

WHAT IS CURRICULUM?

Brad Gobby

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Introduction

Often it's the seemingly simplest of words that turn out to be the most complex. 'Curriculum' is a case in point. This chapter challenges commonsense understandings of curriculum as a plan of content to be taught to learners. It outlines six different uses of the term in the field of education, although the six described do not make up a comprehensive list of its meanings and uses. The chapter encourages you to think of curriculum as the lived experience of learners in an educational setting, and to recognise that social, cultural and political forces influence the curriculum experiences of learners.

KEY TERMS

curriculum experiences
culture
economic inequality
enacted curriculum
emergent curriculum

funds of knowledge
hidden curriculum
intended curriculum
lived curriculum
null curriculum

pedagogy
politics
society

CONTESTING CURRICULUM

In February 2016, an Australian Federal Government-funded toolkit of learning resources produced by the Safe Schools Coalition became the object of a political furor. The premise for creating the resources was that many students in schools are same-sex attracted, transgender, gender diverse, or born with characteristics that do not fit with the medical norms of male or female bodies (intersex), and these students experience hardship in school (the respectful acronym used to refer to this group is LGBTIQ—lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, intersex and queer). The Safe Schools learning resources were designed for primary and secondary school students by the Safe Schools Coalition, a group of organisations and schools working toward promoting safe and inclusive school environments for LGBTIQ students, staff and families. The program, which schools voluntarily opted into, was developed in consultation with schools and students. It consisted of lesson plans and curriculum resources created by the Coalition; however, it emphasised that principals and teachers must make their own professional judgments about how to use the resources in their school settings.

To many, this program was a long time coming. Statistics show that most LGBTIQ students feel unsafe and vulnerable at school. A report for the Western Australian Equal Opportunity Commissioner (Jones, 2012) noted that 80 per cent of LGBTIQ students experienced abuse at school. It also reported that because of prejudice, 61 per cent of LGBTIQ students experienced verbal abuse, 18 per cent reported physical abuse, and 69 per cent reported other forms of bullying. In Western Australia, despite 94 per cent of students reporting they had some form of sexuality education (e.g. with a focus on puberty and procreation), only 12 per cent reported they were taught that homophobia is wrong. Further, 82 per cent of LGBTIQ students did not classify their schools as supportive, and 44 per cent considered their schools to be *actively homophobic*. Jones and Hillier (2012) observe that narrow understandings of gender and sexuality pervade schools, such that: ‘For some, the message that their sexual or gender identity is something to be ashamed of, and even physically beaten out of them, is a poignant form of school sexuality education beyond “official” lessons’ (p. 439). These experiences, where ‘being normal is the only way to be’, are confirmed elsewhere (see e.g. Martino & Pallotta-Chiarolli, 2005; Robinson, Bansel, Denson, Ovenden & Davies, 2014). Although these statistics are a cause for concern, a promising finding of the research is that schools that had explicit anti-homophobia policies to protect LGBTIQ students had a higher number of LGBTIQ students report that their schools offered a supportive school environment (Jones, 2012; Jones & Hillier, 2012). In other words, actively naming and addressing sexuality-based discrimination makes a positive difference to the experiences of these children and young people, like naming and addressing racial, cultural and religious prejudice. Given these facts, the Safe Schools program sought to address the bullying and discrimination experienced in schools by LGBTIQ students. In fact, it was considered so worthwhile by educators working in schools that 526 schools voluntarily signed up to participate in the program.

What appeared to be worthwhile and important resources for many working in schools raised the hackles of some conservative government politicians in Canberra. Reminiscent

of the moral panic that followed the harmless depiction of a same-sex couple with children as an ordinary family on the ABC's children's television program *Play School* in 2004 (Taylor, 2007), many conservative politicians and media commentators reacted angrily to the Safe Schools resources. They demanded the Safe Schools Coalition be de-funded. One conservative politician said: 'Our schools should be places of learning, not indoctrination' (Anderson, 2016). The program's opponents, most of whom have had no direct experience of schooling other than being a student many decades ago, claimed the curriculum material was age-inappropriate. That is to say, they considered that by talking about gender and sexuality, innocent children were being sexualised and brainwashed into socially inappropriate ways of thinking (i.e. that gender and sexuality is complex). (See Gay Alcorn's 'The reality of Safe Schools' (2016) for more information about the program and reactions to it.)

In response to the upheaval by his backbench, on 26 February 2016 the Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, ordered an independent review into the program. The *Review of appropriateness and efficacy of the Safe Schools Coalition Australia program resources* (Louden, 2016) was conducted by respected Professor Bill Louden. Completed on 11 March 2016, the review found that, while a few resources were not entirely appropriate for *some* students, the program itself was appropriate. It also found that the resources aligned with the program's objectives and would increase support for and reduce prejudice against LGBTIQ students. Despite this, the enraged backbenchers who instigated the Prime Minister's review would not let go of the issue. They rejected the review's conclusions and challenged the Prime Minister to do more. On 18 March 2016, ironically the sixth Annual National Day of Action Against Bullying and Violence, the Prime Minister intervened again by announcing the program would be dramatically changed beyond the recommendations of Louden's review. Fronting the media, the Federal Education Minister, Simon Birmingham, announced changes to the program that included restricting involvement to secondary schools, restricting some resources to counselling sessions, editing the lesson plans and requiring parents' consent for their children to participate. Birmingham said that 'parents should have confidence in what is taught ... especially about potentially contentious issues ... "Parents should have a right to withdraw their child from classes dealing with such matters"' ('Government reveals changes to controversial Safe Schools program', 2016). But who decides what a 'contentious issue' is?

Given the response of others to the Safe Schools program, it is clear that what is controversial and contentious to some is common sense to others. Stephen Dawson, the Federal Labor Party's spokesperson for mental health, reacted to the changes with: 'What people seem to forget is that this program is there because it is needed. The reality is that many young people are still bullied because of their sexuality or their gender at school' (Hill, 2016). Greens Senator Robert Simms addressed the fears of the program's critics: 'Opposition to the Safe Schools Coalition seems to be based on the absurd idea that simply by talking about differences in sexuality or gender identity you're going to recruit people. Anyone with the most basic understanding of human sexuality knows how ridiculous that is' (Medhora, 2016). The Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, whose state first developed the program in 2010, posted this comment to

social media: ‘Let’s be honest here: I don’t think these extreme Liberals are actually offended by the structure of the program, or the teachers who lead it. I just think they’re offended by the kids who need it’ (Anderson, 2016). Academic Victoria Rawlings criticised the moral panic surrounding the resources. She observed that ‘young people are exposed to a vast amount of content and navigate this in various ways in their day-to-day lives’ and that the political reactions to the program suggest ‘there is something particularly deviant or worrying about diverse sexual identities or gender identities’ (Rawlings, 2016). So, where some people perceived the program as a threat, others saw a program geared towards inclusivity.

