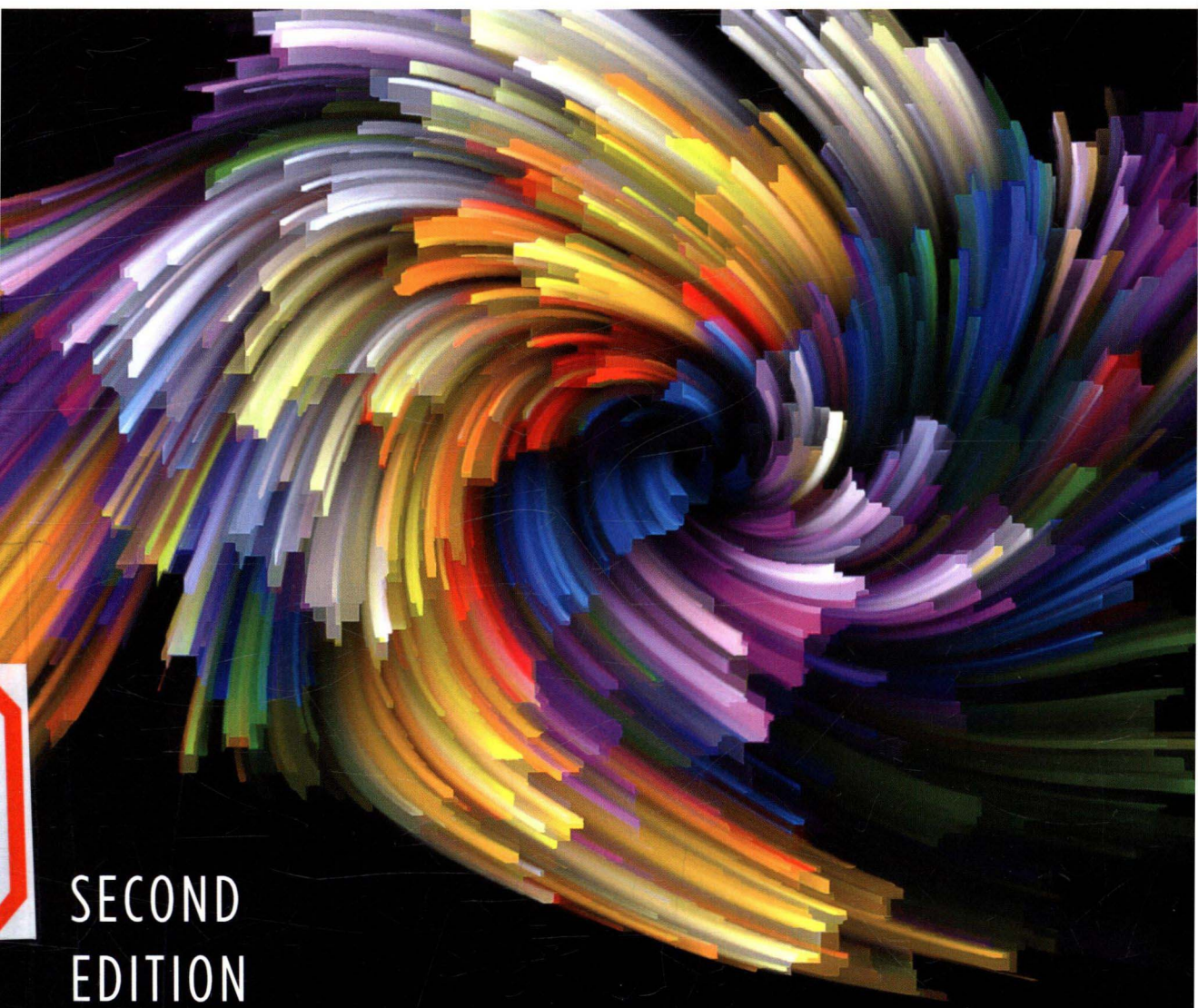




WESLEY NULL

CURRICULUM

FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE



SECOND
EDITION

"Curriculum: From Theory to Practice gives its readers a powerful framework that embraces both classical and contemporary theorists for the mapping of traditions in education, curricula, and curriculum-making. At the same time, it makes a case for the importance of a deliberative tradition of educational thought that can embrace the theory and the practice of the book's title as well as the moral and the practical. I look forward to introducing students to the curriculum field by way of this book."

