WESLEY NULL

CURRICULUM

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

SECOND EDITION

From Theory to Practice

SECOND EDITION

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Contents

PART II: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE

Figures and Textboxes

Figures

Textboxes

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Core Curriculum

Core Curriculum within Universities

Chapter 9

Professional Development Schools and Teacher Ed Curriculum

Chapter 10

Three Traditions within Moral Philosophy

Foreword

Chair of the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Kentucky

ONCE UPON a time school curriculum was developed by wise, informed, and experienced practitioners with a deep understanding of the local learning context. These sages brought deep knowledge of curriculum theory and related fields to bear in thoughtful deliberations aimed at designing learning experiences for others. At least, that is the golden past of my imagination—a fairy tale, to be sure, as all good "once upon a time" stories are. The opposite vision pictures harried, overworked teachers and administrators hastily choosing from among canned commercially-produced curriculum products for their schools then trying to wrestle generic, mass-produced materials into a fit for their local context. I liken them to so many last-minute shoppers on Christmas Eve desperately scouring shelves in a big box store hoping to find something that will work as a gift. This image is no truer to reality, but I suspect it seems so to those immersed in practical curriculum work. I am certain that there were—and still are—careful curriculum deliberations that thoughtfully review the universe of possibilities and carefully choose materials and content that neatly fit the need. But I am equally certain that there are curriculum decisions made by well-meaning, but ill-equipped educators without sufficient time and resources to make the best possible choices for students. In this second edition of *Curriculum: From Theory to Practice*, Dr. Wesley Null invites educators to follow the first path rather than the second and provides the tools to empower them to take charge of the curriculum process in a deeply informed way.

Conditions have changed since the first edition of *Curriculum: From Theory to Practice* was published. Many states and the national government devote more resources to schools than they did a decade ago. There are now more shared curriculum elements across the country due to the advent of the common core state standards and increasing consolidation in the educational publishing industry. Greater attention is paid to the interdisciplinary connections among traditional subjects and to applying content knowledge in real world situations. Greater importance is placed on the development of "twenty-first-century skills" through the integration of traditional academic subjects with career technical education. There are growing trends toward the privatization of schools and the use of computer technology as a curriculum tool.

The changing demographic composition of the schools has increased efforts to develop appropriate educational approaches for linguistically and culturally diverse populations and engendered a heightened sensitivity to issues of social justice in education. However, although the educational environment has changed, the basic questions of curriculum have not. In fact, these pressures and others make questions such as what knowledge is of most worth, what (and who) are schools for, and what content should we focus our limited time on, more pertinent than ever. Dr. Null's approach to thinking about curriculum addresses those questions directly and helps educators grapple with them deliberately.

Null places curriculum in its proper place at the forefront of schooling. Curriculum considerations should take precedence over those of management, assessment, teaching methodologies, technology, etc., because basic curriculum questions must be settled before appropriate decisions can be made about the other important elements of education. He does not ignore these elements, but after presenting five curriculum traditions, he calls on the reader to integrate ideas and implementation through engaging problem-based scenarios.

In addition, he appropriately characterizes curriculum as a controversial subject, which it is. Curriculum decisions are controversial because they deal with the most fundamental questions of what is true and how truth should be conveyed, what is human learning and how it should be approached, and who should benefit from knowledge, among others. These are moral questions and Null does not shy away from the moral dimensions of curriculum, but addresses the moral and ethical implications of various thought traditions. This approach helps educators locate their own assumptions within historical and philosophical contexts and identify appropriate steps consistent with those traditions. He helps the reader to enter curriculum struggles well-armed.

In his foreword to the first edition of this book, David M. Callejo-Perez wrote, "Teacher education is becoming a method of advancing reform efforts with an ever increasing emphasis on instructional methodology without an opportunity for students to examine the ideas behind social theory, politics, and a substantive view of curriculum. Students enrolled in teacher education programs are inundated with basic information that is necessary to advance the status quo of educational practices without a thought as to the nature of the curricular decisions handed down or the implications of their implementation. True reflection in education needs to become part of teaching practices in order to advance the professionalism of teaching." The nature of educator preparation in this regard has not improved in the intervening years. In fact, as preparation programs have become increasingly market-driven some have

become shorter, less personal, and less likely to meaningfully explore the historical and philosophical foundations of education. This volume helps remedy that trend by providing valuable tools to help teachers and other educators grow as informed, deliberative professionals to the ultimate end that we might develop, as Null coins it, a "liberating" curriculum. A liberating curriculum is one that opens students to "new possibilities" without ignoring intellectual traditions. It "transforms" students so that they can employ "reason, reflection, and deliberation" in their lives. It enlists all students' powers to make them more "humane and compassionate" and better equips them for deliberative lives in their social and political spheres. These are lofty ambitions, but education can empower people for just this kind of human flourishing. What could be more important to, and worthy of, a pluralistic, democratic society?

