

Introduction

So, you want to be a teacher.

But have you thought about what it means to be a teacher? Is it about imparting knowledge to others? Is it about getting students excited and passionate about what they are learning? Or is it about teaching vital social and/or vocational skills?

In fact, the job of a teacher encompasses all of the above. This is what we call ‘curriculum’. In very general terms, the curriculum can refer to all that teachers should *know*, what they should *do*, *how* they should do it and for what *purposes*. Curriculum refers to *all* of the experiences in which students engage. And this is why teachers might also be referred to as ‘curriculum workers’.

Curriculum theory has come to represent a fixed object or a product – usually comprising a body of knowledge and a set of standardised learning outcomes, or a rigid method of interpreting the art of learning and teaching. This is unfortunate because what is lost is *education*. By contrast, in this book we encourage you to see curriculum theory as the practice of trying to make things clearer rather than simply more certain. Even the public knowledge you have come to know as ‘the truth’ should be questioned and tested from time to time. This is where theory can bring into view concepts that are normally hidden from us in our busy, everyday dealings with the curriculum. Theory often reveals that the educational problems we encounter are not problems at all, or that certain problems should be re-examined and taken more seriously. Theory is a powerful way to uncover ideologies that drive the curriculum¹ and one way in which we discover what counts as public knowledge in society. When people speak of teaching in the ‘real world’, educational theory helps us figure out what we mean by ‘real’, what counts as ‘the world’ and what is significantly valuable. Working theoretically means considering the political, moral and spiritual dimensions of education; all of which are woven seamlessly into skilful teaching.

In this book we bring to the fore the importance of how you as a teacher or student teacher relate to curriculum. Our purpose is to guide you through the rocky landscape of curriculum theories and to identify how some of these contend with each other. As you read about these and understand that there are multiple perspectives, we encourage you to take the time to reflect on how you relate to these and to take a committed stance for the sort of curriculum work you want to enact. As a teacher you will be making thousands of decisions every day regarding the sorts of learning experiences that might be best for your students. To be a *good* teacher your decisions ought to be rigorously thought through and mindful of the context in which learning and teaching take place. With that in mind, we want to provoke and inspire you to take the steps towards developing an informed and intelligent theory of curriculum to guide your own teaching practice. In doing so, we are very careful not to provide you with the ‘right’, or even a neutral, theoretical viewpoint. Instead, we provide you with

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a pedagogical space in which to provoke and challenge your thinking, and to help you grow and develop as a professional educator; someone who is able to understand curriculum work in such a way as to enhance its *educative* value.

As the authors of this book, we each have our own purposes, understandings and expectations of curriculum, which are not necessarily the same. In this pedagogical space we share our different views and approaches so that you can be encouraged to develop your own purposes, understandings and expectations of curriculum, as depicted in the following diagram.

