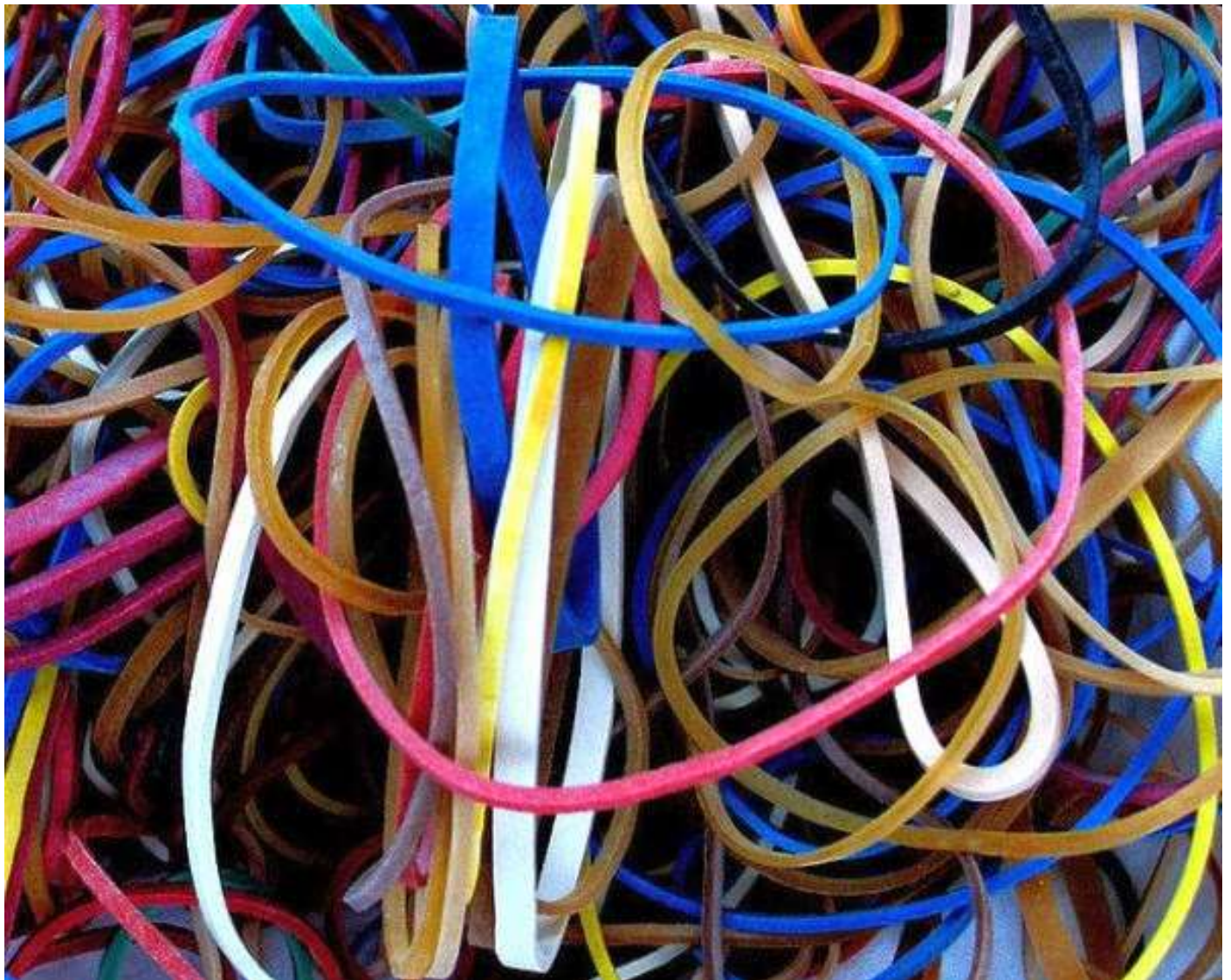


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What is curriculum? Exploring theory and practice



Curriculum theory and practice. The organization of schooling and further education has long been associated with the idea of a curriculum. But what actually is curriculum, and how might it be conceptualized? We explore curriculum theory and practice and its relation to informal education.

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The idea of curriculum is hardly new – but the way we understand and theorize it has altered over the years – and there remains considerable dispute as to meaning. It has its origins in the running/chariot tracks of Greece. It was, literally, a course. In Latin curriculum was a racing chariot; *currere* was to run. A useful starting point for us here might be the definition offered by John Kerr and taken up by Vic Kelly in a standard work on the subject. Kerr defines curriculum as, ‘All the learning which is planned and guided by the school, whether it is carried on in groups or individually, inside or outside the school. (quoted in Kelly 1983: 10; see also, Kelly 1999). This gives us some basis to move on – and for the moment all we need to do is highlight two of the key features:

