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Piecemeal Change in Higher Education: An Example of Curriculum Re-conceptualization

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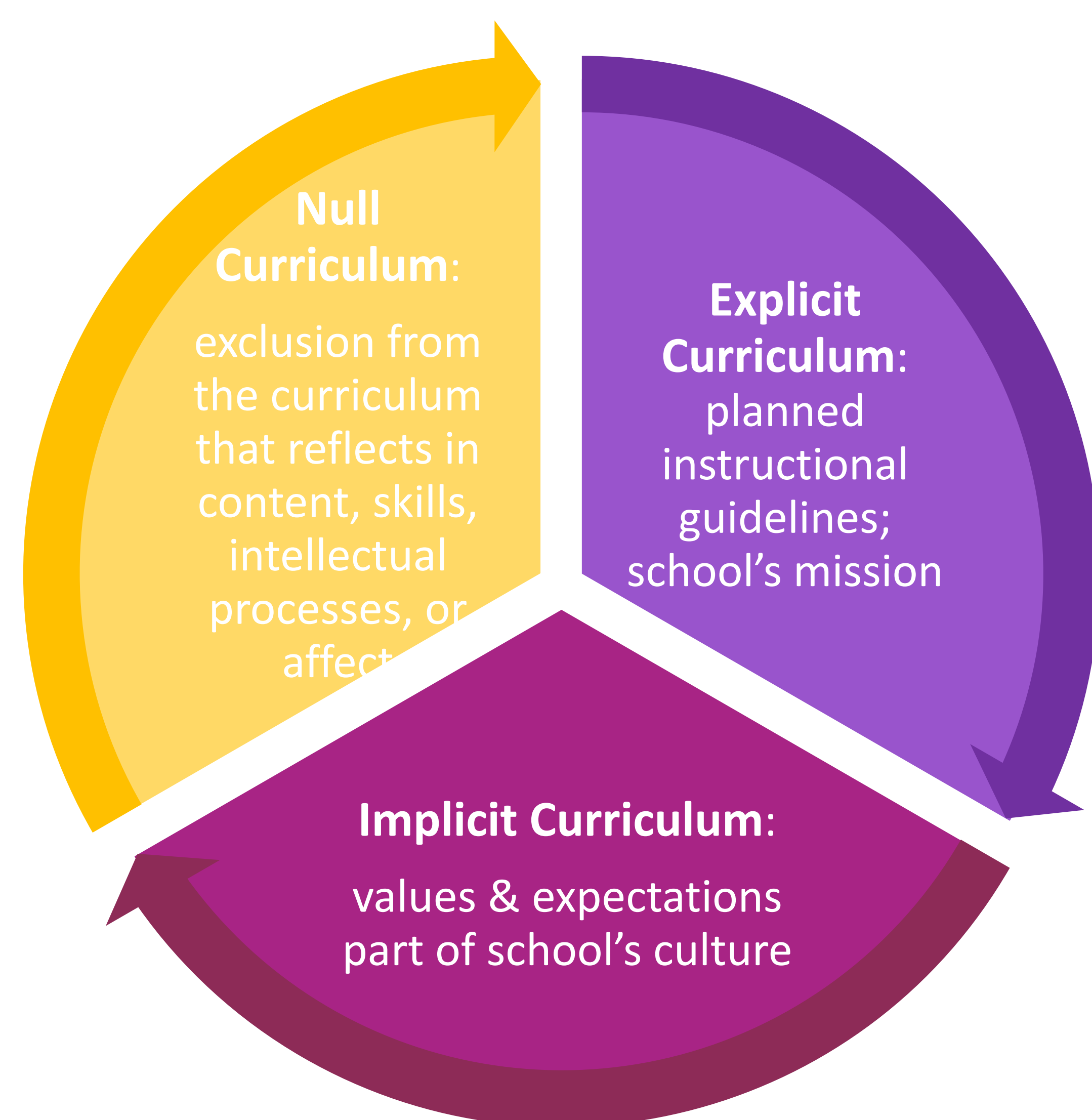
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Abstract

Curriculum adjustments are sometimes necessitated by the increasingly diverse student populations served in community colleges. An applied curriculum analysis and re-conceptualization is performed on a college psychology course to demonstrate how curriculum components' weaknesses can be addressed to improve academic experiences, based on Anderson and Rogan's (2011) model.