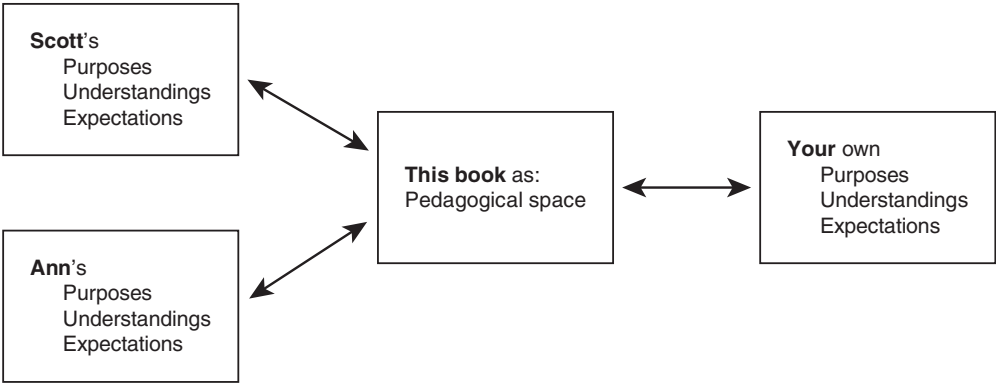


Figure 0.1 Purposes, understandings and expectations of curriculum

Here, we draw mostly on educational philosophy and the philosophies of pragmatism and existentialism, and we are sympathetic to postmodernism, critical theory, postcolonialism, feminism, liberation pedagogy and analytical philosophy, but see less value in essentialism, positivism and technical rationality. Some of these philosophies may or may not be familiar to you, but we hope that this will indicate the approach that we are adopting in this pedagogical space. We have included reverse arrows in the diagram to indicate that we have developed and changed our own ideas as a result of contributing to this book, and we look forward to your own contributions into this space and, indeed, into curriculum theory itself.

Reflective activity 0.1

We understand that readers of this book are most likely to be early career teachers. As a reader you enter into this pedagogical space with your own purposes, understandings and expectations. We invite you to reflect and write down what you are expecting to learn as you study this book. This will provide some useful material for us to review in the final chapter.

Our design of the pedagogical approach of this book involves professional reflection, re-framing and responsible commitment. This design draws largely from the work of William Perry, who has conducted in-depth studies of university students, using theoretical insights offered by John Dewey. Perry was concerned with students becoming anti-intellectual, meaning that they are not against thinking as such but are unable to think their *own* thoughts, for which they are responsible.² Perry's research interests were in how university students developed – both intellectually *and* ethically – because he understood these two dimensions to be intrinsically entwined with each other. He argued that 'the students' endeavour to orient themselves in the world through an understanding of the acts of knowing and valuing is therefore more than intellectual and philosophical. It is moral endeavour in the most personal sense.'³ This moral dimension is crucially important for curriculum work because it is based on judgements as to what is *good* for students to do and to know. Perry mapped his findings onto nine positions through which maturing students gradually work – partially or, in rare circumstances, completely. These nine positions are grouped into three general ones, as follows:

1. Dualism stage

Students see the world dualistically, as one thing or another – usually as right or wrong, black or white, us and them. Knowledge tends to be assumed as certain and absolute, needing to be obtained usually in the form of answers, facts and correct procedures.

2. Multiplicity stage

Students appreciate that knowledge is not certain but is tentative. People understand the same phenomena in different and multiple ways, and each of these can be valuable depending upon the context. Knowledge is contestable due to the multiple ways it can be justified.

3. Commitment stage

This requires an acknowledgement that there are multiple theories contributing to knowledge and, therefore, the individuals who reach this last stage acknowledge the need to take on personal responsibility for understanding things in the way that they do and for acting upon their convictions. This third position can be conceived as quite existential, as a deepening understanding inspires one to live a life perceived as more worthwhile.

As the authors of this text we are attracted to this scheme – hence the structure of this book and our invitation through the reflective activities for you to evaluate your own developing understandings. We have avoided the pretence that we can offer you 'answers' as such, and have endeavoured to lead you to the realisation that there is a multiplicity of curriculum theory. Since this book focuses on the Australian context,

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this approach is most in keeping with the very dynamic nature of the Australian Curriculum itself. The Australian Curriculum is now delivered entirely online to reflect its intended dynamic nature and continuing updates and changes. We witness it undergoing a major review under the new federal government and, indeed, it is likely to continue to be reviewed each time a different political party is voted into office. Therefore, we cannot refer to the curriculum as something static, something you can be informed about or memorise. It is constantly changing and so you need to know how to relate to it and understand it in such a way as to enable you to make the best possible decisions for your students. An important emphasis of ours is to broaden your awareness of the contentious nature of theories, and that through a variety of views you might be enabled to give sense to your own professional understanding, and critically and creatively offer *educative* experiences for your students.