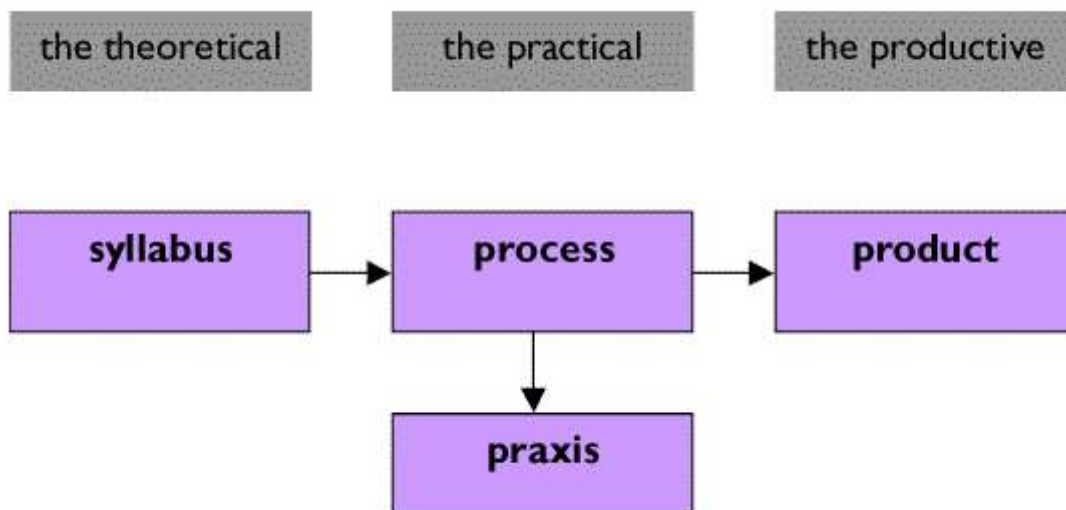
Learning is planned and guided. We have to specify in advance what we are seeking to achieve and how we are to go about it.

The definition refers to schooling. We should recognize that our current appreciation of curriculum theory and practice emerged in the school and in relation to other schooling ideas such as subject and lesson.

In what follows we are going to look at four ways of approaching curriculum theory and practice:

1. Curriculum as a body of knowledge to be **transmitted**.
2. Curriculum as an attempt to achieve certain ends in students – **product**.
3. Curriculum as **process**.
4. Curriculum as **praxis**.

It is helpful to consider these ways of approaching curriculum theory and practice in the light of [Aristotle's](#) influential categorization of [knowledge](#) into three disciplines: [the theoretical](#), [the productive](#) and [the practical](#).



Here we can see some clear links – the body of knowledge to be transmitted in the first is that classically valued as ‘the canon’; the process and praxis models come close to practical deliberation; and the technical concerns of the outcome or product model mirror elements of Aristotle’s characterization of the productive. More this will be revealed as we examine the theory underpinning individual models.

Curriculum as a syllabus to be transmitted

Many people still equate a curriculum with a syllabus. Syllabus, naturally, originates from the Greek (although there was some confusion in its usage due to early misprints). Basically it means a concise statement or table of the heads of a discourse, the contents of a treatise, the subjects of a series of lectures. In the form that many of us will have been familiar with it is connected with courses leading to examinations – teachers talk of the syllabus associated with, say, the Cambridge Board French GSCE exam. What we can see in such documents is a series of headings with some additional notes which set out the areas that may be examined.

A syllabus will not generally indicate the relative importance of its topics or the order in which they are to be studied. In some cases as Curzon (1985) points out, those who compile a syllabus tend to follow the traditional textbook approach of an ‘order of contents’, or a pattern prescribed by a ‘logical’ approach to the subject, or – consciously or unconsciously – a the shape of a university course in which they may have participated. Thus, an approach to curriculum theory and practice which focuses on syllabus is only really concerned with content. Curriculum is a body of knowledge-content and/or

subjects. Education in this sense, is the process by which these are transmitted or ‘delivered’ to students by the most effective methods that can be devised (Blenkin et al 1992: 23).

Where people still equate curriculum with a syllabus they are likely to limit their planning to a consideration of the content or the body of knowledge that they wish to transmit. ‘It is also because this view of curriculum has been adopted that many teachers in primary schools’, Kelly (1985: 7) claims, ‘have regarded issues of curriculum as of no concern to them, since they have not regarded their task as being to transmit bodies of knowledge in this manner’.

Curriculum as product

The dominant modes of describing and managing education are today couched in the productive form. Education is most often seen as a technical exercise. Objectives are set, a plan drawn up, then applied, and the outcomes (products) measured. It is a way of thinking about education that has grown in influence in the United Kingdom since the late 1970s with the rise of vocationalism and the concern with competencies. Thus, in the late 1980s and the 1990s many of the debates about the National Curriculum for schools did not so much concern how the curriculum was thought about as to what its objectives and content might be.

