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# UNIT 1 CURRICULUM: THE CONCEPT

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## Structure

- 1.0 Objectives
- 1.1 Introduction
- 1.2 Defining Curriculum
  - 1.2.1 Meaning and Concept of Curriculum
  - 1.2.2 Define Curriculum
  - 1.2.3 Programme of Studies
  - 1.2.4 Course Content
  - 1.2.5 Planned Learning Experiences
  - 1.2.6 Intended Learning Outcomes
  - 1.2.7 Plan for Action
  - 1.2.8 Educative Experiences
  - 1.2.9 Implications
- 1.3 Curriculum Movement
  - 1.3.1 Reasons for Neglect of Curriculum
  - 1.3.2 Reasons for Curriculum Reform Movement
  - 1.3.3 The First Stage (1893-1938)
  - 1.3.4 The Second Stage (1939 onwards)
  - 1.3.5 Definitions Revisited
  - 1.3.6 'Inert' and 'Live' Curriculum
- 1.4 Curriculum Theory
  - 1.4.1 The Concept of Theory: Our Stand
  - 1.4.2 Curriculum Theory: A Perspective
  - 1.4.3 Theories of Curriculum Construction
  - 1.4.4 Theories of Curriculum Development
- 1.5 Curriculum Movement: Development and Future Directions
- 1.6 Let Us Sum up
- 1.7 Answers to Check Your Progress

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## 1.0 OBJECTIVES

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After completing this Unit, you should be able to:

- explain the different interpretations of the concept curriculum;
- explain the difficulty in arriving at a definitive meaning of curriculum;
- describe the emergence of curriculum as a field of study by tracing its genesis and growth;
- examine the possible meanings of 'theory' and why curriculum theory is 'scientific';
- explain the theories of curriculum construction and development; and
- analyse future directions of curriculum theory and movement.

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## 1.1 INTRODUCTION

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Make a list of possible definitions of curriculum that occur to you; and do not be surprised if it looks something like the following:

- A curriculum is an inventory of items of information, skills etc., which have to be taught to the learners.
- A curriculum is a charter or plan which dictates the educational activities in an institution.

The fact, that curriculum is a framework, or a plan that is handed over to the teachers implies that the teachers do not have an active role in its making. By deduction, one can say that the failure of a curriculum can be attributed to, among other things, the non-inclusion of teacher participation in evolving a curriculum.

This course, as you know, is an attempt to prove that an understanding of curriculum is essential in the context of planning of academic activities in distance education.

This unit introduces you to curriculum as a theory and an area of experience. Various interpretations of the term curriculum, the emergence of curriculum as a field of study and a theory, speculations on future trends are within the scope of this unit.

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## 1.2 DEFINING CURRICULUM

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Like many other terms, 'curriculum' has been, and still is, used in more than one sense. Obviously, if any two communicators do not use the term in the same sense, it is bound to lead to misunderstanding. Even those who are engaged in education and/or curriculum as professionals use this term in different ways, therefore confusion among common people or non-professionals is not unusual. Attempts have been made to fix the meaning of 'curriculum' as a technical term, but by and large, a unique commonly agreed upon definition of the term will need some more time to be arrived at.

Etymologically, the term curriculum has been derived from a Latin root which means 'race course'. The word 'race course' is suggestive of

- the course, i.e., the path; and
- the time (suggested by the prefix race) in which the path could/must be covered.

Obviously, curriculum was seen as a prescribed course(s) of studies with a beginning and end and to be covered in a prescribed time frame. However, this concept of curriculum was not precise enough to make multiple interpretations impossible. Eventually, therefore, the expression came to be interpreted in different ways.

What are these differing interpretations?

Here, we shall present five of them to give you a feel of the problems involved.

### 1.2.1 Meaning and Concept of Curriculum

It is difficult to give an exact and adequate definition of the term 'curriculum' because of its comprehensiveness and complexity. Some definitions are general and some others are specific in connotation. You should read carefully the

following definitions are general and some others are specific in connotation. You should read carefully the following definitions and try to comprehend the meaning and scope of each definition's suitable to your context, purpose and relevance.

### 1.2.2 Define Curriculum

- “All the learning which is planned and guided by the teacher, whether it is carried on in groups or individually inside or outside the school” Kerr (1960).
- “As a systematic organization of instructional content and related activities designed to provide students with a sequence of meaningful learning experiences” Davis (1962).
- “Curriculum is the sum total of student activities which the school sponsors for the purpose of achieving its objectives” Albery and Albery (1959).
- “Formulation and implantation of an educational proposal to be taught and learnt within schools or other institutions and for which implementation and its efforts” (Jenkin and Shipman, 1975).
- Curriculum refers “to the total structure of ideas and activities, developed by an educational institution to meet the needs of students and to achieve desired educational aims” Derek Rowntree (1981).
- “A curriculum is all of the experiences that individual learners have in programme of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives, which is planned in terms of framework of theory and research or past and present professional practice” Glen Hass (1987).
- A curriculum is a structured series of intended learning outcomes (Johnson, 1957). This explanation emphasizes that learning outcomes and not learning experiences constitute the curriculum. These outcomes are linked with objectives.
- A curriculum is an attempt to communicate the essential principles and features of an educational concept in such a form that it is open to critical scrutiny and capable of effective translation into practice (Lawrence Stenhouse, 1975). Here, curriculum has been viewed as an attempt, an activity aimed at communication.
- A curriculum is the formulation and implementation of an educational proposal, to be taught and learnt within schools or other institutions and for which that institution accepts responsibility at three levels: its rationale, its actual implementation and its effects (Jenkin and Shipman, 1975).
- A curriculum is an organized set of formal educational and/or training intentions (David Pratt, 1980).
- A curriculum is all of the experiences that individual learners have in a programme of education whose purpose is to achieve broad goals and related specific objectives, which is planned in terms of a framework of theory and research or past and present professional practice (Glen Hass, 1987). The curriculum is thus a list of planned learning experiences offered to the students under the direction of the school, in other words, curriculum is a blueprint of experiences that have been planned for the students.

