Curriculum Design and Its Implications

By

Huma Ejaz
Department of Humanities, COMSATS, Lahore, PAKISTAN.

Abstract

One of the most important objectives of the education is the socialization of the individual. School is a social agency, which is entrusted with the task of transmitting the cultural and social values to the coming generations. Curriculum is such a tool used by the school to achieve this objective. Therefore, revision and improvement in curriculum is necessary for making provision for the challenges and demands of the society. In this study, the focus of attention is on curriculum design, as an integral part of the larger view of the educational planning. It also examines the present state of the secondary level curriculum of English language in Pakistan. The general principles of curriculum design and its implications on the language teaching methodology will be discussed in chapter one. It will also include a discussion on various curriculum design models and their implementation. It will also explore the notion of communicative competence, which is now considered as imperative for an English medium student of secondary student to develop and acquire.

Keywords: curriculum, secondary school, education, English

1.   Literature Review

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 its meaning. It has its origins in the chariot race tracks of Greece. It was, literally, a course. In Latin curriculum was a racing chariot; *currere* was to run. However, curriculum has come to mean much more than a prescribed one track race and calls for a search for an understanding that gives meaning to education that is both functional and ethical.

Curriculum

Curriculum is defined as *all the experiences provided by the institution or agency which are designed to foster student learning*.
According to this definition, then, the work the faculty does in the classroom is the heart of the curriculum. This view also takes into account the opportunities for learning which surround and relate to the formal sessions.
A useful starting point for us here might be the definition offered by John Kerr and taken up by Vic Kelly in his 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.
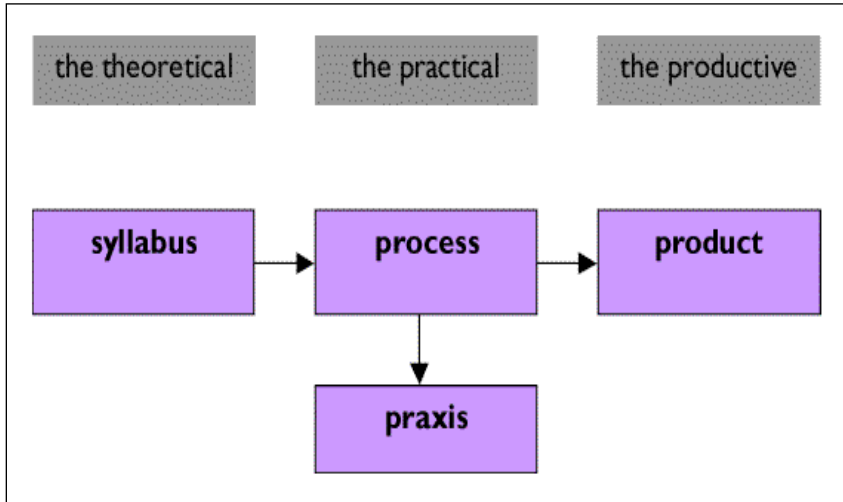
Here we can see some clear links - the body of knowledge to be transmitted in the first is that classically valued as 'the canon'; the process and praxis models come close to practical deliberation; and the technical concerns of the outcome or product model mirror elements of Aristotle's characterization of the productive. More this will be revealed as we examine the theory underpinning individual models.

Curriculum is an interrelated set of plans and experiences which a student completes under the guidance of the school

(Marsh and Stafford 1988; Marsh and Willis, 1995)
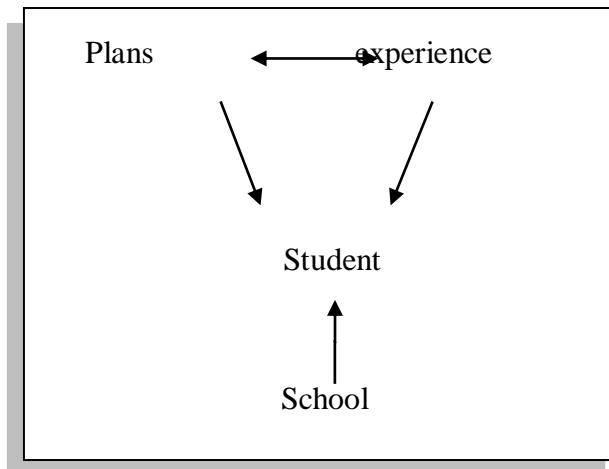This definition needs amplification and illustration (see Figure 1)

Figure 1: An Illustrative definition of curriculum

Numerous scholars have commented upon what they perceive to be curriculum. For example, Goodson (1994), describes curriculum as, A multifaceted concept, constructed, negotiated and renegotiated at a variety of levels and in a variety of arena (pg.111)

Longstreet and Shane (1993, pg.7), consider that; Curriculum is a historical accident – it has not been deliberately developed to accomplish a clear set of purposes. Rather, it has evolved as a response to the increasing complexity of educational decision making.