Background

- **Operationalized curriculum definition:** teaching, learning, assessment practices, and materials available for a specific course (Anderson & Rogan, 2011)
- **Standard curriculum elements:** introduction, objectives, content of unit, methods and activities, teaching materials and resources, and assessment of student learning (Parkay, Anctil, & Hass, 2014)



(Flinders, Noddings, & Thornton, 1986)

Results

Curriculum Analysis	Curriculum Re-conceptualization
Curriculum Components	
1. Vision	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Globally informed community of successful lifelong learners” •Course objectives: provide an understanding of the scientific method; introduce the basic facts, concepts, and principles of psychology; build a foundation for further study in the field of psychology. •Applicable institutional outcomes: critical thinking, problem solving, and individual development. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Aligning the student distal outcomes for the course with the institutional outcomes. • Student outcomes are aligned with the course content.
2. Operationalization of the Vision	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Broad course objectives vs topic specific learning/student outcomes •Topics in a logical sequence enabling vertical transition between courses. •Teaching and learning activities and materials adequate for reaching the outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Narrowing the course objectives and converting the topic-specific learning outcomes into student-centered ones. •Adjusting the academic standards to correspond to educational level, and prior knowledge. •Coordinating the course with other similar social sciences for a smoother horizontal transition in the program.
3. Delivery	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Various modes of teaching, learning, and assessment addressing each learning outcome as outlined in the syllabus and aligned with the book chapters. •Utilizing aspects of inquiry and problem-based learning and student-centered approach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Systematic emphasis on inquiry, problem-based, self-directed learning, aspects of “flipped classroom”, and science readiness.
4. Evaluation	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Formative and summative assessments planned by the instructor; student survey distributed by the college. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Consistent evaluation criteria for diverse students; student surveys- insufficient indicator of instructor performance.
Influences on the Curriculum	
1. Policy	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Adherence to local and state policies related to disabilities, non-discrimination, accessibility of resources, cancelation of classes, etc. •Compliance with the accreditation standards. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •More inclusive and democratic curriculum development process so instructors have input on more than pedagogy.
2. Local Context	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Curriculum design does not consider non-traditional student characteristics. •Insufficient instructor support and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Consideration for students’ diversity in a flexible curriculum with a “toolbox” of instructional options for levels of language proficiency, background knowledge, academic skills, areas of interest, and flexible class schedules.
3. Societal Context	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Employers’ expectations about students’ knowledge and skills in technical or nursing programs. •Transferability to a 4-year program. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Heavily relying on adjunct faculty can be a threat to instruction quality.
4. Research Trends	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Assigning of required textbook. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Granting resources for obtaining latest research findings.
5. Technology	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Requirement for utilizing online platform CANVAS for each course. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •PD in instructors’ knowledge in educational technology design.
6. Action Plan & Feedback	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Instructors have access to feedback from student surveys; can change pedagogy but not curriculum. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Student learning outcomes may be prioritize by the instructor.

Method

- **Curriculum artefacts used:** syllabus, course and college information online
- **Analysis tool:** describes curriculum components with an emphasis on the dynamic nature of curriculum design and the non-linear connections between the curriculum components (Anderson & Rogan, 2011).
- **Procedure:** curriculum components are identified, described, and analyzed; weaknesses are highlighted and used for curriculum re-conceptualization.



Conclusions

- **Practical suggestions** for analyzing any higher education curriculum;
- Better understanding curriculum components can help identify weaknesses that need to be addressed;
- Piecemeal curriculum changed can be triggered with a positive academic impact.
- **Some of the weaknesses identified** here: broad institutional goals vs specific student outcomes; lack of sensitivity to diversity while reconsidering the traditional university time and space, the role of the scholarly, and student communities (Bridges, 2000); few support structures for instructors.