It is far more important for us to study and to understand the important aspects/features of the concept of curriculum than to get trapped in difficult-to-understand definitions. There are six important aspects of a curriculum that we should bear in mind and these are as follows:

## The Field of Curriculum

- The overall curriculum gamut revolves around design, developments, evolving an appropriate delivery strategy and finally undertaking Learning outcomes and system and course evaluation process. These are not detachable, having linkages and chaining process.
- A curriculum is a planned activity undertaken in an educational institution. It is a planned all learning outcome of an institution, otherwise called “thinking before doing.”
- Any curriculum has four basics, viz; social forces, knowledge of human development as provided by the accepted theory/theories, the nature of learning, and the nature of knowledge and cognition.
- The goals/purposes of a curriculum are reflected in the set of educational objectives that accompany it. These objectives are the end and the given curriculum is a means to achieve them.
- A curriculum facilitates planning of instruction by teachers. You are expected to understand the social force that operates in society, various stages of human development and their peculiar characteristics. You should also understand the factors that influence the process of learning and the nature of knowledge and cognition. Due to intimate knowledge of children, and also how various educational objectives can be attained by children, teachers can plan a set of learning experiences that flow from a given curriculum. The quality and relevance of learning experiences determines the effectiveness of curriculum implementation.
- The teacher plans the same set of learning experiences for all students of the class. However learners differ in terms of the learning experiences, and their level and quality of participation, due to individual differences and variation in their social backgrounds Due to this, every learner has an actual curriculum which is different from the actual curricula of other learners in the same class.
- Due to the gap between the intended curriculum and the transacted curriculum as reflected by the individual learner’s actual learning, the teacher’s role assumes critical importance. A teacher should not only provide flexible arrangements but also meaningful alternatives in learning. These demand professional decisions from teachers in terms of the objectives, bases and criteria of the given curriculum.

### 1.2.3 Programme of Studies

If we ask lay people or even a practicing teacher as to what curriculum was followed at high school, the usual response we would get would be a list of subjects—English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Physics, etc. And if we asked them to further elaborate their response, these statements do not point to any goals, learning experiences, and teaching materials, teaching strategies or evaluation schemes in relation to the curriculum under consideration. The only dimension touched upon is what is technically known as ‘programme of studies’.

### 1.2.4 Course Content

The term ‘curriculum’ is often misunderstood as the course of study or syllabi prescribed for a particular class or degree. In fact, it is broader than that. It includes all the activities that an educational institution can organize to provide better learning experiences to children. Such experiences include not only the classroom activities but also the social, cultural and playground activities conducted under the direction of an educational institution. The environment/socialization or each learner also plays an important role while transmitting the ‘curriculum’.

At times curriculum is seen as a mere list of topics or items that constitute the course of study in a particular subject within a larger ‘programme of studies’ which we tried to characterize in Sub-section 1.2.1.

Suppose we were asked to describe the English curriculum at the high school level, many of us might come up with something like the following:

### English curriculum

- i) English Texts
  - Prose: “Dream Children”, Lamb; “Forgetting”, Lynd and so on
  - Poetry: “Solitary Reaper”, Wordsworth, etc.
  - Drama: “Justice”, Galsworthy, etc.
- ii) English Grammar: Articles, Nouns, etc.
- iii) English Composition: Letters, Essays, Dialogue, etc.

If there is any suggestion with regard to planning in such a list, it is only that of selection (i.e., that Drama has been selected but not the novel, and that under Poetry “Solitary Reaper” has been selected but not “Lucy Gray” and so on) and order (i.e., “Dream Children” has been placed before “Forgetting”, articles before nouns and so on). This is what we could call ‘course content’ of the curriculum.

### 1.2.5 Planned Learning Experiences

Let us now view the concept of ‘planned learning experiences, we shall take up the same English curriculum and analyse it further.

‘English’ is not just ‘prose’, poetry’ and ‘drama’. It is much more than that. It is a language which, in one sense, may be seen as consisting of four language skills—listening, reading, speaking and writing and in a different sense a means of communication. By the same logic, prose is not just “Dream Children”, and “Forgetting”, it is much more than that.

The ‘course content’ (English curriculum) described in Sub-section 1.2.4 therefore, is a mere means of bringing in those learning experiences which presumably help the learner to learn English of a level that is commensurate with the instructional level at which teaching or learning is taking place (say level ‘n’). Obviously, from this point of view an educational institution (be it a school, college or university) is there to bring about changes among its students which can be done by providing the learners with appropriate directed learning experiences. And these learning experiences (which the learner goes through) must be well planned. Thus, what are significant is the planned learning experience which the course content presented in Sub-section 1.2.4 leads to and not that course content itself. In other words, we could prescribe a different course content to achieve the same goal. For example, we could prescribe “Skylark” in place of “The Solitary Reaper”, “Apple Cart” in place of “Justice” and so on, and yet put the learners through the same planned learning experiences for purposes of teaching them English of level ‘n’.

It is on the basis of arguments, like those presented above, that “the commonly accepted definition of curriculum .... Changed from content of courses of study and lists of subjects and courses to all the experiences which are offered to learners under the auspices or direction of the school” (Doll, 1964). In this sense, curriculum is a **blueprint of experiences** that have been planned for the learners.

### 1.2.6 Intended Learning Outcomes

Let us reflect upon and analyse further what has been presented in Sub-section 1.2.4.

Some curriculum specialists argue that ‘learning outcomes’, and not ‘learning experiences,’ constitute the curriculum. They say that learning experiences, unless implemented, i.e., unless students go through such experiences, remain mere lists of such experiences. When implemented, students go through those experiences by interacting among themselves, with peer groups, with the teachers and also the environment. But such interaction characterizes instruction. Let us pause for a moment here and consider the question that emerges from the previous sentence: Is ‘curriculum’ the same as ‘instruction’? One view, quite emphatically, does not equate instruction with curriculum as the latter does not prescribe the means, i.e., the activities, materials or even the instructional content to be used in achieving the results; instead it prescribes the results of instruction, i.e., the intended learning outcomes (Johnson, 1967).

In accepting the definition of curriculum as intended learning outcomes, we have the advantage of:

- i) Linking explicitly the outcomes with objectives; and
- ii) Making a distinction between the basic plan and its implementation (i.e., instruction or teaching -learning transaction in the above discussion).

Going back to our earlier example in Sub-section 1.2.4, in accordance with this definition of curriculum, the English curriculum may incorporate a statement like the following:

At a particular instructional level (say level ‘n’) the learner, on the successful completion of the course, will be able to display and/or use purposefully all the four language skills commensurate with that level.

In such a situation, planned learning experiences, selection, ordering and presentation of the elements of course content, etc., belong to the domain of instruction and not curriculum. Let us take this point further. A curricular statement like the one given above, allows institutions, teachers and learners the freedom to select different means, to prescribe and undergo varied experiences to achieve the outcomes specified in the curriculum. Such a definition of curriculum makes it possible for different institutions to follow differing course contents and schemes of learning experiences and yet bring them together for the same end-of-term examination for certification. It needs to be noted, however, that in such cases even evaluation schemes may differ from institution to institution. In this sense everything in terms of planning, materials and activities becomes subordinate to the desired terminal learning outcomes.