It is the work of two American writers Franklin Bobbitt (1918; 1928) and Ralph W. Tyler (1949) that dominate theory and practice within this tradition. In *The Curriculum* Bobbitt writes as follows:

The central theory [of curriculum] is simple. Human life, however varied, consists in the performance of specific activities. Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities. However numerous and diverse they may be for any social class they can be discovered. This requires only that one go out into the world of affairs and discover the particulars of which their affairs consist. These will show the abilities, attitudes, habits, appreciations and forms of knowledge that men need. These will be the objectives of the curriculum. They will be numerous, definite and particularized. The curriculum will then be that series of experiences which children and youth must have by way of obtaining those objectives. (1918: 42)

This way of thinking about curriculum theory and practice was heavily influenced by the development of management thinking and practice. The rise of ‘scientific management’ is often associated with the name of its main advocate F. W. Taylor. Basically what he proposed was greater division of labour with jobs being simplified; an extension of managerial control over all elements of the workplace; and cost accounting based on systematic time-and-motion study. All three elements were involved in this conception of curriculum theory and practice. For example, one of the attractions of this approach to curriculum theory was that it involved detailed attention to what people needed to know in order to work, live their lives and so on. A familiar, and more restricted, example of this approach can be found in many training programmes, where particular tasks or jobs have been analyzed – broken down into their component elements – and lists of competencies drawn up. In other words, the curriculum was not to be the result of ‘armchair speculation’ but the product of systematic study. Bobbitt’s work and theory met with

mixed responses. One telling criticism that was made, and can continue to be made, of such approaches is that there is no social vision or programme to guide the process of curriculum construction. As it stands it is a technical exercise. However, it wasn't criticisms such as this which initially limited the impact of such curriculum theory in the late 1920s and 1930s. Rather, the growing influence of 'progressive', child-centred approaches shifted the ground to more romantic notions of education. Bobbitt's long lists of objectives and his emphasis on order and structure hardly sat comfortably with such forms.

The Progressive movement lost much of its momentum in the late 1940s in the United States and from that period the work of Ralph W. Tyler, in particular, has made a lasting impression on curriculum theory and practice. He shared Bobbitt's emphasis on rationality and relative simplicity. His theory was based on four fundamental questions:

1. What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. What educational experiences can be provided that are likely to attain these purposes?
3. How can these educational experiences be effectively organized?
4. How can we determine whether these purposes are being attained? (Tyler 1949: 1)

Like Bobbitt he also placed an emphasis on the formulation of behavioural objectives.

Since the real purpose of education is not to have the instructor perform certain activities but to bring about significant changes in the students' pattern of behaviour, it becomes important to recognize that any statements of objectives of the school should be a statement of changes to take place in the students. (Tyler 1949: 44)

We can see how these concerns translate into a nicely-ordered procedure: one that is very similar to the technical or productive thinking set out below.

Step 1: Diagnosis of need

Step 2: Formulation of objectives

Step 3: Selection of content

Step 4: Organization of content

Step 5: Selection of learning experiences

Step 6: Organization of learning experiences

Step 7: Determination of what to evaluate and of the ways and means of doing it. (Taba 1962)

The attraction of this way of approaching curriculum theory and practice is that it is systematic and has considerable organizing power. Central to the approach is the formulation of behavioural objectives – providing a clear

notion of outcome so that content and method may be organized and the results evaluated.

There are a number of issues with this approach to curriculum theory and practice. The first is that the plan or programme assumes great importance. For example, we might look at a more recent definition of curriculum as: ‘A programme of activities (by teachers and pupils) designed so that pupils will attain so far as possible certain educational and other schooling ends or objectives (Grundy 1987: 11). The problem here is that such programmes inevitably exist prior to and outside the learning experiences. This takes much away from learners. They can end up with little or no voice. They are told what they must learn and how they will do it. The success or failure of both the programme and the individual learners is judged on the basis of whether pre-specified changes occur in the behaviour and person of the learner (the meeting of behavioural objectives). If the plan is tightly adhered to, there can only be limited opportunity for educators to make use of the interactions that occur. It also can deskill educators in another way. For example, a number of curriculum programmes, particularly in the USA, have attempted to make the student experience ‘teacher proof’. The logic of this approach is for the curriculum to be designed outside of the classroom or school, as is the case with the National Curriculum in the UK. Educators then apply programmes and are judged by the products of their actions. It turns educators into technicians.

Second, there are questions around the nature of objectives. This model is hot on measurability. It implies that behaviour can be objectively, mechanistically measured. There are obvious dangers here – there always has to be some

uncertainty about what is being measured. We only have to reflect on questions of success in our work. It is often very difficult to judge what the impact of particular experiences has been. Sometimes it is years after the event that we come to appreciate something of what has happened. For example, most informal educators who have been around a few years will have had the experience of an ex-participant telling them in great detail about how some forgotten event (forgotten to the worker that is) brought about some fundamental change. Yet there is something more.

In order to measure, things have to be broken down into smaller and smaller units. The result, as many of you will have experienced, can be long lists of often trivial skills or competencies. This can lead to a focus in this approach to curriculum theory and practice on the parts rather than the whole; on the trivial, rather than the significant. It can lead to an approach to education and assessment which resembles a shopping list. When all the items are ticked, the person has passed the course or has learnt something. The role of overall judgment is somehow sidelined.

