NCSALL Seminar Guide:

Philosophy of Using Authentic Curriculum

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National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy

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Philosophy of Using Authentic Curriculum

This seminar guide was created by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) to introduce adult education practitioners to the research on using authentic materials in class in order to support learners' increased and changing literacy practices outside of the classroom. Programs or professional developers may want to use this seminar in place of a regularly scheduled meeting, such as a statewide training or a local program staff meeting.

Objectives:

By the end of the seminar, participants will be able to:

- Articulate their philosophies of teaching and curriculum development
- Compare three approaches to curriculum—traditional, learner-driven, and critical

Participants: 8 to 12 practitioners who work in adult education—teachers, tutors, counselors, program administrators, and others

Time: 3 hours

Agenda:

20 minutes	1. Welcome and Introductions
5 minutes	2. Objectives and Agenda
45 minutes	3. A Continuum of Approaches
15 minutes	***Break***
55 minutes	4. Three Approaches to Curriculum
30 minutes	5. Reflections on the Three Approaches
10 minutes	6. Evaluation of the Seminar

Session Preparation:

This guide includes the information and materials needed to conduct the seminar: step-by-step instructions for the activities, approximate time for each activity, and notes and other ideas for conducting the activities. The handouts and reading, ready for photocopying, are at the end of the guide.

Participants should receive the following reading at least 10 days before the seminar. Ask participants to read the article, take notes, and write down their questions for sharing at the seminar.

- **Values and Beliefs: The World View Behind Curriculum** by Amy Prevedel (*Focus on Basics*, Volume 6, Issue C, September 2003)

Also, ask participants to bring examples of curriculum that they have used or are developing to share.

The facilitator should read the article, study the seminar steps, and prepare the materials on the following list.

Newsprints (Prepare ahead of time.)

___ Objectives and Agenda (p. 5)

___ Useful/How to Improve (p. 8)

Handouts (Make copies for each participant.)

___ *Key Concepts*

___ *Three Approaches to Curriculum*

Reading (Have two or three extra copies available for participants who forget to bring them.)

___ **Values and Beliefs: The World View Behind Curriculum**

Materials

___ Newsprint easel and blank sheets of newsprint

___ Markers, pens, tape

___ Sticky dots

___ Signs—Traditional, Learner-Driven, Critical (p. 6)

Steps:

1. Welcome and Introductions (20 minutes)

- **Welcome participants** to the seminar. **Introduce yourself** and state your role as facilitator. Explain how you came to facilitate this seminar and who is sponsoring it.

- 📖 **Ask participants to introduce themselves** (name, program, and role) and briefly describe the curriculum they brought to share.

- **Make sure that participants know** where bathrooms are located, when the session will end, when the break will be, and any other housekeeping information.

Note to Facilitator
Since time is very tight, it's important to move participants along gently but firmly if they are exceeding their time limit for introductions.

2. Objectives and Agenda (5 minutes)

- **Post the newsprint <u>Objectives and Agenda</u>** and review the objectives and steps with the participants.

Objectives

By the end of the seminar, you will be able to:

- Identify your philosophies of teaching and curriculum development
- Compare three approaches to curriculum—traditional, learner-driven, and critical

Agenda

1. Welcome and Introductions (Done!)
2. Objectives and Agenda (Doing)
3. A Continuum of Approaches
4. Three Approaches to Curriculum
5. Reflections on the Three Approaches
6. Evaluation of the Seminar

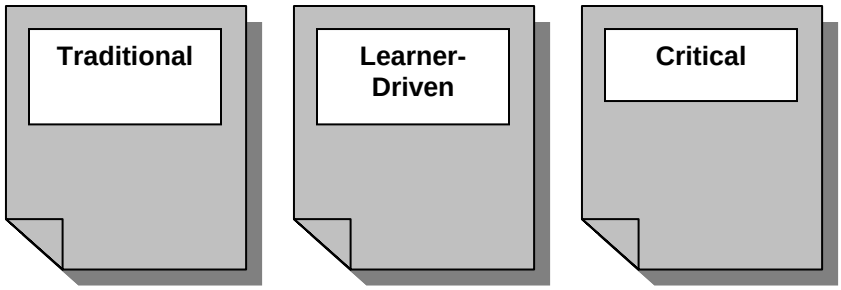
3. A Continuum of Approaches (45 minutes)