Let us now look at yet another interpretation of the term ‘curriculum’.

### 1.2.7 Plan for Action

There are thinkers who have tried to use “curriculum” as a cover term, i.e., as a broader concept, to include the concepts of ‘programme of study’, ‘course content’, ‘planned learning experiences’ and ‘intended learning outcomes’. Put differently, they conceptualize the phenomenon called ‘education’ as an interplay of the following four systems:

- i) teachers may be considered individual personality systems (one teacher taken as an individual) or collective group systems (taking many teachers together or taking teachers as a community) that display professional behaviour of a particular type known as teaching behaviour;

- ii) learners, who as individuals or members of communities, perform activities, undergo experiences, etc., which are seen as learning behaviour;
- iii) instruction, i.e., the situational contexts in which the teachers and learners bring their behaviour together called the instructional system; and
- iv) the system of individuals whose behaviour put together results in a particular educational experience—these individuals may be administrators, educationists, politicians, teachers, parents, students, etc. individually, in various free combinations or limited combinations depending upon specific social situations.

In this sense, ‘curriculum’ is considered a ‘plan for action’, where ‘action’ refers to teaching-learning behaviour or instructional transaction and ‘plan’ takes care of other significant factors such as the content, its selection, teaching materials, learning experiences etc. This concept, obviously, includes the concepts of ‘course content’, ‘learning activities or experiences’, ‘intended learning outcomes’, and also makes room for the details regarding the teaching-learning tools to be used in instructional transactions.

### 1.2.8 Educative Experiences

Bobbitt (1972) defines ‘curriculum’ in two ways:

- i) “It is the entire range of experiences, both directed and undirected, concerned in unfolding the abilities of the individual” or
- ii) “It is series of consciously directed training experiences that the schools use for completing and perfecting the unfoldment of those abilities”. This pair of definitions clearly acknowledges the focus of the concept of experience. In the initial statement it is the ‘entire range of experience’ that constitutes the curriculum in its broadest sense – it is everything that youth must do to become the kind of adults that the society desires at large. Later the shift is on the distinction between directed and undirected experiences that operate outside the educational institution. This denotes the source of common knowledge picked up by the youth in the course of everyday life.

We also have to acknowledge the likelihood of undirected educative experiences operating within the confines of schools. Cremin (1976) and Schubert (1986) extend the educative function of school to that of home and of other institutions outside the school which are likely to intervene with the planned curricular experiences.

### 1.2.9 Implications

We have presented different points of view on the concept of curriculum. It needs to be noted that these are only a few of the viewpoints or definitions available in the relevant literature. There may be many more, and attempts to find better and more precise definitions of curriculum have not come to an end. You may also evolve your own ideas and concepts of curriculum, and based on your subjective experiences of teaching learning processes within and outside the classroom. A new line of thought regarding whether or not we should devote our energies to a search of the correct definition of curriculum emerged during the early 1980’s, when the search for such definitions was in full swing. This search culminated in ‘The inclusion of the entire range of educative experiences within the purview of the concept of curriculum.’

Let us take a parallel to this line of thought from the field of natural and physical sciences—a phenomenon which is true in every circumstance need not be proved with an absolute and correct definition.

Let us elaborate this point with an example.

If a lay person asked a scientist about the true/correct nature/definition of solids with respect to the movement of particles it is made of, i.e., do the particles that constitute a solid keep moving, or are they absolutely stationary? etc., the scientist will in all probability respond by saying that it depends on the situation being dealt with by him. If he is engaged in a study of solids in contrast with liquids and gases, he may be guided by the assumption that the true nature of solids suggests that their constituent particles are stationary. However, if he is engaged in a relative study of different types of solids, then he would be guided by the fact that the constituent particles of a solid do possess movements of various types and various degrees. What does the discussion imply?

Obviously, the correctness of a concept and/or definition depends on the situation in which it is to be used. In other words, the correctness of a concept and/or definition may be assessed in terms of its function in a given situation.

In tune with this line of thought, some curriculum specialists have suggested that a vigorous search for the correct definition of curriculum is neither a productive nor a purposeful scholarly engagement; and that it might be more useful to look into the activities of curriculum making, implementation, evaluation, etc. To study these activities scholars could bank upon different definitions depending on their suitability for particular studies/investigations.

The conclusion is that it is advisable to accept that the term 'curriculum' may not have one absolute definition; instead it will vary in meaning, depending on the purpose for which it is to be used.

Having discussed five differing interpretations of the term 'curriculum' and concluded that the definition of curriculum changes depending on the context in which it is used, let us now look into the history of 'curriculum' as a field of study. Obviously, we have to be brief as our purpose is not to present elaborate details of this field of study but to suggest why there are uncertainties regarding the definition of 'curriculum', and open up paths for further discussions of the concept of 'curriculum'.

**Check Your Progress 1**

*Notes: a) Space is given below for your answers.*

*b) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.*

i) Attempt an interpretation of curriculum with relation to:

- a) Programme of studies and, b) course content at the post-graduate level in your own discipline.

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ii) What are the advantages of accepting the definition of curriculum as intended learning outcomes? Write your answer in 50 words.

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 iii) Define curriculum as a plan for action.  
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### 1.3 CURRICULUM MOVEMENT

In this section we shall be talking about the evolution of curriculum as a field of study and how this process of evolution has influenced the concept of curriculum from time to time.

#### 1.3.1 Reasons for Neglect of Curriculum

The first reason why a clear concept of curriculum planning has not developed in our teachers and the public is that it has always been planned, prepared and prescribed by the expert committees of the departments of education in almost each state. The local community, teachers and parents are not involved in the process of curriculum planning as is the practice in some countries where education is publicly controlled. In fact, the basic principle of a democracy is the participation of the people in the planning and control of educational institutions.

Second, the teacher training colleges or colleges of education as they are now called have concentrated only on methodology of teaching at the cost of many other dimensions of teacher education. Last but not the least is the factor of complex human nature of behavior with regard to change. The peculiarity of human society is seen in building up a cultural heritage and in a ceaseless effort to preserve it. Sentimental regard for the past expressed in the emphasis on the subjects like history, art, language and literature resists any effort to plan curriculum in consonance with the changing times. The time concept in curriculum construction is an indispensable consideration. The society with a long cultural heritage is generally handicapped in planning a functional curriculum according to the present needs as well as the future indications. This is more so in the developing countries. The issues have remained controversial in our country. Hence a clear thinking is necessary on these fundamental issues before a clear concept of curriculum planning could be formulated.