Third, there is a real problem when we come to examine what educators actually do in the classroom, for example. Much of the research concerning teacher thinking and classroom interaction, and curriculum innovation has pointed to the lack of impact on actual pedagogic practice of objectives (see Stenhouse 1974; and Cornbleth 1990, for example). One way of viewing this is that teachers simply get it wrong – they ought to work with objectives. I think we need to take this problem very seriously and not dismiss it in this way. The difficulties that educators experience with objectives in the classroom may point to something inherently wrong with the approach – that it is not

grounded in the study of educational exchanges. It is a model of curriculum theory and practice largely imported from technological and industrial settings.

Fourth, there is the problem of unanticipated results. The focus on pre-specified goals may lead both educators and learners to overlook learning that is occurring as a result of their interactions, but which is not listed as an objective.

The apparent simplicity and rationality of this approach to curriculum theory and practice, and the way in which it mimics industrial management have been powerful factors in its success. A further appeal has been the ability of academics to use the model to attack teachers:

I believe there is a tendency, recurrent enough to suggest that it may be endemic in the approach, for academics in education to use the objectives model as a stick with which to beat teachers. ‘What are your objectives?’ is more often asked in a tone of challenge than one of interested and helpful inquiry. The demand for objectives is a demand for justification rather than a description of ends... It is not about curriculum design, but rather an expression of irritation in the problems of accountability in education.

(Stenhouse 1974: 77)

So what are the other alternatives?

Curriculum as process

We have seen that the curriculum as product model is heavily dependent on the setting of behavioural objectives. The curriculum, essentially, is a set of documents for implementation. Another way of looking at curriculum theory and practice is via process. In this sense curriculum is not a physical thing, but rather the interaction of teachers, students and knowledge. In other words, curriculum is what actually happens in the classroom and what people do to prepare and evaluate. What we have in this model is a number of elements in constant interaction. It is an active process and links with the [practical form of reasoning](#) set out by Aristotle.

Curriculum as process

Teachers enter particular schooling and situations with

an ability to think critically, -in-action

an understanding of their role and the expectations others have of them, and

a proposal for action which sets out essential principles and features of the educational encounter.

Guided by these, they encourage

conversations between, and with, people in the situation

out of which may come

thinking and action.

They

continually evaluate the process and what they can see
of outcomes.

Perhaps the two major things that set this apart from the model for [informal education](#) are first, the context in which the process occurs ('particular schooling situations'); and second, the fact that teachers enter the classroom or any other formal educational setting with a more fully worked-through idea of what is about to happen. Here I have described that as entering the situation with 'a proposal for action which sets out essential principles and features of the educational encounter'.

This form of words echoes those of Lawrence Stenhouse (1975) who produced one of the best-known explorations of a process model of curriculum theory and practice. He defined curriculum tentatively: 'A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational proposal in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice'. He suggests that a curriculum is rather like a recipe in cookery.

It can be criticized on nutritional or gastronomic grounds – does it nourish the students and does it taste good? – and it can be criticized on the grounds of practicality – we can't get hold of six dozen larks' tongues and the grocer can't find any ground unicorn horn! A curriculum, like the recipe for a dish, is first imagined as a possibility, then the subject of experiment. The recipe offered publicly is in a sense a report on the experiment.

Similarly, a curriculum should be grounded in practice. It is an attempt to describe the work observed in classrooms that it is adequately communicated to teachers and others. Finally, within limits, a recipe can varied according to taste. So can a curriculum. (Stenhouse 1975: 4-5)

Stenhouse shifted the ground a little bit here. He was not saying that curriculum is the process, but rather the means by which the experience of attempting to put an educational proposal into practice is made available. The reason why he did this, I suspect, is that otherwise there is a danger of widening the meaning of the term so much that it embraces almost everything and hence means very little. For example, in a discussion of the so-called 'youth work curriculum' (Newman & Ingram 1989), the following definition was taken as a starting point: 'those processes which enhance or, if they go wrong, inhibit a person's learning'. This was then developed and a curriculum became: 'an organic process by which learning is offered, accepted and internalized' (Newman & Ingram 1989: 1). The problem with this sort of definition, as Robin Barrow (1984) points out, is that what this does is to widen the meaning of the term to such an extent that it just about becomes interchangeable with 'education' itself. More specifically, if curriculum is process then the word curriculum is redundant because process would do very nicely! The simple equation of curriculum with process is a very slap-happy basis on which to proceed.

We also need to reflect on why curriculum theory and practice came into use by educators (as against policy-makers). It was essentially as a way of helping them to think about their work before, during and after interventions; as a

means of enabling educators to make judgments about the direction their work was taking. This is what Stenhouse was picking up on.

Stenhouse on curriculum

As a minimum, a curriculum should provide a basis for planning a course, studying it empirically and considering the grounds of its justification. It should offer:

A. In planning:

1. Principle for the selection of content – what is to be learned and taught
2. Principles for the development of a teaching strategy – how it is to be learned and taught.
3. Principles for the making of decisions about sequence.
4. Principles on which to diagnose the strengths and weaknesses of individual students and differentiate the general principles 1, 2 and 3 above, to meet individual cases.