The extraordinary response to the Safe Schools resources reflects the ongoing struggle for power over curriculum. Such incidences are not isolated. Another stark example of this struggle is the recent review of the *Australian Curriculum*. After years of consultation, with its implementation only just commencing, the *Australian Curriculum* was subject to an independent review following the Liberal–National Party Coalition victory at the 2014 federal election. The new Federal Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, launched a review into the coverage and potential bias of the *Australian Curriculum*. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) board’s Chairman, Professor Barry McGaw, defended the curriculum, stating that ‘the authority had used a “rigorous, national process” that had produced a high-quality curriculum’ (Marshall & Preiss, 2014). Indeed, the *Australian Curriculum* had been agreed to by all state and territory education ministers. Despite this, in an opinion piece written for a major newspaper, Pyne pointed to the history curriculum as an example of bias: ‘concerns have been raised about the history curriculum not recognising the legacy of Western civilisation and not giving important events in Australia’s history and culture the prominence they deserve, such as Anzac Day’ (Ireland, 2014). The history curriculum has long been subject to debate among politicians and media commentators who have sought to foist certain interpretations of history on the nation’s school students (Parkes, 2007; Taylor, 2014). In this case, although the history curriculum had become a lightning rod issue for critics of the *Australian Curriculum*, the scope of the curriculum review was much broader.

The political dimension of the review was barely concealed. The appointment of Kevin Donnelly as a lead reviewer raised eyebrows. According to the Australian Education Union:

Mr Donnelly is a supporter of corporal punishment in schools, and is on the record as expressing racist and homophobic views. He has also worked as a consultant for tobacco company Philip Morris, producing materials to be used in schools ... He is a former Liberal Party staffer with a strong political bias. (2014)

To its opponents, the review was not a genuine attempt to fix what might be inadequate about the curriculum, but an exercise in realigning key aspects of the national curriculum with the views and beliefs of the prevailing conservative government. The Opposition’s education spokesperson commented: ‘States and territories—Liberal and Labor—have agreed to an independent board to set curriculum. But today, Christopher Pyne is threatening to take us

backward by making this more about politics and less about learning' (Ireland, 2014). The review courted further controversy when in October 2014, a consultant chosen to review the English curriculum, Professor Barry Spurr, was drawn into an imbroglio over racist emails sent from his work email account (Bagshaw, 2014). In those emails he 'apparently reminisced about the 1950s, when there weren't so many "bogans", "fatsoes", "Mussies" and "Chinky-poops" around' (Hall, 2014). Spurr subsequently resigned from his appointment at Sydney University, but not before submitting his review to the inquiry. He wanted greater emphasis on teaching the Western literary canon (i.e. British literature), criticised 'reading for enjoyment', and derided using Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature as a way for educators to connect the curriculum with students' lives (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014).

You may ask, why are these furores worth discussing in a book about curriculum? In short, what children and young people *get* to learn and experience in their learning settings is not a straightforward matter. It is a matter of social, cultural and political forces. The knowledge, skills, beliefs, practices, morals and values that education *inculcates* in learners through their curriculum experiences is open to debate and struggle. This is because there is no consensus about what children and young people should learn and know, how they should learn, and why they should learn. Differences of opinion reflect different views about the world, about what's true and moral, and about how the world should be. They also reflect people's emotional (or affective) investments in their views and beliefs. In the Safe Schools example, the program's proponents believe young people should have access to learning experiences and knowledge that broaden their thinking about human sexuality, and foster empathy and tolerance toward those who do not conform to prevailing norms. However, its opponents hold different views. Their belief in the naturalness of children's innocence, the heterosexual nuclear family, and traditional morals and gender roles motivates them to control what and who can be talked about in schools (i.e. 'normal' heterosexual people). Their emotional attachment to these views partly explains why many of them reacted so vociferously. So, the curriculum experiences of learners are shaped not just by what occurs within the decorated walls of the classroom, but also by the powers and forces that exist in the domains of **society**, **culture** and **politics**. This is a central idea of this book. We aim to provoke you to explore the social, cultural and political forces embedded in the decisions that constitute and shape the experiences of teaching and learning in early childhood settings, primary schools and secondary schools.

Society: The dynamic collection of relations and associations established between individuals, and between individuals and their material surroundings. Not a pre-formed entity.

Culture: The contextually specific, dynamic and human practices of making meaning and organising the human and non-human world, giving rise to beliefs, customs and symbols.

Politics: The different views and interests people and groups have about how to govern and to what ends we should govern. Politics involves debates about what policies, programs and laws governments should implement and why.

Theory in action

Read about Safe Schools and its resources and the political interference that ensued:

- www.safeschoolscoalition.org.au
- www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2016/feb/23/turnbull-orders-review-safe-schools-lgbti-program-after-pressure-from-cory-bernardi/.

Following the political furore described earlier, the program is now only funded for secondary schools, and parents must give agreement for their children to participate.

- 1 Do you think the political interference in the Safe Schools project is acceptable? Why or why not?
- 2 Does the Safe Schools program introduce new ideas to students, or is it responding to the lives and experiences of many of today's children and young people?
- 3 Why might obtaining parental consent be a problem for schools that aim to create inclusive learning environments that are free from prejudice and discrimination?
- 4 If a child of homophobic parents were secretly lesbian or gay, do you think their parents should have the ultimate say about their participation in the program? Why or why not?
- 5 Does the right of a parent to make decisions for their child override the responsibility of schools to protect and support students by stamping out all kinds of prejudice and hate? Why or why not?

CURRICULUM IN CONTEXT

This is not a book about ‘the curriculum’. Pre-service educators often come to their university studies believing they will learn what to teach students (‘the curriculum’) and how to teach it. Given this expectation, it is understandable that students might begin reading this book about ‘curriculum’ believing they will learn about the subjects, knowledge and skills governments and departments of education require children and young people to learn. However, this book challenges such commonly held views of curriculum. Rather than construe curriculum as simply the content and outcomes of learning outlined in official government or school documents, this book seeks to broaden the horizons of our thinking about curriculum.

At its simplest, curriculum is a document, subject or plan of content to be taught. We can call this ‘the curriculum’. But at its most complex and fascinating, ‘curriculum’ encompasses the planned and unplanned lived experience of learners in a learning setting (Marsh & Willis, 2003), whether that setting is an early years learning centre, a primary school, a secondary school or a university. If we view curriculum as the lived experience of learners in learning settings, then there is no shortage of forces far and wide that have a direct and indirect impact on learners’ *curriculum experiences*. This book explores the forces that make up the lives and experiences of learners and educators. I am going to touch on a few here.

One important force is economic inequality. Australia’s distribution of wealth and poverty shapes the life and educational experiences of children and young people. Over the past three decades, government policies across the world have contributed to growing wealth and income inequality. In Australia, a ‘person in the top 20% wealth group has a staggering 70 times as much wealth as a person in the bottom 20%’ and the ‘wealth of the top 20% wealth group increased by 28% over the period from 2004 to 2012, while by comparison the wealth of the bottom increased by just 3%’ (ACOSS, 2015, p. 8). In 2012, ‘one in seven people, including one in

six children, lived below the most austere poverty line widely used in international research' (ACOSS, 2014, p. 8). Poverty especially afflicts those in remote, regional and rural areas, and those on the fringes of large cities (Sullivan, Perry, & McConney, 2013), as well as women, children, older people, sole parents, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability, and those born in countries where English is not the main language (ACOSS, 2014). Reductions in government support and services over the past two decades have exacerbated economic and social inequality, with a person's family background becoming a larger factor shaping their social and economic wellbeing and future. In this context, many families and communities on modest incomes struggle to make ends meet in what feels like an insecure and competitive world that is leaving them behind.