It is certainly the case that curriculum has been a meter of intense debate during the twentieth century. There have been all kinds of priorities put forward including citizenship demands, personal development priorities and vocational training pressures. There have been various pressures ranging from practical, school-focused approaches to curriculum and curriculum development; theoretical perspectives of different kinds and technical, scientific management approaches.

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 knowledge of the program. We must, thus, conclude that approaches to the curriculum that focus on objectives and detailed programs 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 differentiate 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 does Stenhouse consider being a curriculum!

The other key difference is context. 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.

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.

2.   Characteristics of Curriculum

Some curriculum experts such as Goodland (1979) contend that an analysis of definitions is a useful starting point for examining the field of curriculum. Other writers argue that there are important concepts or characteristics that need to be considered and which give some insights into how particular value orientation have evolved and why.

Walker (1990) argues that the fundamental concepts of curriculum include:
- Content: it is something which maybe depicted in terms of concept maps, topics and themes, all of which are abstractions which people have invented and named.
- Purpose: it is usually categorized as intellectual, social and personal; are often divided into subordinate and subordinate purposes; stated purposes are not always reliable indicators of actions.
- Organization: The planning is based upon scope and sequence (order of presence over time); can be tightly organized or relatively open-ended.

Tripp (1994) refers to determining characteristics of curriculum, specifically:
- Intentions: to produce a curriculum
- Planning: extent to which a curriculum is planned
- Explication: extent to which the curriculum details are made explicit
- Harmony: extent to which the parts of a curriculum are complementary
- Relations: extent to which the parts of a curriculum are related.

Other writers such as Beane, Toepfer and Alessi (1986) produce principles of curriculum but they are more value- oriented and less generic. For example, they list five major principles about curriculum:
- Concern with the experiences of learners
- Making decisions about both content and process
- Making decisions about a variety of issues and topics
- Involving many groups
- Decision-making at many levels

It is evident that these authors have a particular conception of curriculum, perhaps a combination of student and society-centered. Inevitably, if specific principles are given a high priority, then a particular conception of curriculum emerges. Longstreet and Shane (1993) refer to four major conceptions of curriculum:
- Society-oriented curriculum: purpose of schooling is to serve society.
- Student-centered curriculum: the student is the crucial source of all curriculum
- Knowledge-centered curriculum: knowledge is the heart of curriculum
- Eclectic curriculum: various comprises are possible including mindless eclecticism!

The conceptions or orientations of curriculum produced by Eisner and Vallance (1974) are often cited in literature, namely;

- A cognitive process orientation: cognitive skills applicable to a wide range of intellectual problems
- Technological orientation; to develop means to achieve pre-specified ends
- Self-actualization orientation: individual students discover and develop their unique identities

- Social re-constructionist orientation: schools must be an agency of social change
- Academic rationalists: to use and appreciate the ideas and works of various disciplines

These conceptions of curriculum are useful to the extent that they remind educators of some value orientations that they may be following, whether directly or indirectly. Yet others, such as Pinar *et al.* (1995) argue that these conceptions are stereotypes and are of little value.

Aims, Goals and Objectives:

Curriculum intent

Aims

↓

Goals

↓

Objectives ⟶ ⟮ **General / Unit**

Specific / Instructional
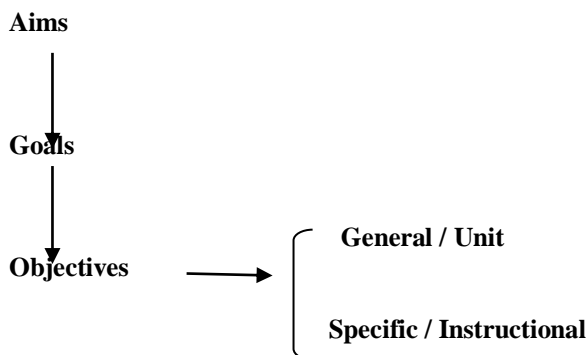
Source: Print (1993)