B. In empirical study:

1. Principles on which to study and evaluate the progress of students.
2. Principles on which to study and evaluate the progress of teachers.
3. Guidance as to the feasibility of implementing the curriculum in varying school contexts, pupil contexts, environments and peer-group situations.

4. Information about the variability of effects in differing contexts and on different pupils and an understanding of the causes of the variation.

C. In relation to justification:

A formulation of the intention or aim of the curriculum which is accessible to critical scrutiny.

Stenhouse 1975: 5

There are a number of contrasts in this model of curriculum theory and practice as compared with the product model. First, where the product model appeals to the workshop for a model, this process model looks to the world of experimentation.

The idea is that of an educational science in which each classroom is a laboratory, each teacher a member of the scientific community... The crucial point is that the proposal is not to be regarded as an unqualified recommendation but rather as a provisional specification claiming no more than to be worth putting to the test of practice, Such proposals claim to be intelligent rather than correct. (Stenhouse 1975: 142)

Thus, in this sense, a curriculum is a particular form of specification about the practice of teaching. It is not a package of materials or a syllabus of ground to be covered. 'It is a way of translating any educational idea into a hypothesis testable in practice. It invites critical testing rather than acceptance' (Stenhouse 1975: 142).

Second, and associated with the above, given the uniqueness of each classroom setting, it means that any proposal, even at school level, needs to be tested, and verified by each teacher in his/her classroom (*ibid*: 143). It is not like a curriculum package which is designed to be delivered almost anywhere.

Third, outcomes are no longer the central and defining feature. Rather than tightly specifying behavioural objectives and methods in advance, what happens in this model of curriculum theory and practice is that content and means develop as teachers and students work together.

Fourth, the learners in this model are not objects to be acted upon. They have a clear voice in the way that the sessions evolve. The focus is on interactions. This can mean that attention shifts from teaching to learning. The product model, by having a pre-specified plan or programme, tends to direct attention to teaching. For example, how can this information be got over? A process approach to curriculum theory and practice, it is argued by writers like Grundy (1987), tends towards making the process of learning the central concern of the teacher. This is because this way of thinking emphasizes interpretation and meaning-making. As we have seen each classroom and each exchange is different and has to be made sense of.

However, when we come to think about this way of approaching curriculum in practice, a number of possible problems do arise. The first is a problem for those who want some greater degree of uniformity in what is taught. This approach to the theory of curriculum, because it places meaning-making and thinking at its core and treats learners as subjects rather than objects, can lead to very different means being employed in classrooms and a high degree of

variety in content. As Stenhouse comments, the process model is essentially a critical model, not a marking model.

It can never be directed towards an examination as an objective without loss of quality, since the standards of the examination then override the standards immanent in the subject. This does not mean that students taught on the process model cannot be examined, but it does mean that the examinations must be taken in their stride as they pursue other aspirations. And if the examination is a by-product there is an implication that the quality the student shows in it must be an under-estimate of his real quality. It is hence rather difficult to get the weak student through an examination using a process model. Crammers cannot use it, since it depends upon a commitment to educational aims. (Stenhouse 1975: 95)

To some extent variation is limited by factors such as public examinations. The exchange between students and teachers does not float free of the context in which it arises. At the end of the day many students and their families place a high premium on exam or subject success and this inevitably enters into the classroom. This highlights a second problem with the model we have just outlined – that it may not pay enough attention to the context in which learning takes place (more of this later).

Third, there is the ‘problem’ of teachers. The major weakness and, indeed, strength of the process model is that it rests upon the quality of teachers. If they are not up to much then there is no safety net in the form of prescribed curriculum materials. The approach is dependent upon the cultivation of wisdom and meaning-making in the classroom. If the teacher is not up to this,

then there will be severe limitations on what can happen educationally. There have been some attempts to overcome this problem by developing materials and curriculum packages which focus more closely on the ‘process of discovery’ or ‘problem-solving’, for example in science. But there is a danger in this approach. Processes become reduced to sets of skills – for example, how to light a bunsen burner. When students are able to demonstrate certain skills, they are deemed to have completed the process. As Grundy comments, the actions have become the ends; the processes have become the product. Whether or not students are able to apply the skills to make sense of the world around them is somehow overlooked (Grundy 1987: 77).

Fourth, we need to look back at our process model of curriculum theory and practice and what we have subsequently discussed, and return to Aristotle and to Freire. The model we have looked at here does not fully reflect the process explored earlier. In particular, it does not make explicit the commitments associated with phronesis. And it is to that we will now turn.

Curriculum as praxis

Curriculum as [praxis](#) is, in many respects, a development of the process model. While the process model is driven by general principles and places an emphasis on judgment and meaning making, it does not make explicit statements about the interests it serves. It may, for example, be used in such a way that does not make continual reference to collective human well-being and to the emancipation of the human spirit. The praxis model of curriculum theory and practice brings these to the centre of the process and makes an

explicit commitment to emancipation. Thus action is not simply informed, it is also committed. It is praxis.