Preface to Second Edition

I WAS QUITE surprised and pleased with the strong reception that the first edition of this text received. Upon its initial publication in 2011, I never expected the text to be adopted so widely for introductory curriculum courses. I have benefitted tremendously from the interactions that I have had with the many instructors who have invited me into their classroom—whether in person or via Skype—to discuss the context of the text, especially the curriculum map, with their students.

This second edition takes into account much of the feedback that I have received from the instructors who have used the book as well as from students who have read the book and subsequently chosen to reach out to me. In this new edition, I have expanded where appropriate to include additional authors, I have updated and expanded examples to bring the text up to date with contemporary issues, and I have worked to clarify the book's thesis throughout.

I look forward to hearing from instructors and students how this second edition contributes to their classroom discussions. May your discussions and deliberations enrich your experiences, both personal and professional, as you seek to resolve the curriculum problems before you. I hope the lessons in this book can serve as your companion as we work together to achieve the goal of liberal education for all.

Wesley Null

Waco, Texas

May 2016

■ Supplementary Materials

Supplementary teaching and learning tools have been developed to accompany this text. Please contact Rowman & Littlefield at textbooks@rowman.com for more information. Available materials include:

- PowerPoint Presentations. Instructional approaches for each chapter, answers to activities and text questions, and downloadable slides of text figures and tables.
- Test Bank. Available only through the book's password-protected website.
- Teacher's Manual. Test bank answer key, supplemental readings.

Introduction

What Is Curriculum and Why Does It Matter?

EVERYONE WHO discusses teachers, schools, or education uses the term *curriculum*. The word is unavoidable. Few people, however, stop to think about what curriculum means or what it takes to create a good curriculum. Even fewer people ask questions about what curriculum is *for*, what should serve as the proper foundation for curriculum making, and how we should go about making curriculum decisions. These decisions should tie knowledge together, build community, and serve the common good. This book is about these questions and these goals. The best place to start is by making a distinction between curriculum and education.

■ Curriculum versus Education

Curriculum is the heart of education. The reason is twofold. First, curriculum is about what should be taught. Second, it combines thought, action, and purpose. "Education" is an abstract, nebulous concept that takes place through families, churches, the media, and many other social and cultural influences that impact children.[1] Curriculum, however, is a specific, tangible subject that ties decision making to particular institutions, whether they are schools, churches, nonprofit agencies, or governmental programs. Unlike education, curriculum requires those who discuss it to address what subject matter should be taught. Education is frequently discussed without regard to subject matter, but every discussion of curriculum must address subject matter in one way or another. At the same time, subject matter is only one source of content for curriculum making. So-called scientific studies in education often focus so exclusively on process that they seriously neglect, if not downright ignore, curriculum. This tendency to discuss "education" without addressing curriculum is a significant barrier that curriculum specialists, teachers, and indeed the general public must overcome if we expect to create good schools.

In addition to subject matter, curriculum raises numerous questions about sources of content for curriculum making. For example, any curriculum must address *why* subject matter should be taught. Because of its history and etymology, curriculum is a teleological term. This *why* aspect of curriculum must take into account questions of purpose and ultimate goals. Unlike much "education" debate today, curriculum cannot be discussed—let alone created—without addressing this question of purpose. Subject matter is of course one of the sources of knowledge that must be included in a

curriculum. At the same time, however, subject matter—think of history, literature, or science—is primarily a tool that teachers and curriculum makers use to achieve the larger goals embedded in any curriculum. The topic of curriculum raises these questions not only because of its history, but also because the term is tied to institutions. These institutions, in turn, must communicate their reasons for existence if they expect to flourish.[2]

Education is almost always discussed as if it were a modern social science disconnected from ultimate ends. Our modern, empirically driven culture deinstitutionalizes "education," stripping it of its teleological roots. It is much more difficult, however, to do this with curriculum. Curriculum has retained its institutional identity in the face of our modern world. Concentrating on curriculum can help us to rediscover the deeper ideals that were once foundational to education.