- **Explain to participants that, in this activity, they will be discussing the article that was mailed to them to read in advance of this session.**

  [Note to facilitator: **Values and Beliefs: The World View Behind Curriculum** encourages practitioners to reflect on their personal philosophies of teaching and learning through the introduction of three approaches to curriculum development—traditional, learner-driven, and critical. The author describes the advantages and disadvantages of each approach.]

- **Distribute the handout *Key Concepts.* Ask participants to individually read** the handout. Then **ask the participants to form small groups and discuss their reactions** to each curriculum approach.

- **Post three signs with traditional, learner-driven, and critical printed on them.**



- **Ask participants to stand at the point along the continuum that represents their *program's* philosophy of teaching and learning.**

- After participants have identified their position, ask each participant to discuss their program's philosophy briefly.

- Next **ask participants to stand at the point along the continuum that represents what their *own* philosophy of teaching and learning was *before*** reading the article. Make sure that participants know that it is okay for their personal philosophies to differ from their program's philosophy.

- After participants have identified their position, ask each participant to discuss briefly what their own philosophy was before reading the article.

- Then **ask participants to move to the point along the continuum that represents what their *own* philosophy of teaching and learning was *after*** reading the article. Ask those participants that moved to share why and how their philosophy changed.

- **Summarize the points** made during the discussions from the continuum for closure to this session step.

Break (15 minutes)

4. Three Approaches to Curriculum (55 minutes)

- **Explain to participants that, in this activity, they will continue to reflect on the reading** by discussing how the three approaches to curriculum proposed by the author might look in the classroom.

-  **Distribute the handout *Three Approaches to Curriculum.* Ask participants to form three small groups and assign one approach**—traditional, learner-driven, or critical—to each group.

- **Ask the groups to identify how the assigned approach looks in the classroom and to list the advantages and disadvantages of the approach**. Give the groups 30 minutes to work.

- **Reconvene the large group. Ask the small groups to briefly summarize their discussions.** After each group presents, there should be time allotted for questions and comments from other participants (this should be encouraged by the facilitator).

5. Reflections on the Three Approaches (30 minutes)

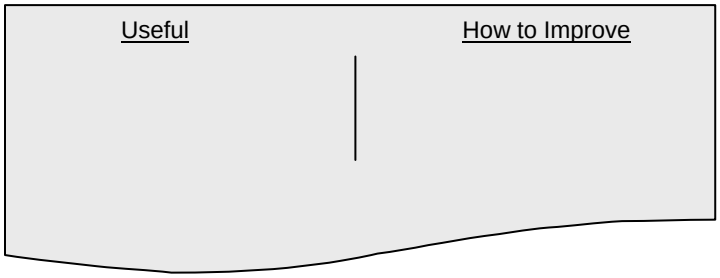
- **Ask participants to individually reflect** on the presentations and the reading. Encourage the participants to identify aspects or elements of each curriculum approach that resonate for them. Ask them to define their personal philosophy of teaching and learning, and the values and beliefs behind that philosophy. **Then ask them to articulate how they might design or select a curriculum** that reflects their values and beliefs. Give participants 30 minutes to work.

- **Reconvene the large group. Ask participants to share their reflections by identifying the theory** of curriculum development with which they most closely identify.

6. Evaluation of the Seminar (10 minutes)

- **Explain to participants that, in the time left, you would like to get feedback from them about this seminar.** You will use this feedback in shaping future seminars.

- **Post the newsprint Useful/How to Improve.**



- Ask participants first to tell you what was useful or helpful to them about the design and content of this seminar. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "Useful."

- **Then ask participants for suggestions on how to improve the design and content**. Write their comments, without response from you, on the newsprint under "How to Improve." If anyone makes a negative comment that's not in the form of a suggestion, ask the person to rephrase it as a suggestion for improvement, and then write the suggestion on the newsprint.