Critical pedagogy goes beyond situating the learning experience within the experience of the learner: it is a process which takes the experiences of both the learner and the teacher and, through dialogue and negotiation, recognizes them both as problematic... [It] allows, indeed encourages, students and teachers together to confront the real problems of their existence and relationships... When students confront the real problems of their existence they will soon also be faced with their own oppression. (Grundy 1987: 105)

We can amend our 'curriculum as process' model to take account of these concerns.

Curriculum as praxis

Teachers enter particular schooling and situations with

a personal, but shared idea of the good and a commitment to human emancipation,

an ability to think critically, -in-action

an understanding of their role and the expectations others have of them, and

a proposal for action which sets out essential principles and features of the educational encounter.

Guided by these, they encourage

conversations between, and with, people in the situation

out of which may come

informed and committed action.

They

continually evaluate the process and what they can see of outcomes.

In this approach the curriculum itself develops through the dynamic interaction of action and reflection. ‘That is, the curriculum is not simply a set of plans to be implemented, but rather is constituted through an active process in which planning, acting and evaluating are all reciprocally related and integrated into the process’ (Grundy 1987: 115). At its centre is *praxis*: informed, committed action.

How might we recognize this? First, I think we should be looking for practice which does not focus exclusively on individuals, but pays careful attention to collective understandings and practices and to structural questions. For example, in sessions which seek to explore the experiences of different cultural and racial groups in society, we could be looking to see whether the direction of the work took people beyond a focus on individual attitudes. Are participants confronting the material conditions through which those attitudes are constituted, for example?

Second, we could be looking for a commitment expressed in action to the exploration of educators’ values and their practice. Are they, for example, able to say in a coherent way what they think makes for human well-being and link

this with their practice? We could also be looking for certain values – especially an emphasis on human emancipation.

Third, we could expect practitioners committed to praxis to be exploring their practice with their peers. They would be able to say how their actions with respect to particular interventions reflected their ideas about what makes for the good, and to say what theories were involved.

Curriculum in context

To round off this discussion of curriculum we do need to pay further attention to the social context in which it is created. One criticism that has been made of the praxis model (especially as it is set out by Grundy) is that it does not place a strong enough emphasis upon context. This is a criticism that can also be laid at the door of the other approaches. In this respect the work of Catherine Cornbleth (1990) is of some use. She sees curriculum as a particular type of process. Curriculum for her is what actually happens in classrooms, that is, ‘an ongoing social process comprised of the interactions of students, teachers, knowledge and milieu’ (1990: 5). In contrast, Stenhouse defines curriculum as the attempt to describe what happens in classrooms rather than what actually occurs. Cornbleth further contends that curriculum as practice cannot be understood adequately or changed substantially without attention to its setting or context. Curriculum is contextually shaped. While I may quibble about the simple equation of curriculum with process, what Cornbleth does by focusing on the interaction is to bring out the significance of context.

First, by introducing the notion of milieu into the discussion of curriculum she again draws attention to the impact of some factors that we have already noted. Of especial significance here are examinations and the social relationships of the school – the nature of the teacher-student relationship, the organization of classes, streaming and so on. These elements are what are sometimes known as the hidden curriculum. This was a term credited to Philip W. Jackson (1968) but it had been present as an acknowledged element in education for some time before. For example, [John Dewey](#) in *Experience and Education* referred to the ‘collateral learning’ of attitudes that occur in schools, and that may well be of more long-range importance than the explicit school curriculum (1938: 48). A fairly standard (product) definition of the ‘hidden curriculum’ is given by Vic Kelly. He argues it is those things which students learn, ‘because of the way in which the work of the school is planned and organized but which are not in themselves overtly included in the planning or even in the consciousness of those responsible for the school arrangements (1988: 8). The learning associated with the ‘hidden curriculum’ is most often treated in a negative way. It is learning that is smuggled in and serves the interests of the status quo. The emphasis on regimentation, on bells and time management, and on streaming are sometimes seen as preparing young people for the world of capitalist production. What we do need to recognize is that such ‘hidden’ learning is not all negative and can be potentially liberating. ‘In so far as they enable students to develop socially valued knowledge and skills... or to form their own peer groups and subcultures, they may contribute to personal and collective autonomy and to possible critique and challenge of existing norms and institutions’ (Cornbleth 1990: 50). What we also need to recognize is that by treating curriculum as a contextualized social process, the notion of hidden curriculum becomes rather

redundant. If we need to stay in touch with milieu as we build curriculum then it is not hidden but becomes a central part of our processes.

Second, by paying attention to milieu, we can begin to get a better grasp of the impact of structural and socio-cultural process on teachers and students. As Cornbleth argues, economic and gender relations, for example, do not simply bypass the systemic or structural context of curriculum and enter directly into classroom practice. They are mediated by intervening layers of the education system (Cornbleth 1990: 7). Thus, the impact of these factors may be quite different to that expected.

Third, if curriculum theory and practice is inextricably linked to milieu then it becomes clear why there have been problems about introducing it into non-schooling contexts like youth work; and it is to this area which we will now turn.