Recognizing the distinction between curriculum and education also helps us to become more effective teachers, more thoughtful curriculum makers, and more astute consumers of educational rhetoric. Focusing on curriculum makes us better citizens because of the renewed sense of purpose that deliberations about curriculum can provide, whether they take place in schools, homes, churches, legislatures, or anywhere else. Distinguishing between education and curriculum helps us to realize that much of what passes for talk about "education" today is shallow, devoid of meaning, and deceptive.

Curriculum is distinct from education in other ways as well. Curriculum forces us to think about ethics, whereas education is frequently discussed as if it can be divorced from questions of right and wrong. Curriculum is about the substance of what should be taught (an ethical matter), whereas "education" is often presented as if it can or should be a social science disconnected from the moral question of curriculum. "Education" is analyzed in this way whether the conversation takes place in elementary schools, high schools, community colleges, universities, foundations, think tanks, the legislature, or the media. We often find people with backgrounds in economics, psychology, and political science making pronouncements about "what must be done" in education. Rarely, however, do these "experts" address the moral question of curriculum. The basis for their claims about "education" almost always derives from their standing as specialized researchers who explain social phenomena, not as moral actors who contribute to curriculum deliberation.[3]

Explanations about social phenomena have real value. By themselves, however, they do not provide us with what we need to make curriculum decisions. The source can be economics, psychology, sociology, history, or any other intellectual specialty,

but the result is the same. Explanations can be *useful* in making curricular decisions, but they are not sufficient in and of themselves for making curriculum. The attempt to separate education as a social science from curriculum as a moral practice is impossible and dangerous. Trying to create a science of education divorced from curriculum is equal to training someone how to fire a weapon but failing to teach them when and why to do it.

Now is a momentous time, however, in intellectual history. Recent changes in social science and moral philosophy indicate that the twenty-first century will be a time of reintegrating the social sciences and moral philosophy.[4] Specialists in curriculum need to pay attention to what is happening in other fields that integrate theory and practice. One example is medicine.[5] There was a time when discussions of medicine attempted to be "objective" and value-free, but no longer. Recent debates about healthcare reform illustrate this point powerfully. Like medicine, education and curriculum cannot be "objective" or value-free. The language that surrounds so-called scientific debates about education does not do a good job integrating theory and practice, nor does it succeed at combining social science and moral philosophy. This book will make the case that the language of curriculum deliberation has a much better chance of succeeding at this task.

A major goal of *Curriculum* is to help anyone interested in educational improvement to recognize when rhetoric about education is masking the underlying *curricular* issues that are the essence of education. Many people—in the media and elsewhere—make pronouncements using the word *education*, when in reality they are making assertions about curriculum. Often these assertions about "what must be done" in the name of education are incomplete, hollow, and doctrinaire. This book addresses this problem by providing an introduction to five curricular traditions and then offering a deeper vision for what curriculum is, can, and should be. The goal is for readers to reimagine what can and should be done in the name of education by infusing our approach to education with a richer conception of curriculum. A significant first step is to think and speak more clearly about curriculum at all levels.

One of the main reasons schools struggle is because states have spent a great deal of time and money on the creation of efficient systems of education but have not thought clearly about the subject of curriculum. To be sure, the common core movement of the last four to five years has placed a great deal of emphasis on curriculum, but are the assumptions about curriculum embedded within Common Core defensible? Did those who launched headlong into the Common Core movement stop to think about the meaning of curriculum before unleashing Common Core standards on teachers and school administrators across the country? Spending money to create a national set of

curriculum standards without stopping to think carefully about what curriculum means would be like dedicating billions of dollars to creating a new space shuttle without taking into account the path the ship will take, the purpose of the space program, or the characteristics of the people who will pilot the ship.

Perhaps we have ceased to engage in meaningful deliberations about curriculum because we have stopped asking deeper questions about the purpose of schooling. If that is the case, curriculum can help us to raise these questions again. We cannot continue to evade discussions of curriculum by allowing social science researchers to make assertions about what must be done in education while at the same time dismissing the term, topic, and moral practice of curriculum making. Educators at all levels—and especially curriculum specialists—need to learn how and why to ask challenging *curricular* questions, which are inevitably moral, social, and political in nature. Asking curricular questions in the face of rhetoric from empirical specialists can be difficult, but asking them is essential if we are to provide a liberating curriculum to all young people. Not only curriculum specialists but also members of the general public need to learn to ask curriculum questions.