Australia's education system is barely able to meet the needs of Australia's increasingly unequal society. The *Gonski Review of funding for schooling* (2011, p. 34) notes that 'research shows a clear relationship between the socioeconomic backgrounds of students and their school performance' (see also Lamb, Jackson, Walstab & Huo, 2015). Peruse the league tables of top-performing schools and you will notice the persistent connection between a person's economic background and their educational achievement, which is why Raewyn Connell (1995, p. 6) declared: 'Statistically speaking, the best advice we can give to a poor child, keen to get ahead through education, is to choose richer parents'. It is criminal that large numbers of children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are not meeting learning milestones (Lamb et al., 2015), becoming disengaged and 'dropping out' (Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). The decisions of politicians and policymakers contribute to this (see Teese, 2010). While improving educational achievement requires wider economic and social inequalities to be addressed, we also know that 'young Australians become disadvantaged through what they experience in their education and training journeys and the way they are treated' (Lamb et al., 2015, p. 3). Children and young people put at disadvantage are often stereotyped, made to fit the norms and practices of the education system that works against them (Connell, 1995), and, along with their communities and families, blamed for their 'deficiencies' and 'poor' choices (Comber & Kamler, 2004). We can only transform disadvantage into advantage if we understand the effects of social and economic inequality, and challenge the educational ideas and practices that contribute to this inequality.

To a great extent, this means creating an education system that takes seriously the diverse social, economic and cultural backgrounds and experiences of its learners. Think about Australia's cultural diversity, for example. Australia's largest ethnic group is Australians of British descent. The British colonisation of Australia has resulted in the dominance of Anglo-Celtic norms, values and practices, which are reflected in Australia's history, institutions, political system, customs, values and our notion of 'being Australian'. However, Australia is an extremely culturally diverse country. Data from the Australian census (ABS, 2012) reports that 47 per cent of the population were either born overseas (26 per cent) or are the children of at least one parent who was born outside of Australia. A large proportion of both long-standing arrivals (49 per cent) and new arrivals (67 per cent) speak a language other than English at home, while 81 per cent of Australians over five years of age speak only English at home.

Of the total population, 61 per cent is affiliated with a Christian religion and 7.2 per cent is affiliated with a non-Christian faith, including Buddhism (2.5 per cent), Islam (2.2 per cent) and Hinduism (1.3 per cent); while 22.3 per cent report not having a religion. The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population, the original inhabitants of the continent, account for 3 per cent of the total population, with this group composed of several hundred groups, including Koori, Nyungar and Yolngu (ABS, 2013a). This diversity manifests in the rich tapestry of beliefs, languages, norms, practices and values of Australian society. Information on ‘the “average” Australian’ can be found at the Australian Bureau of Statistics’ webpage ‘Australian social trends’ (ABS, 2013b).

Do educators recognise, celebrate and use the extraordinarily diverse experiences, expectations, knowledge and languages that children and young people bring into learning centres and classrooms? Unfortunately, diversity is not always represented in the curriculum and practices of learning settings. For example, when it comes to cultural diversity, differences to the dominant Anglo-Australian norms are often ignored or viewed as inferior, exotic or a threat. Cultural differences have therefore become a source of discrimination, prejudice and inequality of treatment and opportunity (Jones Diaz, 2009). In fact, the cultural backgrounds of non-Anglo Australian students are often interpreted as deviant, deficient and the reason for children’s and young people’s struggles in and outside of school (Mills & Keddie, 2012). To the issue of gender and sexual diversity, many people and institutions (including politicians, educators and schools) remain locked into traditional notions or stereotypes of sex-gender. Many educators and learning settings often explicitly and sometimes unwittingly encourage compliance to sex-gender norms without questioning those norms. These are norms that can be oppressive and damaging, *marking* some children/young people and their families as deficient. It is not uncommon to hear, for instance, educators speak of children from families that do not have two differently sexed parents as needing to be ‘supported’. The assumption, without evidence, is that these children are living in circumstances that are deficient and inferior to the dominant norm. How educators think about and approach diversity (whether economic, social or cultural) will determine the extent to which they create *inclusive* learning environments. Educators need appropriate ways to think about the economic, social, political and cultural forces that shape the lives and educational experience of children and young people.

Unfortunately, successive government policies and programs over the past decade have challenged the capacity of educators to respond to such diversity. Educators are working in an environment that increasingly enforces standardisation, compliance and the pursuit of forever-improving test results. Since 2008, the Federal Government has forced Year 3, 5, 7 and 9 students to participate in a national testing program called the National Assessment Program of Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). Labor and Liberal governments believe that schools can be improved by regularly accounting for the performance of their students through a standard test of only a ‘thin slice’ of the total official curriculum. The publication of NAPLAN results on the Federal Government’s *My School* website (www.myschool.edu.au) further drives this performance

focus (see Lingard, Thompson & Sellar, 2016). NAPLAN and *My School* foster competition as schools seek to out-do each other in NAPLAN results, which are taken to indicate ‘quality’ and contribute to the reputation of schools. Pressure is further applied to schools by the media’s naming, shaming and blaming of underperforming schools (Mockler, 2016; Shine & O’Donoghue, 2013). The push for ever-increasing testing, performance and competition that dominate the government’s approach to education is transforming the learning priorities, practices and environments of schools (Keddie, Mills & Pendergast, 2011). By pushing students to demonstrate improved test results, many schools are narrowing the curriculum experience of students. It is not unusual for students to be prepared for the test months in advance. With such emphasis on testing, it is unsurprising that it causes many young children to feel ‘scared’, ‘worried’, ‘nervous’, ‘tired’, ‘sick’ and ‘queasy’ (Howell, 2016, p. 177). As discussed in Chapter 13, those teachers who dislike NAPLAN testing and wish to cater to the diverse needs of students find themselves constrained in doing so. External pressure is forcing them to incorporate NAPLAN into their teaching (‘teaching to the test’) and this is resulting in a narrow use of *pedagogical approaches*, such as completing practice tests and worksheets (Thompson & Harbaugh, 2013). Teaching has become about compliance and satisfying the needs of the system.

The role of educators as intellectual workers

Educators are central to transforming education in positive and new directions. Although regulated by the policies and priorities of governments, educators are arguably the most responsible for *directly* shaping the daily curriculum experiences of children and young people. The knowledge and beliefs of centre managers, school leaders and teachers influence the hundreds of decisions they make every day related to policies, rules, personal interactions, **pedagogy**, programs of learning and the organisation of activities. These influence what learners do, think and feel. Educators must therefore be aware of their habits of thought, or the forces, bodies of knowledge, cultural norms and beliefs that are consciously and unconsciously embedded in their decisions and actions. Consider, for example, the consequences for learners of the different responses educators might give to the following questions: What are the causes of social, economic and educational disadvantage? How does a child’s social and economic background shape their engagement with education? To what extent is a child’s family, community and social context important to their development and learning? Does learning occur best when learners sit quietly at desks, or when they are interacting with others? How do I view the students I teach? Are children needy, incomplete and vulnerable or strong and competent? How important to learning is the relationship between the educator and the student? What significance should be given to developmental psychology and achieving developmental milestones? Are the official curriculum documents provided by governments incontestable and therefore to be strictly adhered to regardless of the needs of learners? How educators answer such questions reflects certain cultural knowledge and beliefs, and these in turn shape their practices.