- **Do not make any response to participants' comments during this evaluation.** It is very important for you not to defend or justify anything you have done in the seminar or anything about the design or content, as this will discourage further suggestions. If anyone makes a suggestion you don't agree with, just nod your head. If you feel some response is needed, rephrase their concern: "So you feel that what we should do instead of the small-group discussion is . . . ? Is that right?"

- **Refer participants to the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy Web site (www.ncsall.net) for further information**. Point out that most NSCALL publications may be

downloaded for free from the Web site. Print versions can by ordered by contacting NSCALL at World Education: ncsall@worlded.org.

- **Thank everyone** for coming and participating in the seminar.

Reading 📖

(To be read by participants *before* the session.)

Values and Beliefs: The World View Behind Curriculum

By Amy Prevedel
Focus on Basics, Volume 6, Issue C, September 2003, pp. 8–13

Most simply put, a curriculum is a guide for learning. Many adult basic education teachers and literacy tutors pick up existing texts or curriculum packets and start teaching, without knowing why they're using the curriculum or what philosophy of education it reflects. But "curriculum always represents somebody's version of what constitutes knowledge and a legitimate worldview"(Sleeter & Grant, 1991, p. 80). Everyone who chooses or creates curriculum needs to develop a personal philosophy of teaching and learning, examine the values and beliefs behind that philosophy, and design or select a curriculum that reflects those beliefs and values. In doing so, they must also recognize that they exercise a lot of power: their choices will convey to students a particular world view.

This article is designed to provide adult basic education (ABE) practitioners with an introduction to three approaches to curriculum development, as a starting point for greater awareness about curriculum choices. The first approach, "traditional," is borrowed from the K-12 school setting. The second, "learner-driven," incorporates theories specific to adult literacy education as well as recent research about teaching and learning. The third approach, "critical," sees education as a distinctly political act, and curriculum development as functioning in personally or politically empowering ways. These three approaches to curriculum development emphasize different beliefs about education, but in practice the lines between them are blurring more and more. None of them represents a fixed ideology or body of thought. Each functions more as an organizing tool. Some of the research and theory used to explain one approach may appear in more than one category depending on the purposes and contexts in which they are being used. In the same way, teachers and tutors may find that, in the classroom, they draw from all three approaches when they create curriculum. The important point is that teachers be conscious of why they are choosing to use each approach.

Three Approaches to Curriculum

Issue	Traditional Approach	Learner-Driven Approach	Critical Approach
Who determines curriculum?	▪ Curriculum developer (publisher, state, institution) sets goals and chooses learning experiences, evaluates, plans and proposes curriculum	▪ Students articulate learning goals that spring from their real-world roles ▪ Students help plan curriculum	▪ Teacher leads the class while following the lead of learners ▪ Students, rather than "outsiders," become experts
What does knowledge look like?	▪ Appears neutral and equitable in its availability ▪ Exists "out there," can be organized and transmitted ▪ Is observable and measurable	▪ Created through the interaction of student and text ▪ Builds on what learners already know ▪ Relevant to students' real-life context	▪ Not fixed—dependent upon interaction among students, text, and teacher ▪ Autobiographic—depends on the politics of identity brought to learning ▪ Complex interaction between text, the teacher, and what is taught ▪ Knowledge is created, rather than taken in
What are the underlying assumptions?	▪ Pre-determined goals ▪ Learning happens in a linear, step-by-step fashion ▪ Expert knowledge is important	▪ Learning happens in social contexts ▪ Instruction is transparent and based on purposes students determine ▪ Learners actively build on knowledge and experience	▪ Education is political ▪ Language and power are connected
What might this look like in action?	▪ A classroom with lesson plans, homework, grades possibly ▪ Skills-based/sequenced textbooks or workbook with pre-determined learning goals	▪ Apolitical on the surface ▪ Drawn from adults' lives in their everyday contexts	▪ Abandons technician mentality ▪ Addresses social and community issues of importance ▪ Curriculum not set in advance; emerges from "action and interaction of the participants"(Doll, 1993)
How is learning assessed?	▪ Objective, observable "scientific" means ▪ Can provide comparative scores	▪ Performance of the student's contextualized goal ▪ Continuing, involving metacognitive strategies	▪ Portfolios, self-assessment instruments ▪ Measures of social and personal change ▪ Levels of critical consciousness reached ▪ External performance levels do not apply

