

**Two contrasting Australian Curriculum responses to globalisation:  
what students should learn or become**

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## Two Australian curriculum responses to globalization

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Curriculum defines what counts as valid knowledge, pedagogy defines what counts as valid transmission of knowledge, and evaluation defines what counts as a valid realization of the knowledge on the part of the taught (Bernstein, 1973, p. 85).

...differences within and change in the organization, transmission and evaluation of educational knowledge should be a major area of sociological interest. (Bernstein, 1971, p. 47)

### Abstract

This paper explores two competing educational policy responses to globalization in Australia: the 'New Basics' experiment that occurred in the State of Queensland (2000-2003) and the Australian Curriculum, which is currently being implemented across the nation from preschool to year ten in English, history, mathematics and science. Planning for curricula in other subjects in the Australian curriculum is underway, along with approved courses of study in the senior phase of learning. We believe that these reforms illustrate the tensions that have continued to mount during the last decade over answers to the question of 'what counts' as the most valuable knowledge and/or skills needed to negotiate the complexities of a rapidly globalising world in which technology facilitates the rapid production and demise of hitherto accepted 'facts' and our knowledge base expands exponentially year by year. Illustrating one international trend of favouring the development of competencies and dispositions, the New Basics project abandoned traditional school subjects for task-oriented, 'real-world' learning. The emphasis here was on depth of knowledge and not width of coverage. In contrast, at first glance, the Australian Curriculum appears to signify a strong return to 'the disciplines'; however, closer analysis of it reveals attempts to accommodate twin global demands of: curricular accountability through disciplinary rigor, to be benchmarked against performance on the likes of international comparative tests such as the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) and other international testing regimes; *and* - via its framework of 'Cross Curriculum Priorities' and 'General Capabilities' - the inculcation of the skills and dispositions required by the global millennium citizen and worker.

## **Introduction and background to Queensland and national curriculum developments**

The two quotes from Bernstein at the head of this paper are demonstrative of the sociological approach to curriculum that we take. We recognise the politics of curriculum construction, the selective tradition of curriculum, and how its construction affects the other message systems, namely pedagogy and assessment (Bernstein, 1971). We would also argue that in contemporary education, particularly in Anglo-American countries, the evaluation message system, framed as high stakes census testing, potentially affects in a reductive ways both curriculum and pedagogy (Lingard, Martino & Rezai-Rashti, 2013). In particular, the second Bernstein quote draws the sociologist's attention to the symbiotic relationships between changes in the message systems and broader social changes. We have heeded this point in the analysis provided of two Australian curriculum responses to globalization: the New Basics in the state of Queensland, and the post-2007 move towards an Australian national curriculum. Furthermore, these responsive curriculum developments work with two common responses across the globe today in curriculum reform. One is a response that gives emphasis to the competencies and dispositions of those graduating from schooling as the way to construct the knowledge that constitutes the curriculum; the other is a return to a more traditional, discipline-based approach to constructing curricula.

The New Basics experiment was of the former kind, working with an account of the imagined future worker, citizen and person that schooling ought to produce in the rapidly changing, globalizing, digitized world of the present. The Australian curriculum, at one level at least, is a case of the discipline response to curriculum reform. However, the latter classification of the Australian curriculum is complicated by the fact that it also gives priority to two other elements that cut across the discipline-based curriculum. These are 'Cross Curriculum Priorities' and 'General Capabilities'. Additionally, we argue the introduction in 2008 of the National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), whereby every student in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9 is tested in May each year on literacy and numeracy, has also affected the enactment of the Australian curriculum by using up valuable teaching time in preparing students for these tests. Whilst NAPLAN is considered low-stakes assessment for students, as a systems' accountability measure it has evolved as high-stakes for teachers and schools. Furthermore, the complex mediations of national school reform in Australia that flow from the federal political structure,

where schooling is ostensibly the Constitutional responsibility of the States and Territories (Lingard, 2000), has also intervened in both development and the enactment of the new Australian curriculum. This is evident in the reality that all elements of the Australian curriculum as they are developed have to be approved by the intergovernmental council in education, consisting of all education ministers. This has seen an incremental staged implementation with the focus in the first instance on P-10 curriculum and on English, mathematics, science and history. The political persuasion of these various governments is a factor in the extent of agreement, but other factors also mediate its enactment. When federal Labor began this development in 2007, all State and Territory governments were Labor. The federal government is now conservative, along with that of Western Australia, Victoria, New South Wales, Queensland and the Northern Territory leaving only Tasmania, South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) in the Labor camp.

Historically, federal Labor governments have been more centralist, while conservative governments have been more federalist. An earlier move towards a national curriculum that occurred under the Hawke and Keating Labor governments (1983-1996) was also heavily mediated by the politics of Australian educational federalism. This centralist/federalist binary remains the case with the important difference being that the current conservative Prime Minister and government are also committed to a national curriculum and testing. Indeed on the latter, they are committed to including science testing nationally in the near future. We would argue this bipartisanship reflects the reworking of the nation in the context of globalization and the human capital framing of education policy, or what we might see as the economisation of education policy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). The federal government is responsible for the 'national' economy and thus with the economic reframing of education policy has taken a stronger role in schooling, including in curriculum.