Pedagogy: The ways (strategies and approaches) and philosophy of teaching.

It is no overstatement to suggest that educators' ideas about education and learning are informed by their own schooling experience, by what they *already* know and by the current practices in education. Unfortunately, this can lead educators to view the ideas, rules, norms, practices, solutions and events in the field of education as commonsensical, natural or inevitable; for example, NAPLAN testing or the grouping of students according to their sex or age. But, often what appears to be normal and beyond question needs examination because the appearance of naturalness and self-evidence is not necessarily a sign of the way things should be. Rather, the appearance of inevitability silences and hides the influence that humans, culture, power and politics have had on how we *choose* to organise education, and the world for that matter. So, accepting at face value 'the way things are' reinforces the status quo by foreclosing our questioning of the values, beliefs, prejudices, truths, biases, interests and processes that shape our ideas, our norms and our educational practices. It is the mindless observance of established ideas, norms and practices that arguably result in educators not meeting the diverse needs, expectations and aspirations of their students (Smyth, 2012; Smyth & Wrigley, 2013). By contrast, the acts of doubting and questioning empower educators. An educator who is worth their salt asks probing questions, such as: Why do we think and do things like this? How do we know what we know? Upon what bodies of knowledge and assumptions do I base my actions and thinking? What do my choices enable and constrain? How might things be otherwise? In asking these questions, educators can explore the complex range of forces that impact on society, education, the knowledge and beliefs they possess, and the actions they take.

While we invite you to begin asking questions, do not expect this book to offer simple answers and quick fixes to the questions educators ask and the problems they face. Today, educators find themselves under immense pressure to demonstrate results, account for their teaching and respond to the latest educational issue or crisis, often manufactured by the media and politicians (Berliner & Biddle, 1995). These circumstances can lead educators to search for a silver bullet to their problems, or 'tips for teachers' that purport to answer the question of 'what works?' The internet facilitates the dissemination of inaccurate information, which brings to mind Mark Twain's comment that '[a] lie can travel halfway round the world while the truth is putting on its shoes'. There is no shortage of private consultancies and corporations seeking to profit from selling seductive and slickly marketed educational solutions (e.g. glossy, pre-packaged programs and ideas). These often lack substance and invite educators 'into a world of blandness, quick fixes, and mindless optimism' (Meadmore & McWilliam, 2001, p. 41). While educators may be tempted to believe that educational problems have readily discernible causes and easy fixes, they must resist uncritically adopting fads that sound intuitive and commonsensical. The hard graft of educating is intellectual work. Educators must critically think about the problems and solutions they are presented with. Consider the *Theory in action* example on the next page.

Theory in action

Written in 1983, Howard Gardner's *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences* proposed a theory of multiple intelligences in response to the perceived too narrow focus on IQ tests as a measure of intelligence. Gardner proposed that rather than possessing a general intelligence, individuals have multiple and distinct forms of intelligence. These include the following 'intelligences': linguistic/verbal, logical/mathematical, musical, spatial, interpersonal, intra-personal, naturalistic and bodily-kinesthetic. Gardner's theory has been very popular with educators; however, there is little scientific evidence in support of it (Klein 1997; Waterhouse, 2006). The theory has been criticised for its use of the concept of intelligence and its vague definitions of its specific intelligences. There is no evidence that validates the existence of Gardner's intelligences, with some authors characterising these as nothing more than skills or abilities. When examined, these intelligences are not separate or distinct as Gardner's theory asserts. They overlap, and this indicates there is a general mental ability that influences specific abilities (e.g. Gardner's intelligences). Waterhouse (2006, p. 253) writes that despite the lack of evidence in support of it, multiple intelligence theory has 'wide currency and, unfortunately, may continue to be applied in education because [it tells] "good news" stories'.

- 1 What do you know of multiple intelligences? What is your opinion of the theory?
- 2 Why might the theory of multiple intelligences be supported by many educators despite questions about its accuracy and claims?
- 3 How can educators know what knowledge they have access to is true?
- 4 There is popular belief that people may be categorised as being either 'left-brained' or 'right-brained'. Left-brained people are supposedly logical and analytical, and right-brained people are supposedly creative and subjective. What evidence is there to disprove this simplistic categorisation of people as being one of either two kinds?

In taking up this critical and questioning stance, educators are invited to be reflective and discerning in their approach to the issues of educating and learning. To achieve this, the following chapters examine society, culture and politics with the goal of provoking reflection on current ideas, knowledge and beliefs in education and more widely. This book offers a toolkit of concepts and perspectives that can be used to thoughtfully and critically view, theorise and question the complex issues surrounding curriculum experiences and 'the curriculum'. This is what Hansen (1997) calls the inquiring teacher: one who discerns, ponders and analyses the perceptions, knowledge, beliefs and personal theories that underpin their professional views and practice. New concepts, ideas and perspectives not only make possible new ways of seeing, like a lens through which to apprehend the world; they also offer the opportunity for different ways to act in the world. This is because thinking and practice are inextricably

tied (Dean, 1998). Our perceptions and practices are linked to, informed by or generated by thoughts, ideas or theories, whether or not these are fully formed or conscious to us. By thinking differently, then, we can live differently through our actions. And by acting differently, we can bring new thoughts and ideas to life.

WHAT IS CURRICULUM?

Many curriculum researchers have theorised ways to understand the term ‘curriculum’, most being motivated by the desire to improve learning. In its narrowest interpretation, curriculum refers to the content of a course or subject. This is a view of curriculum often held by primary and secondary school teachers whose school day is usually organised around interpreting and teaching the subject content outlined by the *Australian Curriculum*. However, does this definition of curriculum do justice to the complexity of teaching and learning? Does it recognise that what an educator might intend to teach might not actually be what is taught or learnt? Are unplanned learning experiences just as important to learning as the planned? Does the early childhood sector in Australia not have curriculum because it does not have an outline of content or subjects for teaching? To answer questions of this kind requires us to broaden our sense of curriculum beyond that of the content and plans of our teaching.

Below are six equally valid and valued ‘types’ of curriculum that speak to the complexity of curriculum and the learning experiences of children and young people. These types interact and overlap, and when taken together they are useful in approaching curriculum. After examining these, we will go on to look at a broader definition: ‘the lived curriculum’.

The intended/official curriculum

When pre-service educators enrol in units about ‘curriculum’, they often expect to learn ‘the curriculum’, or what they are required to teach and assess for specific ages or subjects, such as English, mathematics or science. Curriculum is commonly thought of as the objectives, knowledge and skills contained in official documents that governments and education departments require educators to teach and assess. This understanding usually also encompasses the programs of learning and assessment created by educators and schools in response to the government’s ‘official curriculum’. In Australia, the official curricula include the *Australian Curriculum* (ACARA, 2015) and *Belonging, being & becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia* (EYLF) (DEEWR, 2009).

