

Curriculum Compendium: Plato as Curriculum Theorist (Protagonist)

Plato's (c.428BC - 348BC) model of curriculum centers on a dialectical inquiry process (Wians, 2012; Brumbaugh, 1970). This is reflected in his use of the literary genre of the 'dialogue', and in his characters' use of the Socratic Method (Rowe; 2006; Brumbaugh, 1970). This dialectical inquiry process, which requires active learner participation in order to be effective, follows a common pattern. It begins with the problem of definition (Blackson, 2011; S. Cohen, 2004), in which Socrates poses a question which needs to be answered. From here the interplay of dialectic begins by means of the Socratic Method whereby Socrates systematically asks questions to his interlocutors in order to arrive at a precise definition. In attempting a definitive answer there are a series of 'moments of puzzlement', when the attempt at a definition breaks down, usually as the result of a contradiction (M. Cohen, 1962). The question is then re-articulated in light of the contradiction and a new path of questioning begins. The moments of puzzlement are a central pedagogical tool serving as the means to provoke the curiosity of the inquirer and to force him to choose whether to actively continue the inquiry (Turner, 2014; Wian, 2012). At the same time, Plato's readers are brought to the point of asking the underlying question: What does a life worth living look like? Plato's answer is a life whereby one actively commits oneself to the cultivation of virtue - itself a reflection of the highest 'Good' - in the movement from 'true belief' to 'knowledge' (*Meno* 88d; Weiss, 2003; Blackson, 2011; Dorter, 1994).

Fr Matthew Penney

References

Barrow, R. (2006). *Plato: His precursors, his educational philosophy, and his legacy*. London, UK: Continuum.

- Blackson, T. (2011). *Ancient Greek philosophy: From the presocratics to the Hellenistic philosophers*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- Brumbaugh, R. (1970). Plato's philosophy of education: The Meno experiment and the Republic curriculum, *Educational theory*, 20(3), 207-228.
- Cohen, M. (1962). The aporias in Plato's early dialogues, *Journal of the history of ideas*, 23(2), 163-174.
- Cohen, S. (2004). *Socratic definitions*. Retrieved from Lecture Notes Online Web site:
<http://faculty.washington.edu/smcohen/320/socdef.htm>
- Dorter, K. (1994). *Form and good in Plato's eleatic dialogues: The Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman*. Los Angeles, CA: The Regents of the University of California.
- Rowe, C. (2006). Interpreting Plato. In H. Bensen, *A Companion to Plato* (pp.13-24). Malden, MA: Blackwell.
- Turner, J. (1998). *The project of self-education in Plato's Protagoras, Gorgias, and Meno*. Retrieved from: <https://www.bu.edu/wcp/Papers/Anci/AnciTurn.htm>
- Weiss, R. (2008). *Virtue in the cave: Moral inquiry in Plato's Meno*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Wians, W. (2012). Virtue, practice, and perplexity in Plato's *Meno*. *Plato*, 12. Retrieved from <http://gramata.univ-paris1.fr/Plato/spip.php?article117#biblio>