



Knowledge-centred curriculum

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What's the idea?

A knowledge-centered curriculum focuses on students acquiring 'powerful knowledge' (Young and Muller, 2013, p. 245) across a range of academic disciplines ensuring that they have access to a broad and balanced education. Within a knowledge-centred curriculum, subjects are taught at gradually increasing levels of complexity leading to deeper knowledge and understanding.

What does it mean?

A knowledge-centred curriculum (see also 'knowledge-based', 'knowledge-led' and 'knowledge-rich') provides students with a broad understanding of traditional academic subjects across the arts, languages, sciences and humanities. A knowledge-centred curriculum is subject-based and aims to teach students discipline-specific knowledge and skills. Within each subject, students learn specialised subject-related concepts. According to Ellis (2004, p.105), a knowledge-centred curriculum 'focuses on intellectual growth and development, on

challenging the learner to go deeper into history, literature, mathematics, the arts, and other subjects.'

Sherrington (2018, pp. 19-20) maintains that there are four main components to a knowledge-centred curriculum:

1. *Knowledge provides a driving, underpinning philosophy*
2. *The knowledge content is specified in detail*
3. *Knowledge is taught to be remembered, not encountered*
4. *Knowledge is sequenced and mapped deliberately and coherently*

A knowledge-centred curriculum is carefully and logically constructed and sequenced so that subject knowledge is built on pre-existing knowledge and becomes more complex over time. In Year 4, for example, students might first learn about cells, such as identifying the component parts. Then, in Year 9, they may use that knowledge to explore cells in more complexity in understanding other living organisms.

Being academic and teacher-centred, the knowledge-centred

curriculum should be taught by teacher-experts in their discipline, who are able to communicate their expertise to their students. While there is no exclusive pedagogical approach, teacher-led models of instruction tend to be more common in a knowledge-centred curriculum (Ellis, 2004).

What are the implications for teachers?

- » How will the curriculum be constructed and implemented to provide students with a broad and balanced education covering the arts, languages, sciences and humanities?
- » Why is the knowledge selected 'powerful'; or, will this knowledge take pupils beyond their everyday experience?
- » How can schools ensure that the curriculum is well constructed and sequenced with knowledge building on pre-existing knowledge, and becoming more complex over time?
- » How can teachers ensure that the knowledge taught will be remembered in years to come?

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

- » Ellis AK (2004) *Exemplars of Curriculum Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- » Hirsch ED (1983) Cultural literacy. *The American Scholar* 52(2): 159–169.
- » Sherrington T (2018) What is a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum? *Impact* 4: 19–20.
- » Young M and Muller J (2013) On the powers of powerful knowledge. *Review of Education* 1(3): 229–250.