The national *Australian Curriculum* informs the planning and assessment of the learning of school-aged children and young people in key learning areas. It was intended to replace the separate curriculum frameworks of the states and territories. Consultations with stakeholders and community began in 2008–09 with a blueprint, entitled the *Shape of the Australian Curriculum* (National Curriculum Board, 2009). The *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MYCEETA, 2008), which was agreed to by all state and territory education ministers in 2008, informed the development of the curriculum. In 2014, all states and territories

commenced implementing the Foundation to Year 10 curriculum. At the time of writing, the *Australian Curriculum* is structured according to: year/grades (a Foundation to Year 10 curriculum, and a Senior Secondary curriculum) and learning areas (English, Mathematics, Science, Humanities and Social Sciences, the Arts, Technologies, Language, and Health and Physical Education). It outlines ‘general capabilities’ expected of students, and cross-curricula priorities that should be embedded across all learning areas. Because of its organisation, as a plan of what will be learnt and when, the *Australian Curriculum* resembles a *syllabus*—a form of curriculum. The word ‘syllabus’ is derived from 1600s modern Latin and refers to ‘list’ or main headings, which today we take to mean the outline, main subjects or topics of a course of study.

Although the official curricula are national in scope, the Australian Constitution makes each Australian state and territory responsible for their schooling systems. Consequently, the Federal Government cannot impose a school curriculum on the entire country unless the state and territory governments agree. Currently, each state and territory has modified the *Australian Curriculum* for use by their education systems, meaning there is no single national curriculum.

In contrast to the *Australian Curriculum*, the EYLF is not a syllabus. Used for early years’ settings, the EYLF ‘is not a syllabus, not a program, not a curriculum, not a model, not an assessment tool, not a detailed description of everything children will learn. It is a framework of principles, practices and outcomes with which to build your curriculum’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 3). Rather than stipulate what educators should teach, it outlines key *principles*, *practices* and *outcomes* of teaching and learning in early years’ learning settings for children aged 0–5, and their transition to primary schooling. As a guide for educators about desirable curriculum experiences of children, the EYLF gives educators the freedom to make decisions tailored to their local contexts, which today are very diverse. These contexts include the local community, the physical environment, available resources and the children. The decisions made by educators should enable children to work towards demonstrating and meeting the stated outcomes over a period of time. These documents and their use are discussed in Part 3 of this book.

The intended curriculum is imposed by authorities from above with the intention of organising or regulating the teaching of educators and the learning of children and young people. This raises important questions about which groups decide the content of the official curriculum. Who gets to decide what knowledge is acceptable and necessary such that it becomes ‘school knowledge’ to be taught? Bernstein (1973, p. 85) says curriculum ‘defines what counts as valid knowledge’, and Apple calls ‘official knowledge’ that which those with authority deem to be worthy and valuable (Apple, 2004). Official knowledge often involves ‘selective tradition’, where the knowledge of the *dominant culture* and those with authority is passed off as part of our shared traditions and is therefore significant. In effect, some knowledge is represented as important, objective and factual, while the perspectives and knowledge of other groups are marginalised. Think, for example, about what and how Australian history is taught. Which events are viewed as defining Australia’s history? Whose perspectives and experiences are left out? The intended curriculum is not comprehensive and value-neutral, yet schools and

education systems often legitimate 'limited and partial standards of knowing as unquestioned truths' (Apple, 2004, p. 12).

That is not to say official knowledge is uncontested. The 'control of curriculum has become increasingly contested as different groups have vied to shape this powerful technology in ways that benefit and/or represent their identities and interests' (Seddon, 2001, p. 308). The official curriculum is often a compromise between different powers, beliefs and versions of truth, with the 'final' version being a *modus vivendi*; that is, a settlement despite continuing disagreement—'we agree to disagree'. This settlement becomes the battleground for continued struggle over the official curriculum.

Given the above, we should ask some critical questions of the intended curriculum:

- Who decides what is included in 'the curriculum' and how is this decided?
- What ideas, views and knowledge are selected and omitted?
- Whose view of the world is represented and whose view is marginalised?
- Upon what values, beliefs and truths is the official curriculum based?
- Are all things in the curriculum of equal value?



- 1 How much of the official curriculum should be about preserving and conveying society's cultural knowledges, values and beliefs, and how much should be about preparing children and young people for a future where these knowledges, values and beliefs may change? Who should decide what is worthwhile to know?
- 2 Think back to your days as a primary and secondary student. Was there a 'hierarchy of subjects' at school? Which subjects were at the top and which were at the bottom? Why was this the case? Did this hierarchy enable a social hierarchy of learners? Explain your answer.

The enacted curriculum

The official curricula documents have significant influence over the teaching and learning in early childhood settings and schools in Australia. However, this does not mean that all students of the same year are taught the same thing in the same way. This is because the intended curriculum is always interpreted, translated and enacted by educators, and therefore what is intended is scarcely what is actually enacted.

Many variables influence how educators interpret and enact the intended curriculum. These variables include: the resources available to educators and learners; an educator's knowledge of and beliefs about their learners; the theories of learning to which educators subscribe; the confidence an educator has in what they are teaching; events that occur unexpectedly in the classroom or learning centre; and the expectations of parents, the community and the principal or learning centre manager. This list is potentially endless.

Let us consider a couple of these influences by discussing some examples, beginning with the practice of interpreting curriculum. Each one of us interprets texts differently based on

our prior knowledge, experience, values and prejudices. You have probably had conversations with friends about your conflicting interpretations of the lyrics of a song, a character in a book or the messages of a film. The only way we can comprehend these texts is by interpreting them. As this process of interpretation is shaped by our personal histories and our culture, insofar as culture shapes our views, the meaning we make of texts does not come directly from the text itself, but from an interaction between the reader (you) and the text. Similarly, an educator's interpretation of the official curriculum is influenced by their belief about curriculum and its role; for example, whether they view curriculum as a blueprint, a guide, a roadmap or a recipe to be strictly adhered to. An educator who views the curriculum as simply pieces of information that need to be transmitted to learners will use the intended curriculum differently from an educator who takes the official curriculum as a guide. The latter may use the official curriculum as the basis for creating learning experiences that are relevant and meaningful for their learners. For example, educators may facilitate the learning of narrative elements (such as characters, plots and setting) through simulated computer games, if that is an interest of their students (Gee, 2007; see also Yelland, 2007).

Educators' knowledge and beliefs also influence how the intended curriculum is translated into the classroom. A primary school teacher who believes in an *integrated approach* to learning will not view each 'subject' (English, mathematics, science, etc.) as a discrete unit of knowledge to be learnt through carefully staged activities linked to teacher-determined objectives. They might instead look for the connections between the disciplines, and create rich interdisciplinary learning experiences. So, the learning of mathematical processes and concepts may be integrated with the scientific study of habitats and wildlife, or the geographical and social study of urban development. Similarly, a primary school teacher who is committed to authentic and relevant learning contexts will eschew teaching the curriculum in abstraction (i.e. having learners learn concepts and ideas without meaningful and real-world contexts and examples). Such educators might instead use as a curriculum resource children's '**funds of knowledge**'. These are the experiences, cultural resources and backgrounds of children and young people, such as their practices in the home or their knowledge of popular culture (e.g. television shows) (Gonzalez, Moll & Amanti, 2005). A primary or secondary teacher needing to teach about political power may use students' experiences of the effects of peer group status and hierarchies at school to teach them about the political abuse of power in the twentieth century. Here, curriculum content can be interpreted and explored in relation to students' lives and current events. This fosters the learning of school curriculum knowledge and concepts.

