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 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.