

# UNDERSTANDING CURRICULUM

CURRICULUM INTERFACE: Making the connection  
between curriculum theory and practice

# OBJECTIVES

- To review the field of curriculum theory
- To explore the relationship between theory and practice
- To reflect critically on the need for teachers to position themselves in the realm of curriculum
- To determine the demands of enacting the curriculum

# Teachers as reflective practitioners

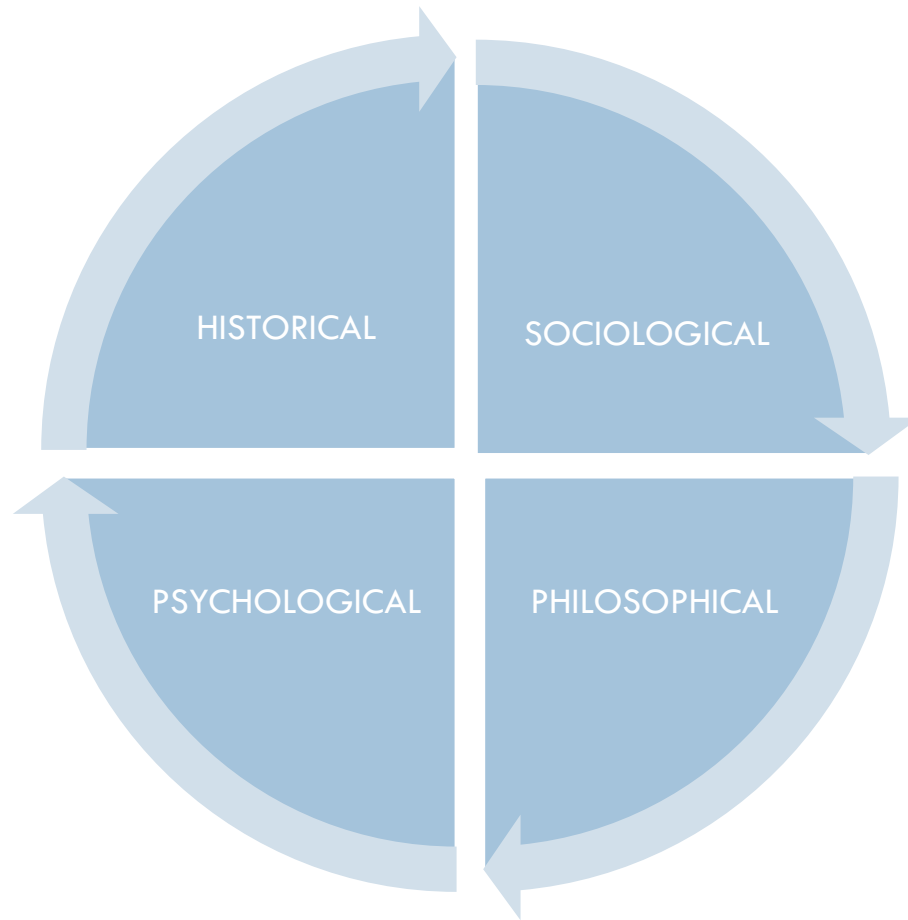
Students need teachers who

- ❑ understand curriculum
- ❑ are aware of the power they hold in their hands
- ❑ have the skill to analyse what they are doing, and
- ❑ is willing to wield their inner sense of what is right.

STUDENTS NEED

**SKILLFUL, CONSCIOUS AND CONSCIENTIOUS  
TEACHERS**

# CURRICULUM FOUNDATIONS



# Ways of viewing curriculum

1. Conceptions
2. Perspectives
3. Ideologies

## IDEOLOGIES

(Eisner, 2002)

- Religious Orthodoxy
- Rational Humanism
- Progressivism
- Critical Theory
- Reconceptualism
- Cognitive Pluralism

## CONCEPTIONS

(Eisner and Vallance  
1973)

- Academic rationalism
  - The development of cognitive processes
  - Curriculum as technology
  - Social reconstruction-relevance
  - Self actualization

## PERSPECTIVES

Carr and Kemmis 2004/Freire  
1970/Slattery 1995

- Practical
- Critical
- Technical/Modern
- Postmodern

# Conceptions in curriculum theory

- **Academic rationalism** produces a curriculum of facts and figures that are to be learnt by all students regardless of ability or interest and which is expected to produce logical, rational, high-functioning members of society.
- A focus on **developing cognitive processes** says that curriculum's main aim should be teaching students how to learn and reduce its focus on what is taught.

