

# CURRICULUM

## 1. WHAT IS CURRICULUM?

A curriculum is a dynamic set of interconnected, interrelated, and overlapping “processes” → planning, enacting/implementing, evaluating

These processes are in play at every curricular level:

*lesson level* (micro level):


- a teacher plans a lesson for a class → Product: **lesson plan** (a detailed written plan, a set of notes, marginal notes in the textbook, or a mental plan)
- teacher and learners enact the lesson – it may go according to plan or may diverge from it → teacher makes adjustments depending on what happens in the classroom
- teacher evaluates its effectiveness and makes decisions

*program level* (macro level):


- a person or group of people designs a curriculum plan for an educational program
- teachers and learners enact the curriculum
- effectiveness is evaluated informally/formally

*unit and course level*:

- a teacher (or group of teachers) makes a plan for a course → Product: **syllabus** (what will be taught, and sequencing, in a course of instruction)
- teacher and students enact the course
- teachers and others evaluate the effectiveness of the course

 **Note 1:** Curriculum is a broader concept than syllabus:

- (a) it applies to the program level, which subsumes units and lessons
- (b) it is more comprehensive because it includes not only planning but also enacting and evaluating

 **Note 2:** syllabus is also used to refer to the content of a program, as in “the program syllabus,” especially in British English  
curriculum is also used to refer to the instructional content of a course, as in “the curriculum for my course,” especially in American English

## 2. TWO VIEWS OF CURRICULUM

Curriculum development uses models to examine the elements of a curriculum and how those elements interrelate.

Tyler (1949):

(1) What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?

*Clarify the nature of the educational enterprise, i.e., specification of aims*

(2) What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?

*Articulate the matter used for attaining the pre-specified aims, i.e., specification of content*

(3) How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?

*Articulate the principles for staging and sequencing input, i.e., organization*

(4) How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained?

*Aims and objectives → Content → Organization → Evaluation*

Tyler’s model:

- ends-means model
- linear approach
- systems-design model

**2.1. Implementation**

This is a top-down approach since the curriculum is designed by curriculum specialists and is implemented by the teachers and learners

The processes of curriculum development are seen as sequential stages, each carried out by different specialists in a hierarchical manner:

It puts the learners and the teachers at the end of the chain of decisions.

Domain →	Curriculum planning	Specification of ends and means		Program implementation		Classroom implementation	
Participants →	Policy makers						
Products →	Policy						
		Needs analysts	Methodologists				
		Syllabus					
				Materials writers	Teacher trainers		
				Materials	Training program		
						Teachers	Learners
						Teaching acts	Learning acts

Problems:

- ⊗ Each different group of people performs different curricular functions → Each product is ‘handed off’ to the next group and each successive group uses and interprets the previous product in its own way.

➡ lack of alignment between each stage ↔ lack of coherence in the curriculum

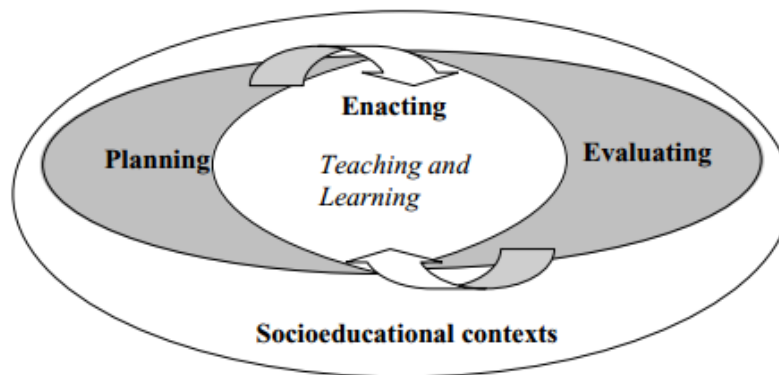
- ⊖ By putting the classroom at the end of the chain of decisions, it positions teachers/learners as implementers of received wisdom, rather than decision-makers in their own right  $\leftrightarrow$  congruent with fidelity perspective  
 $\Rightarrow$  As all curriculum decisions are made at a remove from the classroom the curriculum is often not realistic for the classroom.
- ⊖ No room for evaluation of the curriculum once it is implemented in the classroom especially in large-scale curriculum projects

**2.2. Enactment view**

Three core processes of curriculum: planning, *implementing* and evaluating  $\rightarrow$  the middle one renamed *enacting* to reflect the agency of teachers and learners  $\rightarrow$  importance of negotiation and interaction

Curriculum is a complex, dynamic system where everything is interconnected; nonlinearity and adaptation are the norms:

Classroom enactment  $\leftrightarrow$  planning  
 Planning  $\leftrightarrow$  evaluation  
 Evaluation  $\leftrightarrow$  teaching and learning  
 $\rightarrow$  these processes are embedded in specific social and educational contexts



**3. IDEOLOGY OF THE CURRICULUM**

Planners’ ideologies about schools, learners, and teachers provide the philosophical underpinnings for educational programs and the justification for the kinds of aims they contain.