Curriculum as the boundary between formal and informal education

Jeffs and Smith (1990; 1999) have argued that the notion of curriculum provides a central dividing line between formal and informal education. They contend that curriculum theory and practice was formed within the schooling context and that there are major problems when it is introduced into informal forms of pedagogy.

The adoption of curriculum theory and practice by some informal educators appears to have arisen from a desire to be clear about content. Yet there are crucial difficulties with the notion of curriculum in this context. These centre around the extent to which it is possible to have a clear idea, in advance (and

even during the process), of the activities and topics that will be involved in a particular piece of work.

At any one time, outcomes may not be marked by a high degree of specificity. In a similar way, the nature of the activities used often cannot be predicted. It may be that we can say something about how the informal educator will work. However, knowing in advance about broad processes and ethos isn't the same as having a knowledge of the programme. We must, thus, conclude that approaches to the curriculum which focus on objectives and detailed programmes appear to be incompatible with informal education. (Jeffs & Smith 1990: 15)

In other words, they are arguing that a product model of curriculum is not compatible with the emphasis on process and praxis within informal education.

However, process and praxis models of curriculum also present problems in the context of informal education. If you look back at our models of process and compare them with the model of informal education presented above then it is clear that we can have a similar problem with pre-specification. One of the key features that differentiates the two is that the curriculum model has the teacher entering the situation with a proposal for action which sets out the essential principles and features of the educational encounter. Informal educators do not have, and do not need, this element. They do not enter with a clear proposal for action. Rather, they have an idea of what makes for human well-being, and an appreciation of their overall role and strategy (strategy here being some idea about target group and broad method e.g. detached work).

They then develop their aims and interventions in interaction. And what is this element we have been discussing? It is nothing more nor less than what Stenhouse considers to be a curriculum!

The other key difference is context. Even if we were to go the whole hog and define curriculum as process there remain substantive problems. As Cornbleth (1990), and Jeffs and Smith (1990, 1999) have argued, curriculum cannot be taken out of context, and the context in which it was formed was the school. Curriculum theory and practice only makes sense when considered alongside notions like class, teacher, course, lesson and so on. You only have to look at the language that has been used by our main proponents: Tyler, Stenhouse, Cornbleth and Grundy, to see this. It is not a concept that stands on its own. It developed in relation to teaching and within particular organizational relationships and expectations. Alter the context and the nature of the process alters. We then need different ways of describing what is going on. Thus, it is no surprise that when curriculum theory and practice are introduced into what are essentially informal forms of working such as youth work and community work, their main impact is to formalize significant aspects of the work. One of the main outcome of curriculum experiments within youth work has been work, for example in the field of health promotion, which involve pre-specified activities, visiting workers, regular meetings and so on. Within the language of youth work these are most often called programmes or projects (Foreman 1990). Within a school they would be called a course.

What is being suggested here is that when informal educators take on the language of curriculum they are crossing the boundary between their chosen

specialism and the domain of formal education. This they need to do from time to time. There will be formal interludes in their work, appropriate times for them to mount courses and to discuss content and method in curriculum terms. But we should not fall into the trap of thinking that to be educators we have to adopt curriculum theory and practice. The fact that so many have been misled into believing this demonstrates just how powerful the ideas of schooling are. Education is something more than schooling.

Conclusion

We have explored four different approaches to curriculum theory and practice:

Curriculum as a body of knowledge to be **transmitted**.

Curriculum as an attempt to achieve certain ends in students – **product**.

Curriculum as **process**.

Curriculum as **praxis**.

In a number of respects these different bodies of curriculum theory and practice link to the four main forces in North American curriculum-making in the twentieth century: the liberal educators; the scientific curriculum makers; the developmental/person-centred; and the social meliorists (those that sought more radical social change) (after Kliebart 1987).

	the liberal educ	the scientific cu	the develop- me	the social melio
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	ators	rriculum makers	ntalists	rists
Orientation	Guardians of an ancient tradition tied to the power of reason and the finest elements of the Western cultural heritage	Human life consists in the performance of specific activities. Education that prepares for life is one that prepares definitely and adequately for these specific activities.	The natural order of development in the child was most significant and scientifically defensible basis for determining what should be taught	Schools as a major, perhaps the, principal force for social change and social justice
Curriculum	Systematic development of reasoning power and the communication of 'the canon'.	Influenced by the rise of scientific management and notions of social efficiency. Focus on setting objectives (the statement of changes to take place in the students) and the organization of sc	Sought a curriculum in harmony with the child's 'real' interests, needs and learning patterns	Corruption and vice, inequalities of race and gender, and the abuse of privilege and power should be addressed directly with the aim of raising a new generation equipped to deal effectively with these abuses.

		hooling to meet t hese.		
Key thinkers	Charles W. Taylor	Franklin Bobbitt and Ralph W. Tyler	G. Stanley Hall	Lester Frank Ward
Linked to	transmission	product	process	praxis

We shouldn't push the similarities too far – but there are some interesting overlaps – and this does alert us both to the changing understanding and to shifting policy orientations over time.

