

Theoretical Foundations of Curriculum

Theoretical Foundations of Curriculum Design
Key concepts, major theories, and practical implications for designing effective curricula.

1. What Is Curriculum Design?

Aspect	Description
Definition	A systematic plan that specifies learning goals, content, instructional strategies, and assessment methods for a particular educational context.
Purpose	Aligns what learners need to know and be able to do with the resources, teaching methods, and evaluation tools used to achieve those outcomes.
Scope	Ranges from a single lesson or unit to an entire program or national standards framework.

2. Core Philosophical Foundations

Philosophy	View of Knowledge	Implications for Curriculum
Essentialism	Knowledge is a body of core, timeless facts and skills.	Emphasizes mastery of foundational subjects; sequenced, teacher-centered instruction.
Progressivism	Learning is a process of problem-solving and experience.	Focus on projects, inquiry, and relevance to students' lives; flexible sequencing.
Reconstructionism / Critical Pedagogy	Education should transform society and address inequities.	Integrates social justice themes, student voice, and community action.
Constructivism	Knowledge is actively constructed by learners.	Learner-centered tasks, scaffolding, authentic contexts, and collaborative learning.
Humanism	Education nurtures the whole person—cognitive, affective, and social.	Emphasizes personal growth, self-direction, and supportive learning environments.

Theoretical Foundations of Curriculum

3. Major Theoretical Models

Design

3.1 Tyler's Rationale (1949)

1. **Define Objectives** – What should learners know/do?
2. **Select Learning Experiences** – Choose activities that help achieve objectives.
3. **Organize Experiences** – Sequence content logically (e.g., from simple to complex).
4. **Evaluate** – Assess whether objectives have been met.

Impact: Basis for outcome-based curriculum planning.

3.2 Taba's Inductive Model (1962)

1. **Diagnosis of Needs**
2. **Formulation of Objectives**
3. **Selection of Content**
4. **Organization of Content**
5. **Selection of Learning Experiences**
6. **Determination of Evaluation Procedures**

Impact: Highlights teacher involvement in curriculum development and a bottom-up approach.

3.3 Hunkins & Gagné's Instructional Design (1970s)

- **Gagné's Nine Events of Instruction** (e.g., gain attention, present stimulus, provide feedback).
- **Hunkins' Emphasis** on aligning content, learner characteristics, and instructional methods.

Impact: Provides a systematic framework for designing instruction at the lesson level.

3.4 Backward Design (Wiggins & McTighe, 1998)

1. **Identify Desired Results** – Standards, competencies, enduring understandings.
2. **Determine Acceptable Evidence** – Formative & summative assessments.
3. **Plan Learning Experiences & Instruction** – Activities that lead to the evidence.

Theoretical Foundations of Curriculum

Impact: Shifts focus from teaching activities to what students should ultimately demonstrate.

Design

3.5 CIPP Evaluation Model (Stufflebeam, 1971)

- **Context** – What needs exist?
- **Input** – What resources and strategies are available?
- **Process** – How is the curriculum being implemented?
- **Product** – What are the outcomes?

Impact: Provides a comprehensive framework for ongoing curriculum evaluation and revision.