The Traditional Approach

The traditional model was laid out by Ralph Tyler in 1949 in his seminal book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, and is generally considered the mainstream way to conceptualize curriculum development. Many educators and adult literacy students find it familiar because of its wide use in public schools in the United States. The approach has a "subject-centered" orientation: students gain mastery of subject matter predetermined by a set of "experts." Curriculum is organized around content units and the sequence of what is taught follows the logic of the subject matter (Knowles, 1984). The organizing principles, laid out in the introduction to Tyler's book, identify the school as the holder of power in decision making about what gets taught:

1. "What educational purposes should the school seek to attain?
2. How can learning experiences be selected which are likely to be useful in attaining these objectives?
3. How can learning experiences be organized for effective instruction? and
4. How can the effectiveness of learning experiences be evaluated?"(1949, p. v-vi).

In Tyler's view, curriculum is a cumulative process: over the course of the schooling years, educational experiences accumulate to exert profound changes in the learner, "in the ways water dripping upon a stone wears it away."(1949, p. 83). Knowledge and skills are not duplicated, but instead, are taught sequentially over time. One spiral approach, in which learners return to topics, in more complexity over time, can also be considered a traditional approach. Skills-based or competency-based instruction, common in adult basic education, often draws upon a traditionalist approach to curriculum, with students mastering a given set of skills or procedures in a logical instructional sequence.

Advantages

One of the advantages of the traditional approach is that students like it: they're used to it and it fits their idea of what school should be. Learning discrete skills in a step-by-step fashion lends itself to traditional testing. Test scores can be easily quantified and explained to funders as program outputs. Program administrators can use the results of traditional tests to justify their programs' achievements. Students, tutors and teachers can point to quantifiable progress, and that is certainly motivating.

Traditional curriculum also lends itself well to mass production: publishers can produce workbooks that break down reading or math into subskills and processes, which students and teachers can easily navigate. The traditional approach is efficient in a field in which resources for staff development are scant. While teachers can create their own materials using a traditionalist approach, they can also draw upon commercially or locally developed materials and methods. Volunteer tutors and adult basic education teachers without much training or time can easily teach from an existing curriculum.

The traditional approach is also accessible. Commercially produced traditional curricula and materials, via workbook or computer, are widely available to learners who are interested in studying on their own. They don't have to wait for a class to start or fit it into their schedules. Since National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy (NCSALL) research (Reder & Strawn, 2001) finds more people with low literacy skills engaged in self study than we might have assumed, the availability of these materials is important.

Disadvantages

In the traditional approach to curriculum, someone other than the student controls what is taught and when: the state, which has mandated a curriculum framework; the program, the teacher, or the book publisher. This perpetuates a power dynamic in which the teacher has a more valued form of knowledge, and more control, than the student. The student's role is passive, and serves as an example of "banking education," in which the expert teachers deposit knowledge into the student who lacks knowledge (Freire, 1970). Whether conscious or not, this approach supports the view that low literacy skills are the burden and/or the responsibility of the individual as opposed to the result of a complex interaction involving culture, race, class, language, gender, families, communities, economies and institutions of learning.

In its most extreme, the traditional model omits the importance of learner experience, requiring a learner to accept, rather than challenge, the information being transmitted. In addition to insinuating to the adult learner that he is not capable of determining what it is he needs to learn, the cumulative element of the traditional approach can work against an adult's needs. Adults often have immediate needs and motivations for learning and may not have time to accumulate years of knowledge and skills to apply in the future. Discrete skills can be taught under the assumption that they will automatically transfer to any variety of situations outside the classroom.