If we can clearly identify the goals or directions for our society and the future image of our country, it will be possible for us to resolve the issues of educational planning with regard to the curriculum. If our educational system can positively answer the above questions, the curriculum education consists in planning the curriculum according to the national goals of a country. Curriculum is, in other words a function of a nation's philosophy of education. If the one is clearly formulated, the other can hardly remain unplanned or ignored.

#### 1.3.2 Reasons for Curriculum Reform Movement

First, every country now considers education of children as 'the national investment' which will bring future returns. A amount spent on education are to be realized in terms of improvement of community life and growth of individual caliber. Hence, any waste in education is to be avoided since it is viewed as a waste of national resources.

Second, there is a movement pioneered by educational thinkers and researchers towards 'the rationalization of educational system'. It makes all the educational programmes goal-oriented and need-oriented. In other words, curriculum of the educational institutions at all the levels should be object based and meaningful. Any programme that lacks application value or does not help in developing any understandings, attitudes or skills needs to be reconsidered by the curriculum planners.

Third, there is an inevitable impact of globalization and the advancement of 'science and technology' on the educational system of our age. Every country is concerned the scientific and technological progress as well as better utilization of her natural and mineral resources. This implies that more scientists and technologists should be produced from the educational institutions and all the citizens should be equipped with scientific outlook and technical skills. Hence the school curriculum has to give due weightage to the study of sciences and the teaching methods are to be so reoriented so as to develop a scientific thinking in children. Curriculum change, based on review, is an essential component of education reform aimed at improving the quality of learning process. Such changes are determined by simultaneous evolution of global, national, local, social, political and economic realities.

### 1.3.3 The First Stage (1893-1938)

Though thinkers concerned with education have been interested in curriculum for centuries, the beginning of curriculum as a separate field of study is generally associated with Johann Friedrich Herbart (1776-1841), a German thinker, whose views influenced American thinking and practice towards the end of the last century. The Herbart Society, now called the National Society for the Study of Education) was founded in 1895 in America. This was around the time when John Dewey was developing his views on curriculum at the University of Chicago.

Herbart emphasized the importance of 'selection' and 'organisation' of content in his theories of teaching/learning. Under the influence of Herbart, the major concerns of curriculum specialists of this period were systematizing approaches and practices of selection and organisation of the subject matter. (Though we used the expression 'curriculum specialists' in the preceding sentence, strictly speaking no one was thought of as a curriculum specialist at that time. Curriculum did not exist as a specialisation, as we understand the expression today.)

The first book titled "The Curriculum" devoted to the theme of curriculum was published in 1918. The author of the book, Franklin Bobbitt, may, thus, be called the first curriculum specialist. He deserves this credit because his work generated a lot of interest and many other works of significance appeared following the publication of this book. He pursued his interest and published another book, entitled "How to Make a Curriculum" in 1924. In 1926, the National Society for the Study of Education devoted its year book to the theme of curriculum – "The Foundations and Technique of Curriculum Construction". Obviously the curriculum movement, which had its beginnings in the early 1890's, had become a vigorous educational movement. In 1930, various colleges and schools of education established their departments of curriculum and the establishment of such a department at Columbia University in 1937 was a major landmark in the emergence of curriculum as a field of study.

Starting under the influence of Herbart, those who got interested in curriculum addressed themselves to diverse issues, and quite often they did not agree with one another on what these issues could be. However, in the first forty-

five years of this movement, approximately the period from 1893 to 1938, the major concerns of the curriculum specialists (see Seguel: 1966) have been indentified as follows:

- i) the nature of knowledge;
- ii) the nature of learning;
- iii) the domain and limitations of the new field of study, i.e., curriculum; and
- iv) the translation of the theories and principles of curriculum into educational practice.

Since 1938, we have come a long way. During the past half-century, curriculum studies have enlarged their field of interest and their influence has become a world-wide phenomenon. Let us now look at this influence in the following sub-section.

### **1.3.4 The Second Stage (1939 onwards)**

Curriculum studies as a discipline has been an area of active interest throughout the world. During the last fifty years, curriculum has been a dynamic field of research and the world wide activity in this field seems to have brought about a shift in the issues concerned.

Today, in general, the concerns of curriculum studies are seen to be:

- i) establishing a sound relationship between the general aims and the specific objectives to make the process of teaching and learning more effective;
- ii) ensuring pedagogically sound sequences of content at different levels of instruction;
- iii) making the curriculum a balanced fare for the overall growth of learners (Caswell 1966).

Though these concerns do appear as the most clearly identifiable common concerns of curriculum specialists, divergence among their views and interests persists. Especially in Sheldon's statement that curriculum is the historically specific pattern of knowledge selected and organised by dominant elites. This, however, need not surprise that curriculum as a field of study is yet to reach a state of maturity, the terminology used in the literature on curriculum and the technical expressions newly introduced in it do lack precision. As indicated in the earlier section, the very definition of curriculum is no exception to this situation.

Let us now turn to the definitions presented earlier, and see how the above brief history helps us look into those definitions critically.

### **1.3.5 Definitions Revisited**

The first and the second definitions of curriculum (see sub-section 1.2.1 and 1.2.2) emphasise selection and organisation of the information which the students are expected to acquire and master. Obviously, these definitions are embedded in the Herbartian views which formed the foundation of the curriculum movement when it was a period of exploration into the possible elements of theory and contents of curriculum studies.

With the passage of time, new experiences and experiments showed that the "situation" or "condition" under which learners meet or interact with the information (i.e., content) presented to them is as important as 'selection' and 'organisation'. This view became quite strong during the late 1940's, and remained so through the 1950's to the 1960's. This brings us to the third

definition, i.e., curriculum consists of all the experiences which are offered to learners under the auspices or direction of the school (Doll, 1964). This definition, though more comprehensive than the first two, was attacked in the early 1960's on more than one account.

Consider the following reactions to this definition:

- i) Some thought it was too broad to be of any real use at the functional/pragmatic level, as it was difficult, if not impossible, to prepare taxonomies of experience for teachers to be guided by.
- ii) Some thought that it was too narrow as the social situation of the educational institution provided many more experiences which were unplanned and unintended.

For example, while at school learners learnt to spell out a word completely (planned activity) but they also learnt to differ each other (unplanned activity).