Federalism thus mediates the development of the Australian curriculum and certainly has real impact on its enactment, with each of the jurisdictions putting in place different implementation time frames and mediating the national to varying degrees by state developments. For example, New South Wales has embedded the national curriculum in its own new curriculum, while Queensland is implementing in full the national curriculum. We would note that the use of 'national' in the politics of Australian schooling is a signifier of just such

federal mediations. We stress, though, that until the concerted efforts towards a national curriculum during the federal Labor Period (2007-2013), and earlier moves under the Hawke and Keating federal Labor governments (1983-1996), curriculum remained basically the jurisdiction of curriculum authorities in the States and Territories, as did assessment and tertiary selection. Indeed, apart from national literacy and numeracy testing assessment and reporting of the national curriculum remains the jurisdiction of the states.

Since the 1970s, the Australian state of Queensland has had a unique system of senior secondary assessment and tertiary selection based on school-based, teacher-moderated assessment. This system is currently being reviewed by the Newman conservative government elected in 2013. From the late 1990s, under State Labor governments, Queensland also saw a plethora of progressive changes and reforms in schooling at other levels of primary and lower secondary schooling. Research and academic thinking were central elements of this renaissance. The Queensland School Reform Longitudinal Study (QSRLS) (Lingard et al., 2001), was commissioned by a Conservative State government, but adopted by a Labor government to frame reform. This research developed the concept of productive pedagogies after observing and mapping pedagogies in 1000 lessons and found there was not enough intellectual demand, connectedness or working with difference in classroom pedagogies (Lingard, 2007). The research hypothesized that this was an effect of a stress on content coverage of curriculum and insufficient awareness in respect of issues of differences in the classroom, including culture based differences around ethnicity and Indigeneity. However, the productive pedagogies research found that teachers were very caring. The model suggested that pedagogies that were intellectually demanding, connected, supportive, and worked with and valued differences would make a difference to the learning of all students (Hayes et al., 2006). The research, following Bernstein, also argued the necessity of aligning the three message systems, an insight that underpinned the New Basics development.

Subsequent to the QSRLS, Professor Allan Luke, a researcher on the QSRLS and Head of the School of Education at The University of Queensland, was seconded as Deputy Director-General to the State department and given a remit to rethink schooling, in the context of the QSRLS and particularly in relation to the re-alignment of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment in Queensland classrooms. This led to the 'New Basics' trial, which developed a new curriculum

for schooling from Years 1-9 to be aligned with productive pedagogies and assessment practices called ‘rich tasks’.

The rich tasks were geared to ensuring high intellectual demand in pedagogies and assessment practices. These tasks were addressed collaboratively between students and at certain school junctures required public presentations to school and community members. In sum, the New Basics were about aligning curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and recognising that investment in teachers and their professional knowledges and skills was central to enhancing learning outcomes for all students across primary and secondary schools; and, importantly, for achieving more socially just outcomes across schools serving different socio-economic and Indigenous communities. The New Basics were also about what were deemed to be the central knowledge domains, dispositions and capabilities, thought necessary to twenty-first century futures. This was thus a curriculum reform based, not on disciplines, but rather on the imagined future worker and citizen in a global context.

The New Basics was an example of the type of curriculum emerging at this time around the globe and had quite a bit in common with Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence aimed at producing ‘successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors’. Biesta and Priestley (2013, p.36) describe such curriculum rationales as focusing on what the school learner should *become*, as opposed discipline-based approaches which focus on what students should *learn*. The New Basics was developed out of a specific research project; it was explicit about its theoretical framings, especially Dewey; it dealt with pedagogy and assessment, in addition to curriculum; it was a reform or trial in about fifty schools, not implemented across the system; it was only trialled in Queensland, not nationally; it was strongly supported in its implementation through government funded critical friends in each of the schools; and it was subject to an ongoing research gaze. Yet, as with Curriculum for Excellence, it was a manifestation of a process curriculum, but also with implicitly desired outcomes (Priestley & Humes, 2010), namely imagined future citizens and workers.

In one sense, the New Basics could be seen as a re-articulation of a progressive approach in the context of globalization with rapid economic and social change, framed to some extent by new technologies and related multi-literacies. The New Basics experiment thus exemplifies one strand in educational thinking that posits a response to globalization that requires schooling to

shape the dispositions and skills of ‘the person in the world’, the millennium worker and citizen, perhaps even, the new ‘cosmopolitan’ (see for example, Gee, 1999; Robbins, 1998; McLeod & Yates, 2006). Internationally, this kind of approach has been criticised as further entrenching social disadvantage because of a lack of disciplinary knowledge as a context for learning. Michael Young (2011), for example, argues that national and international trends in curriculum construction towards ‘generic’ curricula organised around ‘capabilities’ and ‘dispositions’ are potentially empty of meaningful content, leading to what Gert Biesta (2012) refers to as the ‘learnification’ of education:

The educational demand is *not* that students learn but that they learn *something* and that they do so for particular reasons ...the discourse of learning only becomes an *educational* discourse when we ask questions about the content and purpose of learning – the learning ‘of what’ and ‘for what’. (p. 583 original emphasis)