The Learner-Driven Approach

In his theory of adult learning, Malcolm Knowles, often considered the father of adult education, says that adults come to education "with a life-centered, task-centered, or problem-centered orientation to learning. For the most part, adults do not learn for the sake of learning" (1984, p. 12). This view acknowledges the possible motives for learning that students bring to literacy education. A NCSALL study has shown that making progress toward self-determined learning goals is a major factor in adult learner persistence in ABE programs (Comings, Parrella, & Soricone, 2000). These two perspectives show adult learners as a dynamic force in ABE orientation to curriculum.

The term learner-driven is tricky. It suggests that the adult learner—not the subject matter—plays a central role in determining curriculum. Almost everyone I've spoken to who works in literacy says they work in a learner-centered program, where presumably everyone uses a learner-centered curriculum. However, someone's definition of learner-centered may mean that students get to pick out a skills workbook or decide where to sit in the library. I prefer the pithy and challenging definition coined by Fingeret (2000, p. 14): students are involved in "developing instructional materials that respond to students' interests and respect their culture and prior learning." This definition sees students taking an active role in developing curriculum; the curriculum is based on their reasons for learning as well as what they bring with them into a learning situation. A more recent term, "learner-driven," better describes the dynamic nature students bring to curriculum and instruction, which is why I chose it for this article.

Learner-driven approaches draw upon constructivism, a theory of learning in which "people learn when they relate new information and skills to what they already know, actively practice the new information and skills in a supportive environment, and get feedback on their performance. Learners construct their own understanding from what they are exposed to in the classroom and what they have experienced in the rest of their lives" (Cromley, 2000, p. 10). Lev Vgotsky's socio-cultural theory of cognition posits that mental functioning has its origins in social life; the very act of processing information goes beyond the direct functioning of the brain's structure (Wertsch & Kanner, 1992). Historical, social, and cultural influences play major roles in shaping the way individuals think and learn, and a learner-driven curriculum acknowledges these influences. The learner-driven approach also draws upon the work of contextual theorists, who believe that effective learning is situated within the social context of real surroundings and situations. Learning skills means applying skills, which involves practice with the real activities and materials that come out of real-life situations (Bransford et al., 2000).

To develop learner-driven curriculum, teachers need to view learners as active inquirers who use previous experiences—both mental and social—to make meaning of the world. Curriculum springs from students' purposes for learning and uses real-life materials and contexts. To identify and address students' goals and purposes for learning, teachers ask adults what they want to learn more about or be able to do better. Literacy education becomes less about attaining a discrete set of skills and more about gaining expertise in the literacy activities of everyday life. Students learn basic, mechanical, reading and writing skills in the process. As researcher Marilyn Gillespie writes about this approach in discussing the Equipped for the Future initiative from the National Institute for Literacy, "Teachers begin with tasks learners need immediately in their daily lives and then 'back into' the knowledge, skills and strategies required to perform those tasks. This does not mean that basic skills are not covered, but they are addressed in an iterative rather than a sequential manner" (2002, p. 4).

Advantages

A learner-driven approach to curriculum by definition gives power to the learners: they are identified as the experts in knowing what they need to know. Students see their needs clearly reflected in the classroom, which is very motivating. The learner-driven approach creates a direct link between in-class work and learners' need for literacy outside the classroom. As a result, learners can more easily transfer new skills to day-to-day use (Purcell-Gates, et al., 2001). The immediacy of this transfer of skills at home, at work, and in communities also encourages learner persistence.

The constructivist element of this approach honors the social and cultural context of the learner. Given that adult basic education learners are predominantly from marginalized groups in American society (D'Amico, in press), respecting learners' perspectives is a bold political act. Learner-driven curriculum development provides a rich picture of adult learning and moves beyond the image of ABE merely as "school for big people."

Disadvantages

A learner-driven approach often relies on the teacher's ability to create or select materials appropriate to learners' expressed needs. This requires skill on the part of the teacher, as well as time and resources: at a minimum, texts brought in from real life, a wide pool of commercially available materials from which to draw, and a reliable photocopier. Given the reality of teachers' professional preparation and working conditions (Smith, et al., 2001), lack of skill, time and resources makes creating curriculum with this approach difficult.

