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The Australian Curriculum:
Where have we come
from? Where are we going?

What makes a quality
school curriculum?
The learner perspective

Quality education for all:
A global necessity

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Editor

Paola Ghirelli
paola.ghirelli@austcolled.com.au

Editorial assistance

Dr Norman McCulla, FACE
Dr Julie Rimes, FACE
Dr Glenn Savage, MACE
ACE Publications working group

Advertising

P: 03 9035 5473
F: 03 9341 6021
ace@austcolled.com.au

ACE membership

P: 03 9035 5473
F: 03 9341 6021
ace@austcolled.com.au
www.austcolled.com.au

Australian College of Educators

PO Box 73, Carlton VIC 3053
P: 03 9035 5473
F: 03 9341 6021

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The Australian National Curriculum

It gives me great pleasure to be introducing this first edition of *Professional Educator* for 2015, which has emerged from passionate discussions both within and beyond the College about developments associated with the Australian Curriculum.

This year marks the seventh year since the Melbourne Declaration and the establishment of the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) set in motion our nation's first national curriculum. Since then, rapid transformations have taken place across the nation as the curriculum has progressively unfolded.

In many ways, the Australian Curriculum is a triumph of political will, made possible by unprecedented national cooperation between Australia's states and territories. It is also the product of significant efforts on the part of the Australian education community, from the highest levels of policy making to educators at the chalk face.

Those who remember the failed attempts at national reform in the 1990s will know the achievement of national consensus over what young people should learn in schools is no mean feat.

Recently, a senior policy maker in Washington DC told me he admired Australia's capacity to 'have a conversation about curriculum' that didn't descend into bitter politics and petty debate. He saw the Australian Curriculum as a sign the nation was ready to move forward with 'a common vision' for education.

Of course, while there is truth to this view, the grass always looks greener from the other side.

The recent federal review of the curriculum, chaired by Kevin Donnelly and Ken Wiltshire, reminds us that a diversity of opinions still exist about the shape and efficacy of the Australian Curriculum.

While some lament the uncertainty the review provides and many do not agree with its findings, I believe we should view it as a necessary part of the political process.

Curriculum is (and will always be) intensely political and hotly contested. Debates about curriculum are central to the healthy functioning of an education system and the broader fabric of democracy.

If history teaches us anything, it's that curriculum is a moving feast, endlessly morphing and evolving in response to changing social and economic conditions. Curriculum reviews, therefore, are inevitable.

The articles herein provide a chance to reflect on the historical development of the Australian Curriculum, current debates and emerging considerations as we look to the future.

The articles dip variously into the worlds of research, policy and practice, to examine the Australian Curriculum from a range of perspectives.

Anne-Marie Shin considers the curriculum from an early childhood perspective, Ashley Duggan reflects

on the curriculum as an early career teacher and Phillip Roberts considers equity issues.

My article considers the development and design of the Australian curriculum, as well as emerging issues and debates. John Rose also reflects on the development of the curriculum, arguing that consultation processes have been rushed and tokenistic.

Kira Clarke draws upon a rich set of interviews with members of the Victorian Student Representative Council Executive about what young people consider a quality school curriculum to be.

Norman McCulla reflects on the notion of curriculum as a representation of our values and aspirations as a society.

Together, these articles provide a dynamic portrait of the evolving landscape of national curriculum reform. Some also provoke us to question the norms of the present and to seek new ways forward.

So, wait no longer. Grab a cup of coffee or tea, or maybe even a sneaky glass of wine (my preferred choice), and get stuck into this edition.

Before you do, just remember, the College is always looking to expand its membership base, so get out there amongst your colleagues, lend them a copy of *Professional Educator*, and spruik away.

Glenn Savage is a lecturer in Education Policy at the Melbourne Graduate School of Education (MGSE). He currently chairs the ACE Publications Working Group.

GLENN SAVAGE, MACE

The Australian Curriculum: Where have we come from? Where are we going?

Since the 1980s, unprecedented changes have taken place in the curriculum landscape of Australian schooling. The most rapid changes have occurred since 2008, when the Melbourne Declaration ushered in a new era of national reform.

Seven years on, Australian educators and policy makers find themselves in the midst of significant transformation as states and territories progressively align with the requirements of the evolving Australian Curriculum.

As the national curriculum deepens its reach, new challenges and possibilities are emerging. Opinions about the curriculum are also proliferating and new political battle lines are being drawn in the sand.

It is time opportune, therefore, to step back and reflect upon the trajectory of national reform to date, to revisit the development and design of the Australian Curriculum, and to ponder over emerging challenges as we look to the future.

Revisiting the development of the Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum is often mischaracterised as an invention of the Rudd-Gillard Labor Governments, yet the truth is a national approach to curriculum has been on the boiler for many decades and has generally had bipartisan support.

The history of national curriculum reform in Australia reflects *three distinct phases* of development since the 1980s¹:

1. National goals

The first phase was the establishment of national goals for education in the late 1980s, a policy trend that was mirrored in other nations, including the US.

In 1988, under Federal Labor Education Minister John Dawkins, a report was released titled *Strengthening Australia's Schools*, which expressed growing anxieties about schooling and linked these concerns to the global economy.

The following year, the Hobart Declaration was established, which set out 10 national goals for schooling and announced an intention to establish Australia's first national curriculum agency.

The Hobart Declaration was signed by all state and federal education ministers and represented an unprecedented commitment to inter-governmental cooperation on education in Australia's federal system.



2. Failed attempts at national reform

Following the Hobart Declaration and development of national goals, attempts were made to write a national curriculum framework.

The early years of this phase were a surprising success and by 1993 Australian states and territories had negotiated the development of 'National Statements and Profiles' in eight curriculum subject areas.

The process soon fell apart, however, due to a host of political factors, including changes in state governments and a subsequent push back from curriculum agencies.

As a result, the National Statements and Profiles were never adopted and attempts at national reform were momentarily put on ice.

3. The rise of the Australian Curriculum

The failures of the 1990s put a dampener on the idea of a national curriculum, yet the 2000s saw a host of factors converge to powerfully reignite the idea.

This time, debates were powerfully driven by global economic concerns and a new era of global testing and comparison, driven in no small part by the OECD's 'Programme for International Student Assessment'.

The Federal Liberal Party drove renewed calls for national curriculum standards and standardised testing during the latter term of the Howard Government.

During this time, the government released a report titled 'Australian Certificate of Education: Exploring a way forward', which argued for the development of a single Australian Certificate of Education, to be underpinned by national curriculum standards and 'Key Capabilities Assessments' in literacy, numeracy and ICT.

When the Labor Party won office in late 2007, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd came to power promising Australia an 'Education Revolution', which would include greater national cooperation, consistency and accountability. Central to this was a commitment to develop a national curriculum.

In 2008, state and territory ministers endorsed the development of a national curriculum via the Melbourne Declaration and the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was established.

ACARA subsequently led the development of the curriculum, which followed a staged approach that involved national consultation on expert-drafted *Framing* papers, bureaucrat-drafted *Shape* papers and curriculum framework drafts.

The final framework for the first four subjects (English, Mathematics, Science and History) was published in December 2010, followed by Geography, which was endorsed in May 2013. Several other subjects are currently awaiting final endorsement.

The implementation of the Australian Curriculum is now underway at varying stages and in different forms across Australia's states and territories.

Design and implementation: A blending of approaches

The design of the Australian Curriculum has emerged out of a complex series of debates about the kinds of knowledge and skills young people need in an increasingly globalising and changing world.

In an attempt to reconcile competing arguments about curriculum design, ACARA has developed the Australian Curriculum in a way that blends *three distinct dimensions*, each reflecting a different way of understanding curriculum.

The first dimension is the *Discipline-based Learning Areas*, which form the central pillar of the curriculum.

The discipline-based approach has been the subject of criticism over the years for being out-moded and elitist, yet strong arguments remain for maintaining disciplines at the heart of a curriculum.

This approach is also experiencing a global resurgence of support amongst an expanding group of 'social realist' curriculum scholars, including Michael Young and Johan Muller, who argue that the disciplines represent 'powerful

knowledge' that all young people have a right to access.

The second dimension is the seven *General Capabilities*, which are intended to define the 'knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions' relevant in 'a complex, information-rich, globalised world' (ACARA 2014, p. 15).

The General Capabilities reflect the popular 'twenty-first century skills' movement in education, which has gained momentum over the past few decades.

This movement is exemplified in the work of scholars like Yong Zhao, who argue that the forces of globalisation and technological innovation are rapidly transforming our societies, thus making new knowledge, skills and talents requisite.

Whilst the discipline-based learning approach emphasises what young people *should know* (in terms of learning area content), the General Capabilities emphasise what young people *should be able to do* (in terms of specific skills and attributes).

According to Barry McGaw, Chair of the ACARA Board, the Australian Curriculum strikes a productive balance between these two approaches, suggesting it 'lets us have it all ways. We can embrace general capabilities that are particularly important in the 21st century without abandoning well established discipline based ways of knowing' (cited in Rubin 2011).

The third dimension is the three *Cross-curriculum Priorities* – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures; Sustainability; and Asia – which require educators to engage with contemporary issues and imperatives that are not necessarily made explicit in disciplinary subjects.

The three cross-curriculum priorities, which have been designed to align with the goals of the Melbourne Declaration, are the most political and contentious dimension and were criticised in the recent federal review of the Australian Curriculum (see below).

Through attempting to blend these three dimensions, the Australian Curriculum

responds to a number of different and potentially competing arguments about what students 'should know and be able to do', by marrying traditional disciplinary knowledge with global 21st century skills and contemporary political priorities.

Where are we going? Emerging trajectories and challenges

As the Australian Curriculum expands, a number of considerations are emerging for Australian educators and policy makers. Let me draw attention to *three*

issues likely to animate political and educational debates over the coming decade.

1. Diversity versus uniformity: State and territory hybrids

Australia's federal system of governance means state and territory curriculum agencies have responsibility for education and technically control the curriculum.

Whilst states and territories have reached a level of consensus to allow the Australian Curriculum to be developed to date, there are important differences in how the curriculum is being enacted across jurisdictions.

In Victoria, for example, the AusVels curriculum has emerged, which represents a hybrid of the Australian Curriculum (Aus) and the previous Victorian Essential Learning Standards (Vels).