Concerns about ‘what’ students were learning in Australian schools also dominated political debate during the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Conservative commentator, Kevin Donnelly was a constant presence in the Murdoch press, criticising constructivism, child-centred learning Outcomes Based Education and educational frameworks that aimed to inculcate ‘understandings, dispositions and capabilities’ (Donnelly, 2006). Signalling his support for a traditionally oriented, discipline-based subject, conservative Prime Minister John Howard also called for ‘a root and branch’ renewal of the content and ways of teaching Australian history (Grattan, 2006). Thus, by the end of 2007, with the election of the Rudd Labor government federally, there was considerable momentum for introduction of a more tightly controlled, discipline-based Australian curriculum; accompanying it however, as a result of on-going perceptions that educationally Australia’s young were falling behind their international counterparts, came a national accountability agenda with national testing of literacy and numeracy via the National Assessment Plan – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). The latter is taken by all students nationally in all schools at Years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

In a sense, the national reform agenda in Australia pursued by Labor after 2007 can be seen as a vernacular manifestation, mediated by Australian education federalism, of what Sahlberg (2011) has called GERM, the Global Education Reform Movement. This largely, but not exclusively Anglo-American approach to school and system reform in response to

globalization has the following features: prescribed curriculum, focus on literacy and numeracy, top-down, test-based accountability, standardized teaching and learning, and market-oriented reforms (e.g. management models from the private sector, school and parental choice discourses) (Sahlberg, 2011, p.103). This reform agenda has seen the New Basics, and its approach to curriculum, move rapidly off the agenda in Queensland. Paradoxically, the Finnish approach that Sahlberg juxtaposes with GERM, has much in common with the senior approach to curriculum and assessment in Queensland and with the New Basics trial.

In the longer term, we also think the Australian curriculum might represent a challenge to the Queensland form of school-based, teacher-moderated assessment at the senior levels and its implicit trust of teachers and their professionalism. As already noted, the state conservative government is also reviewing this mode of assessment; as well, there has been a state parliamentary committee investigation of this mode of assessment specifically in relation to mathematics, physics and chemistry. The national reform agenda has been a component contributing to the withering of the New Basics reforms and more importantly its philosophy. What we have is a new policy focus and some policy borrowing from other national settings (Lingard, 2010) with Australian developments framed by globalized education policy discourses (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), particularly in respect of knowledge and skills relevant to OECD testing regimes.

On the first NAPLAN in 2008, Queensland students performed comparatively badly, especially when compared with those in New South Wales and Victoria. In response to huge media coverage and political pressure, the Premier Anna Bligh (previously education minister) appointed the head of the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), Professor Geoff Masters to report on changes in Queensland schooling, as a way to enhance Queensland's comparative performance on NAPLAN. Interestingly, Queensland's apparently declining performance on the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement's (IEAs) Trends in International Maths and Science Study (TIMSS) was also a factor in the appointment of the Review (see Masters, 2009).

One specific policy outcome of the *Masters Report* was the implementation of Teaching and Learning Audits in all Queensland government schools, a manifestation of the 'audit cultures' accompanying state restructures (Power, 1997). Much more time was also spent in

schools preparing students for the tests. This was the major interim recommendation of the Review. The publication of NAPLAN results on the *My School* website, created by the federal government in 2010 as part of its accountability and transparency agenda, has strengthened this teaching to the test, as has extensive media coverage of school and system performance with the publication of school league tables of performance. While Queensland's 2009 to 2012 performances were better than that of 2008, all other States had improved as well, perhaps suggesting much more time spent on preparing students for NAPLAN in all Australian schools.

Thus, the policy context changed with consequences for any ongoing impact of the New Basics. We are thinking here specifically of the new discipline-based Australian curriculum, now being implemented for English, mathematics, science and history in P-10 across the nation, but particularly the focus on literacy and numeracy through National Partnerships on Literacy and Numeracy and Low SES School Communities and the centrality now of NAPLAN to accountability and school performance. While NAPLAN is not high stakes in the traditional sense of carrying great consequential significance for students, our argument is that it has become high stakes for systems and through political pressure deflected down the line through bureaucracies to schools and teachers, for students too (Lingard & Sellar, 2013). Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that NAPLAN performance has become the sole measure framing principal accountability in Queensland schools.

The analysis that follows begins with a broader contextualizing of the development of the New Basics in Queensland. We then concentrate specifically on the rise and fall of the New Basics. This is followed by consideration of the national policy agenda and its impact upon policy reforms in Queensland schooling. The 'conservative restoration' as part of the vernacular expression of GERM in Australia is then the focus. Here we show how stress on NAPLAN performance and the more discipline-based Australian curriculum, P-10, mark a new policy moment in Queensland and Australian schooling. We conclude by analysing and contextualising this curriculum change narrative. Here we document the ways in which schooling policy has been economised and become a central plank of national economic policy in the face of globalization and the pressing necessity of ensuring a competitive national economy within the global one (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010). Our analysis of current trends in the Australian Curriculum

also reveals somewhat fraught attempts to marry disciplinary rigor with the shaping of capabilities and the development of trans-disciplinary knowledge and skills.