Teachers may also find it difficult to strike an acceptable balance among the competing needs and interests of students. Students are often initially uncomfortable with the seemingly ambiguous nature of a curriculum that is molded jointly by teacher and learners. Teachers, too, are often uncomfortable with asking students to share issues in their lives, they struggle with the balance between skills instruction and content necessary in this approach. In addition, while this approach recognizes the individual backgrounds of students, it does not explicitly address political and power issues that cause and perpetuate marginalization and low literacy skills.

Finally, adult basic education programs, pushed to produce concrete outputs such as test scores, may feel that the creation of learner-driven curriculum is a luxury that they can not afford.

The Critical Approach

Those who embrace the critical approach consider education a political act, one that should function in emancipatory ways (Pinar, 1978). The pioneer of this approach was Paolo Freire (1985), a Brazilian adult literacy educator who worked with laborers, peasants, and fishermen and was greatly influenced by his experiences with these economically marginalized social classes. He believed that "illiteracy is one of the concrete expressions of an unjust social reality" (1985, p. 10). Instead of the traditional "banking" model of adult education in which the teacher deposits politically neutral, technical knowledge into students, critical pedagogy assumes that education is a value-laden process. Learners actively create knowledge as they participate in learning by taking a "critical look" at who has power and what impact that power has on the lives of those without it, recognizing the causal and circumstantial relationships that cause social injustice. Gaining power with words translates into gaining personal power and making change in the world.

Freire's theories, and the curricula that spring from them, promote critical thinking, dialogue, and decision-making activities that support democratic ideals and move toward socially critical consciousness. In developing critical curriculum, teachers must first learn about important issues in their students' lives through conversations, journaling, discussions, and lots of listening. This research enables teachers to identify issues that relate to the experiences and concerns students identify. Reading and writing skills develop in tandem with critical thinking skills, and ultimately, literacy learning becomes a means of transforming students' lives and communities. Often, a unit of curriculum ends with meaningful action that addresses a community need.

Within Freire's activities and overarching goals, however, other theorists have located areas to further develop. For example, feminists point out that critical

theory does not explicitly include gender issues, even though women often experience low literacy skills, or marginalization, in different ways and in different situations than men do. While Freire's ideas take aim at disparities in social class, theorists writing after Freire have expressed a "sharpened interest in power and language, with an emphasis on a multiplicity of perspectives that include race, class, gender, and culture." (Hemphill, 1999, p. 2). Curriculum design—and adult education in general—needs to move beyond the concept of a universal adult learner and have the flexibility to include adults' diverse identities and experiences.

In this third approach, students are central to the process of constructing and interpreting knowledge. Critical curriculum activities include journals, portfolios, and other autobiographical, literary and artistic methodologies (Slattery, 1995) that focus less on external objectives than on internal experiences. William Doll, a theorist who views curriculum as a means of gaining personal emancipation (1993), sees opportunity for two powerful actions in critical curriculum: self-organization and transformation. He writes, "Plans arise from action and are modified through actions...., this translates into course syllabi or lesson plans written in a general, loose, somewhat indeterminate manner. As the course or lesson proceeds, specificity becomes more appropriate and is worked out conjointly-among teacher, students, text"(1993, p. 171). The negotiation that takes place engages both students and teachers in decision-making; students see themselves as equal partners in solving problems in the classroom and beyond.

Advantages

The critical approach to curriculum is, by definition, political, putting power issues front and center. It does not ignore the difficulties that learners face in life but provides a way for learners together to meet them head on. By doing so, it does not create a separation between learners' lives and what they are learning, which, as in the learner-driven approach, is motivating. In addition, the call to action inherent in this approach helps learners bridge the "classroom/real world" divide. This method is rooted in the social justice movement. Teachers who believe in adult literacy as an element of social justice embrace the premises underlying this method.

Disadvantages

The critical approach to curriculum has many of same disadvantages of the learner-driven approach. It takes time. Teachers need a particular set of facilitation skills in addition to the skills needed to teach reading and writing, or English for speakers of other languages. Learners are not usually familiar with this approach, and may be uneasy with it. They may initially have trouble

understanding how a class taught using this approach will help them, for example, pass the tests of General Educational Development (GED).