■ Curriculum Questions

What should be taught, to whom, under what circumstances, how, and with what end in mind? Put more concretely, what should be taught to these students, in this school, at this time, how, and to what end? What process should we use to decide what our curriculum ought to be within a particular school, college, or university context? These are *curriculum* questions. They are *not* questions that can be answered only with economics, psychology, political science, history, biology, mathematics, or any other intellectual specialty. They also cannot be answered only by looking at the skills that employers want their workers to possess. Curriculum questions can only be answered by thoughtful inquiry into *curriculum.* This point seems obvious, but it is too often forgotten in heated debates about schooling.

Curriculum is at the center of every controversial issue within teaching and schooling today. Debates rage on with regard to national or state standards, moral education, sex education, religious education, state-mandated testing, intelligent design, whole language versus phonics in the teaching of reading, prayer in schools, and other hot-button topics. What is the common theme that unites these debates? At their foundation, they are curricular in nature. Partisan advocates for one view or another may discuss these issues as if they are about education, but in reality they are about curriculum and education *at the same time*. They are curricular because they are ethical and teleological, leading us inevitably to the subject of purpose.

What is curriculum? What is it *for*? *Who* is it for? Who should make curriculum decisions? How should these decisions be made? How should we structure the decision-making process? What should we do to make a good curriculum, and what should people who specialize in curriculum development (or curriculum deliberation) do in order to make curriculum better? What characteristics, or virtues, should these people possess? Dealing with these questions is essential if any state or local educational institution expects to be effective, or successful, in any meaningful way.

Theoretic debates routinely take place in state legislatures or in the U.S. Senate, but at some point any abstract political battle must come into contact with real-world practical decision making in classrooms and schools. This book is about this transition that always takes place between theoretic visions for what curriculum "must do" or "should do" and the practical, decision-making world of classrooms and schools. Good curriculum making takes into account both of these extremes as well as all points in between.

What should be the nature of this transition between curricular vision and classroom decision making? How should we take theoretic plans for what curriculum must or should do and turn these plans into an enacted curriculum within a particular classroom, school, or school district? What should be the internal and external characteristics of the curriculists who have worked to understand this transition and, as a result, can help the process to take place more smoothly?

In addressing these questions, the purpose of this book is twofold. It begins by describing five curriculum traditions that have been powerful for hundreds of years. I have attempted to discuss these five traditions in a manner that presents their strengths and weaknesses as fairly as possible. Nevertheless, readers should recognize that the deliberative tradition, discussed in chapter 6, is the one that I contend provides the best foundation for high-quality curriculum making. Whether they are reading this book for a course or on their own, I hope readers will recognize, and even appreciate, the fact that I have sought to present the various curricular traditions evenly while at the same time acknowledging up front that I find the deliberative tradition most convincing. Secondly, this book uses specific cases, drawn from my background as a curriculum specialist, teacher, university professor, and higher education administrator, to show how the deliberative tradition operates in practice. The case studies provide students of curriculum with the opportunity to discuss and deliberate about the unique, contextual problems that always surround curriculum decisions.

■ Why Curriculum Matters

Another hope I have for this book is that readers will discover that curriculum is an

exciting subject of study. Much more than merely a lesson plan or a list of boring topics, curriculum matters tremendously as a subject, an organized field of study, and a moral practice. In this respect, curriculum shares many characteristics with philosophy, specifically moral philosophy. People write books, take courses, and engage in disagreements about what curriculum is and should be. For these reasons, curriculum is a subject that will never go away, especially in our modern society that relies on institutions, credentialing, and structure. Curriculum also parallels philosophy because both fields attempt to see knowledge, reality, and practice in their entirety. Both aim to see the relationships between numerous fields by concentrating on the "big picture" while at the same time developing specialization in one area, for example continental philosophy or science curriculum. In addition, curriculum and philosophy both rely upon reason and logic, but both can be tied closely to matters of religion and faith.