### **Contextualising the Development of the New Basics in Queensland**

In 1998, in the final chapter of the Conservative Queensland Borbidge government (1996-1998)<sup>i</sup> the *Leading Schools* initiative had been launched. While this was largely an experiment in school-based management, it also sought to improve student outcomes through the adoption of educational concepts developed in the USA by Newmann and Associates (1996) from the University of Wisconsin-Madison's Centre on Organization and Restructuring of Schools. Because of their focus upon student engagement and higher order thinking, Newmann and Associates' 'authentic' pedagogies and 'authentic' assessment promised better student outcomes in both learning and equity. This research became the construct, albeit reconceptualised and re-contextualised, upon which the QSRLS began to evaluate Queensland's *Leading Schools*' initiative.<sup>ii</sup>

The election of Labor leader, Peter Beattie as State Premier in 1998 saw him launch his 'Smart State' strategy in which he identified knowledge, creativity and innovation as drivers of economic growth (see Adie, 2008). This was followed by extensive community consultation for developing long-term goals for schooling that would underpin the *Queensland State Education - 2010* (QSE – 2010) initiative. The *QSE – 2010* consultation process sought to investigate the major challenges facing Education Queensland such as student retention rates, the drift of students to the private sector, as well as the implications for education of broader economic and social changes related to globalization and the growth of the knowledge economy. In the course of this process, many stakeholders questioned the extent to which Queensland education was preparing young people for a globalised, technologically driven future.

Such concerns were confirmed in the findings of the QSRLS, which had continued under the Beattie government with the support of senior policy makers and the Minister, then Anna Bligh. The QSRLS was conducted over a period of three years and extended upon the work of Newmann and Associates' conceptual framework of 'authentic' pedagogies and 'authentic'

assessment. The QSRLS models of ‘productive’ pedagogies and ‘productive’ assessment provided the lenses needed to evaluate pedagogies in Queensland classrooms.

The QSRLS reviewed the pedagogies and assessment practices of approximately 250 teachers in four lessons, across 24 primary and secondary schools over three years. Classroom observations and samples of student work were scaled via twenty pedagogic items and eighteen assessment items in order to code the work of teachers and the outcomes of their students. Subsequently, these items were grouped into four domains of productive pedagogies: Intellectual quality; Connectedness; Supportive classroom environment; and, Working with and valuing difference. The emphasis upon the social outcomes from schooling, namely, inclusivity, active citizenship and group identities differentiated the Queensland study from that of Newmann and Associates. The Queensland study emphasised both social and academic outcomes. While rating Queensland classrooms highly on the dimension of care and supportiveness, the findings of the QSRLS showed low and concerning levels of intellectual demand, connectedness and recognition of difference in classroom practices. Assessment tasks rated similarly poorly with not enough intellectual demand with teachers seemingly not recognising the need to align assessment and pedagogy.

Responding to these findings was fundamental to achieving the *QSE – 2010* strategic priorities that promised a futures-oriented curriculum for the New Millennium. The ‘Framework Project’, led by university academic, Allan Luke, was the first step towards formulating a planned response (Education Queensland (a), 2004) and this initiative subsequently delivered the New Basics Project. Drawing upon the QSRLS Report, the four domains of productive pedagogies and productive assessment that were derived from the research - Intellectual quality, Connectedness, Supportive classroom environment and Working with and valuing of difference became one key contributor to the *Smart State* initiative and a fundamental element of the New Basics reform.

However, a parallel quasi national curriculum reform had been in place across Australian States and Territories during the 1990s, led by federal Labor governments (1983-1996). This was the organisation of school curricula into eight ‘Key learning Areas’ (KLAs) based upon related fields of knowledge. For example, Studies of Society and the Environment (SOSE) comprised knowledges and skills from the disciplinary fields of history, geography and economics. SOSE

also included related elements of culture, values and citizenship. In contrast and more radically, the New Basics Project erased the ‘subject’ map’ in favour of starting with ‘real world’ tasks, later known as ‘Rich Tasks’. Teachers had to begin with ‘the problem’ and ‘backward map’ to determine what skills and knowledge (repertoires of practices) would be required by students in order to solve it. According to the *New Basics Report*, ‘the New Basics program is based on ... envisioning the kinds of life worlds and human subjects that the education system wants to contribute to and build. (Education Queensland (a), 2004, p. 3). Here we see a new rationale for school curriculum, one not based in behavioural objectives, not based on disciplines, but rather framed through a visioning of future workers, citizens and a desired future world. For teachers, these ideas were revolutionary and a comprehensive trial was needed to evaluate their worth. This trial occurred between 2000 and 2003, involving 38 state government primary and secondary schools across Queensland.

### **The New Basics: Global Workers and Citizens**

A renewed interest in educational reform was signified by the appointment of a university educator, Professor Allan Luke, as the Deputy Director-General of Education Queensland. Appropriating the political rhetoric of the Right, ‘the basics’ soon became ‘the *New Basics*’ as he, along with the QSRLS team, began redefining the fundamental knowledges, skills and attributes needed in a globalizing world of new economies, new workplaces, new technologies, diverse communities, complex cultures and new citizenship of the ‘New Times’ (Hall, 1996) of the approaching New Millennium. We note that the name ‘New Basics’ flowed from market research that showed this nomenclature appealed to both conservatives and progressives in the broader community.