—**IAN WESTBURY**, professor emeritus of curriculum and instruction,
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

"Wesley Null combines in this work the deft hand of an educational historian with the knowledge and skill of a curriculum scholar. His analysis of deliberative curriculum—and its attendant synthesis through the work of past and present curriculum thinkers—is both original and imaginative. Not only is the theory of curriculum examined, but the foundation is provided for students and practitioners to make meaning of the field in all its processes and outcomes. Null's commitment to balance in curricular theory and practice is exemplary. This well-crafted and thoughtful book is a noteworthy contribution to the arena of curriculum studies."

—**JOHN A. BEINEKE**, distinguished professor of educational leadership
and curriculum, Arkansas State University

***CURRICULUM: FROM THEORY TO PRACTICE* INTRODUCES READERS TO CURRICULUM**

theory and how it relates to classroom practice. Wesley Null divides the curriculum field into five unique traditions: systematic, existential, radical, pragmatic, and deliberative. After one chapter on each perspective, Null presents examples of problems that commonly arise within elementary schools, middle schools, high schools, and universities. This new, second edition expands the scope of the first and updates the text to include references to contemporary issues.

WESLEY NULL is vice provost for undergraduate education at Baylor University. He also serves as a professor of curriculum and foundations of education in the School of Education and the Honors College. He teaches curriculum theory and educational history in the School of Education and great texts in the Honors College.

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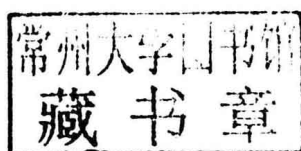
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CURRICULUM

FOR MY PARENTS

Master teachers and curriculum-makers

We wish all men to be educated in all the virtues.

—JOHN AMOS COMENIUS, *The Great Didactic*

Foreword

JARED STALLONES

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

Preface to First Edition

DOZENS OF books on curriculum are published every year. Only time will tell if *Curriculum: From Theory to Practice* will stand out in a crowd, but my hope is that it provides a unique contribution to the field not only because of the way it depicts five curricular traditions, but also the way it addresses curriculum problems. I hope the book will introduce students to the exciting field of curriculum while at the same time showing experienced scholars some new ways to approach an old subject.

My journey with curriculum began in the summer of 1995 when I took a graduate course entitled “Curriculum: Theory into Practice” from Dr. Alan W. Garrett at Eastern New Mexico University. Alan combined stories and structure in a way that I found fascinating. The concept of curriculum at first seemed a bit impersonal, but during that course I came to realize that curriculum is as much a personal quest as it is an institution. When I began graduate school, I thought I was primarily interested in the foundations of education (i.e., the history and philosophy of education), but I have since learned that curriculum has a way of integrating thought and action that foundations of education will never have. As someone who is part educational historian, I remain deeply involved in the foundations of education field, but, at least professionally, I know that I am most satisfied when teaching “Curriculum Theory and Practice,” my version of Alan’s course that I teach at Baylor.

My goal with *Curriculum* has been to offer an approach to curriculum theory and practice that hits the mean between several extremes that, when put into practice, harm the effort to create good curriculum and teaching. The nature of these extremes will become apparent throughout the text, but they revolve around the questions of theory and practice, the personal and the institutional aspects of curriculum, and the proper balance between experience and knowledge when creating curriculum. Good curriculum-makers, and indeed good teachers, know they must constantly search for ways to balance—in theory and practice—all of these complex dimensions of curriculum and teaching. This task is sometimes easier said than done, but I do know that curriculum is the path to finding the mean between so many extremes. I am hopeful that the cases presented in Part II and the curriculum dilemmas in Appendix A will provide readers with the opportunity to find this mean in both discussion and practice.

My interest in writing this book began as I was working with William A. Reid on the second edition to his *The Pursuit of Curriculum: Schooling and the Public Interest*. After working on that book with Bill, I decided that the tradition he had worked to uphold for many years has the potential to remake not only curriculum, but entire communities as well. The four years I have worked to produce this book have been full of countless ups and downs, both personal and professional. During this time, my personal curriculum has brought into my life new babies, a positive tenure decision, colleagues leaving and arriving, soccer coaching when I knew nothing about the sport, piano recitals, gymnastics, a first fishing trip with my son, and a cancer scare for my wife. Some of these experiences have been liberating and others not, but I must say that, because of friends and family, the final push to finish this book has been nothing short of liberating. I hope reading it will do the same for those who spend time with what I have written.

Wesley Null
Waco, Texas
August 2010