Curriculum matters as a specialized field of study as well. Universities, national and state departments of education, local school districts, and individual schools rely upon curriculum specialists. If curriculum specialists are to be employed in these roles, they need specialized preparation that will help them and the institutions they serve. In our divisive world of competing interest groups and conflicting views on a host of topics, curriculum specialists must be creative, thoughtful, and socially astute people who understand the various levels of curriculum planning and execution. During their preparation in graduate school or as undergraduates, the best curriculum specialists have studied state curriculum guidelines, but they also know how to take these documents and shape them appropriately within specific institutional contexts. Making this transition between curriculum as an abstract document and curriculum as a living classroom force requires that curriculists be taught how and why curriculum is a moral practice, not just a body of knowledge.

Curriculum is about taking a subject, preparing it for school and classroom use, and following through so that it makes a lasting impact on students. This shift from curriculum as an abstract body of knowledge to curriculum as a social force requires those who make curriculum decisions to address questions of teleology, ethics, and local circumstances. Specialized knowledge of one area outside of curriculum—whether it be mathematics, history, or chemistry—is essential but not sufficient when the task is curriculum making. The sooner we liberate curriculum from the idea that it is nothing but subject matter sequentially organized in an abstract way, the sooner we will be on our way to realizing the ideal of a liberating curriculum for all.

■ What Is a Liberating Curriculum?

What is a liberating curriculum? I ask this question because curriculum should liberate students from narrow ways of thinking. It should open them up to new possibilities while at the same time teaching them to appreciate tradition. A liberating curriculum is a necessary component of a liberal education. A liberating curriculum transforms students internally so that they can lead lives of reason, reflection, and deliberation. A liberating curriculum also is a course of study that draws upon all of the talents and abilities of students to make them more humane and compassionate. A liberating curriculum connects students with the traditions that provide the foundational knowledge necessary for understanding social and political life. It also prepares students to deliberate wisely, extend the best aspects of tradition, and lead communities toward the ideals they uphold.

Describing what a liberating curriculum is *not* is sometimes easier than describing what it is. Curriculum needs to be liberated from ways of thinking that have shackled its growth and quality for decades. These restrictive ways of thinking include the attempt to reduce curriculum to a mechanical script that all teachers are expected to parrot, without teachers thinking for themselves or taking into account the students they teach. Another is the tendency to reduce curriculum to nothing but a syllabus on the one hand or an efficiency problem on the other. Others reduce curriculum to an impersonal list of topics divorced from meaning, purpose, and humanity. Beyond that, there are Utopian dreamers who focus so much on what could be that they forget that curriculum must start with reality and all its imperfections. There are also makeshift practitioners who reject the need to connect curriculum to a broader vision for what schooling can or should achieve. Then there are revolutionaries who promote a curriculum that foments revolution but fails to discuss what should be done once that revolution has taken place. There are also theorizers who emphasize personal experience to such an extent that they forget curriculum must address community, citizenship, institutions, and concern for the common good. Others seek to control curriculum through the application of scientific "expertise." They wrongly assume that the structure of their academic specialty doubles as a legitimate curriculum. Finally, there are economically driven executives who see curriculum as nothing but a tool to train the next generation of compliant workers. All of these views hinder the goal of a liberating curriculum for all.

Curriculum can address some of the problems raised by these limited ways of thinking, each of which has something to offer. However, when curriculum is captured by one of these perspectives alone, it loses its life, vitality, and direction. By "a liberating curriculum," I mean a path, a way of life that enhances the social, moral, political, intellectual, and spiritual faculties of every student. I mean something similar

to what philosopher Pierre Hadot means when he speaks of philosophy and wisdom. Hadot writes, "For real wisdom does not merely cause us to know: it makes us 'be' in a different way."[6] The best hope for offering this path, this way of life, is to build upon what I call, following others, a deliberative approach to curriculum practice.

■ Thesis and Structure of the Book

My thesis has three parts. The first is that curriculum is narrowly understood and must be liberated if we expect to have better schooling. The second is that, in order to create a truly liberating curriculum, we must begin by liberating *the concept* of curriculum before we can address specific curriculum problems. Third, in order for curriculum to be truly liberating for real students in real schools and universities, we must move from liberating *the idea* of curriculum within our *minds* to *deliberating* about specific curriculum problems within contemporary institutions.