We consider that developing an intellectually rigorous understanding of the Australian Curriculum and of education is of central importance if you are to be a good teacher. In recent years politicians have been increasingly involved in matters of curriculum development and implementation through school funding decisions and accountability measures, and their concerns in these matters are inextricably linked with their economic responsibilities and desires to win popular and public approval. However, in recent years it appears that Western democratic governments are not only influencing curriculum reform but actually are directly intervening and *controlling* it. Kelly⁴ lamented this recent development because teachers are becoming de-professionalised in his view, and he argues the case that a truly *educative curriculum* is no longer possible when governments centralise the control and administration of the curriculum to meet their own narrow purposes. It is for this reason that in this book we shall be encouraging *you* to transcend any tendency you may have to be inclined to look for certain ‘answers’ in order to provide proven methods for delivering the curriculum, and instead to appreciate that there are multiple valuable ways of teaching. Therefore, you need to take a responsible stance in committing to particular approaches rather than passively to accept from central authorities packaged materials and preferred methods of delivery as though curriculum work and teaching were only technical affairs.

Consequently, we do encourage you to reflect seriously and articulate your personal responses throughout each chapter – including how you feel and what questions are forming in your mind at various times. Importantly, we ask you to consider what the ideas mean to you and how they might significantly assist you in becoming a *good* teacher – one who is able to *educate* the next generation to be able to engage with the mounting challenges we are facing on a global scale and to live meaningful lives.

Reflective activity 0.2

Consider what you believe to be the various needs you have regarding your preparation to become a fully qualified and ‘good’ teacher. Do educational theory and curriculum theory appear on your list of needs? Why or why not?

In order to develop an *understanding* of Australian Curriculum you need to become aware of its complex nature and some of the various and, at times, conflicting influences. To come to such an understanding involves becoming concerned about and interested in the deeper issues. This is especially so for those of you who are teachers, because you will appreciate that you are intimately involved with your understanding – it involves your reasons, purposes and passions for teaching. This is why we have designed a provocative approach in order to promote your understanding and have not attempted to provide an all-encompassing overview, as can be found in Pinar and colleagues’ (2008) comprehensive book *Understanding Curriculum*. Our book is far more modest in scope and does not attempt to be exhaustive. We bring to the fore the importance that *you* have in the way that you relate to curriculum, and focus on the Australian context. We trust that your experience with this book will contribute towards becoming the best educator you can be.

Further reading

Garrison, J. (2010) *Dewey & Eros: Wisdom and Desire in the Art of Teaching*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing.

Giroux, H.A. (1988) *Teachers as Intellectuals*. New York & London: Bergin & Garvey.

Jackson, P.W. (2012) *What is Education?* Chicago & London: University of Chicago Press.

Kelly, A.V. (2009) *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 6th edn. London: Sage.

Pinar, W.E., Reynolds, W.M., Slattery, P. & Taubman, P.M. (2008) *Understanding Curriculum*. New York: Peter Lang.

Notes

- 1 Apple, M. (2004) *Ideology and Curriculum*, 3rd edn. New York & London: Routledge Falmer.
- 2 Perry, W.G. (1999) *Forms of Ethical and Intellectual Development in the College Years: A Scheme*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, p. 44.
- 3 Ibid., p. 60.
- 4 Kelly, A.V. (2009) *The Curriculum: Theory and Practice*, 6th edn. London: Sage.

Chapter 1

The
landscape of
curriculum
theory

Chapter 1 The landscape of curriculum theory

Curriculum theory, being closely connected with the work that we do and our views of what is true and important about ourselves and our world, reaches far down into our personal, social and cultural depths ... And so, curriculum theory deals with matters that are likely to be highly charged.¹

This book provides an introduction to the way in which different understandings of curriculum are contesting with each other. What should constitute a curriculum is not simply a matter of ‘common sense’ because, as the quote above indicates, deep personal, social and cultural values and views of the world are involved, and sometimes these differ significantly between people. The problem with ‘common-sense’ beliefs is that they tend to be held ‘unquestioningly’ because they are assumed ‘to be obvious’.² This book is designed to enable you to form your own judgements about what it might mean to teach in the context of what is ‘good’ and ‘best’ for your individual students and for society. In order to support you with this we shall encourage you to become aware of the *contested nature* of the curriculum.³ This chapter aims to introduce you to various understandings of curriculum and to explore why its nature is so contested.