One of the major difficulties of the curriculum process is the transition of the general aims to the specific objectives of the classroom. Whether the aims of the educational processes are stated as part of the curricular process, or, as in more usual, in isolation from it, they are in the little use in day to day learning situations in the classrooms or schools. (Rashid, 2000)

A useful way to think about educational aims is to consider them as statement of social expectations and desires. More particularly, aims are more broadly phrased statements of educational intent. Aims states what is to be hopefully achieved by the curriculum. They are purposely stated generally because they are developed for general level of education by the society. Mostly aims are considered to be developed at a system level such as an education department or level. Aims are long term in nature and cover a time span of years, or even an entire school life of a child.

Goals are more specific, precisely worked statements of curriculum intent and are derived from aims, usually phrased in non technical language, goals are directed towards students' achievement by emphasizing content and skills. Another way to conceptualize goals is to consider them as the ways institutions and organizations within society facilities of educational aims. That is, if an aim of an education system is to make students literature and numerate, then goals are the ways by which educational institute will address this aim. Curriculum developers often devise goals from medium to long term depending upon how they are translated from aims.

Goals imply and state preferences, value and judgments about the directions in which educational activities might go. (Print, 1993)

Teachers have a fairly wide range of objectives which are clearly and precisely expressed. These objective scan then be used to plan the learning opportunities of the pupils and to devise means of assessing the context to which the pupils have achieved the objectives. We must, as teachers, have a very

clear idea to where we are going to order to have a rational basis to guide and direct the activities in the classroom. (Nicholls, and Nichollas, 1983)

Objectives are invariably devised by teachers, or group of teachers, to use within the school, or group of educators within an institute. They are short term in nature, and, as such, cover a lesson, a day or a week, or a term or semester. (Print, 1993)

3. Curriculum objectives

The objectives of the curriculum are usually written in fairly broad terms. Examples include:

- ➢ To help teachers stay abreast of recent cases dealing with search and seizure.
- ➢ To assist teachers in developing their skills in courtroom management and administration, new legislation, case law, and rules.
- ➢ To help teachers understand the most recent cases in tort reform.
- ➢ To assist teachers with stress management.

Curriculum objectives should be set for a particular period of time. For example, a state that has a biennial legislative funding cycle may wish to develop curriculum objectives (and related budget plans to support the program) for that two-year period. The statement of objectives should be flexible, with the planning group making changes if necessary. Plans for the next period may use the earlier statements of objectives as a point of departure in deliberations.

Lewy (1997) has pointed out that the selection of objectives is a matter of choice, and therefore must be considered a representing the value judgments of those who are responsible for schools. Nevertheless, the selection of curriculum objectives can be facilitated by certain considerations,

- Contemporary life outside the schools
- Manpower employment patterns
- New behavior patterns in welfare, politics and social activities
- The needs of the learner
- Subject matter

Sources of Objectives

There are two major sources which can be helpful in identifying objectives for the curriculum:
- ➢ The learners themselves.
- ➢ Experts in the law and related fields.

Numerous processes, informal and formal, can help discern topics and issues participants need to learn about. Members of the curriculum planning committee can draw on their conversations with judges in the field and their own observations of the problems courts encounter. For example, professional conferences such as state or national bar meetings are logical settings for such interaction.

In a more formal way, questionnaires can be used at the end of training sessions for judges to identify issues that future programs could address. Where resources are available, interviews with a sample of judges might also be conducted, allowing for a more in-depth look at learner needs and issues. The information gathered in this way is more contextual and can be used to illuminate questionnaire responses.

Committee members should also seek the views of subject-matter experts, such as professors of law and scholars in particular subspecialties of the law. They should also consult experts who can speak to the needs of society and community, perhaps researchers in criminal justice, medicine, and political science.

These two groups -- learners and outside experts -- have perspectives which are necessary for effective curriculum planning. The first group brings the "wisdom of practice." Judges working daily in the courtroom can speak from the current demands of their positions.

Outside experts bring a vital perspective as well -- the "wisdom of specialized knowledge."
Because they do not work directly in the courts, they have a more detached view as they study trends and issues that affect the judiciary.

Good curriculum planning comes from an integration of the views of the learners themselves and of outside experts. Wise action in the courtroom flows from the integration of the wisdom of practice and the wisdom of specialized knowledge (see Figure 1).