The idea that curriculum is enacted invites educators to move beyond thinking of curriculum as planning documents and statements of content to be simply implemented and assessed. As the above points to, educators translate the official curriculum into teaching strategies and learning experiences in specific contexts. The curriculum that is enacted is therefore shaped by educators' knowledge and beliefs, the routines and rules they establish, the routines, resources and policies of the school or centre, and the documents and artifacts they use or create in the process of translating the curriculum into practice.

Funds of knowledge:

The knowledge, information and skills a child or young person acquires as part of household and community life. These include general knowledge, cultural knowledge, ways of thinking, and skills such as cleaning, shopping and cooking.

Theory in action

The EYLF contends that children's lives are characterised by belonging, being and becoming.

- 1 What is your interpretation of each of these terms?
- 2 Are your interpretations similar to others?
- 3 What might be the consequences (in terms of your professional priorities and practices) of your differing interpretations?

Next, read the EYLF's descriptions of belonging, being and becoming (DEEWR, 2009, p. 7).

- 4 To what extent did your interpretations align with those provided by the official document?
- 5 What might this activity suggest about the relationship between the intended curriculum and interpretation?
- 6 What other parts of the EYLF may be interpreted differently?

The negotiated curriculum

The content and priorities of the official curriculum and departments of education do not always recognise the backgrounds, experiences and expertise of learners from culturally diverse, disadvantaged or marginalised backgrounds. When the curriculum is negotiated, power is placed into the hands of the people who are subject to it: children and young people. Here, educators reach out to their students, and learning is opened up to the input of learners, parents and the community. Curriculum negotiation is an opportunity for learners and their communities to contribute to what and how they learn (Boomer, Lester, Onore & Cook, 1992). It acknowledges that a one-size official curriculum does not fit all learners. It offers the opportunity to move away from making the 'learning self' compliant to the official curriculum, as simply a passive receiver of the knowledge of the curriculum and teacher. By contrast, the learner is involved in their learning—not passive, but 'in transition and in motion towards previously unknown ways of thinking and being in the world' (Ellsworth, 2005, p. 16, original emphasis).

A negotiated curriculum may involve the educator having conversations with learners and their communities to learn about their experiences, and to identify their strengths and interests. As an example, Clark's *mosaic approach* is a multi-method approach to maximising the potential for children to communicate with adults and for adults to listen. She writes:

The value of talking to young children is not overlooked. However, tools are suggested which also enable young children to communicate their ideas and feelings to adults in other ways, for example through photographs, drawing, and walking. These methods may in turn serve as a springboard for more talking, listening and reflecting. (2010, p. 67)

A negotiated curriculum improves the relevance and meaningfulness of learners' curriculum experiences. It exemplifies a *strength-based approach* to teaching and learning, where educators capitalise on the strengths and expertise of learners, rather than view learners in terms of their weaknesses—what they do not know and cannot do. For example, educators can use children's and young people's interest in and knowledge of popular culture as a vehicle for teaching school-based literacies, with their interests used to 'extend learning into other culturally valued areas, rather than extend or encourage the interest per se' (Hedges, 2011, p. 28). In other words, a negotiated curriculum uses learners' out-of-school experience, knowledge and expertise to facilitate pre-school and school-based learning.

Were you given many opportunities in your schooling to be involved in decisions about the curriculum or your experiences of learning? If yes, what were they? Were these opportunities successful or miserable failures? Why? If no, what do you think about not being given these opportunities?

ASK
YOURSELF

The emergent curriculum

The emergent curriculum is mostly used in early childhood settings, but is also found in primary schools (Jones & Nimmo, 1994). Rather than an educator determining beforehand the entire learning a child will experience, as expressed in a curriculum program, the educator is more responsive to the children's lives, passionate interests and concerns. The curriculum emerges from 'the particular connections that develop as participants bring their own genuine responses to the topic and collaboratively create the course to follow out of these multiple connections' (Wein, 2008, p. 5). In short, the curriculum emerges over time with only minimal planning. So, for instance, an educator who finds a young child playing in a puddle after a rain shower could use the child's fascination with the pooled water to facilitate the child's learning. The educator might ask questions about the source of the rain and why the puddle has formed, and the child's verbal and physical responses may direct further activity and questioning. Here, the learning experience emerges from the interactions between the environment, the child and the educator, who keeps an open mind about the learning that should or could take place at any given moment. In this child-centred approach, the educator does not impose a plan on the child, but directs the child into meaningful learning experiences by observing, listening, questioning and guiding them. Learning is an open and ongoing process and learning outcomes cannot be fully known in advance.

Again, think back to your days as a primary and secondary student. To what extent were your teachers curriculum-centred or learner-centred? Why do you think this? What does each approach look like in schools?

ASK
YOURSELF

The hidden curriculum

Curriculum is more than what we hear and see. Children and young people also learn about the world from a 'curriculum' that is hidden from view—what has been termed the hidden, covert and implicit curriculum (Apple, 2004; Eisner, 1985). The hidden curriculum refers to the

learning that, while not part of the explicit and official curriculum, nevertheless occurs simply by the learner being a part of a school, classroom or learning centre. The hidden curriculum is not intentionally concealed from view, but is a result of the often taken-for-granted practices of learning settings, which indicate what is valued and normal. These include ideas and practices related to what is taught and how (e.g. the education system's focus on logical, mathematical and linguistic ways of knowing), the organisation of time, school rituals and routines, the texts used and given authority, the interactions between teachers and students, and examination and grading systems (Cornbleth, 1991).

The decisions of educators are central to the hidden curriculum. The hidden curriculum exists in the choices of educators that reflect their personal beliefs and assumptions. For example, when educators assign tasks to students based on their sex—for example, asking female students to clean whiteboards and male students to move heavy objects—they might unconsciously assume that some activities are appropriately male and others appropriately female. Such a division of tasks sends messages about sex-gender norms—that males and females have different strengths and weaknesses. This covert learning about sex-gender norms is often reinforced by the distribution of punishments and rewards (e.g. what girls and boys are differently praised for), and advice to students on subject enrolments and future career choices.

While the personal beliefs of educators shape the hidden curriculum, so too does their professional knowledge, such as their knowledge of learning and education. The educator who subscribes to the 'banking model of education' views themselves as the expert transmitting their wisdom to students. The content of teaching is pre-packaged information that is largely viewed as beyond question. Students are viewed as passive, 'empty containers' waiting to be filled with facts. The banking model 'transforms students into receiving objects. It attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power' (Freire, 1970/2012, p. 77). This approach teaches a hidden curriculum; that is, students learn that the teacher is the centre of the learning process, that knowledge is uncontested facts, and that academic success depends on absorbing, memorising and regurgitating information for the teacher.