During the early 1990s, Stuart Hall mapped a number of significant global and local shifts in economic, cultural and national manifestations that gave rise to the definition of ‘New Times’, the metaphor he coined to embrace a transformative process that featured the following: new ethnicities, new subjectivities, globalization, hybrid identities, informational technologies, and a resurgent neo-liberal capitalism. This was the context within which Queensland’s New Basics project was launched. The global citizen of the New Millennium required an education that provided more than the ‘old basics’ of ‘reading, writing and arithmetic’. The *New* ‘basics’

would facilitate knowledges and skills that would respond to the conditions of Hall's 'New Times' 'new economies, new workplaces, new technologies, new student identities, diverse communities, and complex cultures' (Education Queensland (a), 2004, p. 2). Also fundamental to the New Basics Project was the explicit attempt to improve student outcomes and close the disadvantage gaps among diverse groups of students by uniquely aligning the three message systems of curriculum, pedagogy and assessment.

At the heart of the New Basics was the premise that educational reform would not eventuate if changes were made to curriculum or pedagogy or assessment practices in isolation from each other. First it was necessary to 'unclutter' the curriculum via four curriculum 'organisers': Life Pathways and Social Futures; Multiliteracies and Communication Media; Active Citizenship; and, Environments and technologies. Students would engage with 'core tasks' (rich tasks) – real world problems that, in their 'unpacking' would facilitate the acquisition of the knowledges and skills needed for New Times. However, for Luke and his team, such reshaping of the curriculum was just the beginning stating that 'it won't make a difference if our pedagogy isn't up to scratch' (Luke, 1999, p. 4). Thus, the third element of the New Basics triad (complementing its curriculum and pedagogy), was an approach to assessment that drew upon the work of Vygotsky's (1978) constructivism, Newman and Associates' (1996) authentic assessment, Freire's conscientization and Dewey's (2001) project learning, to propose student-centred, constructivist, complex assessment tasks – 'Rich Tasks' - for demonstrating learning outcomes that would then be collaboratively graded and moderated by teachers. This would see the migration of teacher moderation practices, central to senior schooling in Queensland, to primary and lower secondary levels.

These rich tasks were divided into three suites: Years 1-3, 4-6 and 7-9. They included such activities as multimedia presentations, creation of student web pages, artistic performances, and designing structures for the built environment, to name but three examples of the challenging tasks (Education Queensland (b)) that would facilitate the education of young people for a global New Times. The tasks also required public presentations to other classes in the school and to community. The New Basics also aimed to address the needs of the most 'at risk' students in the classroom. Unfortunately in 2013, Australian educational authorities are still struggling to address much the same issues, including the intransigent social class/race/gender performance

nexus. Despite incremental progress over the last few years, for Indigenous students, school completion rates remain at 52.9% for girls and 49.2 for boys (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2012). Progress has also been slow for other groups of disadvantaged young people. Between 2006 and 2011 Year 12 attainment (or equivalent) for young people from the *lowest* SES backgrounds rose from 71.6 to 73.7%; however, significant gaps are evident when this is compared to a national completion rate of 85% and 93.3% for young people from the *highest* SES backgrounds (COAG, 2013). School refusal, student disengagement and perceptions of falling academic standards continue to preoccupy educational bureaucrats and politicians, as well as remaining key foci in the research interests of education academics (see Mills & McGregor, 2014). National political panic also continues in relation to Australia's declining position on international testing such as PISA (Sellar & Lingard, 2013).

While the New Basics experiment indicated that its tenets had the potential to deliver intellectually in the classroom, it struggled to surmount systemic obstacles: staffing and resourcing, change weariness and in some cases teachers' lack of pedagogical content knowledge. Thus, instead of extending the New Basics framework to the rest of Queensland, its 'core values' were claimed as informing subsequent educational policies. As a radical response to the New Times of a globalizing world, the New Basics was discarded, perhaps because it was *ahead* of its time, as noted by one of its international supporters, Carmel Gallagher, speaking about the need to change the Northern Ireland curriculum:

[If we had decided to throw out subjects altogether] probably all hell would have broken loose from subject associations in the world asking "How can you get rid of subjects?" We also looked at the New Basics project in Queensland, Australia –I suggest you look at that amazing project, in which they did throw it all up in the air and try to get rid of subjects but they found that was a step too far; the teachers could not deal with it (House of Commons CSF Select Committee, 2008, response to question 146).

The election of the Rudd federal Labor government in late 2007 strengthened the national presence in schooling in Australia, signalling the end of ambitiously experimental projects like the New Basics.