Since taking action is a crucial element of the curriculum, teachers need to recognize the potential that learners' actions may cause backlash from powers that are being questioned or threatened. The teacher and program need to be committed to supporting learners, rather than abandoning them if, for example, a landlord decides to evict students rather than rectify housing problems.

One Topic, Three Approaches to Curriculum

A class that uses a traditional approach to curriculum might cover the topic "housing" in a series of lessons nested within a workbook that focuses on "life skills." In a learner-driven class, a student might indicate interest in better understanding a rental agreement. The teacher might first find out what the students already know about contracts and rental agreements. Then the teacher might use the rental agreement to help learners build reading skills and develop reading strategies. In a class that uses a critical approach to curriculum, if students indicate that housing is an issue, a teacher might display pictures of types of housing, and lead a discussion about the kinds of housing with which students are familiar, the differences in housing, the underlying policies and power structures that lead to substandard housing. Reading and writing activities might center around writing letters to protest current housing policies, or discrimination in certain housing markets.

Conclusion

Many teachers are not free to choose their curriculum: the state, funder, or program has made that choice, or time and resources present so many restrictions that the choice is virtually made for them. In recognizing that curriculum design always reflects someone's values and beliefs, those who have the luxury of making decisions about curricula have the responsibility to ensure that their choices reflect their views about the goals and purposes of education. That said, it is true that the lines between the approaches have blurred considerably. Many textbook series were developed with extensive input from learners. Some pose critical questions about issues of power; others include activities that help learners bridge the classroom/real life divide. Many teachers find ways to use traditional texts in learner-driven classrooms; and learner-driven curriculum can be a means of explicitly taking action for social change. My guess is that, like most teachers, you will draw from the best of each approach, creating your own, eclectic curriculum.

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About the Author

Amy Prevedel coordinates Berkeley Reads, the adult literacy program of the Berkeley Public Library. She has worked in volunteer-based adult literacy settings for the past 10 years and holds a master's degree in Adult Education from San Francisco State University. She is working toward certification as a national trainer for the Equipped for the Future initiative.

Handout

Key Concepts

Excerpts from Values and Beliefs: The World View Behind Curriculum

Prevedel, A. (2003). The world view behind curriculum. *Focus on Basics,* 6(C), pp. 8-13.

Most simply put, a curriculum is a guide for learning. Many adult basic education teachers and literacy tutors pick up existing texts or curriculum packets and start teaching, without knowing why they're using the curriculum or what philosophy of education it reflects. But "curriculum always represents somebody's version of what constitutes knowledge and a legitimate worldview" (Sleeter & Grant, 1991, p. 80). Everyone who chooses or creates curriculum needs to develop a personal philosophy of teaching and learning, examine the values and beliefs behind that philosophy, and design or select a curriculum that reflects those beliefs and values. In doing so, they must also recognize that they exercise a lot of power: their choices will convey to students a particular world view.

The Traditional Approach

The traditional model was laid out by Ralph Tyler in 1949 in his seminal book, *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*, and is generally considered the mainstream way to conceptualize curriculum development. Many educators and adult literacy students find it familiar because of its wide use in public schools in the United States. The approach has a "subject-centered" orientation: students gain mastery of subject matter predetermined by a set of "experts." Curriculum is organized around content units and the sequence of what is taught follows the logic of the subject matter (Knowles, 1984). The organizing principles, laid out in the introduction to Tyler's book, identify the school as the holder of power in decision making about what gets taught.

The Learner-Driven Approach

The term learner-driven is tricky. It suggests that the adult learner—not the subject matter—plays a central role in determining curriculum. Almost everyone I've spoken to who works in literacy says they work in a learner-centered program, where presumably everyone uses a learner-centered curriculum. However, someone's definition of learner-centered may mean that students get to pick out a skills workbook or decide where to sit in the library. I prefer the pithy and challenging definition coined by Fingeret (2000, p. 14): students are involved in "developing instructional materials that respond to students' interests and respect their culture and prior learning." This definition sees students taking an active role in developing curriculum; the curriculum is based on their reasons for learning as well as what they bring with them into a

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Key Concepts (continued)

learning situation. A more recent term, "learner-driven," better describes the dynamic nature students bring to curriculum and instruction, which is why I chose it for this article.

