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Unit 4
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What should be taught in schools today? Would students benefit more if they have less thrown at them but they dive deeper into the material or would students benefit more if they have a lot of material come their way but only skim the surface? In other words, is it more important for “Breadth” of knowledge or “Depth” of knowledge? These two competing theories have thrown many educators into turmoil against each other, most notably Howard Gardner and Ed Hirsch, because it is hard to decide what exactly would be the best method for today’s classroom. These two competing ideas is just one example of theories that educators argue about. There are many more polarities that exist in the education system. The best way for educators to get a grasp on what the polarities are, why they exist, and how to solve them is to partake in curriculum inquiry.

Curriculum inquiry is when people study teaching and learning, organization and leadership in schools, local and national policies and their consequences (**Unit 4**). When educators practice curriculum inquiry they begin to discover the best methods, lessons, standards, and subject matter that should be taught in the schools system. Teachers and administrators can improve many aspects of the education system, from the classroom level to the district level, if they take the time to discover what is best for the students overall. However, like anything else, curriculum inquiry can pit educators against one another because each person has their own ideas and belief systems; therefore, creating different solutions for the polarities that exist within the schools. Howard Gardner and Ed Hirsch are two examples of theorist that show how curriculum inquiry can create tension and debate among educators.

One of the polarities that exist with the school system is “Breadth vs. Depth” that was stated above. Gardner and Hirsch both have very different views on this issue. Gardner feels that students should focus on four major disciplines: science, mathematics, the arts, and history. Within these four disciplines the teachers should engross the students in only a few major topics. That way the students will not just get to skim the surface of a lot of subjects but they will be able to completely immerse themselves in a subject. Students will then be able to understand, comprehend, and remember in the long run instead of just regurgitating the information for a test (TDM).

On the other hand, Ed Hirsch feels that it is important to cover a wide range of subjects within the curriculum. Hirsch feels that there should be a set “Core Knowledge” that every student across the nation learns. This knowledge does not need to be gained by rote memorization or regurgitated on the test but should be learned by connecting the information in a methodical fashion. “Nobody likes word lists as objects of instruction; for one thing, they don't work. But I am not thinking of such a lexicon as an object of instruction. I am thinking of it rather as a guide to objects of instruction. Take the phrase "First Amendment," for instance. That is a lexical item that can hardly be used without bringing in a lot of associated information (4.12).” Hirsch also believes that if every student is learning this same core knowledge then as the years go by and each student progresses to the next grade a wealth of background knowledge will be gained. This background knowledge will in turn help the students learn more and gain understanding on the subject. The core knowledge will also decrease the cultural gap that persists in the United States by making sure all students, no matter their economic or cultural background learn, the necessary skills to succeed in life.

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As it can clearly be seen curriculum inquiry creates competing ideas among researchers and theorists. Even though tension and disparity is created when curriculum inquiry is used it is still a good way to address the problems in the school system. The hard part is comparing the different ideas that many educators develop and finding the best one for the nation. However, as long as people keep investigating, improving, and most of all caring about the state of the education system today our nations children will eventually benefit and learn more.