AusVels is an interesting case as whilst it retains the discipline-based learning areas at its core, it includes a reduced number of General Capabilities (from seven down to four), and does not include the Cross-Curriculum Priorities.

Another key difference is that whilst the Australian Curriculum is organised via year levels, AusVels is organised into levels of learning on a developmental continuum.

The emergence of state and territory hybrids means there are now multiple versions of the Australian Curriculum operating across the nation, rather than 'one' homogenous version.

This raises interesting questions about an age-old curriculum tension: *diversity versus uniformity*. For example, if the pendulum swings too far towards uniformity, then the curriculum might become too inflexible and difficult to tailor to local needs; whereas if the pendulum swings too far towards diversity, the curriculum risks becoming incoherent and could lose the commonality it was originally designed to achieve.

The challenge, therefore, is finding a productive balance that allows for a common national approach, but also for reasonable levels of state and local tailoring.

2. The Donnelly and Wiltshire Review

The recent federal review of the Australian Curriculum, chaired by Kevin Donnelly and Ken Wiltshire, was marred by controversy from the word go.

The purpose of the review was to 'evaluate the robustness, independence, and balance of the Australian Curriculum' (Australian Government 2014, p. 8), yet it was never clear how this task was going to be achieved with a level of impartiality, given Donnelly has arguably been one of the most ardent and outspoken critics of curriculum in recent years.



The review, released in October last year, made 30 wide-reaching recommendations, including: a greater focus on literacy and numeracy; the need to address the overcrowded nature of the curriculum; a reconceptualisation of the Cross-curriculum Priorities; and greater recognition of Australia's so-called 'Judeo-Christian' heritage.

There was a lot of huff and puff about the review when it was released, but it remains unclear as to what extent its recommendations will be acted upon.

Reports from the most recent Education Council meeting in December 2014 suggest state and territory education ministers are reluctant to make any changes to the curriculum as a result of the review.

Only time will tell, therefore, as to whether the review has any meaningful impact.

3. A senior years Australian Curriculum? A national certificate?

The current plan is for Australian Curriculum subjects to be extended into Years 11 and 12 in the coming years, yet this is an incredibly thorny area of education policy that remains hotly contested and uncertain.

The senior years are so complex because each state and territory has a different senior secondary certificate. Certificates provide the architecture for organising the curriculum and are intimately entwined with assessment and examination systems, and the provision of vocational education and training.

If the Australian Curriculum does extend its reach into the senior years, then the obvious question begs: Will a national certificate of education be far behind?

Whilst this might sound like an audacious proposition, it is worth remembering that the idea of a national certificate has been put forward several times over the past decade.

The first serious attempt was the Australian Certificate of Education proposal under Howard in 2006. More recently, the Gillard Government announced an intention to develop an academically focused Australian Baccalaureate and a vocationally-focused National Trade Cadetship (NTC). Whilst the Baccalaureate idea faded away, the NTC is moving ahead, with ACARA currently leading its development.

Despite these tentative steps towards a national system of certificates, it is unlikely that any large-scale changes will emerge without considerable negotiation and debate between state and territory curriculum agencies.

As Geoff Masters has previously noted, Australian states and territories are 'staunch defenders' of their systems and certificates and would happily 'support a national approach if it meant others adopting their arrangements' (Masters 2006, p. 12).

A moving feast...

If history teaches us anything, then we should expect to see curriculum evolutions proliferate and debates continue with fervor.

As the recent federal review suggests: 'There is little as controversial in education as determining what it is that young people should be able to know, understand and be able to do following their time at school' (Australian Government 2014, p. 1).

Ongoing debates about the content of schooling, therefore, are not only evitable, but are an essential condition of a healthy school system and democracy.

Glenn Savage

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Notes

¹A more detailed examination of each of these phases can be found in an article I have co-authored with Kate O'Connor, which is forthcoming in the *Journal of Education Policy*, titled 'National agendas in global times: Curriculum reforms in Australia and the USA since the 1980s'.



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NORMAN MCCULLA, FACE



The Australian Curriculum: Who are we?

The formal curriculum of schools, it is said, is one of those places where we ask ourselves 'who are we?' It is a cultural artifact; a representation of our values and aspirations as a society for our young.

In varying degrees we hope that it will communicate to students the best of what our culture has to offer from the past, help them develop as young people in the present, and prepare them to face the uncertainties of the future with confidence. Perhaps the only true indicator of wise curriculum design and successful education is a prosperous and peaceful civil society. What then can we learn about ourselves by standing back and considering the current Australian Curriculum and the debate that has surrounded it?

We could observe that as a nation we are struggling towards defining our identity in the 21st century and that a national curriculum is central to this. There are some compelling reasons to

do so. International competitiveness in a globalised world requires its litmus tests of education productivity currently measured through PISA and TIMSS, and nationally through NAPLAN. Each of these requires a consolidated national response. We struggle because our country is huge and diverse, both geographically and culturally, and it is changing rapidly. It has emerged from separate state colonies where control of school education has rested with the states for well over a century. This is set against a backdrop of our Indigenous peoples' sustained relationship with the land stretching back in excess of 50 000 years, with the vast majority of us as newcomers.

Australian school education, long centralised in the various states and territories, has now seen increasing centralisation and standardisation at the national level in curriculum, assessment and standards of teacher professionalism. We sometimes wonder just how it is the Organisation for Economic Co-operation

and Development (OECD) appears to have become the arbiter and monitor of world education standards and to what effect. And why it is that we are prepared judge the richness and totality of all that happens in individual schools or in schools systems, or nationally, by somewhat narrow tests of literacy and numeracy.

There is in political philosophy an interesting concept. It is that of the 'Overton Window' (Mackinac Centre, 2014). In a given policy arena such as education, only a relatively narrow range of potential policies will be considered politically acceptable at any one time in a given socio-cultural context. This 'window' of politically-acceptable options for discussion is defined not necessarily by what politicians prefer, but rather by what they believe they can support, and be supported on, in the public domain so that prospects of re-election are enhanced.

In general, this 'window' shifts to include different policy options not when ideas change among politicians, but when ideas change in the society that elects them. (An alternative view suggests that the political process can also manipulate the Overton Window to justify and achieve a particular agenda).

If we look back over the discourse surrounding the need for a national curriculum, for instance, we can observe that it was justified in the public domain for the most part on the grounds of the (relatively small number of) families moving between states, our doing better in 'the 3 Rs', and going 'back to basics' as a means of achieving greater productivity.

We are indeed highly conservative as a nation, at least when it comes to education. Everyone has been to school and therefore has an opinion about what schools should be doing and what should be in the curriculum. Having taken the seven-league step of deciding a national curriculum was in order, the curriculum framework in which we decided to work was always going to be a conservative one. The Overton Window prohibited otherwise. Speed was of the essence in setting about the task, especially given the tenuous nature of the concept and a history of previous failed attempts. Who could argue therefore against

a curriculum framework centred on English, Mathematics, Science and History? In so do, we privileged, at least initially, some curriculum areas over others, such as health and wellbeing, and the creative arts.

As a nation we are also highly committed to consultation. As curriculum centralised, so too did the importance of peak groups at the national level representing all manner of constituencies in the education community. The Overton Window did not permit a lengthy discussion among these groups, or in the general community on what would be the most appropriate curriculum for our young people in the 21st century, or the key values on which it might be based, or the overall shape it might take in its design, or on structures that might best enable and develop teachers in their work. It did not allow for a re-visiting of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA,

2008) to consider its appropriateness and how it might influence curriculum design. It did permit consultation on the contents of a tiered and differentiated curriculum framework where the approach adopted for the first subjects to be considered became the template for others that followed. Other matters relating to cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities were addressed 'on the trot'.

We came to see curriculum, therefore, as predominantly about content; what needs to be taught to children and young people during schooling. Consultation focused on what should be 'in' the curriculum. We then surprised ourselves with the realisation that the national curriculum is already 'overcrowded'.

In the primary years the focus was on 'the basics' of literacy and numeracy. We recognised, as always, that these are highly important but the Overton Window restricted debate to one of addressing 'declining standards' rather than a

consideration of society's ever-increasing demands for higher-order standards.

As a consequence, we still fall back to debating long-discredited and unnecessary polarities such as 'phonics versus whole language', and often conceive of literacy and numeracy development as skills learnt in vacuums rather than integrated with the rest of the curriculum. We tend not to acknowledge the constraining effects this has on the breadth of the primary curriculum (at a time when the development of the entire human capital of all our young people is paramount). We are less prepared to discuss other forms of cultural and technological literacies essential to the 21st century. In opting for narrow definitions of literacy and numeracy and the safe territory of outmoded debates we align ourselves more with a time when the main purpose of schooling was to prepare young people for the burgeoning office work of the Industrial Revolution. ►

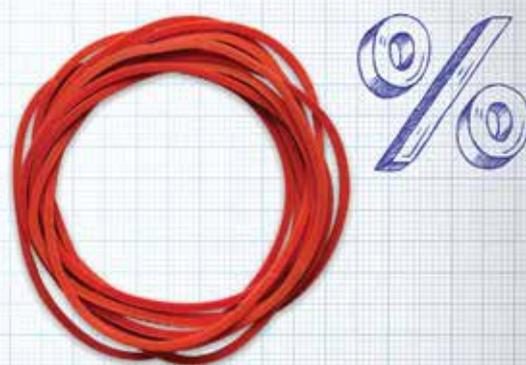


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We do like polarities. We debate direct instruction versus constructivist learning. Accomplished teachers on the other hand are the first to tell us that they are all part of a teacher's professional repertoire. Getting the right pedagogical mix at the right time to address the specific needs of students is the key.

We opt for a detailed and highly differentiated, outcomes-based and assessment-driven curriculum. Our prime reasons for doing this are ones of equity and meritocracy. We believe that all of our students should be able to learn and compete in a curriculum that offers a level playing field. Our dilemma is that we also recognise that the evidence tells us that students from higher socio-economic backgrounds generally do better despite there being evidence sometimes of high performance where



one might least suspect it. Quite rightly we remain concerned about the 'long tail' in performance particularly among our Indigenous young people. We stop short of asking the question of whether or not the curriculum itself could be part of the problem rather than the solution.