The everyday clamour of the classroom and curriculum theory

Teaching is often considered to be a practical activity. It is assumed to be something we *do* rather than something we theorise or think about. In her book *Practice Makes Practice*, Deborah Britzman reflects on the idea of continuously practising the same taken-for-granted ways of teaching because ‘theoretical knowledge of teaching is not easily valued’.⁴ This is because each new generation of teachers repetitively embraces the same ways of teaching they are accustomed to without much critical reflection. Early career teachers attempt to replicate the teaching practices they experienced when they were students.

We suggest throughout this book that curriculum theory offers us a powerful means of developing a critical and reflective approach to thinking about curriculum work and of ‘developing a non-common-sense attitude towards one’s beliefs’; an attitude that ‘is at the beginning of the disciplined, critical and reflective thinking that is the mark of educational progress’.⁵ This is because, as John Dewey argued, it is not a case of theory *versus* practice but rather of intelligent practice versus uninformed practice.⁶ Zygmunt Bauman stated that ‘[w]hat is wrong with the society we live in ... is that it has stopped questioning itself’.⁷ Day-to-day practices can be challenged and improved through thinking and theorising when theory is considered to be something to engage with as a matter of daily living. Hans-Georg Gadamer, a philosopher of learning and education, claimed that because of the value that thinking and theorising offer us, ‘students should be confronted with scholarship as a way of life – and not merely to become experts’.⁸ By engaging with opportunities for scholarship and

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reflection; that is, curriculum work as intellectual interpretation, there is increased opportunity for critical evaluation of practice.

Here they come

Here they come.
And I'm not ready.
How could I be?
I'm a new teacher and learning on the job.⁹

Consider the following scenario:

Boisterous, sullen, jostling, shuffling, laughing, dreaming, pushing, hesitating ... iPods dangling out of their ears, erecting a wall of laptop screens to hide behind, the students settle themselves eventually into their seats. A carefully aimed lone banana hurtles through the air and finds its mark.

You cannot hide, they're waiting – this is the urgent 'here' and 'now'; what use are all those theories and philosophies of education? What is the value of discussing the moral and ethical imperatives of teachers' work in the classroom when there is important administrative work to be done: taking attendance, preparing for meetings, preparing class materials, setting assignments, marking assignments, meeting parents, writing reports...?

While these are *urgent issues*, often requiring immediate attention, the actions of teachers will have little meaning if they are not framed within a deep consideration of why we teach. Gutek agreed that the above concerns are urgent, but he also counselled that they are not the most important concerns in relation to the 'big picture' and how the work of a teacher relates to society and the world, the meaning and purpose of education and what it means to be an educated person.¹⁰ Therefore, understanding education requires us to draw firstly upon some political theory in the sense of being clear about what sort of society we are working towards, and secondly some moral philosophy regarding the sorts of persons our students ought to become.

Experienced educators, especially those who continue to question what they do, appreciate the value that theory has to offer to the practice of teaching. Educators who are labelled as theorists are usually experienced teachers and researchers themselves, and have closely and critically examined the practice and value of curriculum work. All the better-known educational theorists – such as Plato, John Dewey, Nel Noddings, Maria Montessori, Paulo Freire and Henry Giroux – were once practising teachers. So it might be helpful for us to consider that while curriculum theory may be difficult and challenging to understand at times, it is written primarily by experienced peers who would have us teach in a more thoughtful and considered manner than we might otherwise do. In other words, they are offering us ways to improve and to become better teachers.

