

Identifying Curriculum

In general, most curriculum theorists identify four basic sources of curriculum. You may hear different names used to describe these four approaches, but most curriculum is either:

- Discipline-based,
- Issue/Agenda-based,
- Problem-based, or
- Competency-based.

Discipline-based Curriculum:

- Traditional approach to course construction.
- Content is fixed
 - The student's needs are not generally taken into account.
 - The curriculum developer or teacher outlines the course content
- This approach emphasizes the acquisition of a fixed body of knowledge that is determined often by the content of a textbook.
- Course is typically structured as a content outline.
 - Organized into units and each unit will be organized into topics or lessons.

Issue based curriculum:

- Fairly new innovation in education.
 - With the rise of progressive education in the last century, some educators started trying to use education to advance their own agendas.
- Agenda-driven curriculum approach. Examples:
 - Early versions of Feminist Studies and African-American Studies. In such courses, the content is often not fixed. These courses frequently emphasize reasoning and critical thinking.
- Content may well be structured as a series of ethical discussions.
- The instructor may initially supply a background for the premises that will emerge later in the course.
- Once the background is laid and the premises are established, the instructor poses ethical dilemmas for discussion.
- The intention of such courses is more to change peoples' viewpoints more than to communicate a fixed body of knowledge.

Problem-based curriculum:

- Fairly modern innovation.
 - With the rise of the philosophies of John Dewey and with the development of Constructivist learning theories, more and more emphasis is being placed on active learning rather than passive learning in education.
- This approach is driven by the solution of real or hypothetical problems.
 - In agricultural education the traditional method of instruction has always been problem solving.
- The content is not fixed in the same sense that it is fixed in discipline-based education.
- Emphasizes inquiry and analytical thinking.
- Curriculum is based on identification and solutions of successive questions and problems.
- Method:
 - The teacher requires the students to establish home projects as a part of the program requirements.
 - The teacher then leads the students to identify the problems they must solve and the questions that they must answer to successfully complete the projects.
 - Finally, he or she structures the curriculum around helping the students solve those problems and answer those questions.
- A problem-based course may be structured around problem areas instead of units.
 - Each problem area is organized into questions & problems rather than topics.

Competency Based Education: (CBE)

- CBE emerged at the same time as the vocational education movement.
- The fundamentals of CBE grew from behaviorist learning theory.
 - In that learning theory, it is assumed that a person learns new skills by performing them in a closely supervised setting and practicing the skills until they are mastered.
 - The assumption is that learning is a change in behavior and that true learning has not occurred until the student has demonstrated that change in behavior.
- CBE emphasizes practice and performance.
- Highly structured and the curriculum is organized into Duty Areas (we typically call these units) and Competencies (we often call these tasks or lessons).

Are there any real differences or is this just an exercise in theorizing? The differences are very real. Not only do the histories of the approaches differ but the underlying purposes of education differ in each approach. The purpose of discipline-based education is to transmit knowledge. The purpose of issue-based education is to change the world. The purpose of problem-based education is to encourage students to inquire into solving their own problems and constructing their own answers. CBE is designed to prepare efficient and effective workers and citizens. As a result of these differences, the teaching methods used in the different settings also differ.