a series of "crises" with the pendulum shifting between traditionalists' call for getting back to the basics and the progressives' focus on the learner. However, tracing this history, one can see a common theme in the criticisms expressed by both parties: the failure of the existing curriculum to meet the demands presented by an increasingly complex society. I follow this theme in order to provide historical context for contemporary calls by scientists and educators for wider use of systems-oriented curricula (i.e. curricula designed to improve systems thinking) at primary, secondary, and tertiary levels of education. With this context, one can view these current calls not as a radical shift of direction, but as a logical next stage in the evolution of curriculum. I conclude with a call for more research assessing the effectiveness of systems-oriented instruction and provide guidelines for enhancing the usefulness of such research in the current United States system.

KEYWORDS

History of Curriculum Development; Systems Thinking; Complexity

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