So we are caught in a bind. On the one hand we opt for a centralised curriculum, which takes time to develop and time to change. We want less in the curriculum, especially so that students can engage in deeper-order learning and not see schooling as a litany of assessments. We ask how a national curriculum can be both centralised, yet relevant to diversity of place and to the multicultural nature of Australian society. We look to more clearly defining the key values that bind us together as a society and discerning the ways in which these might influence curriculum design and implementation.

We know little on a large scale about students' views of their school education. We do not inform our curriculum design to any great extent with any developmental understanding of how students learn in these stages of schooling, and indeed how teachers might best teach in order to enable that learning, such is our preoccupation with what is to be taught. The influence of high-stakes testing at the end of schooling tends to permeate down through the curriculum, shaping its intent in the earlier stages. We know that the curriculum and policy frameworks in which teachers operate are central to enabling or undermining their sense of professionalism, resilience and wellbeing. We have only a cursory understanding of how our teachers learn in the various stages of schooling and in their own professional careers- but that is another yet related matter.

We are honest enough to admit that, while we strive for world's best practice in curriculum, we have not achieved it and that we have much to learn from other jurisdictions. We now know that curriculum excellence cannot and should not be equated with simply basic skills testing. We know that teachers work hard to learn about and bring about curriculum change and that this takes time.

The realisation that it is timely to reflect on these matters as an outcome of the recent Donnelly-Wiltshire review of the Australian Curriculum has brought its own Overton Window of opportunity to explore new ideas, without prejudice, as teachers implement the current curriculum. The allocation of such time was unthinkable when the national curriculum was first agreed to, hence the conservative response to its design on the one hand and, somewhat ironically, the attempted yet unattainable speed required of its development on the other.

Our initial response to a national curriculum told us that we are pragmatic; that we preferred get on with it while the time was ripe rather than talk about it. We opted for safe and familiar territory and have been disappointed with the outcome as a result, not so much because of the work that has been put into by the designers, by those who contributed to consultative processes, and by teachers who have implemented it.

How indeed do we want to develop all of our young people during their years of school education in the 21st century? What might the next iteration of the Australian Curriculum tell us about who we are as Australians? And about who we want to be?

Dr Norman McCulla is the Co-ordinator of the Educational Leadership Program at Macquarie University, Sydney.

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Appreciation is extended to the highly-experienced, practising teachers of the 2014 class of Curriculum Studies at Macquarie University, Sydney who shared their readings and insights into the Australian Curriculum for this article.

The Australian National Curriculum: An early childhood perspective

ANNA MARIE SHIN



The notion of a national curriculum is contentious. In the Australian context, Brennan (2011) positioned the development of the Australian curriculum as 'the use of the already politicised field of education as a vehicle to reform commonwealth-state relations in a federated system' (Brennan, 2011. p.259).

Early childhood educators working across the birth-8 age range are required to use two curricula: The national curriculum (ref) for the school years and the Early Years Learning Framework (EYLF) (ref) for birth-5 years. Both Australian documents can't be seen outside of the context of other accountability measures such as the development of the 'My School' website, the National Quality Agenda for Early Childhood Services and the debates between federal and state labour and liberal governments about appropriate funding models for both schooling and early childhood education.

Over the past ten years internationally there has been a trend to codify early childhood curriculum. This can be attributed to the positioning of early childhood education as a social and

economic benefit for governments. This was highlighted in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) thematic review of the Early Childhood Education and Care Policy: Starting Strong II (OECD, 2006). Within this review the general acceptance of some structuring and orientation of children's experiences towards educational goals is noted, as well as a distinction between a 'readiness for school approach' in French and English speaking countries and 'a social pedagogy tradition' in the Nordic and Central European countries. The tensions between these approaches and issues of consistency and continuity for children in the transition from kindergarten to primary school were highlighted within the review and are still very much alive in our current Australian context.

To consider the contemporary situation in respect to a national curriculum for early childhood, and where we might be heading in the future, continues to be a matter of weaving through contradictions and paradoxes, where children, parents, professionals and policy makers have to traverse through two very different approaches to curriculum in the early childhood years.

Tensions between curricula designed for prior-to-school contexts and schooling have been widely highlighted in research. Dunlop and Fabian (2007) comment that these differences, in perspective from early childhood to schooling, are long-standing and common around the world. They highlight, however, recent policy attention to attempt to bridge the differences. In Australia, from a policy maker's point of view, it is possible to draw connections between the two curriculum documents for the early childhood and schooling sectors. Indeed, it could be seen as politically palatable to do so.

The paper *Foundations for learning: Relationships between the Early Years Learning Framework and the Australian Curriculum* (2011), jointly published by Early Childhood Australia (ECA) and the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), sets out to explain how the two curriculum documents are aligned. It encourages the reader to consider the biggest possible ideas espoused by both the EYLF and the Australian Curriculum, arising from the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, ►

2008). It indicates that the two documents share both a policy context and the same vision about the kind of society that education should promote (Connor 2011). However, this paper underestimates the barriers posed by both the different structure and content emphases of the two curricula and the history of traditional divides.

Lack of articulation between early years and school curriculum is not an issue exclusive to the Australian context. The US' National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) position statement on early childhood curriculum, assessment and program evaluation (2003) discusses the efforts made to link K-12 curriculum frameworks to early childhood standards. In Britain, the Department of Education's National Strategies website lists a range of case studies to articulate practice between the Early Years' Foundation Stage and Key Stage One of the British Curriculum (Department for Children, Schools and Families UK, 2010)

In Sweden, a country renowned for the progressive nature of its early childhood education, reforms have been introduced to develop a truly integrated education system. One reform involved creating a pre school class for six year olds, within the school system. This reform was introduced for both educational and economic imperatives; it aimed to link pedagogy and curricula in the interests of children's development and learning (Kaga, 2007).

In a review of five pre-school curricula, by Pramling Samuelsson, Sheridan and Williams (2006), each curriculum reviewed perceived preschool children as different from older school children and proposed that one reason for the reviewed preschool curricula to be judged as high quality is that they did not try to give pre school learning the formality found in primary school. Neugebauer's (2008) collection of reports representing challenges facing early childhood programs across 29 countries includes challenges of implementation of national curriculum in some countries contrasted with stories of fragmented and inequitable access to early childhood services and limited recognition within the public education systems in others.

The EYLF can be viewed as privileging process; it views curriculum as 'all the interactions, experiences, activities, routines and events, planned and unplanned that occur in an environment designed to foster children's learning and development' (Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations, 2009 p. 45). It provides detail about a variety of pedagogical practices that are useful for educators to support young children's learning; and the processes that young children should engage in as evidence of their development of broad learning outcomes. It does not provide specific articulation of the content that might be useful for educators to engage with in order to support young children's learning nor does it specifically articulate the 'content' knowledge that would benefit children.

By contrast, the Australian Curriculum can be viewed as privileging content. It describes a learning entitlement for each Australian student. It sets out what young people should be taught, through the specification of curriculum content from learning areas, general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities; and an expectation of the quality of their learning, specifying the extent of knowledge, depth of understanding and sophistication of skills through achievement standards. (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority, 2012). The curriculum does not articulate the pedagogical approaches for educators to use to support children's learning. Rather it suggests that each educational organisation is able to make decisions about the pedagogical approaches used to deliver the curriculum.

These two very different ways of orienting the curriculum appear at odds with each other, and this, combined with the focus on quantifying learning through standardised testing within the school sector nationally, contrasted with a holistic approach in the prior-to-schooling sector which resists quantifying learning outcomes, sets the scene for miscommunication and misunderstandings across the 0 to 8 span of early childhood education. In New Zealand, Mawson (2006) found



that there appeared to be one-sided thinking about the responsibility of being aware of the curriculum and philosophy between the sectors. Primary and early childhood teachers often knew little about each other's curriculum documents. Information about the early childhood sector was not included in primary years teaching courses and most primary teachers had not accessed professional development regarding links to the early childhood sector, contrasted with preschool teachers' sometimes greater knowledge and use of primary school curriculum documents.

The future of effective early childhood education in the context of national curriculum in Australia lies in increased communication, connections and shared understandings about practice. This is the leadership challenge that must be met in the areas of practice, research, the academy and policy making if the early childhood field is to be strengthened becoming one that is able to work together effectively in the interests of young children, their families and society as a whole.

One lever for action which could support increased connection and understanding is the recommendation from the *Review of the Australian Curriculum- Final Report* (Donnelly and Wiltshire 2014): 'that early childhood should be better recognised for the unique phase in student development that suggests there should be greater flexibility in relation to the current rigid framework of key learning areas, and be concerned primarily with literacy and numeracy' (p. 245). It is disappointing that this recommendation did not include recognition of the EYLF and greater connections between the prior-to-school and schooling sectors in early childhood.

Some years ago on a visit to Melbourne, Gunilla Dahlberg used the phrase 'walking on two legs' as a metaphor for being able to make progress in critical pedagogy—it was something like the ability to keep one leg working in a pragmatic way while the other leg walked in the area of critical provocation. I would like to suggest that serious attention to having the legs of process and content working together in early childhood curriculum in both prior to school and

school contexts would be beneficial. While I see some dangers if a narrow view of literacy and numeracy was adopted, and would like to see more focussed attention and priority on social learning and relationships, I do believe that there would be positive outcomes, if this recommendation was used to rethink how process and content work together for the interests of young children 0 to 8 years. This would include the EYLF as well as the Australian National Curriculum.

In open frame curriculum documents, the educator is positioned as taking opportunity of learning based on children's interests and experiences, rather than being tied to prescriptive content. This process, however, is only possible if the educator has a clear conception of the content that is available and useful for young children to learn. We need to carefully consider who we are as educators in early childhood. What are the knowledge bases and disciplines that are comfortable for us, and what are the knowledge bases and disciplines that challenge us? Where do we need to extend our own learning—both individually and collectively, in order to confidently create meaningful learning experiences for young children? If we don't do this thinking, we are in danger of not only ignoring important learning for children, but also reproducing misconceptions and attitudes to learning that are not helpful. Opening these kinds of 'zones of interaction' for curriculum development needs to happen at all levels; between practitioners, teacher education institutions, policy makers and researchers to make positive change for early childhood.