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Teachers as curriculum workers

The Australian Curriculum is specifically designed for teachers – not students. Teachers have a key role in the education process; a role that demands responsibility and commitment. Professor Raewyn Connell from the University of Sydney said that:

... teachers necessarily interpret the world [which] ... requires ... knowledge of how interpretation is done, of the cultural field in which it is done, and of other possibilities of interpretation that surround one's own. This interpretation helps to define teaching as intellectual labour and teachers as a group of intellectual workers.¹¹

This intellectual undertaking of teaching involves interpreting curriculum; that is, the decisions that have to be made regarding *who* should teach, what she or he should *know* and what she or he should *do*. Curriculum means different things to different people because it represents a point of view or a perspective of people and what they value. The two main approaches to curriculum development are the traditional and the progressive approaches, and these shall be studied separately in chapters 2 and 3. These two approaches exemplify how different archetypes of curriculum result in radically different views of educational aims and practices, and how these are valued. It is the responsibility of teachers to understand some of this contested nature in order to navigate their way in using the Australian Curriculum. Indeed, this responsibility has been recognised by Dewey to be an indicator of a 'healthy' approach to education. He argued that it is normal for all social movements in a democracy – including education – to involve some conflicts. He concluded that:

It is the business of an intelligent theory of education to ascertain the causes for the conflicts that exist and then, instead of taking one side or the other, to indicate a plan of operations proceeding from a level deeper and more inclusive.¹²

Having an intelligent theoretical understanding of curriculum is necessary for good teaching because teaching activities are founded upon judgements and decisions. This requires us to resist accepting the authority of tradition and to be willing to explore more deeply into curricular matters. According to Lawton and Gordon, education begins when 'teachers cease to accept traditional beliefs automatically and begin to ask "why?"'¹³ We invite you to join us in exploring the nature of Australian Curriculum by engaging intellectually with the 'why?' questions associated with the ideas and issues raised in the following pages.

Describing our understandings of curriculum

Curriculum is understood differently, and there are various aspects to any curriculum, including:

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Stated curriculum: What appears in official documents such as syllabi and work programs

Enacted curriculum: What is actually enacted by teachers – irrespective of what is stated

Emergent curriculum: What emerges through teacher–student interactions. Not planned

Null curriculum: The content and materials that have been chosen *not* to be included

Hidden curriculum: What is experienced collaterally by students – usually not found in documents, nor noticed or intended by teachers

The Australian Curriculum, as produced by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), represents our stated curriculum, and one might expect that it ought also be a part of what we actually do teach – our enacted curriculum. Through some critical inquiry you might be able to recognise some knowledge, skills and topics that are not present in the Australian Curriculum; that is, a null curriculum.

Reflective activity 1.1

Can you identify any stated, enacted, emergent, null or hidden aspects of the curriculum in the course you are currently undertaking? Consider why certain ideas and materials have been selected to be part of the null curriculum for your course. Compare and discuss your ideas with colleagues.

As you tackle the activity above, you may find it useful initially to think of the curriculum as a noun – an object or a ‘thing’ – usually understood as a course that is to be planned, constructed and delivered to students. The word curriculum is derived from the Latin word meaning ‘running a course’ or a ‘race chariot’. There are two ways the word can be conceptualised: as *curro*, a noun related to the nature of the course itself, and as *currere*, a verb referring to how the course is run or ought to be run. The way in which you choose to conceptualise curriculum will determine the choices you make regarding your aims, practices and the nature of your relationships with the students. We suggest that curriculum be understood both as a noun *and* as a verb.

Curriculum conceived as the noun *curro* will invariably be concerned with a predetermined course of study to be delivered and adhered to. In competitive systems of schooling this often means who can get through the course faster and better than anyone else. It is found in classes in which the acquisition of isolated skills and knowledge by rote are favoured and the teachers take control of the ‘learning’. There is an emphasis on efficiency, control and management procedures. Some students are advantaged over others and there are always winners and losers.

Curriculum conceived as the verb *currere* tends to focus on *how* the course is run, the way individuals participate and the sorts of persons they become. From this