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# **Syllabus Design in Higher Education: From principle to practice**

**A presentation given at the  
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**Prue Goredema, MBS, TESOL Coordinator, Technische Universität Chemnitz**



## Overview

- ❖ Key definitions
- ❖ Philosophies underlying educational practices
- ❖ Constructive alignment



# First things first...

- **Curriculum:** broad, multi-year framework outlining what should be taught
- Informs multiple syllabuses
- Devised through extensive consultation – schools, ministry national or regional stakeholders
- **Syllabus:** Restricted list of topics to be taught in a course, stipulating how they are to be taught and assessed
- Derived from a single curriculum
- Typically devised by a single teacher or a small group



See Nunan, 1988 and Pratt, 1994



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# Three related educational philosophies

# Liberalism

# John Henry Newman

## Focus: Instilling transferable skills

Throughout: focus on broad curriculum, modification to suit current understanding

Strives for a well-read,  
dogma-free, enlightened  
populace cf. French  
Revolution



## Skilled teacher

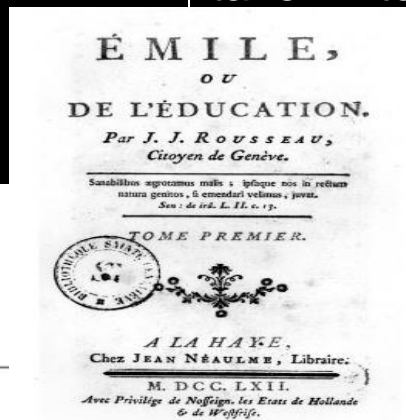
Gruber, 1910; Barry, 1911, Kennedy 1912



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# Three more related educational philosophies

Humanism	Progressivism	Existentialism
Desiderius Erasmus	Jean-Jacques Rousseau	Søren Kierkegaard
Focus: Free will, NOT pre-destination	Focus : Learner's needs and queries	Focus: Learner's choices, inner self, subjectivity
Throughout: Enquiry-based learning, fostering autonomy and responsibility	Throughout: Learning by doing, collaborative, problem-based learning	Throughout: Escape from the rationalist age-old interpretation of the world
People are inherently good, require nurturing	Learner's cultural context taken into account	Individual standards and choice promoted



Yielding

Facilitative

Enthusiastic teacher

Student-centred

Process-oriented



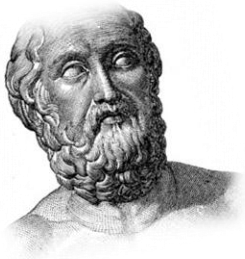
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# Many other philosophies...

**Naturalism**

**Materialism**

**N.B.** categories not discreet



**Idealism**

**Realism**

**Critical Pedagogy  
Reconstructionist  
Radical**



**Education should transmit  
culture AND change society**







Which educational philosophy underlies instruction at the institution with which you are affiliated?







# Principles to practice I

- Perennialism, Essentialism and Liberalism
- Type A
- Synthetic syllabuses
- Teacher-centred
- Grammatical, lexical, algo-heuristic, notional-functional, situational

- Existentialism, Progressivism, Humanism
- Type B
- Analytic syllabuses
- Learner-centred
- Skills-based, task-based, laissez-faire, theme-based, content-based instruction

## Handout

See Nunan, 1988 and Goredema, 2019



# Principles to practice II

- **Define** clear goals based on educational philosophy and socio-cultural milieu
- **Tally** resources available: infrastructure, finances, manpower, students
- **Define** intended learning outcomes
- **Devise** instruction that can be usefully carried out under these constraints and conditions
- **Evaluate** outcomes in order to redefine goals



# Summary

- Educationalists should be cognisant of the philosophies and principles that underlie curricula
- Curricula should inform syllabus design
- Syllabuses should be designed with observable outcomes clearly stipulated
- Instructional methodologies should be aligned with the intended learning outcomes



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