Anne Marie Shin is the Early Childhood Director at Sturt Street Children's Centre, Sturt St Community School in South Australia.

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What makes a quality school curriculum? The learner perspective

SAMANTHA CHAPMAN, MARINE CHU, SPENCER DAVIS,
SAM ILLOBUCHI, DEMI IRWIN, QAIS SADAT, TESS
SHACKLOCK, MARGARET TRAN & KIRA CLARKE, MACE

A wide variety of stakeholders have driven and contributed to the debate and commentary of the Australian Curriculum: teachers, policymakers, politicians, parents, employers and researchers. Each of these represents a different perspective on the what, why and how of the curriculum being learnt and taught in Australian classrooms.

Often missing from the public discourse of this fundamental challenge in Australian education is the voice of the most crucial stakeholder—the learners. What do young people see as essential to a quality school curriculum? What does the curriculum mean to them? How should the curriculum work for and serve their needs and aspirations?

In late 2014, members of the Victorian Student Representative Council (SRC) Executive were invited to provide their

thoughts on 'What makes a quality school curriculum'. The eight perspectives below come from a diverse group of young people, including young men and women from government and independent schools. Their perspectives highlight the importance of curriculum versatility, flexibility and relevance to everyday life. A common theme amongst the students was the idea that curriculum should enable self-discovery—for each student to discover 'who they are and what they are passionate about'. In the vignettes below, the eight students wrote not only of knowledge, but of skills; skills for the 'real world' and for 'empathising and acting globally in a caring and knowledgeable capacity'.

As a new school year begins, and the dust settles on last year's review of the Australian Curriculum, consideration of these student insights may serve as

a tonic for those of us worn out by the rhetoric of 'back to basics', 'parent-friendly' and 'renewed focus on morality'.

Demi Irwin (16) Rochester Secondary College

'The national curriculum should form the role of teaching children to become educated adults of vast levels and skills.

A quality school curriculum needs to be: versatile for all skill levels; adaptable for all children and be interesting and relevant.

If I had the chance to change the national curriculum, I would make it so all schools in the nation have equal opportunities. For example, in the country areas there is a need for more accessible learning opportunities.'



▶ **Sam Illobuchi (14) Fitzroy High School**

'I truly believe that a curriculum should be a tool that provides the structure and resources necessary to education in this century. For a curriculum to be successful and practical, it needs to link back to everyday life. A school curriculum, especially one as broad as a national prospectus, needs to be flexible and should accommodate every student.

Fundamental to a curriculum is its ability to allow students to blossom. It's necessary for a curriculum to give students enough space to grow, yet still ensure that they are following a positive trend. Additionally, it needs to ensure that no ambitions are culled. To have an adequate curriculum, there needs to be various pathways within each subject to guarantee everybody's learning style is provided for. There needs to be flexibility then the system will work!

Samantha Chapman (17) Casey Grammar School

'An education system should not just turn out hundreds of extremely intelligent people. Of course, intellect should be highly-regarded and nurtured, but for me, an ideal education system should produce well-rounded, global functioning citizens. So instead of some classes being four hours a week, cut to three and introduce additional content for after school. This will enable us to contribute to society in local areas, and aid us in empathising and acting globally in a caring and knowledgeable capacity. I would also like to know how to do my taxes, manage a bank account and even how to interact during out of school activities.'

Spencer Davis (14) Footscray City College

'The Australian National Curriculum should be a guiding factor in schools. While it is important, some of the best teaching/learning experiences can be off topic, leading to some of the best student growth. However, this does not mean we should scrap the curriculum.

If the curriculum were to change, I would recommend an annual national survey for both students and teachers to gather feedback on the current curriculum and its classroom effects. The curriculum should stay somewhat fluid to keep up with the needs and wants of youths today.'

Tess Shacklock (17) Templestowe College

'I am a student from a school with a very different curriculum to most and I have experienced what it's like to have freedom in education. At my school students are given the opportunity to create their own curriculum to suit their needs and goals. I want to know why all schools don't do this? Every student learns differently, so why would you make them follow the same curriculum?

For students to get the most out of their education it is important that they are engaged and feel like they are making a step forward towards their goals. I don't understand why a student who knows what they want to do should be forced into doing a class that doesn't benefit them? Why are they not given the freedom to explore the different things a subject could entail?

I remember when I was in Year 7, I attended a very big school where I was forced to do exactly what the teachers told me. I used to love art class and one day it was clay work. We were given direct guidelines on what to make and how to make it. But with my creative mind I didn't want to 'follow the guidelines'. I wanted to make something different. At the end of the class when everyone showed what they had made to the teacher, I was told off because everyone else had made a cork screw tail pig but not me, I had made a turtle.

Why are students forced to follow the crowd? Aren't we always being told to be individual? As you can imagine I left the school and moved to one where my ideas were heard and I could make whatever animal I wished.

Any curriculum needs to be flexible, so students have freedom in their education, and they can find who they are and what they are passionate about. From there a student has a greater chance to find what they want to do when they are older. In my view, the curriculum should be different for every student, we all learn differently, we have different goals, why on earth would you make us all do the same curriculum?’

Qais Sadat (17) Minaret College

‘A curriculum is a vital part of the 13-year journey we call school. It plays an important role in determining, not only what we will learn, but outlines the skills that we are expected to acquire at school.

I think the role a quality school curriculum should perform is one that involves educating students in a way that will allow them to utilise their capabilities to their full potential. If there is anything I would like to change, it would be examination and learning as people learn in different ways, which is why it’s not fair to test them on what they are expected to have learnt. The curriculum should aim to test students on their understanding of concepts and develop skills in order to optimise students’ abilities thus utilising their potential to full capacity.’

Margaret Tran (16) Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School

(Excerpt from a speech at 2014 VicSRC Recognition Awards)

‘I believe that involving students in educational matters will lead to effective learning and increased engagement.

I quote Dr.Seuss: ‘Kid, you’ll move mountains!’ It doesn’t matter how big the size of the task is, you should never be intimidated. It’s just a matter of taking small steps towards your goal. It may sound impossible at first, but the more you think about it, the more you can come up with ways that it can be done. Just begin chipping away at it, and with enough time and patience you’ll see that it becomes manageable. It’s just the

matter of putting yourself out there and opening yourself up to every opportunity that falls in your path.

Student voice is essential in all schools. It is our mission to continue this journey and ensure that student voice continues to be important in schools and the curriculum. We are the leaders who are making good changes in this world. We need to continue to drive student voice across Victoria, Australia, the world. We are the past. We are the present. We are the future. What we do now will affect generations. Every single change that we make will cause a ripple effect in the vast ocean.

‘Young people aren’t just the leaders of tomorrow – they are the leaders of today.’

Marine Chu (15) Mac. Robertson Girls’ High School

‘This great initiative to implement a national curriculum may be a step in providing all Australians a world-class education system. So what makes a quality school curriculum?’

The quality of a curriculum is about its academic content, but it is arguably even more so about quality teaching. Throughout all schools there is always one thing in common: teachers having difficulty teaching a class of students of different capabilities. Teachers must have the capacity to teach at a standard to allow highly-able students to soar even higher and help struggling students find ground where they may learn with ease, so that the true value of education and knowledge may be shared with all.

A school curriculum should not only extend students through academic means, but also allow them to learn useful skills for success, future education and life. Students should graduate fully prepared and armed with knowledge and experience to conquer anything that may come their way.

A quality school curriculum should allow the next generation to reach their dreams and create the future.’

Kira Clarke is a lecturer in Education Policy at MGSE.



State-based national curriculums: Key policy issues

REG ALLEN



This sketch of policy issues in state-based national curriculums—in this case, issues in where the Australian National Curriculum is and where it is going—will focus on the policy issues that ought to matter, rather than the complex immediacies of state relationships with the Commonwealth (in education and more generally), imperatives of bureaucracies (status and influence) and local exigencies.

The primary issue ought to be the development of policies and practices that will deliver 'more learning for more learners', (O' Banion, J. 1997) especially for students from less advantaged backgrounds. Barry McGaw used this phrase in the title of an address to the 2008 Australasian Curriculum, Assessment and Certification Authorities

(ACACA) conference saying that the curriculum will achieve 'Australia's potential' (and hence more learning for more students) through developing a 'single, world-class, curriculum for all Australians from kindergarten to Year 12'.

While we see in McGaw's approach the political imperatives expressed in the curriculum being 'single', 'world-class' and 'for all', the key implication is that excellence in learning will be achieved by writing down a set of clear statements about what teachers are supposed to teach and what students are supposed to learn. That is, the Australian National Curriculum sits within a long tradition (largely unsuccessful, especially in achieving equitable outcomes); an intended curriculum that really matters.

The *intended* curriculum is the material you find in official documents. The actual or *enacted* curriculum is what happens in classrooms, what students actually learn. Putting more emphasis (resources and efforts) on the intended, rather than the enacted curriculum, is one of five types of well-tried and largely unsuccessful ways of achieving more learning for more learners (R. Allen, 2008).

The current move to an Australian National Curriculum is an example of changes in the official curriculum intended to *reduce* diversity, value subject disciplines and focus on 'the basics'. This sits within a broad spectrum of ways to change the official curriculum. In the last century, here and overseas, these have included:

- more diversity (localised variations) in curriculum
- more choice for students of courses, units, modules
- multi-disciplinary studies
- integrated studies
- individualised learning
- subject disciplines
- less diversity
- more concentration on the basics.

We are currently ringing in (well, sort of, nearly) a 'single world-class curriculum for all Australians from Kindergarten to Year 12': the Australian Curriculum. This was developed in two parts: Foundation to Year 10 (F-10) and senior secondary ('Years 11 and 12'). Doing it this way reflected a clash between an intention and reality—the difference between the F-10 sector and the senior secondary sector, characterised by a lot of choice of subjects, much diversity in students' study programs and a lot of high-stakes assessment.

