Hard times for the teaching of Victorian novels?

A critique of the Australian Curriculum: History

Outdoor Education in the curriculum

Reform in music and arts education

Why language is everyone’s responsibility

Plus: The role of rote learning, Q&A with our Young Australian of the Year and Mary Bluett on Teach for Australia
A new Australian Curriculum

Debra Goldfinch, CEO

Australia is on the cusp of an historic moment in education with the implementation of our first Australian Curriculum from next year in most states and territories.

The Foundation to Year 10 Curriculum in English, Mathematics, Science and History has been published by ACARA. Public consultation has been invited by ACARA on the draft Senior Secondary Australian Curricula in English, Mathematics, Science and History with the view to having the curriculum materials published in late 2012. ACE intends to work with members to take part in this important consultative process.

Over the lengthy development process, what students should be taught under the auspices of a national curriculum has been hotly debated. Special interest groups and concerned individuals alike have pressed, through consultation processes and public debate played out in the media, for the inclusion of particular learning areas. No doubt this debate will continue after the curriculum is implemented.

In this issue of Professional Educator we turn our attention to some of the issues surrounding what Australian students learn and how they learn.

In this issue of Professional Educator while Martin Comte and David Forrest discuss the history of curriculum reform in the Arts, Don Watts and Keith McNaught argue the case for the use of rote learning in knowledge acquisition and Fiona Mueller reminds us of the importance of building a strong foundation in English language for all students.

Earlier this year the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Dickens was commemorated. Love or hate Dickens there’s no doubt his work remains influential today. Grace Moore provides a detailed account of the place of Dickens and other Victorian-era novels in schools today and we’ve asked some classroom teachers what they think of working with Mr Dickens.

At the time of writing, the place of ‘Outdoor Education in the Australian Curriculum remains in doubt. Tonia Gray, Peter Martin and Ian Boyle note some of the benefits they believe students gain from participating in this form of experiential learning.

Young Australian of the Year Marita Cheng discusses her desire to increase the place of free play in early years learning.

Letters to the Editor

Congratulations to Jacqui Kirkman on her article “Don’t Panic! a hitchhiker’s guide to teaching the digital native”. She has addressed the associated dangers and implications of using a label like ‘digital native’ on young people. The Melbourne University 2009 handbook, available online at Educating the Net Gen, confirms that learners may not have the sophisticated capacity that some in the techno-centric world assume exists for them at their fingertips. Jacqui refers us to Selwyn’s work that supports this view, detailed in Digital Natives: The Myths and the Reality. Neil explains the limitations these labels have had on teaching in educational settings, for students and teachers.

David White, University of Oxford, uses the phrase ‘Residents and Visitors’ that dispenses with the categories of age and background. This descriptor supports a more complex and useful exploration of the relationship of the tool and the person. It avoids the generational divisions that phrases like Google Generation, Screenagers, Homo Zappiens or Net Savvy Youth create. These labels tend to create subadult dualism of age, and as Jacqui explained, really need to be discussed and debated by educators. The labels need to be held up against the light of research evidence and examined for their veracity in practice. Dr Mark Bullen, UBC, set up the site Net Gen Skeptic, that acts to dispel unfounded assumptions associated with young people and technologies. Dr Christopher John’s ESRC research project, from Open University, notes that university students find the array of technologies problematic. This aligns with research conducted earlier by Melbourne University. Understanding that students have different skill sets, and experiences, and that social purposes and uses are frequently well developed, but that educational uses may need more refinement and support, has implications. Effective educators proceed to find out what their students know and need to know and do not make assumptions about practices based on age. Rather, good teachers always start with their students, at their point of need, and importantly, build on their students’ existing expertise.

Dr Christine Redman
University of Melbourne

Hard times for the teaching of...
At a time when money is tight and school education is subject to a range of cutbacks, it is hard to understand why governments continue to fund a program with such exorbitant per capita costs and exceptionally high attrition rates.

The idea of placing unqualified ‘teachers’, who sign up for a two year teaching taster experience, in classrooms with some of the country’s most disadvantaged students defies professional and common sense. Yet this is the concept behind Teach for Australia.

The May 2012 edition of Professional Educator included the personal account of Teach for Australia Associate James Gutteridge who was among the program’s first cohort in 2010 and has decided to remain in the teaching profession. James described his journey through the Teach for Australia program and his eventual conclusion that ‘I now realise that education is perhaps the most powerful force for change in society and I now realise that teachers, despite the lack of recognition, are amongst society’s most important leaders.

James’ newfound enthusiasm for the teaching profession and his desire to make a difference to the students he encounters is commendable. James also noted in his article that teacher unions have been critical of the program. He’s right. The lack of evidence of the program’s effectiveness, high attrition rates and costs of its implementation lead me to conclude that importing the program into Australia from the US has been a costly mistake.

Teach for Australia is a program designed to place ‘top graduates’, destined for other careers, in two year teaching positions. These graduates are given a taste of what it’s like to be a teacher before they move on to their original occupational choices, including as lawyers, bankers or airline executives. Some, like James’ may decide to remain as classroom teachers. However, having a required minimum qualification of at least one year of postgraduate teacher education (soon to be raised to two years) they enter the classrooms unqualified after only six weeks of study. They have a 0.8 teaching load and are not directly supervised by a registered teacher.

The secondary schools they are employed in are defined as ‘disadvantaged’ with significant numbers of the students coming from low SES, Indigenous and rural/remote backgrounds. The OECD report Equity and Quality in Education (2012) describes the difficulties of teaching in such schools where the disadvantaged backgrounds of students are amplified by their concentration in the same school.

Placing unqualified ‘associate teachers’ in these schools flies in the face of our government-funded initiatives which recognise the complexity of the teaching task. For example, the National Partnership agreements which provide incentives for more experienced teachers and principals to work in hard-to-staff disadvantaged schools. When the noted American educationist Linda Darling-Hammond was in Australia in 2011 she described how the parent scheme of Teach for Australia – Teach for America – was now being seen in some disadvantaged communities as just another part of the educational inequality experienced by their young people.

A coalition of more than 70 organisations representing stakeholders such as parents groups and disability rights organisations wrote to Congress calling for the end of the practice of allowing people to teach in high need communities, and particularly to students with special education needs and English language learners, who have not completed their training and who have not got the benefit of much stronger preparation and expectation of staying in the profession.

The American experience is relevant because the Teach for Australia package was one of several initiatives imported from the United States by Julia Gillard when she was Federal Education Minister. It was another case of applying an expensive off-the-shelf ‘solution’, contentious in its country of origin, to a very different Australian context.

Australia does not have the same problem as the United States with large numbers of unqualified teachers in its schools. We have relatively uniform teacher registration processes across the country and are moving towards a national system of quality assurance. The philosophy behind the American program, described as a type of ‘Peace Corps-style rescue mission’ (the brightest graduates from elite universities postponing their real careers while they go teaching in disadvantaged schools), can be seen as condescending and unprofessional in an Australian context and an affront to mainstream teacher graduates and the profession as a whole.

The notion that a graduate with a high grade point average in their first degree and only six weeks of teacher education lectures can make more of a difference to the learning achievement of students than fully qualified teachers is without any evidential base. The conclusions of a range of independent research studies comparing the effectiveness of Teach for America participants with fully qualified graduate teachers show that this is not the case.

The research also documents the high US attrition rates (estimates of over 80 per cent for a single cohort) which are built into the design of the program. The Teach for Australia program is sold to applicants as a two year only ‘commitment’. In its first cohort of 45 Associates, including James Gutteridge, entered Victorian government schools in 2010. By the beginning of 2012, James is one of only 20 who remain as teachers in any school system.

The high attrition level becomes of even greater concern when the cost of placing a Teach for Australia participant in a school is compared to the cost of the teacher education of a mainstream course graduate. The latter is around $10,000 per annum.

The Federal Government provided $2.2 million to the Teach for Australia program over four years. By the end of the first four years 128 Associates will have participated in the program. This works out at over $100,000 per student per annum.

At a time when money is tight and school education is subject to a range of cutbacks, it is hard to understand why governments continue to fund a program with such exorbitant per capita costs and exceptionally high attrition rates.

The Teach for Australia organisation’s claims, they are clearly not research-based evidence of the program’s effectiveness. Just as the various profiles and articles in the media about positive experiences of some individual participants who are clearly passionate about the possibility of making a difference are not.

Take away the hype and you are left with a costly recruitment program for a few individuals, a high drop-out rate, the placement of unqualified people in classrooms with high need students, no research evidence to justify its funding and a negative impact on the profession as a whole.

Would doctors, engineers or lawyers tolerate this state of affairs in their professions?


ACE welcomes broad discussion on the issues affecting educators including teacher education.

We invite comments on this article for inclusion in our next edition.
Rote is an essential feature of teaching and learning

Emeritus Professor Don Watts
and Professor Keith McNaught

Can we find a logical explanation for why we expect that those seeking to learn in school and then to proceed to university will have gifts of such a scale that hard work is unnecessary?

A significant part of the commentary on the outcomes of schooling suggests that learning by rote should have no place in contemporary teaching. There is a widely held view that rote learning is an historical hangover in teaching and learning. Learning by repetitive confrontation with factual material is seen as a waste of brain capacity at a time when computer-based information services better serve one’s information needs. This fails to recognise that some things must be learned and mastered and be available for immediate application, particularly those facts and experiences that form the foundation for the development of concepts and theory and of more sophisticated understandings.

There are facts, relationships, theories and concepts that must be learned, by rote since they form essential parts of students’ inventories as they progress through the sequences that lead to understanding. There is potentially a relationship between the loss of rote learning of rhymes, poems and chants in the early education years and the recent dramatic increase in auditory processing disorders.

These observations demand a more enlightened discussion about what we should be teaching our children so they have understandings and factual knowledge that enhance their options for success in further study and training. These assets enrich their lives in terms of employment options and empower them to make informed judgments on the many complex issues that face a participatory democracy.

The recognition of the sequential relationships within knowledge in the planning of learning is critical. When ignored, planned learning is replaced by teaching through a smorgasbord of seemingly unrelated experiences. It is thus by ignoring the importance of sophistication in the conceptual development of disciplines that syllabi become burdened by the demand for the teaching and re-teaching of seemingly unrelated material.

The teaching of subjects as a sequence of unrelated learning challenges seems to be possible in some learning areas, at least for a period of time. These subjects are seen in schools as ‘easy’.

Subjects often mislabelled as ‘hard’ are simply those where linear and sequential learning is of critical importance. The ‘easy’ subjects, in contrast, tend to present a collection of material tainted by faddish ideas and undemanding content based on social commentary.

The ‘hard’ subjects demand the mastery of an essential core of sequential knowledge which brings coherence and understanding to what otherwise would be unrelated factual rote learning. Subjects, such as mathematics and the physical sciences are not necessarily more difficult but demand that mastery of previous learning has been achieved. It is this mastery that demands an understanding of the value of ‘rote’, which delivers the readiness to advance along the interlocked sequences of learning.

This inter-relatedness of learning experiences in developing knowledge is not limited to science and mathematics. It is also clear that the success in the study of foreign languages is underpinned by the repetitive demands of establishing a vocabulary. Musicianship demands hours of practice in order to progress to more difficult work.

The idea that there are aspects of education and learning that demand complete mastery provides no dilemma in some areas of learning. Would anyone seriously question the dedicated repetitive learning and training required in the life of a concert pianist or a ballet dancer? Some of this work can be seen as simply skills training. However, this completely ignores the intellectual understanding and historical background that converts even a faultless playing of notes or a perfect sequence of movements into virtuoso performances.

In the same way our culture finds no problem in recognising the extraordinary repetitive demands made on even the most gifted in creating a great athlete, tennis player or professional footballer.

Can we find a logical explanation for why we expect that those seeking to learn in school and then to proceed to university will have gifts of such a scale that hard work is unnecessary?

There seems to be political commitment to seek mastery in numeracy and literacy in our primary schools. However, we exist in apparent bewilderment about what we should be attempting to achieve through lower secondary schooling.

There is evidence that there are insufficient teachers qualified to teach higher level programs, particularly in mathematics and physical sciences (Brown, 2009). Too many Australian school students complete ‘hard’ subjects, particularly in lower secondary, with teachers without competence or training in these areas. Rather, gridlines and timetables determine who teaches which subjects, particularly in lower secondary, with insufficient teachers qualified to teach higher level programs, particularly in mathematics and physical sciences.

There is evidence that there are many of today’s university entrants who work at a higher level, there is evidence that little is retained from school that provides a useful grounding for the next stage of learning.

In the same way our culture finds no problem in recognising the extraordinary repetitive demands made on even the most gifted in creating a great athlete, tennis player or professional footballer.

The adoption of ‘soft options’ in middle and upper schooling has essentially invalidated the ATAR scores used to rank the readiness of students for university study. Western Australia’s ‘three stages’ of courses have resulted in higher numbers of students completing less demanding courses, and having significantly fewer students achieve an ATAR than is the case in other states. Higher scores in soft options distort the data used in the school rankings.

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There is little assessment that attempts to examine absolute standards of achievement. The scores we give our children are almost entirely based on a comparison with their peers. Ranking of scores produces a distribution of marks for a population and the score follows from a child’s position in that population. Many parents would validly express concerns if they were made aware of how many of the learning objectives their children failed to meet. They would only be partly relieved if they were told that a high percentage failed to meet more objectives than their child.

Our greater concern is that by neglecting the place of rote learning we are, in effect, setting the bar too low. We fail to challenge too many of our children in the critical middle school years.

There was merit in the old ways in which children were told they had ‘failed’. This information did no harm if supportive attitudes and endeavour led to new levels of effort. Too few school reports confront parents and students with the realities and thus support complacency. Boss and Sims (2008, p. 135) state: ‘To live is to experience failure. There appears no way around it. Sooner or later, everyone fails.’ We do students an enormous disservice to deny this reality to them, as failure is a stepping stone to success, and develops resilience.

There is no wisdom in sentencing students to soft options simply because they are not meeting standards in middle school that bear a sequential relationship to future career objectives. The value of rote is that it empowers the learner with a foundation on which they can plan better futures. It is certainly better to insist on retained learning than to ask universities to pick up the task of bridging when, in many cases, nothing is retained on which to build the bridge.

Professor Keith McNaught is Director of the Academic Enabling and Support Centre, on the Fremantle campus of the University of Notre Dame Australia. He has taught in primary, secondary and tertiary education for 30 years, and held various school leadership-roles as both a Deputy Principal and Principal. Keith’s doctorate was related to his passionate interest and involvement in Mathematics Education.

Ermeritus Professor Don Watts held a Personal Chair in Chemistry at the University of Western Australia before becoming Director of the Western Australian Institute of Technology, Vice Chancellor of Curtin University and then of Bond University. He retired from the position of Executive Director of the Northern Territory Education and Training Authority in 1995 and since then has been an Emeritus Professor at the University of Notre Dame, Australia.

References
Dr Susan Kreig – Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of the Early childhood Program, Flinders University

Early childhood educators view learning as a holistic process that involves social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Early childhood education is premised on the understanding that from the moment of birth, children participate in, contribute to, and make sense of their worlds through play, experience and interaction with significant others. Early childhood educators therefore work in ways that sustain children’s dispositions to learn.

Ultimately, if in the process of learning new skills, children lose the dispositions to use them, the educative process has been in vain. A play-based, child-centred pedagogy and curriculum enhance children’s dispositions for learning. Given that these dispositions of exploration, flexibility, creativity, persistence, efficacy and precision are the starting points for deep learning, it is difficult to understand how this play experience could ever be construed as being detrimental to children’s intellectual development.

The Early Years Drama Framework provides the pedagogical principles that underpin teaching and learning in the early years but the ideas and concepts that might be considered important for young children to learn are stated in very broad terms. After two years of implementation, the test may be how the framework aligns with the National Curriculum, which is due to start next year. While ACARA believes the continuity of pedagogy is addressed in the outcomes of the two frameworks, they acknowledge that children will continue to enter primary school with differing levels of preparedness. This question has been addressed by ACARA, who recommend teachers in the first year of school, ‘use their professional judgement and pedagogical repertoire to accommodate the varied learning experiences and diverse backgrounds that children bring to school’, as well as applying principles and practices of the EVLF in their teaching. Teachers may then ‘gradually introduce the content of the Australian Curriculum as learners demonstrate the ability to access it’.

As research and evaluation continues, the validity of these approaches will become evident.

Jesse Dean is Policy Research Officer with ACE National Office

Content knowledge and intentional teaching

Intentional teaching, as the name suggests, involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their actions. This includes an increased focus on literacy and numeracy in early childhood, through the active extension of children’s vocabulary, talking explicitly about rhyming and speech sounds, engaging children in the meaning of printed texts, and using ‘real-life resources to promote children’s use of mathematical language’. This has prompted concerns that Australia is following the path taken in the United Kingdom, where formal education around the ‘3 Rs’ begins between ages 3-4. This has received strong pushback from academics and practitioners alike, who believe this is the ‘schoolification’ of early childhood learning.

Dr Judy Willis, a US-based neurologist and child teacher, suggests that the quantity of information that young children are being asked to learn is placing them under undue stress, which in turn manifests as behavioural problems. Instead she suggests, if children cannot be at home they should be ‘in a loving place where the child feels they can explore, and natural curiosity is encouraged, not regimented’. Dr Susan Kreig, Early Childhood Program Coordinator at Flinders University sees things differently. She argues that while teaching content knowledge goes against traditional early childhood pedagogy, bringing together play and subject-based learning allows children to apply concepts and methods of inquiry from subject disciplines, giving children the opportunity for ‘authentic’ learning.

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Being a framework rather than a curriculum ‘the ideas and concepts that might be considered important for young children to learn are stated in very broad terms’, said Dr Kreig. ‘This openness is deliberate and indicative of the wide range of interests that young children have about their worlds.’

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What the experts say

Prof Bridie Rahan – Senior Research Fellow with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

The Early Years Learning Framework offers all early childhood educators a single national framework to set the first time. This enables families and staff as they move round the country to have similar and clearer expectations and understandings. However, the definition of early literacy (copied directly from the NZ Early Childhood Curriculum) is misleading and entirely inappropriate for supporting the literacy development into the early years of schooling.

In particular, the Victorian government has adopted this definition straight into the VELDF which covers the age range 0 – 8 years! Teachers in the early years of schooling may well have some views on this definition, especially with a view to NAPLAN assessments at Year 3.

NAPLAN results over the next 10 years may see the impact of the VELDF, but students will never be equally prepared for school. That is a much larger issue than early childhood settings alone can deal with. Of course early childhood settings are a part of the bigger picture, but further integrated support for families through health, welfare, community as well as education and care services need to be involved in an inclusive range of provision (available for all families).

Dr Susan Krieg – Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of the Early Childhood Program, Flinders University

Early childhood educators view learning as a holistic process that involves social, emotional, physical and intellectual development. Recognising, sustaining and enhancing young children’s intentions and using ‘real-life resources to promote children’s dispositions to learn’ is important to permit uninterrupted play in a safe environment, to encourage children to extend their thinking and develop their social interactions.

The arts (whether music, visual arts, or performing arts) provide a vehicle for expression, giving children the necessary tools to express themselves using a combination of play and stimulating challenges. The integration of the Arts in Early Learning leads to deeper learning through different thinking and expressive skills to promote both intellectual and social development in young children while providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development.

Early Years Drama views play as a powerful vehicle to foster and extend children’s learning. Children are engaged in the fun of learning and develop the understanding of others through their social interaction. They learn to take turns, respond appropriately and express their feelings through verbal and non-verbal communication skills. It is through intentional teaching strategies used in Drama that enhance learning in the play context. Focus on listening and observation skills is promoted to assist children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning.

The main conceptual development within Early Learning Drama is to cultivate the children’s imaginations. This can be developed through symbolisation. Subtle shifts in thinking through group learning situations using ‘kitchen stools’ can transform the ordinary into ‘other’ objects. Chairs also can be transformed into all manner of vehicles and places for children’s play. Very basic props can work together in a collaborative approach in ‘cubby’ and ‘habitat’ buildings using chairs and boxes. All these activities extend the children’s imaginative process to allow them to gain ownership of their creation and their learning.
In an address to mark the bicentenary of Charles Dickens's birth in February of this year, the British Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb, proclaimed the teaching of Dickens by the end of their teenage years. Highlighting the parallels between Victorian Britain and the present day, Gibb outlined the alarming rates of illiteracy both globally and nationally, and pointed to the shadows of Dickens’s world confronting students with no background in English history can struggle to life through highly dramatic performance that thrilled his audiences like those by Carey and the New Zealand novelist Lloyd Jones can offer another way of making ‘classic’ novels relevant to today’s readers and can open up fascinating debates about whose voices are privileged in Victorian writing. Many of the social issues raised by Dickens’s novels remain remarkably relevant. With its spectacular depiction of a stock market crash, Little Dorrit anticipates the chaos of the Global Financial Crisis, while Dickens’s compassionate portraits of suffering and social inequality are vivid reminders of the stark divisions that remain between the wealthy and society’s poorest members. While it’s important to reflect upon how he speaks to us across the centuries, Dickens remains topical and engaging. To suggest that our teenagers lack the concentration and analytical skills to understand his novels is to seriously underestimate their capacity to stretch themselves and, indeed, to downplay the role that Dickens’s compassionate portraits of suffering and social inequality are vivid reminders of the stark divisions that remain between the wealthy and society’s poorest members. While it’s important to reflect upon how he speaks to us across the centuries, Dickens remains topical and engaging. To suggest that our teenagers lack the concentration and analytical skills to understand his novels is to seriously underestimate their capacity to stretch themselves and, indeed, to downplay the role that teachers can play in bringing the works to life. We need to acknowledge the power of Dickens’s work to communicate. Details of the Stanford University Community Reading Project may be found here: www.stanford.edu/readingproject Dr Grace Moore is a lecturer in English at the University of Melbourne School of Culture and Communication.

Hard times for the teaching of Victorian novels?

Grace Moore
The University of Melbourne

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The new Australian Curriculum: English neither prescribes nor prohibits the teaching of Dickens. To allow flexibility in the implementation of the curriculum within the different jurisdictions and at school level, the English curriculum does not include a list of prescribed texts. ‘Throughout the consultation process leading to the development of the national curriculum there was a general consensus of opinion against the prescription of texts,’ Professor Robert Dixon Chair of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney and a consultant to the to the national curriculum process since its beginning in 2008 explains. ‘Instead illustrative texts are included to help teachers identify texts that are most appropriate for their students. In the new draft senior secondary English curriculum, examples of suitable texts are included to “stimulate thinking about teaching resources in relation to the subject and are not intended to be prescriptive.”

The literature strand in the Australian Curriculum: English Foundation to Year 10 aims to engage students in the study of literary texts of personal, cultural, social and aesthetic value. These texts include some that are recognised as having enduring social and artistic value and some that attract contemporary attention.’

Profesional Educator asked teachers and academics for their thoughts on teaching Dickens 200 years after his birth. Here’s what some of them had to say:

Scott Crozier is Dean of Pastoral Care and Students, St Michael’s Grammar School. He has produced numerous student productions of Shakespeare including The Tempest (pictured).

What the Dickens!

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There is no doubt that Dickens’s characters and settings have much to offer students in any educational context. Portraits drawn, read or listened to provide rich material for the classroom. Drama, creative writing, language and grammar exercises can be successfully developed around the likes of Scrooge, Mr Pumblechook, Miss Havisham, Oliver and Fagin. And the settings likewise prove valuable for historical recreation, comparative evaluations and imaginative activities. Whole plot summaries will engage students, the reading of many of Dickens’s novels will not. Given the rich range of texts available today, only well chosen extracts seem worth the effort.

Christine Davis
Loreto Kirribilli

I think Dickens continues to have a great deal to teach teenagers because he is such an accomplished writer. For example, I often use the opening chapter of Great Expectations as a wonderful example of the manipulation of point of view in first person narration. A straight forward way to proceed, for a class at Year 11 level, is to read through the chapter, which is really quite short, and then discuss the students’ responses. How do they feel about Pip? How do they feel about the convict? Do they feel any sympathy for him? At this point we may try to account for these responses or I may move directly to showing the equivalent scene in one of the film versions.

We use this exercise to explore how point of view can shift in first person narrative as a prelude to an exercise in which students are asked to write in first person about a time when something happened to them which they subsequently saw in a rather different light because the older version of themselves understood things they could not understand at the time. The exercise is not to tell the reader about the later understanding, but as Dickens does to enable us to be aware of both the younger and the older reactions. Students learn a lot from Dickens and apply it with relish.

Derek Peat
The McDonald College

The simple answer to how to engage students with Shakespeare is to act it! The scripts were never written to be read; they were performance blue prints. To make it accessible take the universality of the play and give it a context that works for students now. I recently directed a production of Romeo and Juliet set in warring Bosnia inspired by newspaper reportage of a young Christian and Muslim couple shot in no-man’s land running away from the fighting; a Midsummer Night’s Dream, which I ended up taking to Singapore, set in the scaffolded back lanes of a modern city at night; and The Tempest where the comic characters, reminiscent of punsters on their way home from a hard day at Flemington in November, were dumped in a foreign land in a timeless context. This is what grabs the kids. The language then permeates them by osmosis. The idea is easy; the language comes second but when they get it they realise just how powerful the language is in expressing those universal ideas.

Living the story rather than just reading it in print helps students to relate to the themes in Shakespeare. These stories and themes are still relevant hundreds of years after they were written because the issues faced haven’t changed much apart from the themes around the ruling Tudor regime.

If as a teacher you find yourself struggling to get students to engage with Shakespeare let them see it. I vividly remember seeing Zeffirelli’s Romeo and Juliet as a 16-year-old. Baz Luhrman did it for recent 16-year-olds. There are some excellent DVD versions of recent production of most plays that would work.

There is still an important place for Shakespeare on any reading list. Avoiding introducing Shakespeare to students is as bad as blotting out a whole segment of their heritage. Like it or not, so much of our figurative language alone was constructed by Shakespeare let alone the universality of what he wrote about.

Scott Crozier is Dean of Pastoral Care and Students, St Michael’s Grammar School. He has produced numerous student productions of Shakespeare including The Tempest (pictured).

The general parameters of the curriculum are for students to engage with literature from all periods and from Australia and other parts of the world. There are certainly opportunities within those parameters for teachers to select Victorian era novels. Given that the nineteenth century was an important period in the development of the novel, and given Dickens’s own important role in the development of the novel, the curriculum parameters would not only allow teachers to set Dickens but would encourage it.”

Professor Robert Dixon
Chair of Australian Literature
The University of Sydney

I have just begun a close study of David Copperfield with my Year 11 Advanced English class. The students have had time to read and have been set research tasks on Dickens’s life and times preparatory to class study. Reactions to the text have varied from ‘too long, won’t read,’ ‘is there a film version’ to ‘love this, miss’. I plan to focus on characters initially, focusing on Dickens’s skill in drawing people such as Miss Murdstone, Uriah Heep and Mr Micawber. This will build on earlier lessons where we focused on narrative writing and building realistic characters in their own short stories. There are parallels with our current political climate to be drawn from David Copperfield’s observations as a parliamentary reporter and a rich vein to be mined in the observations of Australia and Australian media towards the end of the novel.”

Kris Smith
Hurstone Agricultural High

The simple answer to how to engage students with Shakespeare is to act it! The scripts were never written to be read; they were performance blue prints. To make it accessible take the universality of the play and give it a context that works for students now. I recently directed a production of Romeo and Juliet set in warring Bosnia inspired by newspaper reportage of a young Christian and Muslim couple shot in no-man’s land running away from the fighting; a Midsummer Night’s Dream, which I ended up taking to Singapore, set in the scaffolded back lanes of a modern city at night; and The Tempest where the comic characters, reminiscent of punsters on their way home from a hard day at Flemington in November, were dumped in a foreign land in a timeless context. This is what grabs the kids. The language then permeates them by osmosis. The idea is easy; the language comes second but when they get it they realise just how powerful the language is in expressing those universal ideas.

Living the story rather than just reading it in print helps students to relate to the themes in Shakespeare. These stories and themes are still relevant hundreds of years after they were written because the issues faced haven’t changed much apart from the themes around the ruling Tudor regime.

If as a teacher you find yourself struggling to get students to engage with Shakespeare let them see it. I vividly remember seeing Zeffirelli’s Romeo and Juliet as a 16-year-old. Baz Luhrman did it for recent 16-year-olds. There are some excellent DVD versions of recent production of most plays that would work.

There is still an important place for Shakespeare on any reading list. Avoiding introducing Shakespeare to students is as bad as blotting out a whole segment of their heritage. Like it or not, so much of our figurative language alone was constructed by Shakespeare let alone the universality of what he wrote about.

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Outdoor Education and the Australian National Curriculum

Australia is on the cusp of an educational renaissance, with the introduction, for the first time of a national curriculum. However, the future of Outdoor Education in the school curriculum occupies a perilous position. Severely marginalised in the initial draft of our new Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum, the place of Outdoor Education in the new era of a national curriculum is under threat. Understandably, Outdoor Education Australia (OEA), the professional body responsible for overseeing Outdoor Education, is deeply concerned that experiential education in natural environments is fast becoming a rarity for young children. What is particularly disconcerting for OEA and echoes the notion put forward by Richard Louv (2008) in his book Last Child in the Woods, is that a child in nature is an endangered species and quite clearly, the draft HPE curriculum exacerbates this stance.

Proponents of Outdoor Education have repeatedly argued that the natural environment is a rich and valuable source of holistic educational experiences. By its very nature, Outdoor Education promotes health, well-being and lays a foundation for environmental stewardship, experiences not normally available in mainstream education. In the first draft of the HPE paper that will guide curriculum development, there is only limited acknowledgement of the subject’s importance. OEA is presently lobbying the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and arguing for its distinctiveness and need to be included in the national curriculum final draft.

In June 2012, ACARA will be releasing the final draft of its scoping paper for HPE. It will outline propositions for HPE, strands, aims, proposed structure, scope and sequence of content. In addition, the scoping paper for HPE contributes to general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. Based on this premise, it will be the main guide for the shape of the HPE learning area into the next decade and beyond.

The Shaping paper is the first of a four-stage process that includes: curriculum writing, implementation and evaluations’ review. The draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education was released in mid March 2012 and the wider educational community was able to comment via a dedicated ACARA process. It is anticipated that the curriculum writing stage for HPE will commence later in 2012 and then be trialled in schools early in 2013 for later implementation Australia wide by 2014/15.

The challenge for advocates of Outdoor Education is to clarify how and where it can contribute to the nominated learning areas, general capabilities or cross-curriculum priorities that make up the national curriculum. Traditionally, Outdoor Education as both subject and process has resided within the HPE learning area. However, we are concerned that Outdoor Education does not have a strong or well sequenced presence in the draft Shaping paper for the HPE learning area. This has led to a need to highlight this shortcoming with the goal of having other educators get behind the push for a more substantive inclusion of Outdoor Education in the final draft of the shaping paper.

So let us have a look at the unique benefits of Outdoor Education and why it should be more prominent in a national curriculum.

What does outdoor education offer that is not available in the mainstream curriculum?

Biophilia: Coined by Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson the most basic definition of biophilia is the love of nature and an affection to all living things (Wilson, 1984). Biophilia is an innate part of our evolutionary heritage or genetic blueprint, consequently the restorative qualities of nature are widely accepted and part of being human. In essence this is attributed to the reality of our hunter gatherer human history in which we lived with intimate connections to nature, a connection that was initially disrupted only a few generations ago with the beginnings of industrialisation. Of interest, John Ratey in his book Spark cites anthropologists who believe our hunter gatherer ancestors would have been out in nature actively travelling between 16-19 kilometres a day just to get enough food to survive (Ratey, 2008).

Compare this to today’s society!

Notably, some scientific disciplines are of the belief that modern environmental crises, as well as many health issues such as obesity and depression have been viewed as symptomatic of a fundamental rupture of the human emotional and spiritual relationship with the natural world. Reawakening or rebuilding our innate affinity with nature is a fundamental goal of Outdoor Education. Such re-kindling is based upon what we understand...
about nature, well-being and our human psyche.

Our students are often unaware of the power of the outdoors and how simple short quiet time in nature can provide unexpected wonder and excitement. As noted by Louv and Kaplan, the benefits of exposure to nature are not a universal phenomenon, but are clearly an important aspect of our development. The Draft Shaping Paper does not have a clearly identifiable scope and sequence of how experiences out-of-doors contributes to health and well-being.

Access to natural settings and open green spaces has been found to be crucial for the holistic development of children and adolescents. While there are many benefits to outdoor activities, it is important to consider the potential risks associated with exposure to nature being unexpectedly linked to young people’s health and well-being. The natural occurrences of environmental enrichment have been widely examined and children’s concentrations and work patterns have improved after participating in activities in green surroundings. In addition, Richard Louv notes that his book, *The Nature Principle: Human Restoration and the End of Nature-Deficit Disorder,* outlines the importance of spending time outdoors because it can develop important skills that are a major focus of contemporary education; reflection, relationships and resilience, which are a major focus of outdoor education.

Proponents are now suggesting a new paradigm referred to as **mind-body/nature connection.** The national HPE curriculum could do well to expand its scope to develop the body–nature connection. Reaching this third part of self, a part acknowledged in the psyche, evident in the restorative powers of nature, but obscured by modern living. Childhood exposure to nature and the frequency of visits to greens, natural places at a young age directly correlates with a reduction in visitations during adulthood (Ward-Thompson, Aspinall & Montarzino, 2008).

Outdoor Education has long taught basic skills of being and living outdoors, or knowing how to recreate safely. We know that outdoor activities such as bushwalking are low cost and accessible across the lifespan. Increasingly, as Australians are urbanised and often from cultures beyond the shores there will be an ongoing need for an education that takes you into the wild. The benefits of being able to safely get outdoors are no longer something that is an everyday part of Australian life, then the benefits can be briefly summarised above because we are, in essence, self medicating with nature. It is known that natural settings reduce stress, while also boosting our brainpower.

Dr. Ian Boyle: is an Outdoor Education Lecturer at the University of Sydney.

**References**


**Marita Cheng**

**Young Australian of the Year 2012**

Marita Cheng has been described as an engineering visionary. The Cairns-born student developed a passion for maths and science early in life, encouraged by her mother. Her fascination with the impact that science, technology and engineering can have on the world led Marita to pursue studies in engineering at the University of Melbourne. After discovering female students made up only 10 per cent of all students in her first year and inspired to establish Girls Global in 2008 as a response to the traditionally low levels of participation in women in engineering and technology. Robogals teaches school girls about engineering and technology, which is about the mind and the abilities to design, develop, implement and sustain this relationship is paramount importance in our national curriculum.

Assoc. Professor Peter Martin: Specialises in human nature relationships, professionalism in outdoor education, and rock climbing teaching and its benefits at the University of Ballarat.

**References**


**McG**

I think there is a societal perception that engineering and science, engineering in particular, isn’t a very female friendly profession. And I think that perception is fostered by the girls and their parents and the careers counselors. So what Robogals is trying to get out there is that engineering is a profession that has an amazing impact on the world through the use of innovative designs and ideas. If we present to the girls that engineering is a profession that can have these profound impacts on the world then more women, more girls, will be willing to go into the profession.

Marita’s efforts to encourage more girls to pursue studies in maths, science and engineering saw her named 2012 Young Australian of the Year. Marita Cheng discussed her motivations to establish Robogals and her desire to see more women in engineering with **Professional Educator** editor Louise Reynolds.

**LR:** Firstly Marita, Congratulations on being named Young Australian of the Year. This is a significant acknowledgment of the work you have done to encourage girls to undertake studies in engineering and technology. What does that recognition mean to you?

**MC:** I think my feeling of being named Young Australian of the Year was that it was a real acknowledgment to the engineering community and the work that doers to ensure that our living standards are so high. I think it acknowledged that the people of Australia saw the lack of engineers, and the lack of women in the engineering profession in particular, was a huge problem and they wanted to acknowledge my work in the field by giving me this award and giving me this platform to continue to share my message.

**LR:** As we know engineering and related professions are still very much male dominated. What is putting off girls and young women from pursuing a career in engineering and science?

**MC:** I think there is a societal perception that engineering and science, engineering in particular, isn’t a very female friendly profession. And I think that perception is fostered by the girls and their parents and the careers counselors. So what Robogals is trying to get out there is that engineering is a profession that has an amazing impact on the world through the use of innovative designs and ideas. If we present to the girls that engineering is a profession that can have these profound impacts on the world then more women, more girls, will be willing to go into the profession.

My mother actually wanted me to do medicine when I was in high school because it would lead to a really prestigious and stable job as a doctor. And so I actually sat my tests that you need to do in order to get into medicine and went to my interview to get into medicine. It was actually in that interview where I decided once and for all that I wouldn’t do medicine and that I wanted to do engineering because I realised that you have to do what you’re passionate about because it’s your life and if you don’t spend your life doing what you’re passionate about then you’re not really living.

**LR:** Education research indicates that primary school is an important stage in which to spark interest in science and technology. What sparked your interest at that age?

**MC:** My Mum made me do all my maths homework and made me practice all my times tables and that meant I was really good at maths in school. I think being really good at something made
I realised that you have to do what you’re passionate about because it’s your life and if you don’t spend your life doing what you’re passionate about then you’re not really living.

perspective

me like it more and want to pursue it more. My brother was very interested in science and he would tell me all these great facts about science and set me little research tasks to do about science and different famous scientists and that had an impact. I thought ‘wow science is something that can have a huge impact on the world and change the way that society views the world.’ So I saw it as a very useful and powerful tool and I think that affected my decision to pursue studies in that field.

LR: Jump forward now to your university studies and I understand you found yourself and your fellow female students very much in the minority. How did this motivate you to establish Robogals?

MC: That’s right. I went to school in Cairns, which is a smaller city and is also quite remote from the other cities and I thought ‘there’s only three girls doing engineering from Cairns and that’s because Cairns is so small and remote but when I get down to Melbourne there’s going to be so many girls doing engineering and I’m going to make heaps of friends, both men and women, and it’s going to be great.’ But once I got to Melbourne it took me until the end of my first semester at uni before I found all five of the girls in my course out of the class of 50. I was really surprised and it was only when I was in my second year at university that I did anything about it.

LR: Can you tell me a bit about Robogals and how you think it’s helping to engage girls in the study of engineering and science?

MC: The idea is to get girls interested in engineering and technology careers and tertiary studies and we do that by going to schools and running robotics workshops. Each workshop will simply start by talking about engineering and the different career pathways you can take with an engineering degree. And then we’ll let the girls build and program the robots to get some hands on experience. Hopefully this increases awareness among engineering to the young girls that we reach out to. And it gives them the hands on experience with it from an early age. When we go and conduct these workshops we’re not expecting all the girls to jump up and say I’m going to be an engineer once I finish high school because of this. That would be the best case scenario. What we’re aiming for at least is that girls don’t discount the study of specialist maths and physics and chemistry because they can see that it’s useful to their lives and useful to getting into a more diverse range of careers after high school.

LR: What kind of feedback have you received from girls who have taken part in the workshops?

MC: They have a lot of fun and they really like being able to do something hands on. They learn that things in the world aren’t perfect and if they program something it’s not always going to work the first time. It might take them another five times of trial and error before they can figure it out. We conducted a survey last year of 350 girls who took our workshops and we found that before the workshop they were 8 out of 10 interested in engineering and after the workshop they were 8 out of 10 interested in engineering. So that’s a pretty big jump that I’m quite proud of.

LR: What advice do you have for teenage girls who are contemplating their subject choice at school or thinking about what courses to choose at uni who might be interested in giving engineering a go but are reluctant to take that plunge given the reasons that you’ve cited earlier?

MC: I would say that engineering is a really great course to do because it leads to so many different career pathways. You can go on to become an engineer or you can go on and become really successful in the financial sector or as an executive manager. More CEOs have an engineering degree than any other degree. The reason for that is an engineering degree encompasses a lot of problem solving and higher level thinking of maths and physics. I would encourage girls to stick with their maths and stick with their physics because it leads to a much more diverse range of career options at the end of high school and will allow you to build that higher level thinking muscle in your brain.

LR: So what are some of the biggest challenges facing the engineering profession across the world today?

MC: Some of the biggest challenges are the lack of engineers. There were 70,000 engineers who retired in the five years leading up to 2011 with only 45,000 engineers to take their place. We have a shortage of engineers in Australia and one of the causes of that, I think, is that women haven’t really been targeted to do engineering. Fewer than 10 percent of engineers are female so that lack of diversity is a big challenge in engineering these days.

LR: What different perspectives can women bring to some of the challenges of engineering? How do women look at an engineering problem perhaps differently to men?

MC: As with any problem in life, the person who looks at the problem is going to draw on their own experiences and their own background to form their opinions and then to form their solutions. So if you have a room full of men looking at a problem then they are going to look at the problem differently and hence come up with a different set of solutions to a room of 50-50 men and women. Men and women live together in the world and engineers play a very big part in creating the built environment around us. It just makes sense that women now are sitting at that table creating the built world together with men rather than it being 90 percent of men sitting at that table.

LR: You’re clearly passionate in your interest in robotics. What future can you envisage for robotics in schools and teaching and engaging kids with science and technology?

MC: In schools robots can be used to demonstrate maths and science principles so that kids can see the usefulness in these subjects and how they’re applicable to the real world, which will help engagement with maths and science. South Korea last year introduced English teaching robots to help teach their students English so I think there are even more diverse applications as to how robots can help out with teaching.

LR: And finally, what is your ambition for yourself and for Robogals in say 10 or 20 years from now?

MC: As for myself in 20 years, I want to be running a robotics company that I founded. In 20 years there will be a lot more women in engineering and the world will see the proof of that through the amazing products that are brought to the world.

Further information on Marita’s Young Australian of the Year award can be found at www.australianoftheyear.org.au You can read all about Robogals Global at www.robogals.org
The Australian Curriculum: History – a critique

Ian Keese

Teachers of History were pleasantly surprised to find the subject, along with English, Mathematics and Science – was included as one of the ‘core’ subjects in the Australian Curriculum. While most secondary schools have Ancient and Modern History in the senior years, History in Years 7 to 10 is usually subsumed under a heading such as Studies of Society and Environment and is often not taught by history specialists. The exception was in NSW where a full History/Geography course was introduced when Bob Carr was Premier. History being included in the first round of subjects for the Australian Curriculum was seen as raising its academic status.

But the big question is whether the implementation of this particular curriculum will be beneficial for the long term health of history as a subject, and this will depend on a lot more than just an 84 page document which is essentially just a list of topics and skills. This framework will be fleshed out as it is implemented nationally. Also crucial for its success will be having teachers qualified to teach it, having the support material and professional development available and the backing of each state and territory jurisdiction for the implementation of this particular curriculum will be fleshed out as it is implemented nationally. Also crucial for its success will be having teachers qualified to teach it, having the support material and professional development available and the backing of each state and territory jurisdiction for the implementation of this curriculum.

The three cross-curriculum priorities are:

- Sustainability
- Histories and cultures
- Explaining and communicating

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These appear in all learning areas and ‘encompass’ the knowledge, skills and behaviours and dispositions that … will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century.’ These are: Literacy; Numeracy; Competence in ICT; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical behaviour; Personal and social competence; and Intercultural understanding.

As discussed below, the NSW Draft Syllabus presents an alternative way of doing this. It has grouped cross curriculum priorities with the general capabilities, added a few items and called the combined set Cross-Curriculum Areas.

Implementation in the States and Territories

Most states and territories plan to have the Australian Curriculum in History implemented by 2013. South Australia plans to have History implemented up to Year 9 by Language and Western Australia is spreading implementation over 2012 to 2014. The clear exception is NSW which will only begin implementation in 2014.

This discussion is based on publicly available documents at the time of writing (early May) from some of the jurisdictions. Some of these are draft version and others have some form of assessment tasks that; what is taught (curriculum) must inform how it is taught (pedagogy), how students are assessed (assessment) and how the learning is reported (reporting) – what is assessed must relate directly to what students have had an opportunity to learn; what is reported to students, parents/carers and other teachers must align with what has been learnt from the intended curriculum and assessed.

Another strength of this system is that assessment is based on a folio of work, built up during the course; this allows for a variety of forms of assessment tasks that can cover more areas than would be done in an end of unit examination.

Implementing the new history curriculum poses a particular challenge for Queensland as well as South Australia and Western Australia. In the other states the transition from Primary to Secondary takes place between Years 6 and 7, and this is what is assumed in the Australian Curriculum, where the survey of World and Australian history commences in Year 7. For Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, where currently secondary education begins in Year 8, this will involve a large scale re-write of the Year 7 content, and will also have implications for the current close integration with Geography as a VELS subject.

Victoria does not face the same problems as Queensland in terms of introducing a new content and structure, as its current courses broadly follow that adopted by the Australian Curriculum. In a similar fashion to Queensland, Victoria focuses on outcomes, which also have a similar name: the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS).

The VELS are portrayed as three integrated strands: Physical, Personal and social; Discipline-based learning; and Interdisciplinary Learning.

The first and third of these can be loosely compared to the General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum. However at this stage the General Capabilities have not been mapped on the learning continuum from Foundation to Year 10 so in Victoria teachers will continue with the current VELS strands which do have this sequential mapping.

Unlike both Queensland and NSW Victoria has not mandated teaching time for any of the four stage one subjects, leaving it up to each school to decide how best to achieve the essential learning required.

New South Wales stands out from the other two in producing a stand alone syllabus, which is currently in draft form. A memorandum issued by the Board of Studies, Catholic Education Commission, Association of Independent Schools and DET at the end of 2011 gave as some of their reasons for having their own syllabus and for delaying the implementation, the need to ‘ensure maintenance of the clarity and learning expectations that exists in the current NSW curriculum’ and to allow the Australian Curriculum ‘to be presented in Stages rather than Years’.

Another different was that in looking at cross curriculum areas the NSW Curriculum grouped together general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. The Australian Curriculum has seven items under general capabilities and three under cross-curriculum priorities – a total of ten – whereas the New South Wales curriculum has thirteen: the additional ones are Civics and Citizenship, Difference and diversity and Work and enterprise.

The Draft version of the NSW History Syllabus maintained the same basic content as the Australian Curriculum, but where the Australian Curriculum supplied ‘Elaborations’ – suggested but non-mandatory content – the NSW Syllabus included a series of mandatory dot points (usually ranging between 1 and 4) under
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MEMBER PROFILE

Member Profile
Vickie Vance

Vickie Vance, an ACE member since 2006, recently accepted the nomination of President of the Bathurst Orange committee. As one of ACE’s newest branch presidents, Vickie is working with colleagues to reinvigorate the activities of ACE for educators across the region.

Vickie joined the teaching profession as a ‘career change’ teacher after a career in financial marketing and public relations. Since joining the profession she has worked in all sectors with the exception of TAFE. Currently Vickie works in the Catholic education sector as a district consultant helping schools and teachers to embrace contemporary learning practices through the use of technology. Her role gives Vickie the opportunity to travel and meet educators and hear about their shared concerns and the issues of importance.

‘I have been thinking for some time that there is sometimes a duplication on one side and on the other, a lack of awareness between systems and sectors locally,’ Vickie explains.

‘ACE was the body I identified that crossed all those boundaries; it’s not aimed solely at executive or leaders, but everyone in all sectors including those at entry level. I had been aware of an ACE conference locally in the past that seemed to have disappeared so I got together with some colleagues, Jo-Anne Reid at Charles Sturt University and Peter Miller from All Saints’ College, to scope out what could be done to re-establish an active ACE committee for Bathurst Orange.’

Those first discussions led to an expression of interest’ meeting for local educators in early 2012 where a new committee was established with Vickie as president.

The first event organised by the new committee took place at the Oxford Hotel in Bathurst in early May on the theme of ‘Challenges Teachers Face’ in what Vickie describes as an atmosphere of energy and excitement. Participants heard from two career entry teachers who spoke of the challenges they have faced since beginning their school based careers at the start of this year. A third speaker looked back over his long career and described the trials and tribulations he had experienced as a founder of a school and as an activist to have policy changes.

His comments, while based on experiences some time ago, rang true for current times when he talked of interference in educational decisions by those outside education,’ Vickie says.

Since that first presentation a number of issues were brought forward by committee members by educators who hope that ACE will address them in future events and discussions. These include NAPLAN, with discussion centring on whether teachers are pressured to test to the test; ATFLS and NSW IT requirements and what information was filtering through to the ‘end users’ about the process and reasoning for implementation of registration.

Vickie has received strong support from new members as well as members who have been with ACE for decades who have been pleased to see such a forum established. Vickie and other members of the Orange Bathurst committee are hoping to have regular forums that allow exploration of current topics. ‘They don’t always have to be polite and passive – I’d like people to feel comfortable in having rigorous professional discussions to explore alternative perspectives, treatments and experiences so we can learn and grow as a profession,’ Vickie says.

‘Education for a democratic nation of citizens needs to have a space for all voices, however as professionals, I feel we need to promote and assert our professional knowledge rather than letting mass media take public discussions off on tangents. We have a duty to educate not only our students but society at large about the importance of quality education.’

The next planned event will be held in Orange in August and has been titled: ‘5 to 33: Literacy across the ages’. Speakers from TAFE and Correctional Services will present their perspectives of the teaching in literacy in contrast to compulsory schooling.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the activities of ACE in the Orange and Bathurst region can contact ACE national office on (02) 9958 9896 or by email to ace@australled.com.au and national office staff will be happy to help you make contact with the local committee.
Policy, development and curriculum reform in music and arts education
We will meet our goals

Martin Comte, RMIT University & David Forrest, RMIT University

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e have over 50 years of reports into music – and arts – education – and, in popular school music, apparently to little effect. Numerous reports have indicated that the teaching of music in Australia has been inadequate. The new national curriculum provided an opportunity to address problems that had existed for decades. It seems to have taken us around in circles as this historical review will show.

As Professor Karl Ernst, an American, said in a seminar at an Australian UNESCO Seminar on School Music, held in Sydney in 1965: “In my opinion the Australian experience is not large enough to have anything of prestige in the [Australian] community” (p.275). Another special guest at this seminar was the British music celebrity, Professor Wilfred Mellers. Of special interest here was his comment that “Carus Text” was in many ways an unnecessary limited” (p. 280). He could equally have said the same of Zoltán Kodály or Emile Naoumoff. Yet, even today, more than 35 years later, some schools still advertise for an Orff or Kodály teacher!

In the early 1970s an extensive study into the Arts and Education was undertaken by two semi-governmental organisations: the Curriculum Council (now the Australian Council for the Arts) and the former Schools Commission. The School Music Education Review (1977) reported on the music education of the Commonwealth of Australia. In the final National Report, we have four objectives for education (p.179).

Access A primary goal of the whole arts education program is to ensure that every young person has access to experiences in the arts.

Participation. All young people should have opportunities for personal involvement in arts activities provided in ways which foster continuity and growth.

Confidence and commitment. The benefits for an individual of continued involvement in the arts are cumulative. A test of programs therefore is the extent to which young people develop and retain enthusiasm to continue participation and make practice of the arts part of their lives.

Principals recognise that the teaching of music does not have enough status in many schools. This historical review will show.

Numerous reports have indicated that the maintenance of confidence and commitment to the arts – and, in particular, music – and arts – education – especially for primary school teachers – is inadequate! How many more reports do we need to tell us that in music and the other arts – especially for primary school teachers – is inadequate? How many more reports do we need to tell us that the arts are not fully accepted into the mainstream of a school’s educational program? How many more reports do we need to tell us that primary school teachers’ “own students – among whom are the teachers of the future – suffer; and so the vicious circle is renewed” (p.49). How many other reports do we need to tell us “that experiences in primary, and particularly early primary, are crucial” (p.49)! Is it little wonder that this Senate report added: “It is intolerable that arts – or any subject – should be taught by teachers who, however well-meaning, know themselves that they are not doing the job properly. It is a betrayal of our children” (p.60).

Moreover, we have had the Commonwealth sponsored National Review of School Music Education (2005) and the National Review of Visual Education (2009). While both reviews have informed to some extent the development of the Arts Shape paper for the Commonwealth of Australia, the recommendations have already faded into the collective review memory. What this historical overview demonstrates is that the Federal Government or its agencies have commissioned reports and reviews into music and arts education for any number of reasons – educational, artistic, and political. Always present in a political cycle is a need to gain a degree of understanding about a current situation, and an explanation of why things are happening (or not) across a range of sectors. Over time, reviews have researched different stages of the educational cycle (from early years through to teacher education) while others have been concerned with specific issues, initiatives, disciplines or key learning areas. But in this investigation we have generally had a desire that, over time, change will occur by addressing the recommendations and usage made for undertaking the study. But one must question to what extent anything of a lasting nature has been enacted with respect to music and the arts as a result of any of the reports discussed (and there were many!).

The impetus for policy development – and curriculum change – comes about through perceived need and actual need for change. The remit for policy development often comes about through policy makers’ attempts, where necessary, to find policy solutions that more than the history of the arts practitioners – in our case the arts practitioner – to find new terms that have been apprehended in a practical sense.