The structure of *Curriculum* consists of two parts. Part I, "Curriculum Traditions," addresses the first two parts of the thesis, having to do primarily with the *idea* of curriculum. Part II, "From Theory to Practice," shows the practice of curriculum deliberation at work within specific educational institutions. This structure is designed to (1) show what curriculum theory is, (2) describe how deliberative curriculum theory differs from four other curriculum traditions, and (3) provide specific examples of how deliberative curriculum theory operates in practice.

■ Brief Book Overview

Before expanding on what good curriculum deliberation is and ought to be, Part I examines four other well-known traditions within the curriculum field. Drawing in part upon curriculum philosopher William A. Reid's *The Pursuit of Curriculum*, Part I provides a description of five philosophies of curriculum that are prevalent today and have been influential for centuries.[7] I have incorporated Reid's language by using the terms *systematic*, *existentialist*, *radical*, *pragmatic*, and *deliberative*. In *The Pursuit of Curriculum*, Reid discusses four, not five, curriculum traditions. I have retained Reid's terms but have added a fifth tradition that I label pragmatic. Each tradition provides a vision for curriculum that has strengths and weaknesses, which are discussed toward the end of each chapter.

Chapter 1 describes how I came to organize the book in this way. I begin with a brief history of liberal education and its relationship to democracy before introducing the impact of Joseph Schwab on the field of curriculum.[8] I also describe how I see this book building on the work of Schwab and Reid. Chapters 2 through 6 present major figures who have shaped—and continue to shape—each of the five traditions. Each

chapter discusses why each tradition has been powerful at different times in American history. *Curriculum*, however, is not a work of history. It is a work of curriculum philosophy and practice.

The subject of chapter 6 is the deliberative tradition. I aim to show how the deliberative tradition is uniquely suited to addressing the problems that curriculum entails. The deliberative tradition does not reject the other four. Rather, it incorporates them by maximizing the strengths and weaknesses of each. To highlight the strengths and weaknesses of each tradition, I use the five "curriculum commonplaces" first presented by Joseph Schwab.[9] Chapter 1 discusses the notion of "commonplaces" to show how it is useful in making sense of the five traditions.

Chapters 7, 8, and 9 raise specific practical questions that curriculum workers face each day. These chapters describe representative examples of common curriculum problems within schools, colleges, and universities. They then show what a deliberative curriculum worker likely would do in order to resolve the problems that arise. These chapters take the form of a narrative in which the scene is presented. Each case includes discussion of the characters involved and the specifics surrounding each set of curriculum problems. Each chapter then discusses potential resolutions that address the problems under consideration. The scenarios should be useful to anyone interested in curriculum at all levels, but especially for college and university faculty who teach courses in curriculum development, theory, and practice. In order to broaden the scope of the audience for this book, Part II includes case studies from public and private schools at the K–12 and the higher education levels.

Chapter 10, the concluding chapter, discusses the characteristics—or virtues—that must and should be upheld by curriculists who wish to extend the deliberative tradition. The final chapter also argues why the deliberative tradition provides the most realistic path to a liberating curriculum for all. To begin, however, a broader perspective on the relationship between liberal education and curriculum sets the stage for the five curriculum traditions.