The F-10 Australian Curriculum in English, Mathematics, Science and History is, officially, in the process of implementation, whether being 'taught in classrooms' (ACT, NT, QLD, SA and TAS), 'integrated into syllabuses' (NSW), included in a curriculum framework (VIC), or involving 'teachers using the Australian Curriculum to teach, assess and report on student achievement' (WA). There are differences in the timelines and, in SA and TAS there are official differences in the details of implementation in the different sectors (State and Territory F-10 Australian Curriculum Implementation Timelines August 2014, www.acara.edu.au). The rest of the Australian Curriculum is yet to be finished, and it will not cover everything currently found in official F-10 intended curriculum.

The different meanings of 'taught in classrooms', 'integrated into syllabuses', 'included in a curriculum framework', or being 'used to teach, assess and report' are differences in official positions, differences that are likely to reflect local issues and may or may not have any significance for what happens in practice.

Being 'integrated into syllabuses' appears to be saying something like 'we already have well-written syllabuses and a well-developed process for change so we will include relevant material from the Australian Curriculum into these processes and the resulting syllabuses in a sensible and managed way'. 'Taught in classrooms' seems to include the idea of using the Australian Curriculum as the official curriculum. 'Included in a curriculum framework' seems to imply that the Australian Curriculum is one of several aspects of an overall statement about how schools should organise the content and assessment of their F-10 programs.

We see in these ways in which the complexities of local politics and traditions, change-management, finite resources, provision of teacher professional development and varying patterns of governance blur in practice the clear and clean ideal that the job is essentially complete once the 'world-class' documents have been written. That it, the assumption that a well-written curriculum, provides a clear prescription for practices in every classroom is wrong. What happens in classrooms reflects many very different factors, and it is unrealistic to think that telling teachers what students should be learning is going to lead automatically to all students learning.

The ideal behind the Australian Curriculum would work as advertised if there were, in Allan Luke's phrase, a direct 'hypodermic effect between the official curriculum and the enacted curriculum' (Luke A, 2010 pp 59 -64). And, as is well-shown in the research literature, there is no such effect. As Luke remarks:

Specific knowledges and skills can only be 'named' in official curriculum documents at a level of technical abstraction. They are remade through the lenses and practices of teachers' substantive world, field and disciplinary knowledge, then brought to life in classrooms in relation to teachers' pedagogical content knowledge and students' cultural scripts and background schemata, which include a host of other available messages of media, institutions and community cultures (Luke [2010] p.59).

Putting an official curriculum into practice is not a matter of following step-by-step instructions. It requires interpretation by each and every teacher. Each teacher will bring experience and background to bear, each student will colour what happens with assumptions formed by previous experiences and ideas, including those drawn from school, family, culture and the media.

Data from studies such as the Queensland School Longitudinal Achievement Study and the New South Wales Pedagogies Project tell us that we are foolish to imagine that what we hope happens in classrooms actually occurs; that official intentions are simply enacted just as intended.

We will only know what is actually happening (what the enacted curriculum is, how well it matches the intended curriculum and whether it meets our aspirations for students' learning) if we look at it, carefully in a sustained, systematic way across all schools, in a way that supports the changes needed to achieve more learning for more learners.

For F-10, the policy problem is that this would be expensive, bring major challenges from practitioners, and would almost certainly raise some uncomfortable issues about both the gaps between intention and practices and the gaps between official positions and realities. At this stage, there is no systematic and sustained information gathering about the enacted curriculum in all Australian classrooms.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), however tells us:

Curriculum monitoring, evaluation and review processes are put in place to monitor and review the Australian Curriculum based on implementation feedback. The evaluation process may result in minor changes to, or a revision of, the curriculum. (ACARA shape paper 4.0 clause 22)

It is not ACARA's role to seek out any information about what happens in practice with the curriculum, it develops. If any information turns up, it may be used to make minor changes or revisions. This assumes that there are not and could not be any real deficiencies. ►

Perhaps NAPLAN can tell us what we need to know. The national testing programs don't provide a systematic way to find out what happens in practice with the Australian Curriculum. National testing programs are measurements (at best, snapshots of limited aspects of learned material), not information about the enacted curriculum, about what students actually learn, and don't learn—the outcomes.

So, we now have an F-10 Australian Curriculum (in part) in implementation. The missing policy element is quality assurance of the curriculum enacted in its name. That, conspicuous by its absence the national debate, appears to be left as a state, sector and school responsibility.

The implementation of the F-10 Australian Curriculum not only involves teaching and learning, it also involves assessment and reporting. Meaningful interpretation of any assessments of student learning in terms of each stage F-10 of the Australian Curriculum

rests on the nature and extent of any systematic quality assurance of the validity, reliability and consistency of these assessments. The required quality assurance does not occur and in its absence we should assume that standards will vary significantly.

The Australian Curriculum is to run from Foundation to Year 12, not to stop at Year 10. At senior secondary level ('Year 11 and 12') there is significant systematic quality assurance of assessment for many subjects (including 15 for which the senior secondary Australian Curriculum provides specifications of content and achievement standards). In one sense, this is a policy opportunity in that there is an existing quality assurance regime. However, the intersection of the state-based senior secondary sector and the Australian Curriculum presents a broad range of additional policy challenges.

First, the senior secondary sector includes some subjects that are 'high-stakes' for students (and hence for their teachers and schools). These are the subjects with results that contribute

to selection decisions for high prestige post-school destinations, so the content, assessment, assessment processes and results get much student, parent, teacher and public attention. This means that changes are not just something that can be announced, because they can lead to contention, debate, confusion and concern about the impact on individual students.

Secondly, curriculum, assessment and certification agencies ('Boards of Studies') are responsible for course documents, assessment and quality assurance. These agencies are commonly constituted to be sufficiently independent of government (and clearly independent of State Departments of Education) that their decisions, in these high-stakes areas are, and can be seen to be, made without direction or inappropriate influence. This, together with the public attention to high-stakes assessment and certification, makes adoption of the senior secondary Australian Curriculum (even) more complicated than in the F-10 arena—takes longer, involves more stakeholders, and



requires explicit resolution of differences between the new official curriculum and established practices

Thirdly, senior secondary Australian Curriculum content specifications (and not achievement standards) are being 'integrated' into relevant senior secondary subjects. There is a significant difference between these content specifications being 'integrated' and the being 'taught and assessed' often found in the implementation of the F-10 Australian Curriculum. An 'integration' process must lead to greater diversity in the intended curriculum at senior secondary level, especially since there is much variation in the meaning of 'integration' in terms of how much of the specified content is included and in what form. Some of this variation reflects local idiosyncrasies and traditions—a policy challenge in itself. Some, however, reflects that over time teacher communities of practice have built up shared understanding of ideas, concepts and terms expressed in particular ways and forms. In the documents from

“ *In summary, right now we have the official documents for some of the Australian Curriculum. Officially, implementation of this intended curriculum in some form is underway.* ”

different agencies, similar ideas may be expressed in different forms.

Fourthly, the implementation of common achievement standards will present significant policy issues, including the challenges of change management in the complex and different environments of

senior secondary assessment systems. Not least of these is that the active involvement of teacher communities of practice in senior secondary assessment and certification makes a significant contribution to public acceptance of the legitimacy of such assessment and certification. Imposing common standards for levels of achievement from outside will not be simple or straightforward.

Lastly, the implementation of common content and results using common achievement standards will lead, sooner or later, to the use of students' results in senior secondary to make comparisons between states, between systems and between schools. This will lead to a requirement for demonstrated comparability of subject results, both between-years and between-jurisdictions.

In summary, right now we have the official documents for some of the Australian Curriculum. Officially, implementation of this intended curriculum in some form is underway. We do not know, and do not have a systematic, Australia-wide process for learning about its impact on the enacted curriculum—the one that really matters.

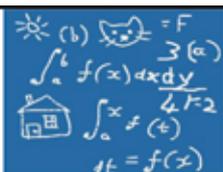
Where are we going? Everything takes (much) longer and costs (much more). Practice is complicated, multi-faceted and untidy in ways outside the ideal of a 'single, world-class, curriculum for all Australians from kindergarten to Year 12'. We do need to achieve so much more learning for so many more learners. Perhaps starting with making changes to the intended curriculum is not the best approach.

Reg Allen is the CEO of the Tasmanian Qualifications Authority. He has 30 years of experience as a teacher and board member consultant, deputy director and director, in the diverse education contexts of Australia, England, and the US.

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The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent the views of any organisation.

For a full list of references please email Reg at reg.allen@tqa.tas.gov.au.



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Complicating the Curriculum: Speaking back to the assumptions of oversimplification

PHILIP ROBERTS

What do we mean by 'curriculum'? This simple question is usually greeted with a form of bewilderment by my pre-service education students and a staunch knowledge-based definition by practicing teachers. There is an exception though, it seems that practicing teachers trained at least 15 years ago jump at the opportunity to revisit holistic thinking putting forward broad understandings including 'everything that happens in school' and values, objectives and outcomes-laden meanings.

This distinction, and indeed the puzzlement by my new pre-service students that I could ask such a question is striking and says something about how our understanding of curriculum has changed. It seems that a normative utilitarian definition has become dominant in the public discourse to the point that to think otherwise is ludicrous. In the face of such simplification I suggest we need to once more complicate the curriculum in the interests of all our students, and in particular those whose lives fall outside the assumptions inherent in simplified understandings.

The discussion surrounding the Australian Curriculum and the Donnelly/Wiltshire Review is symptomatic of the simplification I refer to. Repeatedly we hear statements from politicians stressing the need for a rigorous,

robust, world-class curriculum and decrying falling standards. This rhetoric positions 'curriculum' as a static thing, primarily knowledge to be mastered and regurgitated when needed, usually in exams and other high-stakes assessment. Subsequently curriculum becomes something simple to be implemented through lock-step pedagogy and easily auditable for public reporting.

Looking back

Curriculum has not always been this way. As Marsh points out in 'Key Concepts for Understanding Curriculum' (2009), curriculum can mean many things to many people and as a field of study has undergone a number of changes. To illustrate the point, he offers a few common definitions including subject and knowledge-based definitions, the planned learnings in a school, the totality of learning experiences, student centred meanings and radical social re-interpretation ideas. The key point is that curriculum can mean all of these and more. It is after all traditionally a particularly open concept, at least much more open than contemporary usage suggests.