The Critical Approach

In this third approach, students are central to the process of constructing and interpreting knowledge. Critical curriculum activities include journals, portfolios, and other autobiographical, literary and artistic methodologies (Slattery, 1995) that focus less on external objectives than on internal experiences. William Doll, a theorist who views curriculum as a means of gaining personal emancipation (1993), sees opportunity for two powerful actions in critical curriculum: self-organization and transformation. He writes, "Plans arise from action and are modified through actions...., this translates into course syllabi or lesson plans written in a general, loose, somewhat indeterminate manner. As the course or lesson proceeds, specificity becomes more appropriate and is worked out conjointly-among teacher, students, text"(1993, p. 171). The negotiation that takes place engages both students and teachers in decision-making; students see themselves as equal partners in solving problems in the classroom and beyond.

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Three Approaches to Curriculum

Issue	Traditional Approach	Learner-Driven Approach	Critical Approach
Who determines curriculum?	▪ Curriculum developer (publisher, state, institution) sets goals and chooses learning experiences, evaluates, plans, and proposes curriculum	▪ Students articulate learning goals that spring from their real-world roles ▪ Students help plan curriculum	▪ Teacher leads the class while following the lead of learners ▪ Students, rather than "outsiders," become experts
What does knowledge look like?	▪ Appears neutral and equitable in its availability ▪ Exists "out there," can be organized and transmitted ▪ Is observable and measurable	▪ Created through the interaction of student and text ▪ Builds on what learners already know ▪ Relevant to students' real-life context	▪ Not fixed—dependent upon interaction among students, text, and teacher ▪ Autobiographic—depends on the politics of identity brought to learning ▪ Complex interaction between text, the teacher, and what is taught ▪ Knowledge is created, rather than taken in
What are the underlying assumptions?	▪ Pre-determined goals ▪ Learning happens in a linear, step-by-step fashion ▪ Expert knowledge is important	▪ Learning happens in social contexts ▪ Instruction is transparent and based on purposes students determine ▪ Learners actively build on knowledge and experience	▪ Education is political ▪ Language and power are connected

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Three Approaches to Curriculum (continued)

Issue	Traditional Approach	Learner-Driven Approach	Critical Approach
What might this look like in action?	▪ A classroom with lesson plans, homework, grades possibly ▪ Skills-based/sequenced textbooks or workbook with predetermined learning goals	▪ Apolitical on the surface ▪ Drawn from adults' lives in their everyday contexts	▪ Abandons technician mentality ▪ Addresses social and community issues of importance ▪ Curriculum not set in advance; emerges from "action and interaction of the participants" (Doll, 1993)
How is learning assessed?	▪ Objective, observable "scientific" means ▪ Can provide comparative scores	▪ Performance of the student's contextualized goal ▪ Continuing, involving metacognitive strategies	▪ Portfolios, self-assessment instruments ▪ Measures of social and personal change ▪ Levels of critical consciousness reached ▪ External performance levels do not apply

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NCSALL's Mission

NCSALL's purpose is to improve practice in educational programs that serve adults with limited literacy and English language skills, and those without a high school diploma. NCSALL is meeting this purpose through basic and applied research, dissemination of research findings, and leadership within the field of adult learning and literacy.

NCSALL is a collaborative effort among the Harvard Graduate School of Education, World Education, The Center for Literacy Studies at The University of Tennessee, Rutgers University, and Portland State University. NCSALL is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through its Institute of Education Sciences (formerly Office of Educational Research and Improvement).

NCSALL's Research Projects

The goal of NCSALL's research is to provide information that is used to improve practice in programs that offer adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and adult secondary education services. In pursuit of this goal, NCSALL has undertaken research projects in four areas: (1) student motivation, (2) instructional practice and the teaching/learning interaction, (3) staff development, and (4) assessment.

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