

Introduction

What do curriculum practitioners do? How is their work to be conceived and enacted? Do existing formulations of this work adequately express and meaningfully communicate what is to be done and how to do it? How flexible and adaptable are these formulations in differing settings and circumstances? Is one universal conception of this work desirable or not? These and other related questions form the impetus for a search for a grammar of curriculum practice.

This book addresses the discourses and practices enacted by curriculum practitioners. It undertakes systematic reflection on the distinctive words and discourses and the distinctive deeds and practices employed by curriculum practitioners. Its aim is to formulate an outline of a grammar of curriculum discourse and practice that facilitates understanding and communication among curriculum practitioners and others concerned with their work. The emphasis is on analyzing and clarifying the language of curriculum discourse and practice and on identifying generic structures that underlie the variety of terminology and meanings that surface in ordinary instances of curriculum discourse and practice. Such a grammar constitutes the fundamental structure of curriculum practice on which particular formulations of curriculum discourses, doctrines, actions, and practices can be articulated and acted on. Such a grammar becomes the basis for teaching and learning how to speak about and enact the work that curriculum practitioners do.¹

I choose to refer to the people who do curriculum work as *curriculum practitioners*. While this is not a term commonly given to those who do such work, it is deliberately chosen as a starting point in this effort to create a grammar of curriculum practice as a way to begin to conceive of this work in a new light. Curriculum work has traditionally been referred to as curriculum development, curriculum planning, curriculum making, curriculum designing, curriculum coordinating, curriculum supervision, curriculum management, curriculum negotiating, or using other similar terms. Those who lead this kind of curriculum work have traditionally been called curriculum specialists, curriculum developers, curriculum coordinators, and so on. Terminology of this kind has typically been so ill-defined that curriculum work has been conceived very imprecisely and without much agreement as to what is entailed in doing this work. A new way of conceiving the work of curriculum practitioners is clearly needed.

To label those who do curriculum work as *curriculum practitioners* is to construe their work as a form of professional practice, adopting the language found in the scholarly writings of authors such as Parsons (1968), Schwyzer (1969), Argyris and Schon (1974), MacIntyre (1984), Schatzki (2001, 2012, 2018), Polkinghorne (2004), Schwandt (2005), Green (2009), Kemmis (2010, 2014), Billett et al. (2014), and Mahon et al. (2017). There is precedent for using the language of practice in connection with curriculum work, although it has not been widely adopted or exploited. A number of curriculum scholars have advocated conceiving of curriculum work as a practice. (See box I.1.)

Although these curriculum scholars have consistently observed over several decades that curriculum can be, and for compelling reasons should be, viewed as a practice, this way of conceiving of curriculum work has not become common or very influential in either the conduct of ordinary curriculum activities or in the field of curriculum scholarship.

By contrast, of the two central domains of education—curriculum and teaching—it is the work of teaching that has

Box I.1
Scholars Advocating Curriculum Work as a Practice

Schwab, 1969; Walker, 1971; Westbury, 1972; Connelly, 1974; Pring, 1975/2004; Stenhouse, 1975; Reid, 1978/2013, 1999; Goodlad, 1979; Wise, 1979; Schubert, 1980, 1986; Short, 1983, 1991; Vallance, 1983; Harris, 1985; Yinger, 1987; Connelly & Clandinin, 1988; Walker, 1992; Kemmis, 1995; McCutcheon, 1995; van den Akker 2003, 2013; Walker, 2003; Sears, 2004; Wraga, 2006; Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2008; Dillon, 2009; Gaztambide-Feranadez & Theissen, 2009; Whitson, 2009; Connelly & Xu, 2010; Grimmett & Halvorson, 2010; Connelly & Xu, 2012; Uljens & Ylimaki, 2017; Deng, 2018; Ruzgar, 2018.

been persistently treated as a professional practice and has been more thoroughly studied as a practice than has curriculum work. Teaching has long been construed as a professional practice (e.g., Jackson, 1980; van Manen, 1999; Danielson, 2007; Gitomer & Bell, 2016); so it is surprising that curriculum work has not similarly been understood to be a professional practice. One reason may be because the term *practice* is often taken to mean something performed by an individual and not by groups of people. Unlike teaching practice, which is ordinarily undertaken by an individual teacher, curriculum practice is usually undertaken by a group of individuals collaborating with one another. Curriculum practice is a collective enterprise similar to that undertaken in practices such as producing theater or mining or legislating, and differs from practices such as accounting or surgery or acting that are carried out by individuals. Both of these conceptions of practice are acceptable, as these examples from other fields of practice affirm. Curriculum work should not be excluded from being considered a practice because it involves groups of people.

Whether to call curriculum work a practice, or whether any kind of professional activity should be called a practice, hinges on what definition is given to the term *practice*. So it is with the problem of defining *practice* that we begin the task of creating a grammar of curriculum practice. Attention to defining and elucidating the other key terms included in this topic—*curriculum*, *curriculum practice*, and *grammar*—will follow.