## **The National Schooling Agenda: The Australian Curriculum and NAPLAN**

Post 2007, a new national approach to education in Australia has included national accountabilities and testing, a national curriculum, and a range of National Partnerships between the federal government and the States and Territories. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) oversees the national curriculum and testing and accountability. Another significant national development has been the creation of ACARA's *My School* website, which lists a school's results on NAPLAN against national averages and also the school's performance measured against sixty 'statistically similar schools' across the nation on a socio-economic scale (Index of Community Socio-Educational Advantage - ICSEA) developed by ACARA. In the early stages of Rudd's Prime Ministership, these developments were facilitated by a new cooperative federalism in respect of schooling, facilitated by the reality of Labor governments in all the States and Territories. This situation has now changed. However, as noted already, this changed political situation has not weakened the national agenda in schooling; indeed, there seems to be bi-partisan support for a national approach to schooling in the context of globalization from the recently elected federal Liberal National government.

There are early signs that this conservative government is keen to reshape the Australian Curriculum; the Australian History Curriculum, has been already been criticized by the new Education Minister, Christopher Pyne, as being underpinned by left-wing ideologies (Hurst, 2013). In the same interview, Pyne went on to say, 'my instincts tell me that a back-to-basics approach to education is what the country is looking for, what parents feel comfortable about' (Hurst, 2013). He also criticized child-centred and project-based learning in favour of 'direct instruction' in 'the facts'. As we write this paper, it is still unclear what this will mean for the future of the Australian Curriculum. From a Bernsteinian (1971) perspective it would seem to foreshadow a return to 'strong classification', whereby subject disciplines are rigidly circumscribed; and 'strong framing', which vests most power in the hands of curriculum writers to determine what knowledge 'counts' in the classroom. A return to such traditional structures would only further entrench middle-class educational advantage particularly if coupled with the current regimes of testing and accountability.

The *My School* website created by the federal Labor government in 2010 as part of their accountability and transparency agenda and also the 'school choice' discourse has also been

embraced by this conservative Abbott government. Teachers' unions continue to question the validity of the data and highlight its likely negative effects on curricula and pedagogy, the likelihood of league tables of performance, and the related potential for the 'naming' and 'shaming' of poorly performing schools, often situated within lower SES communities. Additionally, despite claims to the contrary, the literacy and numeracy tests which underpin *My School* have quickly become high-stakes for systems and schools (Lingard & Sellar, 2013), with all the potentially negative effects on pedagogies and curricula as evidenced in other national systems (Stobart, 2008, Hursh, 2008, Darling-Hammond, 2010). It would seem that Australia is continuing to adopt policies close to GERM in respect to assessment and accountability, while simultaneously attempting to successfully implement a discipline-based national curriculum that may soon be more reflective of last-century models of school subjects than those connected with and responsive to global needs and contexts.

### **The Australian Curriculum 2013**

As a coherent response to a globalizing world, the Australian Curriculum is a 'work-in-progress'; indeed, as an on-line initiative it has been conceptualised as such and as we write, it is up to Version 5.1 for the P-10 curriculum. Constructed as a series of interconnected on-line documents (downloadable if you wish) makes it easier to be responsive to changes and developments in the so-called 'knowledge economy'. However, we suggest that, in its current iteration, it may be trying to serve too many 'masters'.

The impetus towards the formulation of a national curriculum in Australia had its naissance in the 1980s when the then Federal Minister for Education, Training and Employment, John Dawkins, initiated the first moves with the States to begin outlining a common national curriculum (Dawkins, 1988). While this initiative produced agreement on the eight KLAs, state and federal political animosities and rivalries hindered any real progress until the Melbourne Declaration of 2008, which finally produced an agreement for the development of a national curriculum, initially in 'core' subjects of English, science and mathematics but also in history due to the so-called 'history wars' between conservative politicians and historians and their more leftist counterparts as they struggled for control over the national story.

The Australian Curriculum has been founded upon the Melbourne Declaration and its ‘Goals for Young Australians’ agreed to by all systems in Australia: (1) Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence; and (2) All young Australians become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. A closer examination of these goals reveals that the first goal has a focus on providing educational access, equity and social justice in respect of knowledge and skills; the second goal, on the other hand, echoes a common educational response to the needs of a globalised economy: developing personal qualities and dispositions best suited to globally oriented 21<sup>st</sup> century societies. Indeed, the Preamble to the Melbourne Declaration exhibits a very strong concern for preparing students for a global world, making four explicit statements about its significance:

- i. In the 21st century Australia’s capacity to provide a high quality of life for all will depend on the ability to compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation.
- ii. Global integration and international mobility have increased rapidly in the past decade.
- iii. Globalisation and technological change are placing greater demands on education and skill development in Australia and the nature of jobs available to young Australians is changing faster than ever.
- iv. Australia has developed a high quality, world-class schooling system, which performs strongly against other countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (Melbourne Declaration, 2008)<sup>iii</sup>

Thus, the foundations of the Australian Curriculum reflect a global orientation, alongside a return to disciplinary knowledge, as evidenced in notions of educational ‘excellence’ and strengthening the competitive edge with like nations. This is a vernacular expression of a globalized education policy discourse

Given that each State had shaped its own, very different, education system since before Federation, it was never going to be an easy task to reach consensus on a national curriculum. Subject writing and advisory teams were formed in 2008 and four years later, in 2012 English, mathematics and science curricula began implementation from P-10, with history coming on board in 2013. It must be noted here that the States were given the responsibility for

implementation in respect of timelines, assessment practices and support materials for teachers and schools. The Australian Curriculum provides the state curriculum authorities the required framework in each subject (and more are in the pipeline) for what to teach, along with a set of achievement standards for each year level.