Judges must have particular facts in hand, know relevant rules and procedures see information in a larger context, and be able to use it appropriately. All of these must now be melded together in the selection and organization of the courses to be provided.

Integration of Two Essential Views
The "wisdom of practice"
"Here and now" data

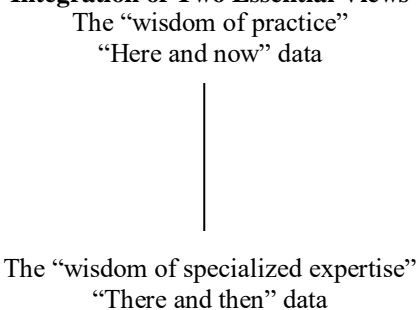The "wisdom of specialized expertise"
"There and then" data

Figure - 2

Adapted from Kolb, D. A. (1984). *Experiential learning: Experience as a source of learning and development.*
Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, p.10

4. Characteristics of a Good Curriculum

Development of Social Understanding:
The exercises, which develop in children understandings about the society, social problems and social relationship, are of great importance for their inclusion in the curriculum. Every child is a member of the existing society and he/she should be trained in such a way that he becomes an asset to the society and contribute to its full development.

Promotion of Maximum Personal development:
Every curriculum plan must resolve the issue of individual differences versus group standards. The experiences covering a wide range of interest and overall individual development are pre-requisites of a good curriculum.

Promotion of Continuity of Experience:

Continuity of experience and proper sequence of learning is one of the most important aims of curriculum planning. Past, present and future experiences show a consistent relationship and are based upon one another.

Promotion of Educational Goals:
In a good curriculum all the needed experiences from important different areas are given proper attention. Goal serving experiences are provided for the varying abilities and needs of all learners are mere three R's

Maintenance of Balance among All Goals:

Provisions are to be made for maximum development and for group interaction. The curriculum plan may incorporate provisions for all educational goals and suggest requirements, time allotments, and other ways of giving balanced attention to each goal. The classroom learning in actual practice depicts the nature of curriculum. A course of study, which prescribes a specific area to be covered in a particular time, no doubt, it delimits teachers in modifying plans for their classes.

Utilization of Effective Learning Experiences and Needed Resources:
Provisions should be made for adequate equipment and material for making effective learning experiences. The teacher should explore and use a wide range of resources for fulfilling the desired goals and ends of learning experiences.
From all this discussion it can be concluded that teachers play an important and vital role in the making of an effective curriculum because he/she fills in the loop holes left in the course of the study. (Farooq, 1994)

5. Conclusion

Increasing diversity in the institutions' policies, new technologies and the ever demanding innovativeness in the field of education and meeting the international standards is a difficult job on account of the curriculum developers.

With this new era, there is no room for wasting time, as they say "time is money", and to save time, and make best use of the available resources, it is of great importance to utilize the abilities of the people who are available for the curriculum developing.

Curriculum development has different stages and processes (see literature review) and to enhance the skills the expertise of the staff, there are some steps (as discussed by the population) which need to be kept in mind by the curriculum developers.

Formal systems of classroom observation are neither worthless nor useless, as some teachers have pointed out. They are there to support the teachers and their teaching strategies.

The introduction of more systematic approaches to curriculum development recognizes the importance of teachers in the crusade to improve the quality of what is taught and learnt in the classrooms.

The institution should be in a position to involve more and more teachers in the process of developing the curriculum as teachers know exactly what is needed in the classrooms as they are the real practioners of the curriculum document and exactly know the needs and the requirements of the students.

Curriculum benefits both teachers and institutions, thus leading to the improvement in the quality of teaching and learning. It involves a two-way process through which all staff is able to reflect on their performance and consider how they may best contribute to the achievement of institutions' plans and objectives towards imparting standardized education which meets the international criteria.

Curriculum development can only be fruitful if it is designed taken in consideration the feedback of the teachers and though it is not possible to involve teachers on every step but it should be the greatest effort to involve them in teaching methodologies, classroom activities and setting attainable targets.

6. References

Bobbitt, F. (1928) *How to Make a Curriculum*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin

Stenhouse, L. (1975) *An introduction to Curriculum Research and Development*, London: Heineman.

Tyler, R. W. (1949) *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Cortes, C.E. (1981) The societal curriculum: Implications for multiethnic educations. In Banks, J.A (ed.) *Educations in the 80's: Multiethnic education.* National Education Association.