# Conceptions in curriculum theory

- **Curriculum as technology** suggests that curriculum should describe step by step ways of communicating ideas as learners are seen as information processors.
- Curriculum for **social reconstruction-relevance** prepares the student to identify and seek to repair what is flawed and problematic in society and culture.
- Curriculum for **self-actualization** seeks to help the student free himself/herself from ignorance and oppression by developing the learner's "potentialities".



# Perspectives in curriculum theory

## **The Technical/modern perspective**

- ❑ views the curriculum as a channel for transmitting objective knowledge as embodied in separate and distinct disciplines and thereby create unified and progressive societies of stable rational human beings.
- ❑ encourages the teacher to use a precise, structured, programmatic approach with clearly-defined objectives, thoughtfully organized and selected content, appropriate instructional practices and achievable, observable and measurable outcomes.

# Perspectives in curriculum theory

## **The Practical perspective**

- ❑ views the curriculum as an opportunity to focus on real world PEEST problems and solutions
- ❑ expects the continually reflective teacher to provide experiences to bring students to a point of knowing and acting because this is what is relevant and good for their lives.

# Perspectives in curriculum theory

## **The Critical perspective**

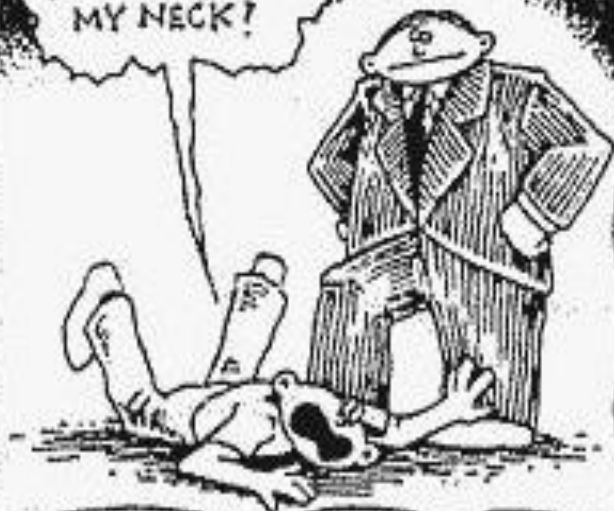
- ❑ sees curriculum as a process through which to develop critical consciousness in the learner of the values and norms of the dominant culture and class embedded in the way the world is organised and the resulting unjust social and economic practices.
- ❑ expects the teacher to be conscious of such impediments embedded in the school curricula and focus on transformation of the learner and eventually that of society.

# Perspectives in curriculum theory

## **The Postmodern perspective**

- ❑ views curriculum as opportunities to challenge the existence of universal truths and instead expose students to myriad and equally valid cultural truths and individual perspectives.
- ❑ requires the teacher to engage and facilitate in explorative participation in a variety of topics and activities so that meaning or sense is self-created not imported and social and inquiry skills are analytical and solution-oriented.

OUCH!.. YOU'RE  
STANDING ON  
MY NECK!



WELL, THAT'S ONE POINT  
OF VIEW... BUT ONE  
COULD ALSO SAY THAT  
YOU'RE TRYING TO  
TRIP ME WITH  
YOUR NECK...



YOU SEE, IN THE POSTMODERN  
CONDITION WE CREATE OUR OWN  
REALITY BASED UPON OUR  
INTERNALIZED PRECONCEPTIONS.  
SINCE THERE IS NO LONGER  
ONE OBJECTIVE TRUTH, WE ARE  
FREE TO CREATE OUR OWN  
TRUTH... SO YOU SEE, THERE  
IS NO RIGHT AND WRONG  
JUST AN INFINITE  
NUMBER OF EQUALLY  
VALID "STORIES"



BUT YOU'RE  
STILL STANDING  
ON MY NECK!

YOU NEVER  
WENT TO COLLEGE  
DID YOU?