Obviously, view (i) considers the possibilities and success of translating this definition/view into effective educational practice. However view (ii) questions the very basis of this definition. The group which believes in the latter argues that it may not be unusual for a class of unfortunate students to learn less "Physics" and develop an aversion towards science subjects under the guidance of a 'bad' teacher. Such arguments raised the notion of the 'invisible' or 'hidden' curriculum.

The suggestion is that if experience is offered by the institution as the basis of curriculum then the realistic view is that "total curriculum", is made up of at least two types of curriculum: (i) the planned curriculum and (ii) the hidden curriculum. Obviously, this constitutes yet another definition of curriculum. Though broader than the third definition which we presented earlier in Sub-section 1.2.3 this definition clearly brings out the fact that it can't be functional, i.e., translatable into practice at the planning stage, for there is no way of accounting for the 'hidden curriculum'.

It is difficulties of this type that prompted curriculum specialists to suggest definitions that would not depend on illusive parameters like 'learning experiences', planned and intended or unplanned and unintended.

**Check Your Progress 2**

*Notes: a) Space is given below for your answers.*

*b) Check your answers with those given at the end of the Unit.*

- i) Most of you are perhaps practicing teachers. (Even if you are not, don't worry. You have already been exposed to the Post Graduate Diploma in Distance education!) Can you describe an instance where the operation of 'hidden curriculum' caused unwanted results?

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- ii) Describe hidden curriculum in about a 100 words.

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Having looked at the third definition, we shall revisit the fourth one which we presented in Sub-section 1.2.4.

The strongest proponent of this definition was Johnson (1967) who emphasised 'learning outcomes'. Johnson argues that learning experiences cannot come into existence, unless the learner interacts with his environment which includes the teacher, the peers, the institutional ethos, etc. This interaction is the teaching-learning transaction rather than the curriculum, which for Johnson is a guide for instruction (i.e., teaching and learning transaction). From this point of view, curriculum is considered a structured series of intended learning outcomes, and the other significant factors such as content, teaching materials, learning experiences and evaluation procedures are seen as the components of instructional transactions. This is clearly a 'means and ends' kind of division. In other words, Johnson believes that the concern of curriculum should be the ends, while the means belong to the domain of instruction (i.e., the teaching and learning transaction).

This distinction is seen as a significant contribution in the development of the field of study called 'curriculum'.

The weaknesses in this view, however, are:

- i) that learning experiences which are the means cannot be completely divorced from learning outcomes which are the ends, the two go together in and cannot be seen as distinct entities;
- ii) that accepting curriculum planning as merely limited to preparing a series of intended outcomes, we allow curriculum experts the license of ignoring those aspects of education which have, by tradition, been major concerns, e.g., content, its selection, organisation, etc.

Thus, though Johnson's views brought in useful insights, the search for a more convincing concept of curriculum continued. And the fifth definition which we presented in sub-section 1.2.5 is yet another milestone in the path which that searches has taken.

Contrary to the harsh division between means and ends suggested by Johnson (1967), Macdonald (1975) proposed curriculum as a plan for action. From this point of view curriculum is an overall plan, a blueprint that talks about the building blocks, the operations of construction and also the final outcome. And in implementing the plan, we step into the domain of instruction, i.e., teaching-learning transactions. Obviously, Macdonald presents his concept as a strong generalisation which makes room for the immediate and specific aspects that constitute instruction and also for 'planning' and 'learning outcomes'.

Let us discuss these two views of curriculum in greater detail in the following sub-section.

### 1.3.6 'Inert' and 'Live' Curriculum

While accepting these broad generalisations, some curriculum experts think of curriculum as a written plan (a written document), called variously the 'curriculum document' or 'inert curriculum'; others, however, would like to emphasise what they called 'operative curriculum', 'functioning' or 'live' curriculum.

The binary distinction – the ‘inert’ and ‘live’ curriculum – is based on the observations that:

- i) no written plan can be implemented to its last word in practice; i.e., in a classroom situation the plan sifts through the agencies like teachers, learners, examiners, etc., and, therefore, only a diluted version of the written plan gets actualized; and
- ii) in the actual classroom many unforeseen and hidden factors come into play, and thus the otherwise tangible written plan ceases to be tangible at the operational level.

Considered in this light, the curriculum document can only suggest and outline its potential as an abstraction whereas the operative, or functioning, curriculum brings forth what portion of that potential is achievable or has been achieved.

In order to reduce this gap between the curriculum document and the operative curriculum, practical steps to bring about a compromise between the two have been suggested and implemented. The crux of this compromise is that the document should prescribe specific content in a way that teachers and others involved in implementing the document see clearly what the focus or the thrust of the content is, and at the same time this prescription should be general enough to allow the selection and organisation of content in accordance with the needs of learners, their interests, their levels of understanding, the conventions of teaching, teaching styles, teacher abilities, the sensitivity of the teacher, etc.

In general, today, curriculum referred to as a **curriculum** or the **curriculum** is understood as the plan for educating learners, but there is no agreement on what the components of this plan might be. And it is because of this disagreement that we should not insist on a conclusive definition of curriculum in the present circumstances. However, there is reasonable consensus or agreement on what its concerns may be – we have presented them in the sub-section 1.3.2. These concerns point to the convergence of definitions 3, 4 and 5 (sub-sections 1.2.3, 1.2.4 and 1.2.5 respectively).

In what follows in this course, we shall use curriculum in the sense of ‘a plan for educating learners’. To avoid confusion we bring in two more expressions, namely, ‘syllabus’ and ‘course’ – whereas the curriculum is a comprehensive ‘plan for educating learners’, “the syllabus represents the picture of a particular stage of this plan, and the courses are the tools used to achieve the objectives piecemeal by going from one stage to the next one and so on” (Das and Koul, 1985). From this point of view, syllabus pertains to a particular level of instruction, and to achieve the objectives of such a syllabus, different institutions may use different courses.

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## 1.4 CURRICULUM THEORY

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In order to talk about curriculum theory with understanding, we need to begin by dwelling upon the term ‘theory’ itself, unless we are clear about its meaning, nature and functions we won’t reach any reasonable conclusions.

Though the available literature on the meaning and nature of ‘theory’ is replete with various definitions, explanations, etc., we shall build our discussion around the following views:

A scientific theory must present a logically unified framework, generally on an empirical basis.

A theory is a set or system of rules that guide or control actions of various kinds such as the one that is applicable to the work of a carpenter.

