

# 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 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.

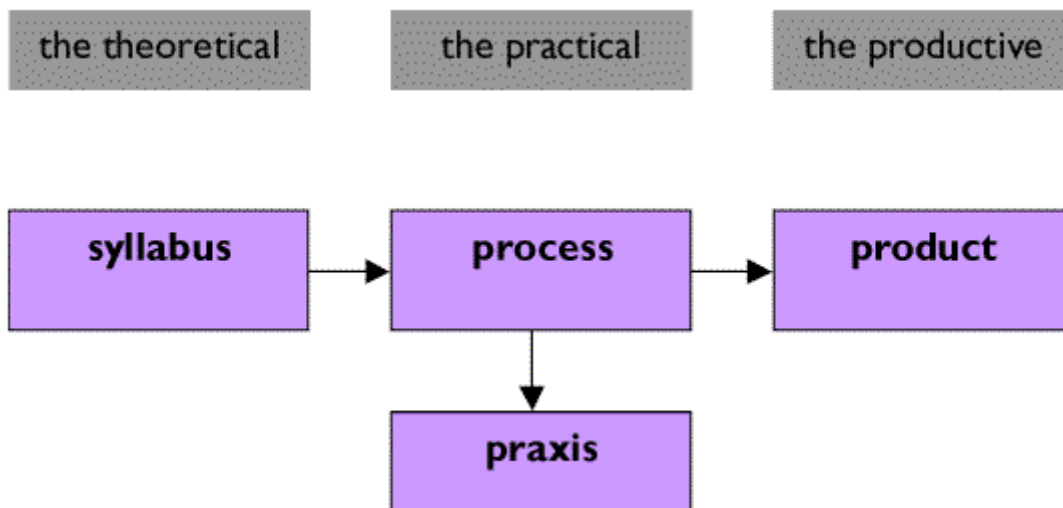
**The definition refers to schooling.** We should recognize that our current appreciation of curriculum theory and practice emerged in the school and in relation to other schooling ideas such as subject and lesson.

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 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

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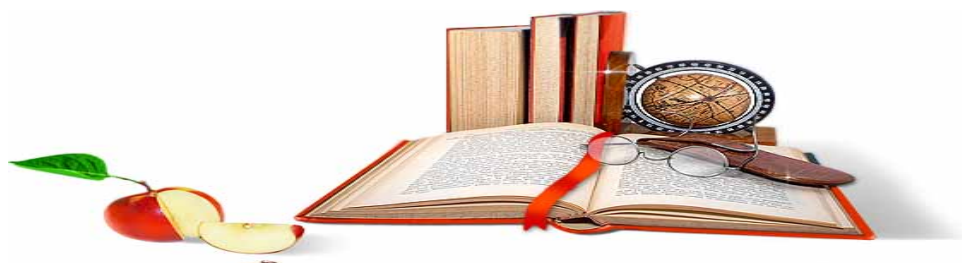
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