The etymology of the term stresses its origin in relation to a course, or a course of study, both singularly or collectively. This led theorists such as Pinar (2012),

to advance arguments that position curriculum as a method and/or process, whereby teachers and students pay particular attention to their present, past and future. That is, the learning and interaction is personal and deeply meaningful. What is clear is that in this usage curriculum is not simply content to be mastered but a process of intellectual, social and emotional growth and development.

Recognising this enlarged meaning and its wide implications, Pinar also suggested that curriculum was a 'complicated conversation' through which students, and teachers, come to question, know and understand the world and their place in it. The complexity arises in that we are working to change students' understanding of the world and equip them with the knowledge and skills to assume responsibility for society. This inevitably includes questions about society, its future and the preferred futures of the young people involved. The leading Australian educator Garth Boomer (1992) advocated a similarly open process-based interpretation suggesting that the curriculum was something to be negotiated. Indeed Boomer saw this negotiated curriculum as a teacher-student partnership through which both explored their understanding of the world.

How we represent society to students is itself fraught. In essence the curriculum

has to represent what we collectively know as a society to students. However, we know exponentially more than we can choose to represent in the few hours allocated to each broad learning area. This problem of representation (Green, 2010) becomes one of selection—what do we choose to represent and what do we leave out?

Finally, there is also the outstanding question about which stage of curriculum we are referring to. Is it that which is planned, enacted or experienced? Is it the official curriculum endorsed by the state, that written in school documents or that actually enacted in classrooms? Is it the formal document we can read online or is it the hidden curriculum through which powerful social values are reinforced? Is it the material under the ‘content’ heading or the aim, rationale or outcomes?

These are just some of the big ideas within the academic field of curriculum studies and some of the broad ideas we might be questioning like ‘what do we mean by ‘curriculum’? Notably they are usually far more complicated than the initial assumptions of many pre-service teachers and increasingly so for in-service teachers. Sadly the resultant simplification of understandings corresponds with the rise of neo-conservative ideologies and the decline of curriculum studies as a field of academic study in pre-service education.

What is the role of curriculum in promoting equity?

It would be hard to argue that the increasing federal political concern with education is not at some level motivated by a concern for equity. Similarly it would be hard to find an educator who does not have a strong commitment to the notion of equity. The contention arises when we consider what is meant by equity in the context of curriculum. When I pose this question as the corollary to the first, responses tend to be a bit more certain and constrained. Typically responses suggest it’s quite simple, the curriculum is what you need to know and everyone who is given a chance to learn it achieves equity. Such a position echoes the sentiments of the proponents of the

Australian Curriculum in its present form from Rudd, Gillard, Abbott, and even Pyne, Donnelly and Wiltshire.

The only catch is, again returning to one of the central questions of the curriculum studies field, ‘what/whose knowledge is of most worth?’ Is it too left leaning and influenced by fads such as sustainability and recognition of the original Australians? Should it make more of the Judeo/Christian heritage of ‘western’ civilisation? Should it value the traditional texts more? Within these, primarily cultural, concerns are the echoes of the curriculum studies field and consideration of how we represent the nation to future generations. They build upon the related knowledge concerns about standards and if Australian students are, and will be, competitive with international students. Within all, however, is the assumption that students merely need to learn more of a certain type of knowledge to be competitive and worthwhile citizens. In essence such orientations are distributive and inherently economic in origin. They suggest that there is a virtual pot of important and worthwhile knowledge that students need to be able to call upon.

When it comes to equity some students, through the chance of birth, have a closer affinity with this knowledge and its cultural origins. This predisposes some to greater success than others as evidenced through the domination of students from higher SES and metropolitan backgrounds in the top ranks of standardised testing and senior secondary curriculum results. The assumption inherent in the curriculum, and in much public discourse, is that those students who traditionally don’t achieve as well merely need to be given a little more of this important knowledge. In a distributive sense they simply need a little more of that valuable and important knowledge. It is assumed that through a national curriculum we ensure a level playing field and make sure that everyone has access to what is important.

Herein lies the catch. In the distributive argument it can run one of two ways: either we prop up those who start behind or provide the opportunity and leave it up to them. This is where we can see

ideology in action. The latter option, of providing a theoretically level playing field and giving everyone a chance in it, pits people in perennial competition and renders failure; a natural outcome and the result of some personal deficiency. After all they were given the chance and they didn’t take it. The problem is we know through decades of social research that it is much more complex than this.

Problematically, the first option of propping up those who start behind is a bit of a smoke screen. Taking the work of Richard Teese and his colleagues as an example (Teese, 2013), building the assumed knowledge upon which the knowledge in the curriculum is built is a massive task that takes a significant proportion of the limited time available. The result is that while some students work to develop the contextual understating upon which the knowledge in the curriculum is based, others focus solely upon mastering the knowledge and the intellectual dexterity needed to excel in its examination.

Increasingly, as we see in the Gonski issue, it also seems that prevailing ideologies are against providing extra support to those who need it more, ironically referencing some warped notion of equity.

While criticised by the Donnelly/Wiltshire Review the focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures alludes to more progressive forms of justice. Recognitive, Representational and Associational forms of justice variously work to represent the interests and the position of traditionally marginalised groups and have their knowledge, perspectives and interests included. Crucially they also change the status quo for everyone leading to a more equitable and culturally richer society. A good example is the progress made in improving education for girls. However, conservative concerns about ‘traditional western values’ are a direct challenge to these ideas.

A focus on curriculum as knowledge again marginalises these concerns, as through this lens all students from traditionally marginalised groups need to do is master what is decreed as important. But if we return to more open ►



and interactive definitions of curriculum how does this help students from such groups see themselves as valuable members of our society? Surely such a knowledge approach merely tells them they need to change who they are. It's hardly any wonder then when large groups of students choose to 'opt out' and maintain their identity rather than disavow who they are.

Missing from such a knowledge-orientated meaning of curriculum is, rather oddly given the context, the students themselves. Where is, in the terms of the curriculum studies field, the negotiation between teacher and student in coming to know the world, the complicated conversation about the future they see and want, the course of coming to know and understand their society, the society they will inherit and ultimately lead. It seems that these questions have been deliberately sidelined. Do we assume that students are not capable of such thinking, or perhaps we don't want them thinking such potentially dangerous thoughts?

It is time we paused and once again complicated our understanding of curriculum. Personally, in faculty, stage, school or collegial teams, let's just pause for a moment and give some thought to what we mean by curriculum and how this relates to equity. The academic field of curriculum studies provides us with a range of tools and insights to help us do this.

We need to once more find room in pre-service education to develop this disposition in our future teachers. However such a challenge to increasingly hollow understandings of curriculum won't be easy given that under the AITSL Standards, that redefine pre-service teacher education, there is no necessity to explore just what curriculum means. Indeed given the pull of registration most degrees are becoming very similar and anything outside that required by the Standards struggles to get space or recognition bar the subversive efforts of individual academics. Instead of reflecting on what we mean by curriculum and how that relates to many educators concerns for equity we have Standard 2 'know the content and how to teach it'.

While the present impulse is mastery of 'stuff' on a national level it might be instructive to note that in the much lauded Finnish system curriculum is seen in terms more akin to the traditions of the curriculum studies field. Schools and teachers design their own curriculum within a national framework, including benchmarks and assessment, in conversation with students and communities. Ironically such an approach is similar to that advocated by Garth Boomer a generation ago. Perhaps it is time we initiated such conversations once more and negotiated the curriculum with our students and communities through the necessarily complicated conversations that educating the next generation involves.

The existing Australian Curriculum doesn't preclude such conversations. It's more that public expectation driven by tabloid media, and political catch phrases subtly push us towards accepting simplified meanings. Thus part of our complicated conversation needs to be with the public and aimed at helping complicate the simple and damaging assumptions they are encouraged to accept. Education is after all about effective communication.

Philip Roberts is an Assistant Professor in Curriculum Studies University of Canberra. Before joining the university, Philip was a teacher for 14 years in rural NSW public high schools.

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JOHN ROSE, MACE

Consultation and the Australian Curriculum

Cleaning out the Augean stables

With any educational change or proposed initiative much is made by politicians and bureaucrats that teachers and schools administrators will be consulted as a matter of priority during the process. The reality, however, is often quite different to the rhetoric and this was plainly evident in the recent development of the Australian Curriculum.

In one of the most significant curriculum reforms in recent decades, under the Rudd/Gillard Labor Governments (2007-2013), the Australian Curriculum was a focal point of that government's 'education revolution', a bold initiative that placed Australia as the first federation in the world to implement a national curriculum. That genuine consultation should have been a major platform in its development is a given, yet, as with previous attempts at national collaboration, it is questionable as to whether this occurred.

Unfortunately, the lessons from these previous attempts were not heeded. For example, during the late 1980s and early 1990s, an attempt was made to secure national collaboration in curriculum through the development of National Profiles and Statements. There were many reasons why this did not succeed including a lack of genuine consultation. Support from the education community, particularly from practising teachers, was not gained from the outset and the response to this was damning. Kennedy (1992, p.33) referred to the Australian Education Council (AEC), the driver of national collaboration at that time, as being 'slow to recognise the need for extensive consultation' and further observed that the curriculum initiative was 'driven by unrealistic political deadlines'. Foggo and Martin (1992, p.39) complained that the collaborative process was 'a juggernaut out of control'. Forster (1995, pp.209-210) described it

as 'a blitzkrieg approach' which 'left the stakeholders gasping' and concluded that 'the speed of the operation left most of the educational interest groups gaping on the sidelines'. Cumming (1992, pp.6-7) likewise suggested that 'while collaboration is perceived to be operating at political and bureaucratic levels, there is a common view that the quality of consultation with the educational and wider community up until now has been very poor, and all too often a case of too little, too late'.

Surely this past dissatisfaction with the consultative process was a signal to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) not to repeat the same mistakes in the development of the current Australian Curriculum. However, almost two decades later, effective consultation has again become an issue. Bound down and restricted by unrealistic government timelines, ACARA instigated a consultation timeframe restricted to ten weeks after the release of the draft Phase 1 documents.

ACE was one of the frontrunners in expressing disappointment regarding both the limited length of the consultation process. A submission to ACARA by the College stated: 'Our overarching concern is that the pace at which the process is being driven is simply too fast for the complexity of the task. While we understand that short political cycles drive the desire for outcomes with unrealistic timeframes, we fear that in the long run this haste may well prove to be self-defeating' (ACE, 2010, p.1).

The Australian Education Union (AEU) concurred, stating that it was 'deeply concerned about the scope and timeframe of the present consultation process' and adding that 'it is imperative that ACARA give greater priority to maximising the opportunities for teachers to have input into all stages of the development of the National Curriculum' (AEU, 2010, p.2).

Alan Reid, in an earlier edition of *Professional Educator* (vol 9, no. 2) warned that '...the rapidity and the limited extent of the consultation processes and implementation are worrying. The 10-week consultation periods ... do not allow adequate time for extensive trialling or debate ... The speed of the development process is contrary to everything that we know about sound professional development practices and educational change' (Reid, 2010, p.32).

The Australian Curriculum Coalition, likewise commented that the timelines for all stages of the project were 'unreasonably short' and came to the same conclusion as ACE that in the long run this would be 'self defeating'. They expressed a concern that the 'consultation timelines do not allow enough time to provide considered, detailed feedback, and do not allow the voices of teachers and other stakeholders to be heard' (Australian Curriculum Coalition, 2010, pp.4-5).

So, just as Hercules cleaned out the Augean stables in just one day—a task that was expected to take months—consultation on the Australian Curriculum was also completed in a rushed timeframe. To further illustrate this, let us consider the six-week consultation process around the Australian Curriculum and students with a disability, and the outcomes of this consultation in terms of the response rate.

During 2011, ACARA's writing teams, with input from a Students Disability Advisory Group, sought to identify sequences of learning relevant to students with a disability whose learning could be described as 'progressing to the foundation achievement standard in English and mathematics'. These writers maintained the structure and design of the existing curriculum in English and mathematics in order to ensure that the new materials would be familiar

► to teachers. Additional descriptions, elaborations and achievement standards were developed using a further four 'phases' as a framework for learning. Each of these phases was representative of the characteristics of learning prior to that described at the foundation achievement standard and intended to be inclusive of all learners, including those whose learning could be described as 'pre-intentional'.

These draft curriculum materials were then available for national consultation with feedback sought during a six-week period (21 September to 1 November, 2011) (ACARA, 2012 p.1). Six main sources of consultation feedback were made available, but only two of these were unrestricted and open to any interested organisation or individual. The four that were by invitation or nomination only included: a national teacher consultation forum with 26 participants; a national professional association's consultation forum attended by representatives from the Australian Association of Special Education and the Australian Special Education Principals' Association; a students with disability national panel; and ACARA's Students with Disability Advisory Group. The two general consultation processes were an online survey on the consultation portal of the Australian Curriculum website where respondents completed a rating scale for each question and were able to provide comments, and the opportunity to provide, within the six week timeframe, a written submission to ACARA.

It is interesting to reflect upon the responses to the invitation to provide feedback. ACARA's Australia-wide public consultation process received only 110 online responses and 40 written responses (ACARA, 2012 p.4). The online responses from a state and territory perspective equalling 46 (42 per cent) came from Queensland. A possible reason for the high response from Queensland could be that during the consultation period ACARA held two activities that were confined to that state only. One was a teleconference consultation with the Queensland Executive of the Association of Special Education Administrators which focussed on the Progressing to Foundation curriculum materials, while the other was a professional development

network session with approximately 300 Queensland educators of students with disability which covered all areas of ACARA's work related to that field.

Looking at the same figures from a demographic perspective, 43 respondents (39 per cent) were primary teachers, 25 (22 per cent) were school leaders, and 19 (17 per cent) were secondary teachers. Despite this being a survey open to all interested Australians, only two parents and three employers responded (ACARA, 2012, p.4). Likewise with the 40 written submissions that were received 18 (45 per cent) came from individuals with significantly no Australian schools or government agencies responding. There was, however, a good response from the various Education Authorities throughout Australia (ACARA, 2012, pp. 45-46).

Of course, the consultation timeframe was related to the overall timeframe for the Australian Curriculum project. However, here lays a major problem impacting on many educational initiatives: the differentiation between a realistic timeframe for a project and the timeline placed on the project by politicians. As Rizvi and Lingard (2010) have stated there is very often 'a mismatch between political timeframes for policy trials and the time required to institutionalise effective change' and further, that 'politics and effective educational change are situated within different temporalities, a reality often ignored by political expectations about education policy and reform' (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 108). Lima (2010) concurs citing this latest attempt we have experienced at framing a national curriculum as a 'classic example' of the time issue. She states:

The problem with political responses to real issues is that time, rather than quality is privileged. Preference is given to strategies which are achievable within the three-year political term. (Lima, 2010, p. 21).

While conceding that ACARA provided input access through its website, held meetings and contacted state professional associations, Lima (2010) encapsulated the general view that overall little consultation actually took place. Among the groups she claims who had little opportunity for consultation were teachers whose disciplines were outside what she termed 'the famous four

of maths, English, History and Science', regional and remote teachers, primary and prep teachers, Indigenous focus groups, Asian focus groups, and special needs teachers (Lima, 2010, p. 21). Taylor (2008) argues that this is the norm with most consultation activities being attended by the usual 'suspects':

This is how things normally get done. Draw as many consultees as you can to the preliminaries, especially the principals' associations, make them feel involved and then narrow down the field as the government moves towards the sharp end of the policymaking process... Meanwhile, behind the scenes, Canberra will be busy setting up in camera meetings with officials from the states and territories, a narrower field of stakeholders... Then will come the subject panels and the detailed nutting out, the territorial arguments... and the compromises. (Taylor, 2008, p. 52).

Clearly, the lessons from the earlier attempts at securing a national curriculum were not heeded with unrealistic time frames and consultation periods not being addressed. However as Ball (2008) points out, rapid change by governments is part tactical—it's about the dynamism of government, about being seen to be doing something, tackling problems, 'transforming systems' (Ball, 2008, p. 2). Quoting Tony Blair's speech writer Ball (2008) concedes that 'modern politics is all about momentum; stagnate, drift, wobble, and the media or, if strong enough, the opposition will pounce' (Ball, 2008, p. 2).

Thus, as an education community, with any future politically-driven educational initiative or change, are we doomed to consultation periods that are necessarily brief and often tokenistic? Until such a time as we gain a stronger and more united voice; a voice that demands to be heard and is backed by the general community, this appears to be the case.

John Rose is Head of the Christian College Institute of Teaching & Learning in Geelong, Victoria.

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The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not represent the views of any organisation.

Please email John on: j.rose@ccg.vic.edu.au for a list of references for this article.

COLIN POWER, FACE

Quality education for all: A global necessity

Education empowers only if it leads to learning, that is, to the continuous development of knowledge, understanding and talents, and to the wise and ethical use of expertise. When nations ensure that such an education is accessible to all, a quiet revolution is set in motion: education becomes the engine of sustainable development and the key to a better world. Quality education empowers communities and nations, but only if it is equally accessible to all.

When I joined UNESCO in 1989, developing countries were in a state of crisis: their education systems were not keeping pace with population growth and their education budgets were being savagely cut. Education expenditure per inhabitant in Sub-Saharan Africa during the 1980s fell by 65 per cent and in Latin America by 40 per cent. Dropout and repetition rates were high and rising, classes were very large and teachers were often untrained and poorly paid. By 1990, the number of out-of-school children had grown to 135 million, and more than 900 million youth and adults were illiterate. In OECD countries, 18 per cent of 15 year-olds were capable of completing only the most basic reading and numeracy tasks. Ensuring that the basic learning needs for everyone was, and remains, a global problem.

It was within this context that UNESCO, UNDP, UNICEF and the World Bank sponsored the World Conference on Education for All in 1990, forging a Global Partnership for Education that to this day continues to work towards meeting the basic learning needs of all. It works

with national authorities to set targets, implement and monitor basic education programmes. Progress has been made, although, not all targets are being met and much remains to be done. For the first time in history, the number of out-of-school children fell from its peak in 1990 to 57 million in 2008 and the number of illiterate youth and adults to 774 million. Gender gaps are beginning to close as more countries move towards the goal of universal primary education. However, since the global financial crisis, progress toward the goals of EFA has stalled, and the right to education no longer features prominently in agenda of the world's most powerful countries. Yet there is hope: the voices of those who have been empowered by education cannot be ignored. Courageous and determined young women like Malala Yousafzal speak to the heart of the matter, demanding that the right of all to a place in the global knowledge society.

Are the basic learning needs of all Australians being met? Does our nation play the role expected of it globally? The evidence presented in recent OECD and UNESCO reports show that Australia has a generally high level of education, but is low on equity. Australia's position on a number of international indicators of quality and equity has stagnated, and in some areas fallen. Improvements are needed in all areas. Our best teachers tend to be concentrated in schools serving advantaged communities. Yet it is the disadvantaged who are in most need of well-qualified early childhood educators and teachers. While at UNESCO, I worked closely with Education International at

improving the quality of teaching. We set up World Teachers Day in 1994 and ran international media campaigns to enhance public understanding of the key role that teachers play in the development of students and nations. UNESCO monitors the extent to which nations meet the standards set in the UNESCO-ILO Recommendations on the Status of Teachers. Australia can and must do better when it comes to teachers' conditions. For example, the number of days Australian teachers spend on professional development is roughly half the OECD average.

One of the most contentious issues is that of funding. Each nation must determine how the burden is to be shared, but countries with high levels of public investment in education generally outperform those with low levels. Until the 1980s, public investment in education in Australia exceeded 6 per cent, but since then it has fallen to around 5 per cent. The reductions in the share of government budgets devoted to education have been even more marked, falling from around 25 per cent in 1980 to 13.5 per cent today. Implementing the Gonski recommendations might well have made a significant difference, but as a recent OECD survey suggests, educational funding in Australia 'lacks transparency and coherence'. What is lacking is the will to address key equity and quality issues.

Australia also has a mixed record in terms of its support for education in poor countries. It was one of the co-sponsors of EFA in 1990 and Australians support for organisations like Save the

Children, Oxfam and World Vision is high by world standards. However, it has one of the lowest levels of Overseas Development Aid, and a far from, satisfactory record in meeting its international obligations when it comes to providing quality education for the children of asylum seekers and refugees.