### 1.4.1 The Concept of Theory: Our Stand

Scientific theory (see view (i) above) seems to emphasise what is observable, i.e., objectivity, while the last one (see view (ii) above) appears to be prescriptive as it sets the rules for activities. In the field of curriculum, those thinkers who support the former view are termed ‘objective/scientific’, and those who support the latter are termed ‘idealistic’ or unscientific. Our interest in these two views lies in the fact that quite a number of curriculum specialists continue calling their theories unscientific or idealistic as if they had no implications for the practice of education. And for us it is reasonable to show that in the ultimate analysis scientific theories are also no more than mere guides to activity.

In order to do this, we turn to what are seen as the functions of a scientific theory. The functions of a scientific theory are:

- i) Explanation; and
- ii) prediction

Now, consider Newton’s laws of motion which describe and explain the motion of bodies on the earth, and also succeed in making predictions about that motion under special conditions or circumstances. It is common knowledge that these laws have an empirical basis generally, and also a logically unified framework, (i.e., the features of a representative scientific theory). For once we believe (or let ourselves believe) that the truth about the motion of bodies has been found. But then, we find ourselves confronted by Einstein’s theory of relativity, which shows that Newton’s theory is only a part of the truth, that the context of Newton’s laws is limited, and that these laws can be derived from the theory of relativity which belongs to a much wider context. In other words, Newton’s truth is only a part of Einstein’s truth, which by itself may be only a part of a yet larger truth.

Similarly, we may consider the Ptolemaic view of our universe. Ptolemy (120-180 A. D.), described and explained the geocentric universe and also quite successfully predicted the phenomena pertaining to this universe—i.e., eclipses, etc. That the earth was the centre of the universe was obviously a statement based on empirical evidence (everybody saw and believed that the planets, the sun and the moon revolved round the earth). However, Copernicus (1473-1543 A. D.) showed that what was visible was not necessarily correct—that perceptions, however evident, can lead to wrong conclusions, that it is the sun, not the earth, which is the centre of our small universe. He, too, described, explained and predicted about the same universe, but with the added advantage of simplicity and ease. Ptolemy’s truth had come to light.

We can add to these examples. The point to be made is that in scientific explorations, theories are seen as objective explanations of the reality as it appears at a particular time or in a particular situation; as new data collected older theories are forced to give way to new theories which are ‘truer’ and ‘more accurate’.

Even the above two illustrations suggest that a certain theory which pertains to a particular context does hold in that context though it may not describe or explain the whole ‘truth’. Besides, even a weak theory serves as a guide for collecting more relevant data, and then for establishing relations between them to give new insights, for otherwise improvements in descriptions, explanations and predictions wouldn’t be possible. When looked at in this light, even the scientific theories are no more than “a set of rules that guide or control action” which are employed in reaching closer to the ultimate ‘truth’.



Having made our position clear with regard to our view of theorization in the field of curriculum we now move on to see what is available as curriculum theory today.

### 1.4.2 Curriculum Theory: A Perspective

Let me begin with how Beauchamp (1975) places curriculum theory in its appropriate perspective. Beauchamp’s view is that all theories originate from the basic three categories of knowledge, namely

- i) the humanities
- ii) the natural sciences and
- iii) the social sciences.

Most established disciplines may be classified under these categories. From these basic theory-areas emerge the second level of theories pertaining to applied areas—engineering, architecture, medicine, education, etc. Theories in these areas (i.e., the applied/practical areas) draw upon the theories in any one or more of the disciplines which come under the basic categories listed above. Theories in education, for example, draw upon theories in philosophy (humanities), sociology (social sciences), etc. Moving on to the third level of classification, Beauchamp suggests that the theories of education, themselves would consist of a few sub-theories and that these sub-theories would also consist of their own sub-theories, or we may call them sub-sub-theories. This last level is obviously the fourth level of classification. Keeping in mind these views of Beauchamp, we shall present a model, which gives us an understanding of the perspective in which curriculum theory may be placed. One may or may not accept the views underlying this model, but the model is an adequate base to start from. Let us now consider Fig. 1.1.

**THEORIES**

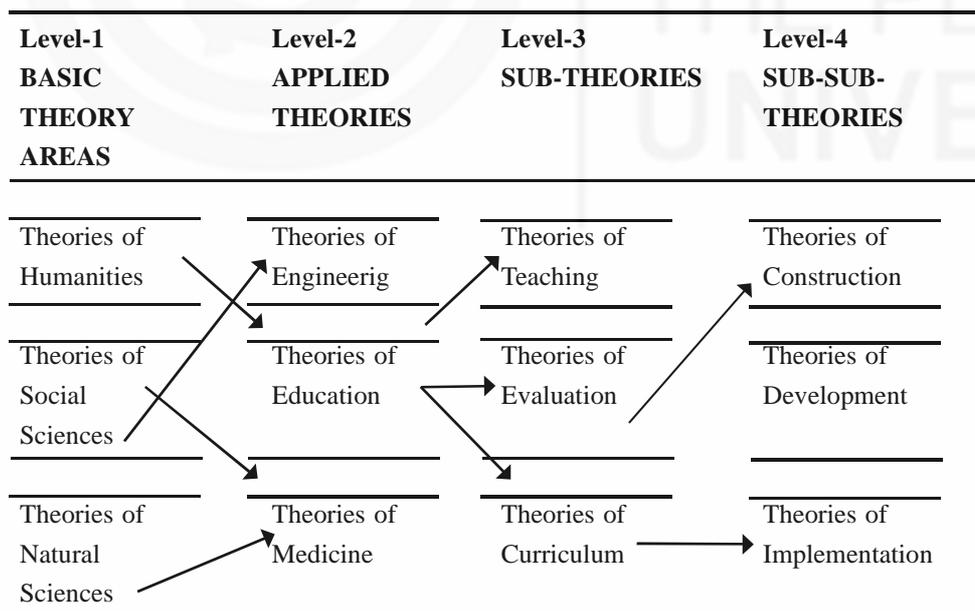


Fig.1.1: Theories and their levels (based on Beauchamp, 1975)

It should be clear from what has been presented in Fig. 1 that a curriculum theory must depend on number of other theories from diverse fields.

Obviously, it is a formidable task to come up with a ‘perfect’/ ‘complete’ curriculum theory.

The best, curriculum specialists have been able to do so far is what is available to us in the form of models. Among models too, most are mainly of the ‘graphic’ type. Accordingly, we have presented Beauchamp’s view about the correct

perspective of the curriculum theory with the help of the above graphic model (Fig. 1.1).

