Handout

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 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

NCSALL
National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy