The book cover features a white central area on a yellow background. The title is written in large, bold, sans-serif letters. 'LEARNING' is in red, 'TO TEACH' is in yellow, 'IN THE' is in blue, 'PRIMARY' is in red, and 'SCHOOL' is in red. The words are arranged in a staggered, overlapping fashion. Below the title, the editor's name 'EDITED BY PETER HUDSON' is written in a smaller, grey, sans-serif font. The cover is decorated with several puzzle pieces: a blue one on the left, a yellow one on the right, and a large yellow one at the bottom center. There are also abstract yellow and blue shapes scattered across the background.

**LEARNING
TO TEACH ^{IN} _{THE}
PRIMARY
SCHOOL**

EDITED BY PETER HUDSON

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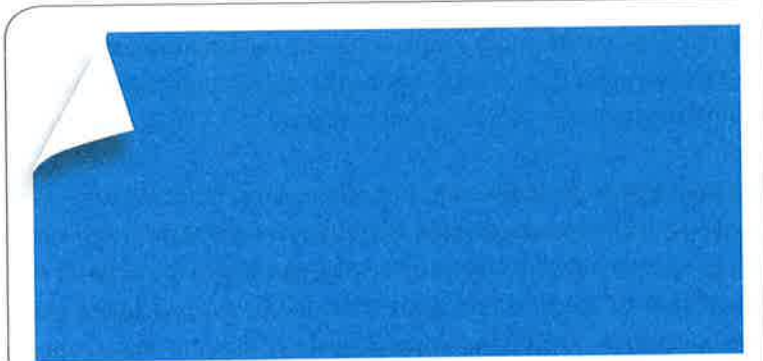
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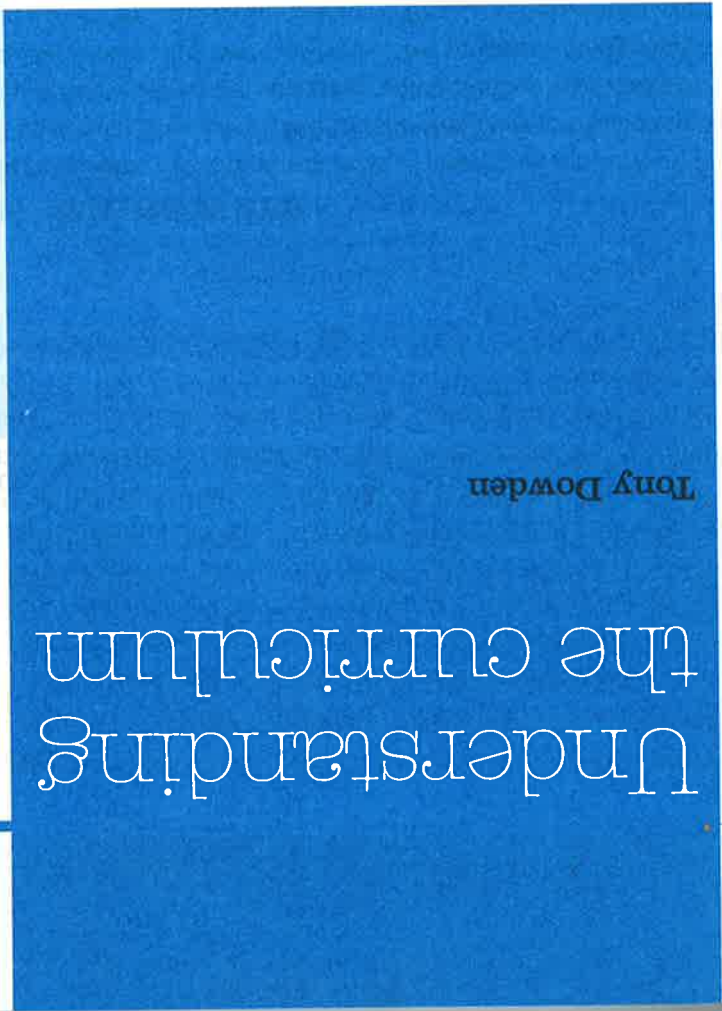
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- Be able to identify the main stakeholders in the curriculum.
- Understand the purpose of national and state/territory curriculum documents.
- Gain insights into the design and construction of the local curriculum.
- Understand why the curriculum always changes.
- Appreciate the importance of meeting student needs within curriculum design.

Learning objectives
By the end of this chapter, you will:



Understanding the curriculum

Tony Dowden

Introduction

The curriculum is crucial to every educational setting. At first glance, the official curriculum, which usually comes packaged in a formidable array of official documents, might seem dry or boring but in reality it is a springboard to powerful and effective classroom teaching. Understanding the basic principles of curriculum design is an important first step, for a preservice teacher, towards making sense of curriculum documents and creating engaging units and lessons for children and young people. This chapter is limited to the discussion of a handful of key topics, with a view to equipping you for further specialised reading at a later stage. These topics are: the curriculum stakeholders, national and state curricula, constructing local curricula at the level of the school and the classroom, understanding that the curriculum constantly changes and examining student-centred approaches to curriculum design and construction.

Theoretical framework

curriculum
the planned learning
in a school or other
educational setting

The term **curriculum**, with the plural form of 'curricula' and the adjectival form of 'curricular', is derived from Latin. It is easy to become mired in discussion and debate about meanings and definitions for curriculum but, in simplified form, this term refers to the course of study students undertake in a learning context. For instance, Marsh (2004) refers to curriculum as the 'planned learnings' in a school (p. 5). Yet, as this chapter shows, a broader definition of the curriculum not only includes the subject matter within each discipline, but also planned and unplanned learning outcomes due to complex interactions between teachers, students, local communities, various interest groups, the global society and digital technologies.

For hundreds of years, schooling in Western countries was a privilege reserved for royalty, the very wealthy and aspiring monks. Schools barely existed, so most students had private tutors. The classical curriculum – inherited from the Greek and Roman civilisations – consisted of the *Trivium* (grammar, logic and rhetoric), the *Quadrivium* (arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy) and, for the most talented students, advanced studies in philosophy and theology at university. The advent of the Industrial Revolution and the subsequent rise of schooling for the masses during the 19th century led to a major rethink about the nature and purpose of the curriculum. In the mid-19th century, British philosopher Herbert Spencer asked, 'What knowledge is of most worth?' (1896, p. 21). Ever since then, educators have engaged in discussions and debates concerning the content and philosophical direction of the curriculum.

Contemporary curriculum theory can trace its roots back to US educator Ralph Tyler's (1949) rationale for curriculum design. Although Tyler believed individual student needs should be met, his rationale for the curriculum emphasised the primacy