The organisation of learning settings implicitly teaches children and young people about the world. While the explicit curriculum does not teach it, rewards systems, routines, school uniforms, rules, assessment practices and pedagogies teach children and young people the ethic of work, the need to obey those with authority, and the consequences of not conforming to the expectations of those with authority. Based on his observation of the first days of kindergarten of a group of children, Apple (2004) argues that through the teacher's rules, expectations and practices of reward and reprimand, children are initiated into the *world of work* rather than into learning the official curriculum content:

personal attributes of obedience, enthusiasm, adaptability, and perseverance are more highly valued than academic competence... It is in the progressive acceptance, as natural, as the work *tout court*, of meanings of important and unimportant knowledge, of work and play, of normality and deviance, that these lessons reside. (Apple, 2004, p. 54)

For Apple, the hidden curriculum is a concept that makes visible the *power* that operates in educational settings to train children and young people to be productive workers in the economy. The hidden curriculum teaches them self-discipline and compliance, to accept the status quo as normal and right, to work hard, and to conform to socially desirable forms of behaviour. Succeeding in school is as much about learning the official curriculum as learning and abiding by the hidden curriculum. Of course, the hidden curriculum can be resisted by students (Willis, 1977). It may also be beneficial, but this depends on the view of the people concerned (Seddon, 1983).

Think about your primary or secondary school experiences.

- 1 What things were rewarded and punished? What did this distribution of rewards and punishment teach students about schooling, learning and life?
- 2 Did your teachers unconsciously send messages through their actions and interactions about what behaviours were acceptable for, and expected of, males and females?
- 3 Whose voices were heard in school assemblies and whose voices were not?
- 4 Which subjects were valued and how did you know?
- 5 How was 'success in school' understood? How was this definition conveyed to students?

ASK YOURSELF

Theory in action

Watch the 1989 film *Dead Poets Society* starring Robin Williams. If you don't have the time, then watch the first 15 minutes. Set in the 1950s, Williams plays an unorthodox English literature teacher, Mr Keating, who arrives at an elite traditional school. He ruffles the feathers of parents and teachers through his unusual attitudes and teaching approaches, which seek to inspire the freethinking of his teenage students. The expressions on his students' faces as he interacts with them reminds me of Ellsworth's description of *learning in transition*. This is:

the sensing of new and previously unthought or unfelt senses of self, others, and the world in their process of emergence ... It is the look of someone who is in the process of losing something of who she thought she was. Upon encountering something outside herself and her own ways of thinking, she is giving up thoughts she previously held as known, and as a consequence she is parting with a bit of her known self. (2005, p. 16)

As you watch the film, consider the ideas about education, learning, students, teachers and the routines of school life being challenged by Mr Keating.

- 1 What is the hidden curriculum in Mr Keating's class? How is it different from the traditional classroom?
- 2 To what extent is Mr Keating's approach child-centred or *curriculum-centred*?
- 3 What do the faces of the students as they get to know Mr Keating tell you about their education? Is it similar to Ellsworth's description of *learning in transition*?

- 4 How possible is it to be an unorthodox teacher like Mr Keating?
- 5 What do you want the hidden curriculum to be in your learning centre or classroom?

The null curriculum

What is not included in the curriculum can be just as important to the learning experience of children and young people as what is included. Closely related to the hidden curriculum, the null curriculum refers to what curriculum documents and educators deliberately or inadvertently omit from the teaching and learning experience of learners (Eisner, 1985). An obvious example of the null curriculum is the omission from the official curriculum of subjects such as naturopathy and anthropology. Educators also make decisions to censor the learning of children and young people on what they might regard as 'sensitive' topics, such as sex, sexuality, death, domestic violence and bodily functions. These are often deliberately ignored, or talk about them is discouraged by educators, even in situations where learners show an interest in finding out about them. Educators may eschew a topic because it is considered contentious by community standards, it is counter to their values and beliefs, it makes them uncomfortable, or they believe it is not in the best interest of the learners. The notion of the null curriculum also refers to omissions within subject areas.

The null curriculum raises important issues about what children and young people actually learn in schools, the official curriculum, the decision-making of the educator, and the purpose of education. Critical questions need to be asked, such as: What is omitted from the intended curriculum and why? Whose interest does the omission benefit? Is it the responsibility of the educator to decide what topics and learning are off-limits? Who is responsible for providing learners of all ages with opportunities to discuss important and controversial issues, especially if these are not discussed elsewhere? Can all children see themselves and their lives represented in curriculum knowledge and resources?

The lived curriculum

The lived curriculum is a broader definition of curriculum that encompasses the above understandings. This signifies a notion of curriculum as the experiences of learners in a learning setting, whether or not those experiences are planned (Pinar, 2012). For Marsh and Willis, curriculum is the interaction between the plans and experiences in a learning setting:

The phrase 'an interrelated set of plans and experiences' refers to the fact that the curricula implemented in schools typically are determined in advance but, almost inevitably, include unplanned activities that also occur. Therefore, the curricula enacted consist of an amalgam of planned and unplanned activities; likewise, the experiences of students within this amalgam can be anticipated in some ways but not in others. Precisely how plans and experiences are interrelated can vary considerably. (2003, p. 13)

This notion of curriculum fits with the learning that occurs in early childhood settings. In early years learning centres, there is no ‘mathematics’ or ‘history’ subjects, or formal lessons where educators instruct learners in content from a curriculum document. But, this does not mean there is no curriculum. There is—just not as it is commonly thought of in primary and secondary schooling. The early childhood setting provokes us to broaden our view of curriculum. Informed by New Zealand’s *Te Whāriki* curriculum document (Ministry of Education, 2016), curriculum in the early years’ context is defined in the EYLF as ‘all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned, that occur in an environment designed to foster children’s learning and development’ (DEEWR, 2009, p. 9).

This notion of curriculum is foreign to the conception of curriculum frequently associated with primary and secondary schooling, where learning is highly structured and organised around both the ages of learners and curriculum subjects. Many educators in primary and secondary schools regard curriculum as the ‘intended curriculum’. However, primary and secondary educators should think about the *curriculum experiences* of their students. Teachers make hundreds of curriculum decisions every day, and these are ‘curriculum decisions’ because they directly and indirectly enable or constrain the experiences and learning of children and young people. Consider, for example, the choices educators make about the learning environment. Educators make decisions about how to organise their rooms, where to sit their students, how to organise the students’ time, the items they exhibit on the walls, whether to include a role-play area, what books to include on the bookshelf, whether learning happens outside, and the technologies they use (Drabble, 2013). These choices shape the experiences of learners in expected and unexpected ways, whether that learning reflects the official curriculum documents or not. In fact, often the most important thing students learn from their schooling is not planned or contained in the official curriculum. In this sense, educators do not *deliver* the curriculum, they *create* curriculum with children and young people. Curriculum studies and curriculum theory are therefore concerned with educational experiences (Pinar, 2012).