# Other perspectives on curriculum enactment

# Curriculum case study assignment

- Each of the following statement represents a metaphor for the conceptions and assumptions that appear to guide the way different teacher's choose to enact the curriculum.
- Try to identify the metaphor or concept after reading the statement.

# Curriculum case study 1

- “Boy, we lost so much time in first term, it was a race to finish that syllabus. Sometimes, I had to use a virtual whip on them.”
- “Really? My strategy was to have them work in groups with definite deadlines for handing up work. I gave them feedback and had them rewrite those essays so many times, they can answer questions with their eyes closed.
- Well, I found that my students did best when I presented them with quick and dirty blocks of information, one at a time. They got it alright.



# Curriculum case study 1 (continued)

- So am I the only one who believes that students need to feel cared for, fed and watered for learning to take place; not feeling tired out or spent?
- I had been having similar complaints from my students but they don't last long as they soon get into the new journeys and explorations that we go on nearly every day.

# Metaphors for some perspectives on curriculum enactment

## CURRICULUM

As racing

As manufacturing

As banking

As gardening

As exploring

# Teaching and Learning as completing the race course



The curriculum is seen as a race course and the teacher is expected to have students at least finish the race.

The focus is on following the course guides and implementing the lesson plans and not necessarily on the condition of the horses at the start or end of the course nor the quality of the process of running the race.

# Teaching and Learning as manufacturing processes



The curriculum sets out the steps that should result in the desired uniform pattern or “educated person” at the end of the mechanical process that is curriculum implementation

The teachers are instructed through the curriculum and students are moved along the conveyor belt no matter his or her shape ( the extent or quality of learning) at the end of each stage in the manufacturing process

# Teaching and Learning as banking



Knowledge is collected in a vault/  
bank external to both teacher and  
learner and contained in books and  
other sources

Teachers seen as depositors pouring  
valuable bits of knowledge into their  
students -the empty wallets

Students seen as withdrawers of  
standard nuggets of knowledge  
because they all have the same  
standard needs



# Teaching and Learning as gardening



The curriculum is fertilizer for the rich soil that is the student.

Teachers till by supplying the curriculum's treatment, attention, conditions and resources needed at different stages of growth and in different circumstances. Flowers are planted and weeds eliminated.

Learners are engaged and motivated and they are encouraged to show the fruits of their growth and development

