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CHAPTER 4

Curriculum and Academic Standards

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Curriculum and Academic Standards

According to John Dewey (1902), curriculum *“is a continuous reconstruction, moving from the child’s present experience out into that represented by the organized bodies of truth that we call studies... the various studies are themselves experience—they are that of the race”* .

This chapter will focus on the different types of curriculum and explore the relationship between curriculum, cognition, and affect.

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4.4:	The Cognitive and Affective Domains of Curricula





4.1: The Purpose of Curriculum

1. Why is curriculum important? Answers may vary, but according to the United States Department of Education, the purpose of having a curriculum is to provide teachers with a clear outline of what should be taught in classrooms. The goal is to ensure that students are exposed to rigorous learning objectives that prepare them for real-world experiences, making them *college and career ready*.
2. At the state level, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) is responsible for creating standards that outline what students should know and be able to do as a result of instruction delivered by qualified educators. Teachers in New York State are required to follow the curriculum aligned with these standards, which are passed into law and officially adopted by NYSED.
3. To support educators, NYSED provides curricular resources that help local school districts develop and implement their own local curricula. These resources guide teachers in planning instruction that meets state expectations and supports student success.



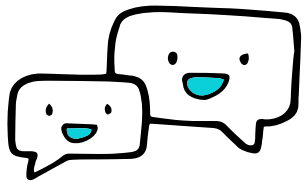
4.2: Sociological Influences of the Four Curricula

- Educators must address four different types of curricula in the classroom: **explicit**, **implicit**, **null**, and **extracurricular**.
- The most visible curriculum is the **explicit curriculum**, which includes the official content and learning objectives approved by the New York State Board of Regents.
- There is also the **extracurricular curriculum**, which includes activities such as academic clubs, band, chorus, and sports. These activities contribute to students' personal and social development.

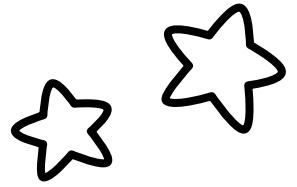
Less visible are the **implicit (or hidden) curriculum** and the **null curriculum**.

- ❑ The **implicit curriculum** refers to the unspoken lessons students learn—such as values, behaviors, and social expectations—through the school environment, teacher behavior, and classroom culture.
- ❑ The **null curriculum** includes the topics or information that students are *not* taught, either intentionally or unintentionally, because they are excluded from the official explicit curriculum.

Each of these types will be explained in detail below, with examples to clarify what they include.



Different Types of Curriculum



Explicit Curriculum

- The subjects that will be taught, and the knowledge and skills that the school expects successful students to acquire

Implicit Curriculum

- The lessons that arise from the culture of the school and the behaviors, attitudes, and expectations that characterize that culture.

Null Curriculum

- “The options students are not afforded; the concepts and skills that are not a part of their intellectual repertoire” (Eisner, 1994, pp. 106-107).

Extracurricular Experiences

- All of the schools-sponsored programs (athletics, band) that are intended to supplement the academic aspect of the school experience.

The Four Types Of Curriculum:



Type of Curriculum	Definition	Examples	Key Characteristics
Explicit Curriculum	The official, formal curriculum approved by the state or district; intentionally designed and publicly available.	NYS ELA Modules, curriculum maps, pacing guides, textbooks, assessments.	Clear objectives, structured lessons, standardized expectations, instructional resources provided.
Implicit (Hidden) Curriculum	Unwritten lessons that arise from school culture, values, expectations, and teaching practices.	Character education, classroom routines, school norms, community-based projects, teacher attitudes.	Influenced by beliefs, culture, community values; not formally documented; shapes behavior and attitudes.
Null Curriculum	Content that is not taught—topics, skills, or perspectives omitted from the curriculum.	Leaving out evolution in biology; not teaching certain historical perspectives; skipping topics due to time limits.	Represents gaps in learning; can be intentional or unintentional; limits exposure to certain knowledge.
Extracurricular Curriculum	School-sponsored activities outside academic requirements.	Sports, music, clubs, student government, yearbook, school newspaper.	Promotes social and emotional development; linked to academic success and school connectedness.

4.3: The Cognitive and Affective Domains of Curricula

Curriculum serves as the framework through which schools help students achieve educational outcomes established by the New York State Department of Education. These outcomes guide local school districts in designing curricula that align with state expectations. The curriculum can be understood from two major perspectives: **cognitive** and **affective**.



Cognitive Domain

- Focuses on **knowledge acquisition**, thinking skills, and intellectual development.
- Emphasizes how students learn, process, and apply information.
- Bloom et al. (1959) developed **Bloom's Taxonomy**, which organizes learning objectives from:
 - ✓ **Lower-order thinking**: remembering, understanding
 - ✓ **Higher-order thinking**: applying, analyzing, evaluating, creating
- Teachers use Bloom's Taxonomy to **scaffold instruction**, supporting students as they move toward complex thinking tasks.