■ Discussion Questions

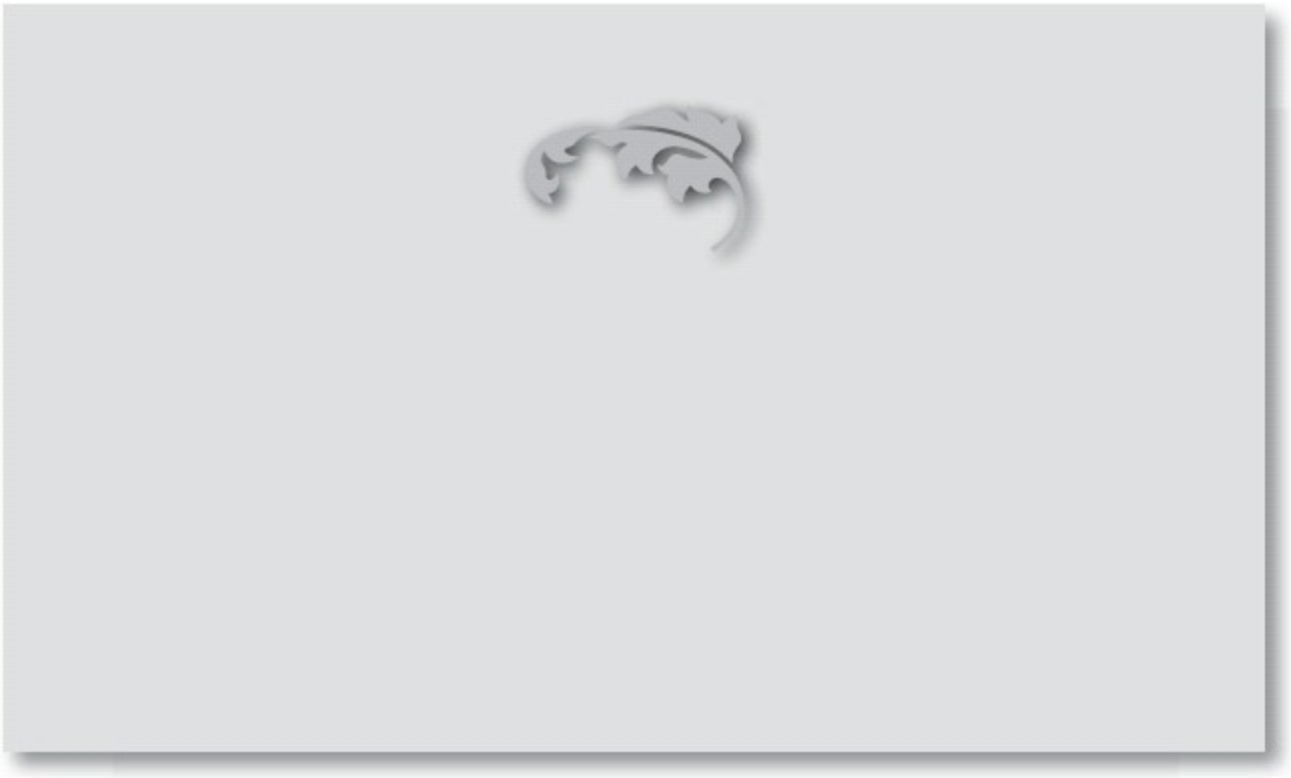
1. What is the difference between curriculum and education?
2. What are some examples of curriculum questions? What makes them "curricular"?
3. How does the idea of "teleology" relate to curriculum?
4. What are some ways that curriculum is similar to philosophy?
5. What does the phrase "a liberating curriculum" mean?

6. What does it mean for curriculum to be a “moral practice”?
7. The thesis of this book has three parts. What are they?

PART

I

CURRICULUM TRADITIONS

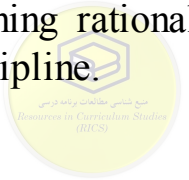


Liberal Education (and Curriculum) for All

LIBERAL EDUCATION is an ideal that has shaped curriculum and teaching for centuries. Forgotten to many people today, the term *liberal* in liberal education has nothing to do with contemporary politics or left-leaning views on hot-button issues. Liberal education, rather, refers to an interdisciplinary approach to curriculum and teaching that pursues the goal of liberating minds so that they can become more fully human, make rational judgments, and provide civic leadership. Liberal education is the opposite of indoctrination. Liberally educated citizens do not merely recite the views of others. They have shaped their character in such a way that they can consider issues from many perspectives. They have developed their personal viewpoints carefully and have learned to support them with well-reasoned arguments and persuasive reasoning.

The idea of liberal curriculum stretches across generational and geographical boundaries. Its roots reach back at least to the ancient Greek philosophies of Plato and Aristotle during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE. Both recognized that true education —meaning an education fit for human beings—must strengthen human nature and cultivate leaders who shape communities toward happiness and harmony. Central to liberal education is the concept of a liberal curriculum. Rarely discussed, the creation of a liberal curriculum is the only way that liberal education can be achieved. A liberating curriculum should turn students into free thinkers who can draw upon many fields of knowledge, pursue truth, and solve problems. To be free-minded means to use our minds to think independently while at the same time basing our judgments on a well-conceived view of tradition and purpose. Liberally educated citizens have learned to base their judgments on reason and thereby avoid surrendering to their passions, following the dictates of others, or merely pursuing material wealth.

The gift of reason distinguishes human beings from other creatures. Nonrational beings merely react to stimuli. They never engage in genuine thought or deliberation. Human beings, especially if they have studied a liberal curriculum, have the ability to think, speak, and deliberate. Some people, however, remain in a state of reaction and rarely think, primarily because they have never experienced a curriculum that awakens their ability to reason and deliberate. Since all human beings possess the gift of reason, any curriculum for liberal education must focus on strengthening rational thought, as well as other human faculties like speech, persuasion, and discipline.