# Teaching and Learning as space exploration



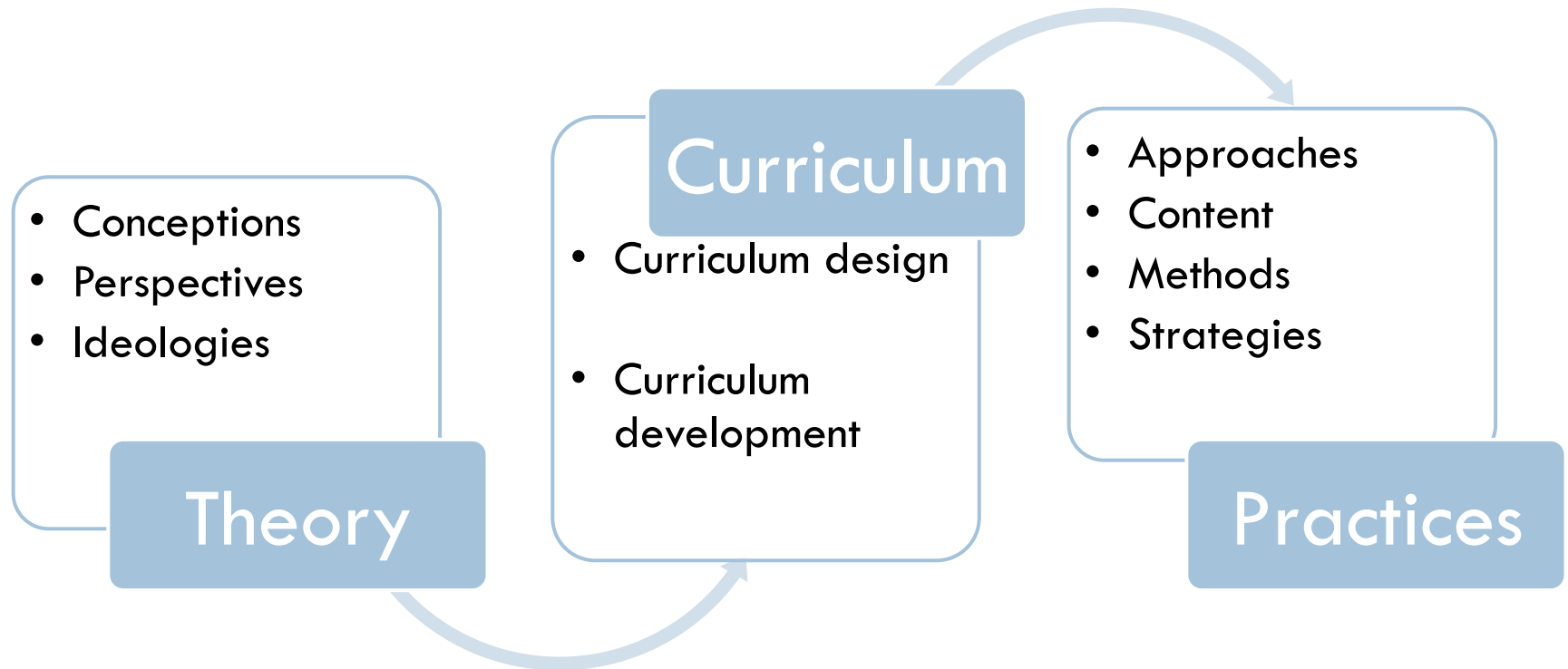
- The curriculum recognises that life is still a largely unknown entity with new discoveries being made everyday. The curriculum should be seen as a platform that encourages an openness to and the development of new knowledge
- Teachers and students are discoverers who utilise but don't settle for existing theories and facts but set out together to seek their own truths which may or may not be consistent with the experience of others

# The curriculum interface

The curriculum and the teacher: where theory and practice meet



# The interconnection of theory and practice



# Influences on curriculum developers

- Philosophy of education (vision and rationale for subject, specific subject goals and expected outcomes).
- History and Sociology (the current and expected effects on society and student lives by implementation of the subject's curriculum).
- Psychology (choice of learning theories affects approaches, content, method/s, and shapes suggested teaching and learning strategies and recommended instructional material).