Affective Domain

- Goes beyond knowledge; focuses on **how students feel about what they are learning**.
- Includes students' **values, attitudes, motivations**, and emotional responses to curriculum.
- Helps educators understand not only what students learn, but **how much they value and connect with the content**.

4.3: The Cognitive and Affective Domains of Curricula

Vygotsky and the ZPD

Lev Vygotsky (1978) contributed an important concept to curriculum and instruction:

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD)

- Defined as the distance between:
 - ✓ What a student can do **independently**, and
 - ✓ What the student can do **with guidance** or collaboration.
- Teaching within the ZPD allows students to grow cognitively without becoming frustrated.
- Teachers use modeling, guided practice, and peer collaboration to help students:
 - ✓ Process information
 - ✓ Apply new learning
 - ✓ Develop higher levels of cognitive functioning



4.4: The Cognitive and Affective Domains of Curricula

The Cognitive Domain of Curricula

- The **cognitive domain** focuses on how students acquire knowledge, process information, and develop intellectual skills. In many modern schools, this is done by **organizing learning into separate subject areas** such as mathematics, science, English, and social studies. Each subject is taught independently, emphasizing **facts, concepts, and content-specific skills** rather than emotional or social development.
- This approach reflects a traditional academic structure in which learning is primarily cognitive—centered on thinking, memorizing, understanding, and applying information.

Subject-Centered Curriculum

A **subject-centered curriculum** organizes learning around distinct academic disciplines. Each subject has its own structure, skills, and content, and instruction tends to be compartmentalized.

Key characteristics:

- Knowledge is divided into **separate subjects**.
- Learning focuses on **academic content**, often delivered through textbooks, lectures, and structured lessons.
- Emotional development, social skills, and student interests are **not major priorities** within this model.
- This approach became common in the United States during the **1870s** and remains widely used today, especially in **middle schools and high schools**.
- Ornstein (1982) identified several **advantages and disadvantages** of the subject-centered approach.

4.4: The Cognitive and Affective Domains of Curricula

Pros of subject-centered Instruction	Cons of subject-centered instruction
Subjects are a logical way to organize and interpret learning.	The curriculum is fragmented, and concepts learned in isolation.
Such organization makes it easier for people to remember information for future use.	It deemphasizes life experiences and fails to consider the needs and interests of students.
Teachers (in secondary schools, at least) are trained as subject matter specialists.	The teacher dominates the lesson, allowing little student input.
Textbooks and other teaching materials are usually organized by subject.	The emphasis is on using lower-order thinking skills like teaching of knowledge, and the recall of facts.

○ Core Curriculum

The core curriculum focuses on essential knowledge that all students should learn. Supporters believe every student needs a shared foundation of important information. This model uses an interdisciplinary approach to ensure all required content is taught.

○ Mastery Learning

Mastery learning is based on the idea that with enough time and proper instruction, most students can meet learning standards. It recognizes that students learn at different speeds, so teachers must adjust instruction to support individual pacing.

○ Affective Domain of Curricula

The affective domain emphasizes feelings, values, motivation, and students' emotional development. It aims to help students see the importance of what they learn and encourages traits like empathy, resilience, good citizenship, and moral growth.

- **Student-Centered Curriculum**

A student-centered curriculum focuses on students' interests and needs. Students play an active role in constructing their own knowledge. Influenced by progressive education, this model encourages motivation and meaningful engagement with learning.

- **Humanistic Approach**

Humanistic learning emphasizes personal growth, self-awareness, and the development of values. It aims to help students reach their full potential and develop a deeper sense of understanding and consciousness.

- **Cooperative Learning**

Cooperative learning uses small, mixed-ability groups where students work together to learn content. Each student may have a specific task, and groups share their findings with others. Students act as both learners and teachers, strengthening teamwork and understanding.

- **Broad Fields Curriculum**

The broad fields design attempts to integrate subjects to reduce the separation found in subject-centered models. It helps students make interdisciplinary connections, but combining many subjects may reduce the depth of content in each area.

- **Activity Curriculum**

The activity curriculum began in private child-centered schools and later influenced public elementary schools. It focuses on well-planned activities based on children's needs and interests. This approach introduced learning through real-life experiences, field trips, and group work.

4.4: The Cognitive and Affective Domains of Curricula

Stakeholders and Curricular Decision Making

❖ Parents, Schools, and Communities

Parents have strong influence on local curriculum decisions because they fund the schools through taxes. They can share their input with teachers or administrators to shape their children's education.

❖ Special Interest Groups

These groups represent cultural, ethnic, or religious communities and advocate for specific educational policies. They often push for curriculum changes through political involvement.

❖ State Legislatures

State lawmakers play a major role in education because they set the education budget and pass statewide school laws. Their decisions affect school standards, funding, and policies.

❖ Schools

Schools influence curriculum through their educational philosophy and practical needs. Colleges also communicate their expectations to help K–12 schools prepare students for higher education and careers.

❖ Textbook and Testing Companies

Large states such as California and Texas buy a significant share of textbooks, giving them strong influence over what publishers include in their materials.



Thanks

