

**Book Review:**  
**Fundamentals of Curriculum:**  
**Passion and Professionalism (2nd Edition)**  
**By Decker Walker**

Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2003

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Many curriculum textbooks focus on curriculum design and evaluation, or provide practical tools for the practitioner; few textbooks provide both. The textbook, *Fundamentals of Curriculum: Passion and Professionalism* second edition (2003) by Decker Walker, seeks to fill this gap. The design structure of *Fundamentals of Curriculum* is set up under two broad themes: perspectives and practice. This structure is useful for the seasoned professional curriculum designer and evaluator, as well as the novice curriculum user. One problem with deciding on what curriculum to teach is that there are unavoidable consequences of marginalizing something simply because it is left out; however the constraints on resources dictate that something must be left out. Furthermore the problem of not teaching enough of a curriculum can create its own societal problems. Walker does a good job of positioning the question of what to teach with the balance of what not to teach, the implications of both, and how societal influences guide these decisions. He also indicates that stability in society makes these curriculum decisions difficult; stating "social and cultural change make the curriculum problem hard" (page xiii).

Walker positions the importance of curriculum planning and theory in the context of "the heartbeat of American society." The author specifically states that this book is for anyone who has already had some experience with curriculum, especially the curriculum professional, developer or reformer. However, the book is for anyone with an interest in curriculum and it offers practical tools along with historical and theoretical foundations for developing a strong, rich curriculum.

In the introduction of *Fundamentals of Curriculum*, Walker explains the uniqueness of this textbook. Walker's first edition attempted to be broad enough yet specific enough that graduate students, teachers, and professionals would all benefit. The first edition, according to Walker, was the culmination of over ten years of teaching and practice. There are four characteristics that the author indicates are unique to this text; it is comprehensive, rigorous, practical, and professional. Walker suggests that the book attempts to be comprehensive in that it acquaints the reader with the various "schools of thought, the major value systems, the major lines of activity, and the major forms of inquiry in the field" (page xv). The text is rigorous in several ways; it tackles the most scholarly and rigorous research on curriculum questions while using research and scholarship to ground the discussions of curriculum issues, which, in turn, aids readers in understanding the various aspects of performing rigorous studies of curriculum questions. This rigor is intended to prepare students with the skills required to conduct scholarly studies that meet high standards of inquiry.

The central focus of the book is to weave theoretical frameworks with practical curriculum practice. Hence the author defines curriculum broadly, as "a particular way of ordering content and purposes for teaching and learning in schools" (p. 4). This broad definition is intentional and forms the argument for curriculum negotiation. As such, curriculum becomes the vehicle through which America's identity is shaped; specifically "students will be shaped by the purposes for which we teach a subject as well as by what we teach them" (p. 13). Democratic societies are faced with a smaller core of agreed upon shared values and "a common culture" is more difficult to define. The broad definition also allows for various goals of curriculum. According to Walker, curriculum functions as "a form of ritual that expressed and affirmed the tradition while also functioning as a means for transmitting it" (p. 15).

After the author spends time on defining curriculum, he then details what curriculum specialists do to constantly improve curriculum. This leads to how curricula have changed since the advent of the American School. In this section the author discusses the evolution of curricula and its delivery in schools, as influenced by several specific events—specifically, early social reformists and progressives, Dewey's Progressive Laboratory School at the University of Chicago, The Committee of Ten, and Sputnik. Walker gives a succinct description of how curriculum has evolved over the past 200 years. Many of the events were instrumental in influencing the push toward a national curriculum policy. The National Defense Education Act particularly "funded projects designed to update

content and curriculum materials in science, mathematics, and foreign languages and to train teachers in the new content” (p. 45).

Walker turns from a historical approach in order to contrast progressive and traditional curriculum theories. Consequently, by using actual examples Walker illustrates how curricula differ and under what ideological frameworks they operate; as such, students begin to understand how curriculum theories shape curricular decisions and students begin to understand how to critically analyze a curriculum. New curricular theories are then introduced along with tools for assessing a good curriculum theory. These tools are essential to every student embarking on curriculum design and evaluation, they include: validity (logical, factual, and meaningful), theoretical power, serviceability, and morality.

It would seem like a logical transition to discuss curriculum studies here. However, it appears after a discussion of curriculum reform. Thus, Walker describes curricular research as secondary to the profession, stating “professional practice is primary, and research has value when and if it helps to improve practice” (p. 132). By strategically placing this chapter after curriculum reform, Walker validates the argument that it is through stakeholders that curricular decisions are made—not through research. Although Walker’s perspective could be right; the need to substantiate curricular reforms through pertinent research may win more stakeholders than Walker portrays. Walker paints a picture of curricular reform where advocates work through constituents in order to “implement its values and priorities” (p. 117). The system is criticized for its lack of continuity, when compared to centralized education systems, and one that is open to everyone “but in which different students receive different curriculums” (p. 118). Walker approaches multiple methods of curriculum reform to illustrate other possibilities for curriculum policy, such as standards-based reforms, high stakes testing, and accrediting associations. The three research traditions—scientific, humanistic, and practical—of curriculum studies are introduced along with a detailed description of research limitations, making the research more robust, and on interpreting and using findings.

The most exciting and instrumental portions of the text are the practical sections. In these sections (curriculum practice, improving curriculum practice, improving classroom curriculum, and improving school curriculum), Walker provides tools for the seasoned and novice instructor. Practical tips include such topics as: scheduling and pacing activities, selecting and planning activities, bringing the curriculum to life, and motivating students to follow the curriculum through activities that are meaningful to them. Practical tips are also provided for administrators as well, such as staff organization which can encourage

collaboration, or in-services geared to desired curricular improvements. These practical suggestions assist individuals with the delivery of curricular content and provide the necessary tools to reach the students receiving this content or the teachers that are delivering it. Further, approaches to improving the curriculum are provided using examples in practice, specifically, practical reasoning through deliberation. Both methods are highlighted and examples of each to improve the curriculum are explored. Best of all, Walker cautions the reader that “deliberation only leads to improvement under certain conditions” (p. 234) and these caveats are detailed to help the reader understand the difficulty in fair deliberation that can actually improve the curriculum.

Walker’s text is an excellent introductory tool for understanding the scope of curriculum design, evaluation and theory. Students will be able to understand the foundations of curriculum, through Walker’s historical analysis, the theoretical underpinnings connected to curriculums, and methodologies for curriculum evaluation. However, more importantly, students will be able to practice curriculum delivery and improve their expertise in real settings. As such, these practical tools may develop the necessary skills that curriculum theorists and researchers need to become experts in the field of curriculum development and evaluation.