Threaded through each subject area are the ‘General Capabilities’, identified as being essential skills for ‘students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century’, namely: ‘Literacy, Numeracy, Information and communication technology (ICT) capability; Critical and creative thinking; Personal and social capability; and, Ethical understanding, and Intercultural understanding’. Alongside the General capabilities sit the ‘Cross-curriculum Priorities’ justified by the claim that ‘The Australian Curriculum has been written to equip young Australians with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will enable them to engage effectively with and prosper in a globalised world’ (Australian Curriculum, 2013). These three additional strands comprise: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia; and, Sustainability.

The Australian Curriculum website is organised such that there are multiple hyperlinks to guide educators towards a vast array of elements that must be considered when developing programs of work in schools: knowledge, skills, scope and sequence, General Capabilities and Cross-curriculum Priorities, assessment standards and models of student work for each year level. Navigating all these requirements is the responsibility of State authorities and schools and teachers are expected to use State sites and support materials for implementation. It is at this point of ‘translation’ that many teachers may get lost, particularly if, as is too often the case, they are not trained particular subject and have limited pedagogical content knowledge.

At first glance, the Australian Curriculum may appear to be content-heavy, particularly if educators do not read the fine print of the State mediating documents. For example, it is often overlooked that the Australian History Curriculum allows significant freedom for local decision-making, even in high school as evident in the following note: ‘The order and detail in which the content descriptions are taught are programming decisions. The number of units planned may vary depending on local decisions about how to deliver or integrate the curriculum content’ (Queensland Studies Authority (a), 2013). Each subject expresses this freedom to make decisions a little differently, but in various ways it underpins the whole curriculum; for example, science

recommends: 'Schools develop learning contexts to suit the content to be taught and students' interests and learning needs. It is important to actively engage students in learning that is relevant and of interest to them. The focus or context for learning should connect with issues of personal or social relevance to students' (Queensland Studies Authority (b), 2013). However, as with other curricular reforms, in Queensland in particular, authorities have decided to embrace rapid implementation which has contributed to a variety of misunderstandings about the intent of the curriculum; for example, thinking that State generated exemplars of teaching materials are the *only* content and skills they can teach to a particular cohort; not realising that topic and subject integration is a school decision; and, that planning across the year levels allows teachers to modify and repeat concepts and skills according to the needs of their students. A perceived lack of teaching time has often been a cause for concern; however, the implementation of the Australian curriculum has strengthened it, particularly for primary schools. Indeed, a content focus is almost the inevitable outcome of the ways federalism mediates both the development and implementation of this curriculum and the division of labour across all aspects of the development/enactment cycle.

A distinction needs to be made here in respect of terminology. As the first step between the 'real-world discipline' and the school subject a 'syllabus', in part, provides comprehensive content descriptors for each subject which, along with a variety of explicit and implicit schooling factors, resourcing and pedagogical practices finally becomes part of the 'curriculum' in a school (Kelly, 2009). One of the issues with the Australian Curriculum is that its very name is misleading; 'curriculum' suggests that what appears on the ACARA website should be implemented unchanged in classrooms but a close examination of the state implementation documents shows that this is not the case; schools are meant to mediate the content both in terms of scope and sequence. A lack of pedagogical instruction is another significant problem with the Australian Curriculum; a search of the site for the term, 'pedagogy' produces '0 results'. Year Level Descriptions such as this one from Foundation (Prep) English tell you what students are expected to do, but provide no pedagogical framework for teaching them how to do it: 'Students create a range of imaginative, informative and persuasive texts including pictorial representations, short statements, performances, recounts and poetry'. This deficiency makes it difficult to see how the Australian Curriculum can achieve the two goals of the Melbourne

Declaration outlined above, particularly educational equity and social justice. In discussing the National Curriculum in England, Whitty (2010) notes that ‘some of the key challenges in giving disadvantaged pupils access to powerful knowledge – and giving it meaning and critical purchase on their everyday lives – are *pedagogic* ones’ (p. 40 emphasis added). According to Sinnema and Aitkin, (2013) pedagogical guidance *is* included in other national curricula such as those developed in Ireland, Wales, New Zealand and Scotland. Of note is that the Australian Curriculum is apparently closer in spirit to the United States Core Standards that ‘explicitly exclude attention to pedagogy’ with ‘clarifications accompanying the standards [that] make clear *what* students need to learn, but not dictate *how* teachers should teach’ (Sinnema & Aitkin, 2013, p. 152). We also suggest that embedding the General Capabilities and the Cross-curriculum Priorities will falter under the complexity of the task for many teachers, but particularly because of the absence of a pedagogical framework and the focus in the first instance by systems and schools on implementing the first four subjects of the P-10 curriculum.