The vexed issue of the move from policy – and curriculum – must be forward looking. Both must be defensible in additional review and debate today while speaking to the future. By the time any policy is implemented it will have emerged and transformed over a considerable period and through the stages of research, comment, adoption, implementation, and eventual evaluation. In recent times, this process has been complicated by new terms that are not common in any of the arts disciplines. They used the terms “generative” (apprehending and comprehending) to convey the artistic and educational process of the arts in schools; in turn, these terms were supported by a complex model. Unfortunately, because they were not terms that the practitioners in the respective arts forms normally identified with the message was generally lost. While this is an unforgivable policy error, the practices of the Arts across the five disciplines was not generally accepted and – new terms – yet to be determined.

While it is important to appreciate that the origin of the word ‘curriculum’ is from the Latin meaning ‘course’ or ‘sequence’ (from the verb currere, to run). Often, curriculum (and policy) writers take us on a ride in an ever expanding circle – even the most dedicated educationists have been doing such circles for some years! Experienced teachers in our country’s schools do not have to be told that a lack of curriculum development is so often engendered with past practices that were overtaken or subsumed by more ‘progressive’ modes and disciplines. The term ‘curriculum’ is often indiscernible in a practical sense. The vexed issue of the move from research through policy development to
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A recent article by the Editor-at-Large of The Canberra Times included the assertion that improvements in Australian education hinge not on money but ‘in the value we place on education’. In the author’s view, … it is simply wrong to think that differences in outcomes between different classes of schools (in whatever sectors) are the simple consequences of differences in resources poured in… Nor does the ‘drift of students away from hard subjects, such as maths and science, or from foreign languages (or even anything that could seriously be regarded as the study of English) have anything to do with resources.

The scepticism expressed here about the teaching of English in Australian schools is neither new nor rare. In part, this is due to the critical role the subject plays in supporting all other learning and thus in enabling individuals to participate fully in a competitive society. The unique status of English in the curriculum must also be considered in relation to the perceived and real advantages that fluency in this language has around the world. The above quotation arguably highlights the unequivocal connection between an appreciation of the value of English by native speakers and a willingness – or lack thereof – to learn other languages.

Contemporary curriculum development throughout the world makes much of the need to prepare students for a fast-paced global environment in which innovation, collaboration and technological competence are regarded as some of the essential attributes. Within that pedagogical framework, Australia’s evolving national curriculum, guided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), places a heavy emphasis on the development of foundational skills, especially in English literacy, as part of an appropriate education for the students of the new millennium. Australian children are expected to demonstrate increasingly sophisticated language skills, including, as reflected in particular in the stand-alone national test of language conventions (viz. NAPLAN), the mastery of English grammar and punctuation.

This renewed emphasis on students’ acquisition of a technical understanding of the English language works, a competency that has been shown to be far easier for those who commit to the study of additional languages, points to one of the profound pedagogical gaps between professional practice in this country and that of some of the countries now regarded as standard-bearers in school education. It must be noted that Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and other highly successful systems make the long term study of several languages compulsory.

According to researcher Inna Buchberger, for example, ‘this has been a reality in the Finnish education system since the early seventies – multilingual Finnish citizens competent in four (European) languages [including English]’. Buchberger asserts that from the Finnish perspective, language competence is a ‘key element in the personal and professional development of individuals’. In such a learning context, there is no debate about the importance of understanding how languages work – this begins early in the student’s academic career and continues to the end of...
the compulsory years of schooling. In this sense, the ‘value’ placed on language as an overarching competency is consistently high and the effect of this unequivocal commitment on overall literacy is reflected in international test results.

If the uptake of foreign language courses in Australian schools remains low, as will always be the case unless every educational service the literacy needs of all other subjects. English teachers to set the standards and to teach about language is regarded as a whole-school approach to learning a language.

In fairness to their students, all teachers need to be able to model the necessary foundation skills with understanding and confidence in order to ensure that common errors affecting fluency can be avoided. This will enhance their professional standing and ensure clear evidence that the ‘hard subject’ – especially language and written communication – are valued.

Dr Fiona Mueller trained as a secondary teacher of French, German, Italian and English and taught in government and independent schools in Queensland and the United States for over twenty years and currently teaches Advanced Academic English at ANU College. Fiona is also the founder of Needs Must Professional Learning, a venture that delivers workshops in schools to reinforce teachers’ knowledge of English language conventions.

The roll out of the Australian Curriculum in Victoria: The state of play
Region: Melbourne, Victoria
Date: 20 June 2012 - 5:00pm - 7:00pm
Close registrations: 13 June 2012
Price: Members: $40.00 Public: $50.00
This seminar provides teachers, parents and other members of the community with the opportunity to learn about the rollout of the Australian Curriculum in Victoria from speakers Professor Barry McGaw, ACARA; Madeleine Franken, Deputy Principal; Curriculum at Avila College; Dr David Howes, General Manager of the Curriculum Division of the Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority.

Australian Curriculum and ROSA Update
Region: Illawarra South Coast
Date: 20 June 2012 - 4:00pm - 6:30pm
Price: This is a free event
Close registrations: 19 June 2012
This event will provide an opportunity for participants to hear the latest information regarding the NSW Board of Studies’ implementation of the Australian Curriculum and the Record of School Achievement. Guest speaker carol Taylor is the Chief Executive of the Office of the NSW Board of Studies and Chair of the Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities.

Further information about these and any other ACE events please visit www.austcooled.com.au.

Empowering Learners 2012 ACE Great Debate
Are we adequately preparing today’s learners for life tomorrow?
Join the discussion with author, journalist and speaker Madonna King and a panel of experts representing all levels of Australian education.
Sydney 28 August, (and by webinar across Australia for those unable to attend)
Melbourne 29 August
Brisbane 4 September
Adelaide 6 September
Members $40 | Non-members $50

Further information on the events and panel members will soon be available from www.austcooled.com.au or from the National Office on 1800 208 586

The success of this group will rest on its diversity – we encourage members old and new, from all sectors and levels of education policy, to join this expanded education policy committee, with expertise in the areas of: Innovation; Curriculum; Social justice; and Reporting & assessment.

These members will be the brains trust of the policy team, but also our eyes and ears on the ground, letting us know what changes are developing in their area of expertise.

The Education Policy Committee will speak every three months via phone via a policy consultation at a mutually agreed time. The success of this group will rest on its diversity – we encourage members old and new, from all sectors and levels of education to contact our policy research officer, Jesse Dean, at National Office about being involved.

You can reach Jesse on 1800 208 586 or jesse.dean@austcooled.com.au

Wyndham Medal
ACE congratulates Dr Norman McCulla for being named recipient of the Wyndham Medal, the ACE NSW Member of the Year Award. Dr McCulla has been honoured for his considerable achievements and contributions to Australian education and scholarship. The award will be presented at the Wyndham Medal Presentation and Fellows Dinner on August 3rd. More information about this event is available from our ACE website at www.austcooled.com.au.
Welcome to our new members

Mr Simon Armstrong, QLD, MACE
Ms Alysha Barnes, QLD, MACE
Mrs Kathryn Barry, QLD, MACE
Mrs Donella Beare, WA, MACE
Mrs Kerry Louise Elliott, VIC, MACE
Mrs Renee Fletton, ACT, MACE
Mrs Paula Maree Heiniger, QLD, MACE
Ms Monica Mayer, Singapore, MACE
Mr York McFadzean, QLD, MACE
Mr Francis McGuigan, ACT, MACE
Ms Celina McKenzie, SA, MACE
Mr Christopher Oxley, NSW, MACE
Miss Jemma Pollari, QLD, MACE
Mrs Darnelle Pretorius, WA, MACE
Dr Ruth Reynolds, NSW, MACE
Mrs Patricia Rodrigues, WA, MACE
Mr Craig Schmidt, QLD, MACE
Ms Kathleen Thelning, SA, MACE
Mr Bruce Titlestad, WA, MACE
Mr Grant Ward, WA, MACE
Mrs Joanne Young, SA, MACE