

How is Curriculum Design Influenced by Knowledge of
Learning Styles and How Learning Occurs?

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The “what” of curriculum is not impacted as much by students’ myriad of learning styles as the “how” curriculum is delivered and though the Appendix A article addresses a lot of the “what” should be taught there are other factors to consider as well. Do we deliver the instruction in a mixed media format to add interest and support struggling readers? After determining whether William Paterson should be introduced to the NJ student population because of his relevancy to the penning of the U.S. Constitution, do we provide a video simulation to tell his story for the visual learners? Acting out knowledge using the kinesthetic style of learning also affects curriculum delivery.

There should be several key general areas of content knowledge that everyone in this country should be taught. The article, “The Debate on what ought to be taught: NJ educators struggle,” proves this to be true (Appendix A). John Mooney shares his research of New Jersey curriculum construction and its various incarnations of the curriculum from past DOE standards. Curriculum design is influenced by the knowledge of learning styles and how learning occurs can be summed up as the influence of sensory input. Background knowledge also engages a child to learn more about a subject.

The curriculum design that most reflects this is called place based or the pedagogy of place and it speaks to teaching students through the environment of their own communities. A student having a connection to the information he/she is learning is most likely to make a connection to it. As in the case of the article, New Jersey residents would need to have an historical reference that makes history relevant as well as knowledge of general matters.

The curriculum can also be structured around a culture-based education, which reflects personal experiences and background knowledge. There is also a politically correct component to determining what to teach versus what can be left out. I found it interesting that even back in 2004 when this article was written, Moody felt it was important to consider Nat Turner in the social studies discussion and just this year a Hollywood produced a moving epic film was launch around the world called The Birth of a Nation. This movie depicted, in poignant and graphic detail, the life of Nat Turner with all of its “privilege” right before his violent end. If the students had learned about him in school, the movie, which was rated PG 17, would have been better understood by the students old enough to view it.

How does learning occur, really? It requires a high degree of repetitiousness and explicitness. As in the curriculum for social studies some elements of important historical events can unfold in greater detail in alignment with accelerating grade levels.

There is also some discussion that technology has taken over and students will be more likely to type rather than to write (although current neuroscience research suggests that there is a hand-brain connection and that writing is helpful to metacognition.)

It almost seems daunting to me to even produce effective curriculum knowing all of the many variables that go into this imperfect science, but a cohesive curriculum is a must-have if we are to produce children who grow up to be collaborative citizens of the world. Just the there are 4 c’s of 21st Century learning model, there are also four c’s for our responsibility as educators: we must customize education to the students we are teaching. Customization, Cultivation, Capability, Civility must all play a part in administrative curriculum writing and students receiving a teacher’s instruction.

In the end, the question of what to teach and who to teach it to is very subjective and curriculum development is a never-ending process involving collaboration as a key factor. One good strategy for determining what goes into the curriculum is having a “forest mentality” as opposed to just the ‘trees.’ We are molding little minds and having a long-term impact on them socially, academically and economically. I see now that spending time on teaching students cursive writing, for example, may not be as cost/time efficient or beneficial as another district whose students arrive in kindergarten with more basic required skills on which to build. In other words, if students are lacking in basic life skills, it doesn’t make sense to divert attention away from acquiring those skills in order to teach them cursive handwriting (a time-intensive task), which may not prove useful to them down the road in this digital age.