## **Conclusion**

Our policy narrative has documented two competing responses to the global in Australian curriculum reforms: the move from the New Basics trial in Queensland to the discipline-based Australian curriculum in P-10. We must, of course, remember that the New Basics was only ever a trial – most Queensland schools continued with a Key Learning Areas Curriculum overseen by the Queensland Studies Authority. In Queensland, the P-10 Australian curriculum in mathematics, science and English were implemented in 2012 with history in 2013. Other P-10 subjects will follow. Queensland opted early to adopt in full the Australian curriculum compared with other States such as Western Australia, which is yet to begin the implementation of the first tranche of P-10 subjects.

Both the New Basics and the Australian curriculum were/are curriculum developments set against the context of all the changes evinced when we speak of globalization, confirming Bernstein’s sociological observation that curriculum changes are signifiers of societal developments. And, as we have already noted, the New Basics was a genre of curriculum emerging at the time across the globe and evidenced also in Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence, focusing on aims and what we want students to become. The New Basics and the

national curriculum are simply different responses to globalization, but both accept that the development of Australia's human capital through education is central to Australia's future, both economically and socially.

The New Basics were conceived at particular policy moment in Queensland of a social democratic Labor government, the pressing need for educational reform, a confident bureaucracy and leadership in education, good relationships between educational researchers and the bureaucracy, and research informing policy; this context allowed a moment of (rearticulated) progressivism in Queensland schooling, set against the pressures of globalization and related changes. We do not pretend that The New Basics was without its challenges, particularly in respect to resourcing and educating teachers, but its demise followed swiftly as the trial ended. We contend that political imperatives being driven by national accountability agendas ultimately prevented its full realisation. Indeed, it was Queensland's poor comparative performance on the 2008 NAPLAN test that closed the moment of progressivism in Queensland schooling. Through political interventions largely in response to widespread and critical media coverage, NAPLAN quickly became high stakes in Queensland government schools (Lingard & Sellar, 2013), with all of the effects indicated in research on the topic in other national settings (Lipman, 2004; Nicholas & Berliner, 2007; Hursh, 2008). NAPLAN remains high stakes for the school system in Queensland and concerns about performance on it have taken on meta-policy status (Lingard et al., 2013).

The Australian Curriculum now being implemented in P-10 is a more traditional curriculum than the New Basics, one constructed more around disciplines and what we want students to learn; however, we need to acknowledge that there are two elements two elements of a changed approach to curriculum as manifested in the New Basics and Curriculum for Excellence. These are the 'General Capabilities' and the 'Cross-curriculum Priorities'. These are to be embedded across the subject curricula. However, in our view, while both are laudable, the complexity of their implementation in schools' work programs may continue to hinder the realisation of the goals of the Melbourne Declaration in terms of their stated goals of preparing young people for: competing in the global economy; being globally connected; coping with technological change; developing skills in response to changing job markets in Australia; and helping the nation achieve an international competitive edge. Unfortunately, to this point most

attention has often been focussed on issues relating to content coverage and improving NAPLAN performance across the system. Such an approach is likely to see the implementation of a *diminished* Australian Curriculum.

Because of the federal division of labour surrounding it, the Australian Curriculum is a framework that neglects to address the issue of pedagogy. Above all else, this omission of one of Bernstein's (1971) three 'message systems' (curriculum, pedagogy and assessment) signifies a fatal flaw and may well be the very thing that stands in the way of engaging young people with Michael Young's (2011) 'powerful (disciplinary) knowledge'/'knowledge of the powerful'. Bernstein's (1990) concern with 'how' disciplinary knowledge is 'converted' to school knowledge and 'transmitted' to young people lies at the centre of his conceptions of 'pedagogical discourse' and his theories about the ways in which various modes of classroom pedagogy may privilege some social groups, while alienating others (Singh, 2002). We argue that the Australian Curriculum signifies yet another missed opportunity to respond effectively to the demands of a globalizing world in ways that are socially just. Certainly, we believe the heavy content coverage of the Australian curriculum, combined with the new and to be expanded testing regime, will most likely ensure the situation that the productive pedagogies research found in Queensland classrooms; namely, that an emphasis on width of curriculum coverage militates against intellectual demand in pedagogies and inhibits a focus on depth of knowledge .

Our curriculum narrative has demonstrated competing rationales for curriculum development and the reality that an Australian version of GERM and a discipline-based, structurally flawed Australian curriculum have won out over other more progressive manifestations of curriculum as exemplified by Queensland's New Basics trial. We have here two very different curriculum responses to the pressures of a globalizing and changing world.

## Notes

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<sup>i</sup> Labor was in political power in Queensland, 1989 until 2012, apart from a short Conservative interregnum of the Borbidge government, 1996-1998.

<sup>ii</sup> The QSRLS was commissioned during the Borbidge government to evaluate the impact of school-based management (*Leading Schools*) on equity and student learning. The election of Beattie Labor in 1998 saw this government abolish *Leading Schools*, but continue support for this research (costing \$1.3 million) which evolved into a documentation of classroom practices and their effects on student learning.

<sup>iii</sup> It is interesting that Australia's apparently declining performance on PISA 2009 caused national political panic with the then Prime Minister establishing a target enshrined in legislation that Australia be back in the top 5 of performers by 2025, a goal supported by the new Conservative federal Minister (see Sellar and Lingard, 2013).

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