A model of this type is a means of describing the various levels and/or components of the entity that is being described, and at the same time it describes and explains the relationships between those levels and/or components (see the arrows in Fig.1.1 above). If the entity described involves processes, the model can indicate those processes as well.

As shown in the model, curriculum theory comprises at least three sub-theories—those of curriculum-construction, curriculum-development and curriculum-implementation.

Now, we shall start with the theories of curriculum construction.

### 1.4.3 Theories of Curriculum Construction

A brief glimpse of two theories of curriculum construction (not in their graphic form) has been presented in sub-sections 1.2.3, 1.2.4 and 1.2.5. Here, however, without going back to them, we shall present the graphic model of the eclectic theory of curriculum as conceived by Zais (1976)

The model presented by Zais (1976) pertains to curriculum construction, which concerns decision making in the areas of:

- i) curriculum foundations; and
- ii) curriculum components.

Under the theories of construction, we essentially talk about curriculum designs of which, the major ones are:

- i) Subject-centred designs,
- ii) Learner-centred designs, and
- iii) Problem-centred designs.

Each of these designs has its own advantages and disadvantages, and one may favour one or the other depending on what the ‘foundations’ suggest. (We shall talk about curriculum foundations elaborately in Unit 2). In the context of open distance education, we think that the approach has to be eclectic as the expectations of both the policy makers and the consumers of that policy happen to be very diverse—education for remote areas, disadvantaged groups, professionals, lifelong education, disciplines, social mobility etc. In order to satisfy such diverse demands, an open distance institution has to follow an eclectic approach to course design. The implication is that depending on the nature of a particular course that needs to be prepared by such an institution, the choice could be any of the above mentioned three designs, i.e., subject-centred, learner-centred or problem-centred, individually or in any combination.

Let me briefly touch upon them in the given order.

#### Subject-centered design

In subject-centered designs, it is the content which forms the basis for both vertical (in terms of the sequence) and the horizontal (in terms of the subject matter presented at a given level of that sequence) structure of the curriculum. In such designs, significant curricular components like aims, learning activities, etc., are lost sight of. In the main, such a design emphasises content coverage, and consequently encourages memorization and the acquisition

of information. This design provides an easy approach to building a course, and then it is easy to administer such a design, but it pays little attention to learners' needs.

### Learner-centred design

Learner-centred designs have as their basis the individual learners and their needs. Under this design, the curriculum evolves as the teacher and learner work together on the learning tasks. Obviously, the design can lead to countless variations. One of them, for example, is based on the 'experience' of learners. The experience-design is characterised by the following features:

- i) Learners' own interest and needs are identified to shape the curriculum.
- ii) Planning and activities are the joint responsibility of teachers and learners; and
- iii) The approach usually follows problem-solving procedures.

Obviously, this is a case in which curriculum does not provide for any kind of 'preparation for life', instead it constitutes 'life' itself. The problem with this design is its loose organisation as it can neither have any horizontal nor any vertical pre-planned structure; and then comes the question of continuity. However we need to point out that in open distance education it is unusual to come across large learner collectivities who have similar needs and experiences. Quite often they are adults in various professions looking for need based courses. Besides, such institutions are expected to cater to pure 'autonomous' learners as well. As such, open distance education institutions must use this design at one or the other stage of their development.

### Problem-centered designs

Problem-centered designs focus on the issues of actual life, individuals and society. Unlike the learner-centred designs, the problems are pre-planned, and yet they cater to learner' needs and experiences. As such they focus on both the content and the needs and experiences of learners. Very often this design takes the form of a core-cum-specific needs model, in which 'core' takes care of the basic content and then 'specific needs' are catered to with the help of need-based courses used as complements to the 'core' component.

Having acquainted ourselves with the theories of curriculum construction, we shall now discuss the theories of curriculum development.

#### Check Your Progress 4

*Notes: a) Space is given below for your answer.*

*b) Check your answer with the one given at the end of the Unit.*

List the three curriculum construction designs and say which design would be suitable for a distance education institution.

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### 1.4.4 Theories of Curriculum Development

Moving on from the theories of curriculum construction to the theories of curriculum development, implies our movement from the concerns of the decision-making process pertaining to the nature and design of the curriculum (i.e., curriculum construction) to the procedures for carrying out the construction process called 'curriculum development'. Without going into details regarding the various theories of 'curriculum development', we shall briefly touch the following two models:

#### **Top down and Bottom up models**

It is to understand the policy making process in general and policy preferences in policy making process in particular, both the approaches are very popular to understand policy formulation process in peoples governing democratic systems:

- i) Top-down model; and
- ii) Bottom-up model.

The first of these is differently known as 'line-staff' or 'administrative' model and the second Taba's (1962) or 'inverted' model.

#### **Top-down model**

While making policies, the needs are generated by the policy makers or research reports or by pre-conceived needs. Here the decisions are made by the top policy makers, who may be political leaders or bureaucrats without involving the lower level people or public opinion.

In the top down model, the curriculum machine gets into operation with a directive from the authorities of the institution. Following the directive, the institutional faculty prepares the outline of the curriculum with all the needed details. In certain cases, expert committees are appointed to prepare the outline of the curriculum. In case, the outline is prepared by the internal faculty, the expert group will discuss it and give it a form which is further discussed at the level of course writers (very often a group of subject specialists, some from within the institution and some from outside the institution). Once the outline is ready, course-writers prepare the units. Since a small group conceived, initiated and directed the curriculum development, its effectiveness in the classroom may be questioned. The group may be expanded and the pattern of participation and the nature of responsibility extended to include elected committees of teachers, depending on their professional competency. In short curriculum development proceeds from the top-down to the 'grass-root' or 'bottom-up' model.

#### **Bottom-up model**

In this approach, while making policies, the needs are generated by the people or through public opinion; here the decisions are made with the help of public opinion or with the participation of common people, citizens in democracy, respective organization stakeholders and by involving the lower level people or public opinion. This is most popular approach in any sovereign, democratic, republic governed states.

Under this model, the open distance institution will depend on surveys already available in various documents, or commission surveys pertaining to selected target groups. The need survey(s) focus on the target group.

Having identified these needs, the following steps will be followed:

- i) formulation of specific objectives in relation to identified needs,
- ii) selection of content to meet those objectives,
- iii) organisation of the content in the form of study units, and
- iv) selection of learning activities to accompany the 'content' to fulfill the objectives.

### **A word of caution**

It is possible that an open distance institution (for example, IGNOU) may use the two models independently for different programmes/course, while a combination of the two approaches in certain cases cannot be ruled out.