Theory in action

Unplanned curriculum experiences occur in the interactions between individuals, facilitated by the teacher’s planning. I recall, as an eager pre-service teacher, quietly sitting at the back of a classroom, observing an English lesson in a metropolitan secondary school. The teacher had set students the task of scanning *Dolly* and *Girlfriend*, popular teen girl magazines. Handing out the magazines from a full crate, she explained that the task’s purpose was to explore how texts reinforce sex-gender stereotypes. The students busied themselves, flicking through the magazines and talking among themselves about their observations. In the whole-class discussion that followed, many of the students demonstrated insight. One student identified how the magazine’s images of girls and women conveyed our culture’s norms of feminine beauty as white, blonde and slim.

Another observed how other images portrayed females as confident, independent and career-focused. Unfortunately, it appeared a small group of boys did not take the lesson seriously. As the discussion was winding up, one of them piped up, 'They should be in the kitchen anyway!' The student's comment was audible to the entire class, but interestingly the teacher did not question or scold the student. The comment was left to hang in the air, absorbed by all the students before drifting away. As a pre-service teacher, this moment illustrated the power of the unsaid. I asked myself: 'What did the teacher's silence teach the students?'

- 1 Create a list of messages the teacher's silence might have communicated to the students in the classroom.
- 2 What might have been a suitable course of action taken by the teacher following this incident, not only immediately following it, but also in the medium- and long-term?

KEY FEATURES OF THIS BOOK

This book uses a number of features to support your comprehension of and engagement with the ideas being explored. These features are probably now becoming familiar to you. They include:

- *Ask yourself*
Often, the best place to begin your learning is with your own experiences. The *Ask yourself* questions are intended to use your personal thoughts, beliefs and experiences to reflect on what you are reading. You are encouraged to think about how your personal thoughts, beliefs and experiences shape your views of education and the world, and how education, society, culture and politics shape your views and experiences.
- *Theory in action*
Thoughts are tied to our practice, or what we say and do, and how we organise activities such as teaching and learning. The *Theory in action* feature encourages you to think about how the ideas you are reading about surface in people's experiences, and can be applied to educational contexts. Some of these require reading and investigating documents, and others are descriptions of experiences, scenarios or 'cases'. You should read the cases carefully. The *Theory in action* questions encourage you to use the concepts, ideas and perspectives discussed in the chapter.
- *Questions and activities*
The questions and activities posed at the end of each chapter encourage you to apply, explore and extend the key ideas and concepts presented. There are a range of different activities, which include further reading, discussing with peers, and reflection.
- *Key further readings and resources*
There is a list of useful readings and resources at the end of each chapter. These resources will assist you in developing and extending your understanding of the ideas contained in the chapter.
- *Glossary*
There is a glossary of key terms and their definitions at the end of this book.

Conclusion

Curriculum is more than a document or plan. It encompasses all that a learner experiences in a learning context, whether these experiences are intended, unexpected or hidden. Given that curriculum encompasses so much, we cannot confine the study of curriculum to the study of official curriculum documents. Rather, curriculum studies must encompass the study of the plethora of influences on learning contexts, the decision-making of educators and the lives of learners. It must attend to the political, social, cultural and economic forces and relations that impact on the experiences of learners and educators.

QUESTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

- 1 Speak to someone you know about what they understand 'curriculum' to mean. Does their understanding of curriculum align with the notions of curriculum outlined in this chapter?
- 2 Ask this same person what their fondest memory of school is. Is their fondest memory related to the official curriculum or to something else? How might their response influence your approach to teaching and curriculum?
- 3 Decisions made about curriculum shape the kind of society we become. Find and read a curriculum document (e.g. the *Melbourne declaration on educational goals for young Australians* or the *EYLF*), looking for key words and ideas. What kind of society does it promote? Do you agree with its vision? What does this say about your knowledge, beliefs and values?
- 4 To what extent should school education be an end in itself, and to what extent should it be a preparation for later life? How might school education be different if it were treated as an end in itself?
- 5 Read the following about curriculum *stakeholders*:
 - *Business groups* view education as crucial for preparing people for the labour market (jobs), so schools should make young people employable and productive. Business groups have often advocated for the development of a narrow set of skills, such as basic literacy, numeracy, communication and problem-solving.
 - *Governments* aspire to the same economic goals as business groups; however, governments have additional priorities and concerns, such as improving teacher standards and educational outcomes, supporting the intergenerational transmission of cultural knowledge, and addressing disadvantage and inequality to improve the life prospects, health, wellbeing and productivity of the population and specific groups (e.g. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children and low socio-economic status children).
 - *Educators* have an interest in what comprises the intended curriculum because they teach it. Educators bring their professional knowledge and first-hand experiences of teaching to discussions about what should form the curriculum. The teachers' unions and professional teacher bodies often represent the views of educators.
 - *State education departments* are responsible for education systems in Australia. They are responsible for policy development, policy implementation, ensuring students receive a high standard of education, and making schools accountable.
 - *Politicians* might have personal and ideological interests. The former Prime Minister John Howard, for example, used the power of his position to argue for history as a separate curriculum subject, rather than it being integrated into social studies/ society and environment.
 - *Education researchers* attempt to shape the curriculum. Using research they have conducted into teaching, learning, subjects and education policy, these experts offer

advice on curriculum and pedagogy. This research can also express the viewpoints of educators, parents and learners.

- *Interest groups* include 'think tanks', such as the Grattan Institute and the Institute of Public Affairs. These privately funded organisations produce reports on educational issues, often reflecting the ideological interests of think tanks, lobby group or funders.
- *Children* are stakeholders in the curriculum, but the curriculum is often 'done to them', and they only sometimes have input into what they are taught.

Create a ranked list of the above stakeholders you think have the most influence over the intended curriculum and discuss the merits of your list. Next, create a second ranked list of stakeholders you believe *should* have the most influence. Discuss the discrepancies between your two lists.

KEY FURTHER READINGS AND RESOURCES

These internet search terms may assist you in sourcing further information on the ideas presented in this chapter: Curriculum experiences, Economic inequality Australia, Enacted curriculum, Emergent curriculum, Funds of knowledge, Hidden curriculum, Intended curriculum, Lived curriculum, Null curriculum.

PRINT RESOURCES

Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations [DEEWR]. (2009). *Belonging, being & becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework for Australia*. Canberra: Australian Government.

This is the curriculum framework document for early years' education. Read the introductory chapter to understand the philosophies and ideas that shape this document.

ONLINE RESOURCES

ABC podcast: http://mpegmedia.abc.net.au/rn/podcast/2012/10/edp_20121004.mp3

Curriculum is more than a document or plan of content to be taught. This podcast concerns the design of a 0–8 learning setting. Learn about the choices made by the designers and educators to help children transition in their learning as they age.

Australian Curriculum: www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/development-of-australian-curriculum

This website provides information about the process for the development of the *Australian Curriculum*.

Forest kindergartens push back against academic focus for young kids: <https://ww2.kqed.org/news/2014/11/14/forest-kindergarten-play-nature-based-alternative/>

Learning experiences are shaped by how educators organise learning environments. This article/podcast explores the use of non-conventional learning environments.

Foundation for Young Australians: www.fya.org.au and <http://unlimitedpotential.fya.org.au>

These websites provide articles, data and information resources about young Australians. They are testaments to Australia's diverse character.

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