For the moment we are having to operate within a policy environment that prizes the productive and technical. Furthermore, the discourse has become so totalizing that forms of education that do not have a curricula basis are squeezed. The temptation is always there to either be colonized by curriculum theory or adopt ways of describing practice that do not make sense in terms of the processes and commitments involved. Kleibart's analysis provides us with some hope – things will change. However, there is no guarantee that they will move in a more edifying direction.

Further reading and references

I have picked out some books that have the greatest utility for those concerned with informal education and lifelong learning.

Caffarella, R. S. (1994) *Planning Programs for Adult Learners. A practical guide for educators, trainers and staff developers*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 248 pages. Just what the title says – but has the advantage of many manuals in this area in that the underlying model is dynamic and interactive and avoids some of the problems with linear planning models. Clearly written with plenty of worksheets etc.

Griffin, C. (1987) *Curriculum Theory in Adult and Lifelong Education*, London: Croom Helm. 218 pages. Explores the use of curriculum theory and practice in non-school settings. Particular attention is paid to Illich, Freire, Gelpi etc.

Grundy, S. (1987) *Curriculum: Product or Praxis*, Lewes: Falmer. 209 + ix pages. Good discussion of the nature of curriculum theory and practice from a critical perspective. Grundy starts from Habermas' theorisation of knowledge and human interest and makes use of Aristotle to develop a models of curriculum around product, process and praxis.

Houle, C. O. (1972) *The Design of Education*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass. 323 pages. Influential statement of theory and practice with regard to a fundamental structure for program design. Identifies basic situations (eleven in all) in which programs are planned and discusses their operation.

Kliebard, H. M. (1987) *The Struggle for the American Curriculum 1893 – 1958*, New York: Routledge. 300 + xvii pages. A cracker of a book which charts the development of different curricula traditions and the political and social context in which they arose. He unpicks suspect notions such as ‘progressive education’ and demonstrates how Dewey in particular is positioned outside the main competing traditions. The movement between mental discipline, child centredness, scientific curriculum making (Taylorism) and social meliorism provides a very helpful set of insights into the theory and process of curriculum making within adult education.

Knowles, M. S. (1980) *The Modern Practice of Adult Education. From pedagogy to andragogy 2e*, Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Cambridge/Prentice Hall. 400 pages. Pretty much the standard US work on practical program design in the 1970s and 1980s. Based around Knowles’ assumptions concerning the way adults learn with some leanings to behaviouralism. Part one explores the emerging role and technology of adult education; Part two organizing and administering comprehensive programs of adult education; and Part three reflects on helping adults learn. Extensive appendices provide various exhibits and additional models. See also Knowles (1950) *Informal Adult Education. A guide for administrators, leaders and teachers*, New York: Association Press (272 pages) for an early but still useful review of program design and implementation within an NGO (Chicago YMCA).

Langenbach, M. (1988) *Curriculum Models in Adult Education*, Malibar: Krieger. 228 pages. Argues that adult educators must have a sound understanding of program design. Reviews different models of curriculum

theory and practice (largely US) and assesses some specific areas of practice such as continuing professional education and literacy education.

Ross, A. (2000) *Curriculum: Construction and critique*, London: Falmer Press. 187 + xiii pages. Helpful overview of the history of curriculum development in Britain

Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An Introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, London: Heinemann. 248 + viii pages. Classic statement of a process approach to the theory and practice of curriculum making. Chapters explore the nature of the curriculum problem; the content of education; teaching; the school as an institution; behavioural objectives and curriculum development; a critique of the objectives model; the process model; evaluation; a research model of curriculum development; the teacher as researcher; and the school and innovation.

Thornton, S. J. and Flinders, D. J. (eds.) (1997) *The Curriculum Studies Reader*, London: Routledge. 416 pages. Excellent collection of 30 readings that provides both a sample of enduring work and more recent material around curriculum theory and practice. Includes: Bobbitt, Dewey, Counts, Kliebard, Eisner, Jackson, Schwab, Greene, Freire, McLaughlin, Ravitch, Glazer, Apple, Lieberman and more.

Tyler, R. W. (1949) *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press. 128 pages. Important discussion of product-oriented curriculum building. The process is clear from the chapter titles: what educational purposes should the school seek to attain? How can learning

experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives? How can learning experiences be organized for effective instruction? How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated? How a school or college staff may work on curriculum building.

Wragg, T. (1997) *The Cubic Curriculum*, London: Routledge. 120 + x pages. Put aside the naff tittle – this book provides an accessible model of curriculum building that attempts to incorporate a ‘vision of the future’; a recognition that there are escalating demands on citizens, a belief that (children’s) learning must be inspired by several influences; and lastly that it is essential to see the curriculum as much more than a mere collection of subjects and syllabuses. Wragg’s ‘cubic curriculum’ has three dimensions: subject matter; cross-curricular themes and issues that influence children’s general development; and the different methods of teaching and learning that can be employed. The concern is to provide a model for practice – so the book is a bit lightweight with regard to competing conceptualizations of curriculum and alternatives to curriculum thinking.

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Links

Knowledge

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