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## **1.5 CURRICULUM MOVEMENT: DEVELOPMENT AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS**

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By and large, curriculum in the pre-World War I era was subject-centred, in which emphasis was on factual details. Reaching their highest point around 1925, such curricula began to lose their hold in the late 1920s. The social conditions following World War II divided the world broadly into three societies—the Communist Block, The Western Non-communist Block and the rest of the world—let us call it the Third Block. The Western Non-communist Block felt threatened by the possibility of international communism. And to counter the threat, they felt they needed highly trained personnel at all levels of human activity. This led to a shift in teaching methodology. In most cases discovery method and problem solving methods were considered better than the passive memorization method. The emphasis shifted from factual details to the learning of principles and concepts. Briefly, the emphasis shifted from knowing to understanding and application.

The emphasis on subject-centred curricula became vigorous around the 1950s when excellence in vocationalism became the guiding principle for the educational enterprise. The influence of such curricula reached its zenith around the mid-1960s. When it was realized that the threat of the international communist movement was not that alarming after all, the student bodies and other influential groups started questioning the relevance of discipline-centred curricula. Starvation, racism, international poverty, issues of equality, liberty, self actualization, etc., brought forth the idea rather than high level specialists, good human beings were what the world needed most. Consequently, this led to an upsurge of humanistic curricula in the mid-1960s.

In general, humanistic curricula emphasise learners' needs; content related to humanistic goals and cognitive; and aesthetic and experimental learning activities. Besides, the development of the concept and practice of open and distance education has been the important feature of such curricula. Among the various strands of the humanistic curriculum the one that gets associated with open distance education may prove to be the most influential of them all in years to come.

The brief sketch of the curriculum movement that has been presented above as an example focused mainly on the trends in the developed Western non-Communist Block. You may look at your own country and see the directions curriculum developments and reforms have taken. For instance, in India what was inherited in 1947 was an educational system and curriculum design introduced by the British—a member of the Block. Subsequently, the curriculum movement in

India has been following, more or less, in the footsteps of the Western developed Block. However, there is a visible time lag between the two movements. For example, we got into open distance education in the early 1980's, more than a decade behind the West. In spite of significant institutional expansion, the system needs curricular reforms and inclusion of new and innovative curriculum areas non-existent in the conventional institutions. More recently the New Education Policy of 1985 has revitalized the thinking and the reformative activity in education. The recent reforms include: delinking degrees from jobs, promoting non-conventional curriculum designs to suit the needs of diversified groups, introduction of vocational courses in undergraduate education, curriculum reforms in 27 discipline areas, etc. besides, by the initiations of NCERT, National Curriculum framework has first time introduced and subsequently training of teachers is given much focus in the National Curriculum framework of 2006. It is a mile stone in the educational history of independent India.

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## 1.6 LET US SUM UP

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This Unit has dealt with the difficulty in defining the term 'curriculum', and said that depending on the context the term is interpreted as:

- programme of studies;
- course content;
- planned learning experience and
- intended learning outcomes

This Unit also gives you an outline of how the curriculum movement has influenced the definition of 'curriculum' at different stages and what curriculum theory is. An analysis of 'theory' is general and an argument that we need not look for a clear line of demarcation between a scientific theory and an educational theory since both of them are essentially plans or guides for action are part of this Unit.

An account of the on-going developments relating to the concept of curriculum and speculations about the future trends ends the Unit. In short, this Unit is an attempt to see 'curriculum' in a holistic perspective.

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## 1.7 ANSWERS TO CHECK YOUR PROGRESS

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### Check Your Progress 1

i) This answer is to be treated only as a model. We have drawn our answer from the discipline of English.

a) Programme of Studies: English : Prose

Poetry

Indian Writing in English

Shakespeare

Literary Criticism

Linguistics.

b) Course Content: a) Prose :

Bacon—Collected Essays

Lamb—'Dream Children'

Lynd and son on

- b) Poetry: 'The Wasteland' —  
T.S. Eliot, 'Four  
Quarters' —T.S. Eliot.  
Confessional Poets—  
Sylvia  
Plath, Thom Gunn
- c) Shakespeare: Tragedies and so on.

- ii) a) an explicit link between outcomes and objectives.  
b) a distinction between the basic plan and its implementation.

According to this view, curriculum prescribes the results of instruction.

- iii) If curriculum were to be considered a plan for action, 'action' would refer to teaching-learning behaviour or instructional transaction and 'plan' would stand for other factors such as the content, its selection, teaching materials, learning experiences. This concept includes 'course content', 'learning activities or experiences', intended learning outcomes and details regarding teaching-learning tools to be used in the instructional transactions.

### Check Your Progress 2

- i) A classic examples of this phenomenon would be that of children learning to use taboo words and slang. On the one hand, there is peer pressure on them to learn and use these aspects of language as they are seen as a measure of covert prestige and group solidarity. On the other hand, the mainstream speech community would frown upon this as a case of flouting its norms.
- ii) From a very early age, children take in overt and covert messages from families, mass media, and friends, peer gatherings and so on. Yet, the assumption has been that students are influenced only by a pre-determined school-curriculum. That a greater part of their outlook, however, is fashioned by unplanned interactions that occur outside the school is quite often forgotten. And it is this forgotten part of learning which comes under what is called the hidden curriculum.

### Check Your Progress 3

- Step 1: A scientific theory is a descriptive and explanatory set of basic connected assumptions or general propositions that ultimately predict or explain experience with regard to the natural world.
- Step 2: Education is a practical activity aimed at educating societies. Educational theory is therefore a guide to that practice. In other words, it sets a plan for action based on a paradigm which can be improved constantly.
- Step 3: Both scientific and educational theories are plans or guides for action developed out of a hypothetical paradigm, they both offer room for the incorporation of new categories to achieve a better paradigm. Therefore, we can say that educational theory is akin to scientific theory.

### Check Your Progress 4

The three major designs of curriculum construction are

- i) Subject-centred design;  
ii) Learner-centred design; and  
iii) Problem-centred design.

In a subject-centred design, generally the needs of learners etc., are paid little attention, as the emphasis is primarily on content. Conversely it is difficult to incorporate all the needs of the learners into a curriculum because of the heterogeneous student population. However, an approximation can always be achieved. Problem centred design, focuses mainly on the issues of actual life and society, yet it takes care of both content and learner-needs. As distance education institutions, by and large, focus on society and therefore the individuals, problem-centred design is suited for distance education in general. However, it is difficult to offer a final opinion on this issue, as depending on the social contact, a distance education institution may be required to design its programmes in a variety of ways.