# Influences on teacher practice



**Environment**

**Learner**

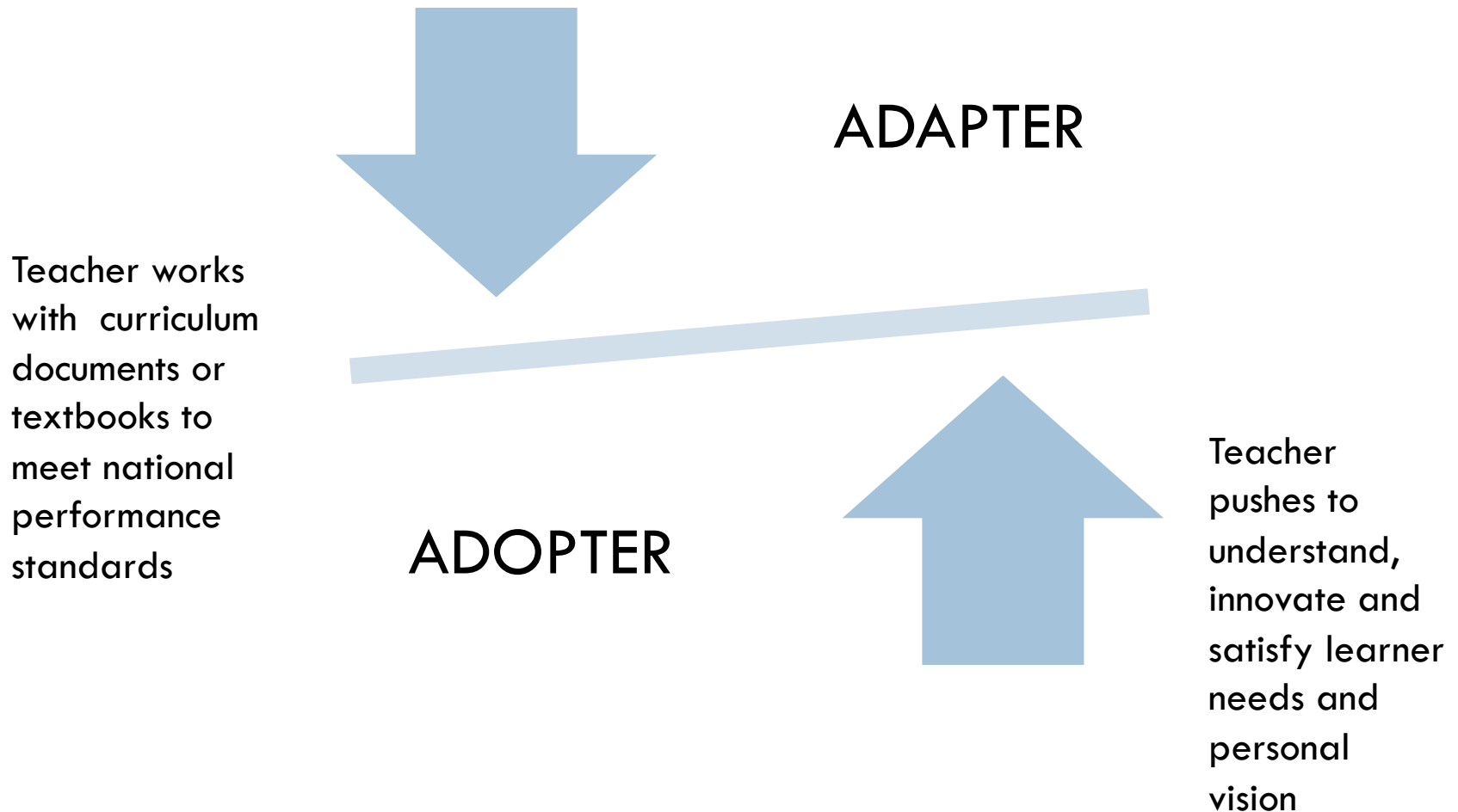
**Instructional  
materials**

**Curriculum**

**Pedagogy**

**Persona**

# Integrating theory with practice



# Curriculum case study 2

- Teaching is a system that we should manage. - Should not students who sign up for the same course actually experience the same course in all sections every semester, unless change is planned? (Moore, 1995).
- Students benefit from teachers who following the curriculum as closely as possible because
  1. Children are taught more effectively, even by underqualified teachers, where expectations are consistent across schools and districts, and specific instructions on what topics to cover, what strategies and learning materials to use and how to assess students are provided.
  2. Standardised curriculum makes for standardised test results which tell which areas can be revised to improve a child's education.

# Areas for adaptation/variation in teacher practice

1. Scope
2. Sequence
3. Level of difficulty
4. Time allotment
5. Level of support,
6. Instructional strategies,
7. Ways for class participation
8. Assessment types and ways of responding to assessments

# Actions and skills for adapting curriculum



Seeking knowledge of the curriculum, learner, context; keep learning about teaching; keep reading/research; keep networking with fellow practitioners of the same mindset (not necessarily the same subject)



# Starting points for integrating theory with practice

- What was your schooling like your educational history and how and why you entered the teaching profession
- What is your philosophy of education, of teaching, of learning
- What do you perceive your role as teacher to be?
- What part do you expect students to play?
- What are the underlying theories which inform your teaching?
- What curriculum perspectives/conceptions do you adhere to?
- How is all of this reflected in your classroom practice?



# Starting points for integrating theory with practice

- (a) consider the characteristics of the curriculum, including its goals and objectives, content and emphases;
- (b) examine the recommended tasks and activities and their sequencing as well as the instructional materials available for teaching the curriculum;

# Starting points for integrating theory with practice

- (c) weigh the various characteristics of curriculum against ... students' interests, abilities, and learning needs as well as their expectations for student academic performance.
- (d) consider the implications of curriculum implementation with respect to maintaining student attention and involvement in instructional activity and the problem of student control.

□ Grounder 1992, p. 20



THANK YOU