4.4: The Cognitive and Affective Domains of Curricula

The Cognitive Domain of Curricula

The cognitive domain of curricula deals with how students gain knowledge. In today’s schools, this is often achieved by dividing the knowledge into separate content areas. In this model, the different content areas are taught independently of supporting student emotions or social skills; therefore, in this model, instruction is contained to content-specific facts and skills.

Subject-Centered

The idea of subject-centered instruction separates instruction into distinct content areas. The skills and content contributing to the curriculum varies by subject. While this model was adopted in the United States in the 1870’s, it is still in practice today, especially at the secondary level. The pros and cons of this model were outlined by Ornstein (1982).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros of subject-centered Instruction</th>
<th>Cons of subject-centered instruction</th>
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<tr>
<td>Subjects are a logical way to organize and interpret learning.</td>
<td>The curriculum is fragmented, and concepts learned in isolation.</td>
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<td>Such organization makes it easier for people to remember information for future use.</td>
<td>It deemphasizes life experiences and fails to consider the needs and interests of students.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teachers (in secondary schools, at least) are trained as subject-matter specialists.</td>
<td>The teacher dominates the lesson, allowing little student input.</td>
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Pros of subject-centered instruction

- Textbooks and other teaching materials are usually organized by subject.

Cons of subject-centered instruction

- The emphasis is on using lower-order thinking skills like teaching of knowledge, and the recall of facts.

Core Curriculum

The core curriculum emphasizes knowledge within the subject areas that all students should learn. People in favor of having a core curriculum believe that all students should know a common body of knowledge. This model takes a more interdisciplinary approach to ensure that all prescribed content is covered.

Mastery Learning

Mastery learning includes multiple educational practices based on the principle that if students are given adequate time to study and have appropriate instruction most students can meet the learning standards set for the course. Mastery learning is based on the acknowledgement of the differing rate of time that students take to master material. Theoretically speaking, there could be the possibility that all students will be learning at different paces and the teacher will have to attend to the differences in the pace of instruction of all of their students (Block & Anderson, 1974).

The Affective Domain of Curricula

The Affective domain of curricula places emphasis on feeling and valuing in education. This is the aspect of the curriculum that emphasizes emotions and motivation. This domain is rooted in the belief that schools have responsibilities beyond the delivery of instruction. In this domain, the information is presented in a manner that guides students to seeing the value in the things they are learning in the classroom in a way that helps the students see the value in the material that is being covered in the course. It is the goal to make a lasting impression on the students, eliciting an emotional response from the students. The affective domain of curricula also attempts to address concepts such as morality, character building, resiliency, empathy, and perseverance by modeling and promoting good citizenship in the classroom (Miller, 2005).

Student-Centered Curriculum

A student-centered curriculum emphasizes students’ interests and needs. In student-centered instruction students take a more active role in their own learning. The students construct their own knowledge with the assistance of the teacher (Ornstein, 1982). The Progressive philosophy of education informs the student-centered curriculum. Teachers who identify with this philosophy believe that focusing on students’ needs and personal interests, students tend to be more motivated to engage with the material in a more meaningful way.

Humanistic

Humanistic learning focuses on student mastery and personal growth. The objectives of humanistic learning strive to instill a set of values and feelings in the students. The humanistic model focuses on the importance of cultivating the
human potential. Humanists seek a higher sense of consciousness in the students and enhancement of the mind (Ornstein, 1982).

Cooperative Learning

Cooperative learning is a teaching strategy that is structured around small groups comprised of students with varying ability levels. Cooperative learning incorporates a variety of learning experiences to enhance their understanding of a particular topic. In some cases, members of each group are assigned tasks. These tasks are then shared with students in other groups. In this model students take on the role of the learner as well as teacher (Johnson & Johnson, 1999). The jigsaw model is an excellent way to engage students in this type of learning. See the video at the bottom of this page to watch a teacher model this technique.

Broad Fields Curriculum

Broad fields design is in response to the lack of integration under subject-centered design. Many educators feel that curricula in the subject-centered model is too compartmentalized. The students sometimes have difficulty making interdisciplinary connections between the different subjects. The drawback with this interdisciplinary model is combining so many subjects, students get knowledge that is less in-depth in comparison to the deeper content of a single-subject. (Barnett, 2009)

Activity Curriculum

This movement originated in private child-centered schools and impacted the public elementary school curriculum. This advocated carefully planned activities that were tied to a child’s needs and interests. This teaching strategy acted as the basis of emerging teaching strategies that included life experiences, field trips, and group activities (Ornstein, 1982).

Stakeholders and Curricular Decision Making

Parents, Schools, and Communities

Parents can be the most valuable influences on the curriculum adopted at the local level. The Board of Education adopts the curriculum, but the parents are the taxpayers in the district, so they have a vested interest in the way their children are taught. This input can be made through contacting individual teachers and/or the administration to shape their children’s educations.

Special Interest Groups

Special interest groups advocate for particular policies and focus in education. These groups can be comprised of people from a specific culture, ethnicity, or religious group and may lobby for changes in education through a political lens based on their political party affiliation.
State Legislatures

Public schools are funded by taxpayer dollars and governed by their respective states and departments of education. State legislators tend to focus on what best meets the needs of all students. State legislatures play a vital role in education because they set the state budget for education and pass laws pertaining to the educational system statewide. Some policies are influenced by state legislators and the state’s department of education.

Schools

The school’s influence revolves around both the philosophical picture of what schools should accomplish and the practical picture of what to do with the students today. Colleges often share their expectations for incoming students so that K-12 teachers can make the students college or career ready.

Textbooks and Testing Companies

The states that represent the greatest possible business for the publishers can have tremendous influence over the content of the books. California and Texas, for example, account for approximately 20 percent of the textbook market.

Standards: The Next Generation

The New York State Board of Regents revised the ELA and Mathematics Learning Standards in 2017. The ELA and Mathematics standards were revised to ensure that New York State has well-crafted standards for our students (NYSED, 2017). This is the most recent iteration of the information that any teacher and student in New York State will be held accountable for. Creation of good objectives that allow for achievement of both cognitive and affective goals will assist us in meeting these standards.

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