**3.1. The content model: Classical humanism**

The central focus of the curriculum in **content model** is the content/subject matter of what is to be learned  $\leftrightarrow$  The content matter is the basis for a curriculum ; mastery of content is an end

ELT  $\rightarrow$  curriculum planning starts with an analysis of the target language, rather than learners’ needs

**Classical humanism** is cultivation of a certain mentality, sensibility, and vision through *classical contents*

the content is a valued cultural heritage; the content is knowledge which is agreed to be universal, unchanging and absolute (as such, it is essentialist).

Characterized by the desire to promote broad intellectual capacities such as memorization and the ability to analyze, classify, etc.

People have fairly definite ideas of what a good education is: religion/ethics, second language, rhetoric, history, poetry, and moral philosophy

ELT → this model underpins the grammar-based curriculum → transmits knowledge of the language system to the learners : ignores factors such as context, appropriacy of use,

*Content:* selection and sequencing of individual grammar points and lexis

*Teaching procedures and learning experiences:* drilling of grammatically correct sentences, explanations of theory and memorization of lists of vocabulary

*Assessment:* learner's ability to produce grammatically accurate language

Criticism:

- ⊗ unable to take into account the wider purposes of education, the abilities or problems of the individual learner, or the complexities of the learning process;
- ⊗ globalization and the growth of multicultural societies → cannot justify the transmission of one particular culture;
- ⊗ 'education for all' → unable to take account of the widely differing needs of a massive student population, where the 'educated' are no longer an elite trained to rule the next generation of workers;
- ⊗ basic premises of science no longer rest on objective theories → the foundations of universal knowledge are no longer secure

### 3.2. The objectives model: Socioeconomic efficiency & Social reconstructionism

The starting point for the **objectives model** is the objectives of the teaching-learning program.

Its origins lie in the work of behavioral psychologists who defined learning as: *a process of observable changes in behavior which could be measured.*

Based on an instrumental view of education as a means towards ends (**ends-means model**): if ends were sufficiently specified then the best means to attain them could be established

Assumption: to understand a complex thing it must be taken apart systematically into its smallest components

Attraction of the model is that it provides:

- Clarity of goals
- Ease of evaluation
- Accountability

**Socioeconomic efficiency** emphasizes the practical needs of learners and society and the role of an educational program in producing learners who are economically productive by *task analysis*, by forming objectives for each task, and by teaching skills as discrete units.

“Educational engineers” whose job it was to discover the total range of habits, skills, abilities, forms of thought, etc. that its members need for the effective performance

Basis of the notional-functional syllabus and outcomes-based approaches

This move often reflects a Research, Development, and Diffusion model

**Social reconstructionism** emphasizes the roles schools and learners can and should play in addressing social injustices and inequality >> schools must engage teachers and students in an examination of important social and personal problems >> *empowerment*: focus on developing knowledge and skills to create a world where people care about each other; social injustices and inequality are central >> associated with critical theory

Criticism:

- ⊗ reduces people to the level of automatons ≠ autonomy, self-fulfillment and personal development
- ⊗ attempts to impose a linear process on something that is cyclical
- ⊗ concentrates exclusively on the products rather than the processes of learning
- ⊗ is reductionist and presupposes that learners’ needs can be identified with a predetermined set of skills and objectives ≠ other aspects of education?!

### 3.3. The process model: Progressivism

The **process model** does not define goals of educations in terms of particular ends or content, but the processes and procedures by which the individual develops *understanding*, e.g., the relations between things encountered earlier and later are made as clear as possible → methodology

**Progressivism** groups together philosophies that stress the individual needs of learners, the role of individual experience, and the need to develop awareness, self-reflection, learner strategies, learner self-direction, autonomy, etc.

*Reconceptualists* stress

- learning is rooted in the questions of learners that arise through experiencing the world;
- learning is active, not passive;
- learner is a problem solver and thinker who makes meaning through her individual experience in the physical and cultural context;
- effective teachers provide experiences so that students can learn by doing

*Constructivists* emphasize learning

- involves active construction and testing of one’s own representation of the world (i.e., development of understanding)

- is seen to involve re-learning and reorganization of one's previous understanding and representation of knowledge

Common sights: small groups debating, custom-made activities, teachers walking freely, posing thought-provoking questions

Less attractive than the objectives model for large-scale curriculum development

Progressivism finds expression in the process syllabus, e.g., Bangalore project

### **3.4. Cultural pluralism**

Schools should prepare students to participate in different cultures not just dominant culture

Students in need to develop cross-cultural competency or intercultural communication → one cultural group is not superior to others ; multiple perspectives representing the viewpoints of different cultural groups should be developed

Seeks to redress racism, to raise the self-esteem of minority groups, and to help children appreciate the viewpoints of other cultures and religions