In a democratic state, a liberal curriculum should be offered to every citizen. The ideal of universal liberal education, however, has never been achieved. The struggle to offer a high-quality curriculum to all has had to overcome many obstacles, many of them political, economic, and social. One obstacle, however, has been a lack of sufficient attention to the subject of curriculum and how it gives rise to the liberal arts ideal. If a democracy overcomes the political and economic hurdles to offer a liberal education to all young people and then fails to think clearly and carefully about curriculum, it has achieved nothing. To begin to address this issue, Part I of *Curriculum: From Theory to Practice* focuses on five traditions that have answered the question of curricular content in different ways. Part II then introduces readers to specific cases that revolve around common curricular problems. Before addressing the five traditions in Part I, however, the first step is to gain perspective on the origins of a liberal curriculum. Attention to this history helps us to understand the ideal and why it has not yet been realized in practice.

■ Origins of a Liberal Curriculum

Greeks like Plato and Aristotle and Christian educational philosophers like St. Augustine and John Amos Comenius recognized the significance of reason when creating a liberal curriculum. Plato made reason the most powerful force in his well-known work, *The Republic*. A liberal curriculum to Plato is one that teaches young people to control emotion and appetite—the lesser aspects of human nature—by strengthening reason and self-discipline. The process of studying such a curriculum makes reason the most powerful force in people's lives. A well-ordered soul, to Plato, is one that keeps reason and emotion in their proper relationship by using logic to direct thoughts, actions, and decisions.

Plato's best, most powerful curriculum, however, was not for everyone. He reserved a truly liberating curriculum for those who had demonstrated their power to reason when they were young, making them the most fit prospects for ruling his ideal city. The only way a community could attain true happiness was if these reason-driven citizens held power over the important decisions made in the city. These philosopher-kings, as Plato called them, were the only citizens who engaged in genuine deliberation. To him, they were the only citizens who should pursue a curriculum that strengthens their ability to reason and deliberate. Sharing this most highly prized curriculum with others was viewed as unnecessary and even harmful to the city.

Aristotle, working in Plato's shadow, similarly identified reason as the unique human ability that separates good citizens from bad, leaders from followers, and liberated citizens from servants. In works such as the *Nicomachean Ethics* and

Politics, Aristotle, like Plato, ties his views on a liberating curriculum to the concept of the soul. Although a bit more complex than Plato's, Aristotle's depiction of a well-ordered (meaning liberated) soul places reason in control of animalistic impulses like appetite and desire. Again, a curriculum fit for human beings, to Aristotle, is one that introduces students to subjects, conversations, and experiences that strengthen virtues like courage, friendliness, and practical wisdom—all of which are rooted in reason, including the proper relationship between reason and emotion. Aristotle stresses moral virtues like courage and magnanimity more than Plato, but a curriculum that cultivates the proper relationship between reason and emotion remains the foundation for a liberating curriculum to Aristotle. To him, a curriculum that neglects to strengthen students' ability to reason will never lead to liberation, nor will it make students fully human.

Plato's Cave

Plato's *Republic* is regarded as one of the most influential books ever published on curriculum and teaching. The highlight of the book is known as the Allegory of the Cave, which is found in Book VII. In that book, he describes the kind of education that he believes leaders of any city need to have. Plato compares uneducated people to prisoners who have been living in a cave for their entire lives. These prisoners have come to believe that the shadows they see on the wall of the cave are the truth. He then depicts teaching as the process of liberating prisoners by showing them that the shadows they have been staring at their entire lives are not real, but rather reflections of something else. Teachers then persuade students to turn toward the light, climb out of the cave, and eventually stare directly at the sun, which is the source of all truth, beauty, and goodness. Teachers and students climb together out of the cave, meaning that both are responsible for their respective parts of the teaching and learning process. Plato's cave metaphor is found repeatedly in literature, philosophy, religion, and many other fields throughout the history of the West. One such example is found in the movie *The Matrix*. The matrix represents the shadows on the wall of the cave, and the prisoners are the humans who provide electricity to run the matrix. The character of Morpheus, played by Laurence Fishburne, is the teacher who leads the prisoners, including Neo played by Keanu Reeves, out of the darkness and into the light.