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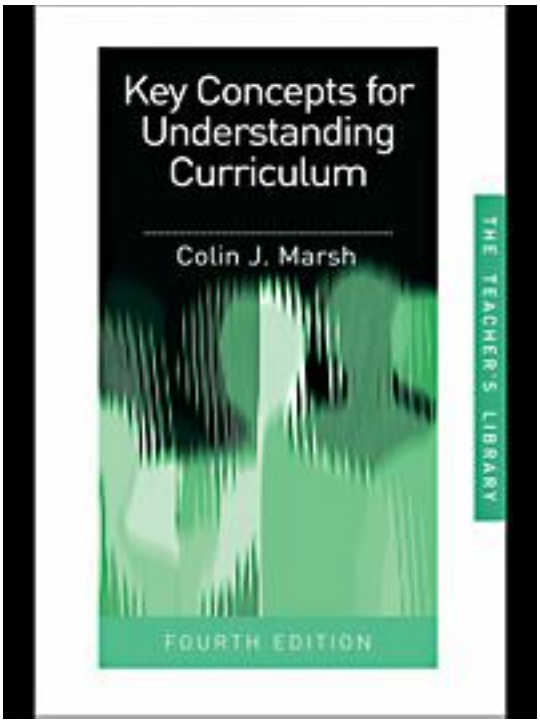

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Page i

Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum

Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum is an invaluable guide for all involved in curriculum matters. Now fully updated, this revised and enlarged fourth edition not only provides a solid grounding in the subject but also covers the latest trends and issues affecting the field. Written in Marsh's clear and accessible style, the book details the strengths, weaknesses and controversies around major concepts in curriculum, including

• curriculum planning and development
• curriculum management
• teaching perspectives
• collaborative involvement in curriculum
• curriculum ideology.

Now updated with new chapters on curriculum models, school-based curriculum development, learning studies, ICT developments in assessment, the new edition includes extra detail on standards and essential learning factors that have recently been introduced in a number of countries, including the UK, USA and Australia.

This up-to-date edition of a definitive text will be essential reading for anyone involved in curriculum planning or development. It will be especially useful to students training to be teachers, and practising teachers following professional development programmes.

Colin J. Marsh is Adjunct Professor at Curtin University, Western Australia. He has been involved in teaching at all levels, from primary school to university, over many years. He has written over thirty books on teaching and learning, including in the areas of curriculum planning, development and evaluation.

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Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum

Fourth edition

Colin J. Marsh

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Preface

Reynolds (2003) uses various metaphors to describe curriculum – lines of flight; a river runs through it – and to express images of inspiration, movement, continuity and integration.

Glatthorn and Jailall (2000) also use the metaphor of curriculum as several streams flowing through the system 'ebbing at times, then gathering strength and flowing together in a dynamic confluence' (p. 98).

By contrast, Wright (2000) describes curriculum in more chaotic but cutting-edge ways. He argues that it is problematic to categorize the field of curriculum – 'as difficult as attempting to nail Jell-O to a wall' (p. 12).

There continues to be much interest in curriculum matters – a range of very different theoretical discourses continue to be widely discussed. Major initiatives by governments and politicians to exert their respective stamps on what they consider to be essential learning and standards have appeared (and sometimes reappeared).

As we close out the final years of the first decade of the twenty-first century we should reflect on these heady days. There is an international interest in the OECD's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) rankings between countries. Ambitious, large-scale curriculum reforms have been initiated in a number of countries, especially the UK and the USA and also in Singapore and Hong Kong. The results to date have demonstrated some short-term successes but long-term issues still have to be resolved.

The players who are taking leading roles in policy formulation are changing, with increasing pressures coming from politicians and employer groups, as well as from community interest groups, parents, teachers and students. A number of these individuals and groups have very limited understanding of curriculum theories, principles and processes, even though they are prepared to commit enormous amounts of funds and energy to advance their preferred solutions to specific curriculum problems.

Key Concepts for Understanding the Curriculum is aimed at assisting various personnel concerned about and involved in curriculum decision-making. Of course, a major clientele are those pre-service teachers who will be commencing full-time careers in schools, namely students who are taking teacher

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education degrees (BA (Education), Bachelor of Education, Diploma of Education, Diploma of Teaching and PGCEs). Another major group who are likely to be very interested in the book include those practising teachers who are embarking upon professional development programmes. Parents and community members involved as school governors and members of school councils, boards and districts will obtain considerable assistance from the succinctly stated commentaries about major curriculum concepts.

The book provides details about twenty-one major concepts in curriculum. In such a small space each chapter cannot provide an exhaustive treatment of each concept, but every attempt has been made to highlight major features, controversies, strengths and weaknesses. In particular, the follow-up questions and web sources challenge the reader to reflect further upon specific issues relating to each concept and there is a listing of recent references at the end of the book.

I acknowledge various colleagues in curriculum, both within Australia and in the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Canada, who have helped me hone my ideas over the decades about curriculum. They include Michael Fullan, Gene Hall, Paul Klohr, Michael Huberman, Elliot Eisner, Bill Reid, Helen Simons, Kerry Kennedy, Eric Hoyle, Ray Bolam, Michal Connelly, Christine Deer, David Smith, Noel Gough, Chris Day, Ivor Goodson, Brian Caldwell, Paul Morris, David Tripp and John Elliott.

The fourth edition includes a number of new concepts which are having considerable impact during the twenty-first century.

For permission to reproduce figures and tables I am most grateful to Patricia Broadfoot, Brian Caldwell, Chris Day, Stephen Kemmis and Barry Fraser. A special word of thanks is due to Suzanne Stocker for her expert secretarial assistance in the preparation of the manuscript.

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Part I

Introduction

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