As the 20th century drew to a close, UNESCO set up an International Commission on Education for the 21st century, chaired by Jacques Delors. Its report (UNESCO, 1996) provided a framework for worldwide reflection on education for the future. There can be no doubt that the Delors Report made a significant contribution: the four pillars (learning to know, to do, to be and to live together) and the principle of learning throughout life are now firmly entrenched in the thinking and policy documents of many countries and educational organisations. The key issues raised in the Delors Report are just as relevant today as they were 20 years ago although some have become more pressing. In combatting religious, ethnic, racial and political extremism, our best defence is to provide all with an education that opens rather than closes minds, one that deepens our understanding of others. Similarly, the challenges posed by global warming, climate change and the growing international market in education goods and services demand a strengthening of the international co-operation in education that only an organisation like UNESCO provide.

Professor Colin Power AM is a Fellow and a life member of ACE. An Adjunct Professor at the University of Queensland and Emeritus Professor of Education at Flinders University. Colin headed UNESCO's education sector from 1989-2000.

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ACE Grassroots Membership Challenge

As a national organisation, ACE members are our greatest asset and the driving force that provides us with direction and purpose. Therefore National President Professor Stephen Dinham has launched the Grassroots Membership Challenge in order to grow our membership numbers.

Achieving our aim to enlarge our membership base will intensify our collective voice, provide more benefit to the wider education community, increase networking and collegial activities for members, diversify our publications and give the College more strength to advocate and influence education policy.

You may be aware of some of the far-reaching advocacy work that the College undertook last year including: the submission to the Teacher Education Ministerial Advisory Group (TEMAG) on teacher education; the Inaugural Jean Blackburn Oration with guest speaker Mr David Gonski AC; the probing articles published in *Professional Educator*; the increased presence of ACE in the media on topics relating to policy and education in Australia and the successful ACE 2014 National Conference - 'What counts as quality in Education?'

So when you, as a member of ACE, are thinking of people to invite into the College, think of educators you know who are interested in engaging with their profession as well as those who would benefit from the College and its future goals.

ACE is known as the nationwide voice of the teaching profession. So with this Grassroots Membership Challenge we

hope to diversify our membership and encourage new members from the wider education sector to join us so that we can advocate for education in Australia and make a real difference to the educational journey of all Australians.

Benefits to members are varied and include: the opportunity to become actively engaged in the discussion on education policy; access to professional development programs; participation in high-profile events; networking possibilities with eminent educators across all education sectors nationwide; opportunities for publication of articles; becoming engaged with a wide range of state and national committees in a range of education subjects and fields; and the use of College post nominal (MACE).

We know education professionals are busy people, but approaching colleagues about the challenge can be a quick and engaging activity. It can be a tea break chat, or a suggestion thrown in to a supportive conversation with a younger colleague. These are small steps that may lead to someone benefitting from an ACE membership.

This year, if every member has one successful conversation with a potential new recruit to the College this can lead to a much larger more powerful membership for ACE. Just picture an organisation with its members' strong voice being heard and heeded by the public and government decision-makers.

Please visit austcolled.com.au/ membership and become involved.

The Australian Curriculum: Only a starting point?



ASHLEY DUGGAN

Many early-career educators are yearning for a shift in the volatile discourse that surrounds the Australian Curriculum. For too long we have been caught discussing the minutiae of the content of the curriculum. Yes, content is of critical importance. However it should be considered only the starting point for an excellent education in Australia. It's time we started discussing how we can best implement and bring the Australian Curriculum to life with shared exceptional pedagogy.

Content descriptions, elaborations, domains, strands, achievement standards, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities, these are just some of the words that form the vernacular soup of the Australian Curriculum. For many early-career educators it is hard to imagine a time before the curriculum — before these words, their structure and their design informed our daily practice. For better or worse, our focus is not on where we've been in terms of a national curriculum, but firmly placed on where we are heading and what this means for our practice and our students.

I spoke with a number of fellow early-career educators to learn different perspectives. A consistent thread that emerged was a sense of disappointment that as a profession we are having the wrong discussions in relation to the curriculum. Too much of the political and professional discourse in education has,

and continues to be, bogged down in the nebulous and unpredictable content wars. The national review of the Australian Curriculum, and the controversy around its appointed chairs, only served to amplify the content-focused discussion both prior and post publication of their report. As a teacher, it is fatiguing and disheartening that this captures so much of the airspace in education. Still we endure politicians bickering about content within the history domain, as well as the continued drone of criticism from certain education academics relating to their pet topics. For just one example, see Ben Goldsmith's piece titled 'Media arts should be at the core of the Australian Curriculum' published in *The Conversation* (27 October 2014).

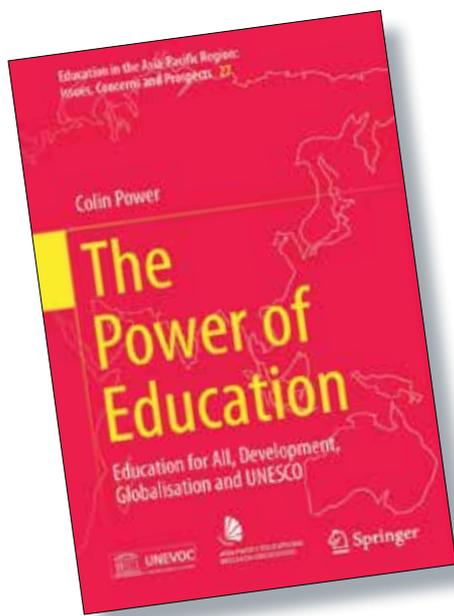
The point here isn't that these criticisms of the content in the Australian Curriculum are wrong. Yes, we know the curriculum isn't perfect. No national curriculum framework ever will be. Nevertheless, as educators we also know that the Australian Curriculum was in phased development for more than six years, initiated an overwhelming consultation and review scheme, and faced a painstaking final approval process. It has been well developed and is strong. The time has come to move on from content wars.

So, where do we go? The Australian Curriculum has provided us with a nationwide common language and

structure. The magic happens in the next step - what we do with it. With the shared language curricula provide, as educators we can have rich pedagogical discussions around questions such as: 'How can we deliver exceptional educational outcomes for students in our domain?' and 'How can we ignite within them an indelible passion for learning?' As an early-career teacher I want to be inspired by how we can use our curriculum to light sparks in the brains of our students. I want to know where exceptional practice is happening and how can we share and learn from it. I want to be challenged by the prominent voices and publications in our field, as well as by my colleagues, to implement this curriculum with gusto and curiosity. This curriculum has set the scene for deep professional engagement, collaboration and impact on a scale we have never before seen in Australia. The immense potential of the Australian Curriculum is staring us in the face; these are the discussions we should be having.

The most innovative and high-performing education systems in the world spend their time talking about how to bring their curricula to life through quality pedagogy. Now that we have the Australian Curriculum, it's time for us to join them. It's time for us to shift the discourse.

Ashley Duggan is a third-year teacher and the Head of English and Humanities at Katherine High School, Northern Territory.



The Power of Education: Education for All, Development, Globalisation and UNESCO by Colin Power

Book review by Jose Roberto Guevara

The book is not just about the 'power of education' it is about the 'Colin Power' of education. Reading it helped me to realise Power's significant contributions to global education initiatives that I have engaged with since 1990 as an educator working in a non-governmental environmental group in the Philippines. The personal anecdotes and background stories made the book enjoyable and informative to read as I reflected on my education practice and the institutions I have worked with at local and global levels.

The international development practitioner in me was excited to engage with the critical reflections on the role of international organisations, like UNESCO, as a key global player in reforming education systems in response to the current and urgent issues. For those who share this interest, the first six chapters and the last are the most valuable to read. They provide an overview of the different periods and issues that UNESCO faced along with Power's core argument: 'despite its weaknesses, the UN system (and in particular UNESCO) has played an important role in the development of educational policy at the international level' (p.247). However, he does acknowledge that for UNESCO to continue to be relevant and effective in the future, it 'must speak with the intellectual, moral and political authority that stems from its unique position as the

intergovernmental organisation mandated to speak and act on behalf of all the world's ministers of education, teachers, learners and scholars' (p. 250).

Power's convincing arguments are based on his leadership roles as Deputy Director-General of UNESCO from 1999 to 2000 and Assistant Director-General for Education from 1989 to 1998. During this period he was responsible for many of the global UN education initiatives, one of the most notable was the International Literacy Year; Education for All; and the International Commission on Education for the 21st century producing the landmark report, 'Learning: The Treasure Within' (1996). At the heart of these contributions and achievements is the commitment to quality education as a human right that everyone, without exception, should have access to.

The environmental educator in me was more interested in his subject-specific experiences, like in the fields of science, health, environmental and peace education. The book reveals how he actively brokered and advocated for establishing the valuable role that education can play in addressing poverty, gender discrimination, environmental degradation, HIV-AIDS, and conflicts. These experiences can be found in middle chapters of the book. Having begun his career as a science educator, Power argues that 'often science is still taught in

a didactic manner'. He says we will not be able to increase the public understanding of global warming if we do not rethink the way we teach science.

The education advocate in me was keen to read his comments on education system reforms, in particular for secondary, TVET and higher education. From a systems perspective, he argues that the 'transition from education to work is both complex and hazardous' (p.147), and this has relevance to how we structure secondary education and TVET, while keeping in view the changing dynamics of our economy and labour market.

Power describes education, as the 'quiet revolution' that is transforming our world and being transformed by the current forces that dominate our world. It is this dynamic between the potential of our education system to transform, and the ongoing need for the system to be transformed, that I hope the readers will reflect on. However, I think the author may also be referring to the power we have as educators to transform, and be transformed, by our own education work.

Jose Guevara is Associate Professor of International Development at RMIT University. He is the President of the Asia South Pacific for Basic and Adult Education (ASPBAE) a network that has collaborated with UNESCO on Education for All (EFA) and Education for Sustainable Development (ESD).



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Contact details

Phone	03 9035 5473
Fax	03 9341 6021
Email	ace@austcolled.com.au
Web	www.austcolled.com.au
Postal address	PO Box 73 Carlton South VIC 3053
Street address	Level 5, 100 Leicester Street Carlton VIC 3053

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