

ACARA National Forum

Australian Curriculum: English

Friday 23 April, 2010

Reflections by Beryl Exley (ALEA rep)

Report	My Reflection
<p>Leading the forum: Lynne Redley (Language: Curriculum Manager) as Peter Hill & Robert Randall not available</p> <p>In attendance: Peter Freebody & approx 50 participants, representative of all states and territories, plus professional groups (eg. ALEA, AATE, ECA etc)</p>	
<p>The purpose of coming together was to address issues echoed from the range of public forums held in each state & territory in March. The 5 most significant issues were deemed to be:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Misplaced, incorrectly sequenced content (punctuation, grammar and phonics) 2. Lack of coherence across the doc 3. Emphasis needed for oral language, spelling, visual literacy 4. K-2 too ambitious & ignores play-based philosophy 5. Achievement standards are content not 'standards' <p>We were asked to discuss each, and identify specific examples of tension on the doc. Some people still had not located the elaborations. There was some confusion as to whether the elaborations would co-exist with the curriculum document. The glossary is still a work-in-progress.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Yes, these are the same core issues I've heard in a number of forums. • One delegate noted there were 93 content headings, 62 of which are not repeated. • The gravity of these areas of concern suggest that the document needs to be rewritten AND tendered for another consultation round. I'm most uncomfortable with ACARA taking these concerns, finishing the doc and then delivering it back to teachers for implementation WITHOUT a considered consultation with the profession. ALEA Qld is recommending that after ACARA issue draft 2, another rigorous round of public consultation follows. • We've not heard from the trial schools – what are their experiences?
<p>In the Q & A session (chaired by Lynne), discussion turned to the 3 strands & if ACARA was committed to the 3 strands as the framework for presenting the content:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ <i>Language</i>: development of a coherent, dynamic & evolving body of knowledge about the English language and how it works. ➤ <i>Literature</i>: to interpret, appreciate, evaluate & create literary texts such as narrative, poetry, prose, plays, film & multimodal texts, in spoken, print & digital/online contexts. ➤ <i>Literacy</i>: apply English skills & knowledge to read, view, speak, listen to, write & create a growing repertoire of texts. <p>Lynn revealed there has been talk about their</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The placement of 'literacy' as a strand for 'English' undoes some of the progressive work the states have done to recognise curriculum literacies, literacy being everyone's business and 'literacy' as a general capability. • The vote was split, with many people expressing disquiet about the trite process of casting a vote on a substantive issue when the voting question was unclear. What was it we were voting for as the alternative? In the absence of robust conversation, a vote of this ilk was premature. • If ACARA upheld the vote, and substantive changes were made, then in the interests of collaboration and respecting the review of the profession, ACARA MUST re-issue the document & a valid period of consultation.

<p>utility, and asked for a show of hands in favour and against.</p>	
<p>Peter offered an informal response to some of the points of conversation, the most notable of which was his description of ACARA's refusal to structure the curriculum along 'stages' rather than aligned with 'grades/year levels' as the 'most spectacular defeat of his career'.</p>	<p>I'm recalling the 2008 <i>Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians</i>, in particular the phrase:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ supporting all young Australians to become successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens, and to promoting equity and excellence in education. <p>Reflection question: How is equity accounted for in a model based on age divisions (which is the arbitrary unit for categorising students into year levels)?</p>
<p>We broke into small working groups of 10 (aligned by junctures of schooling). Each group had to discuss a couple or a few of the general capabilities and their visibility within the content and achievement. The ten general capabilities:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • literacy, numeracy & ICT (which will, in time, have a continua for Yrs 2, 4, 6, 8 & 10) • thinking skills, creativity, self management, teamwork, intercultural understanding, ethical behaviour, social competence (which will, in time, have a development sequence for Yrs 2, 6 & 10) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See comments above re: literacy. • Numeracy not highly visible in English. Lynn offered that children could learn ordinal numbers through narrative or could learn to count through narrative. • Such commentary does not strike at the heart of 'numerical thinking' as it's just an example of a parroted skill.
<p>Lynn revealed that ACARA had received approximately 1000 online responses to date. There is an expectation that this will increase significantly through May.</p> <p>Mark Howie asked how ACARA was structuring its decision to take on board or dismiss feedback.</p> <p>Lynn advised that if a particular issue was frequently noted, then ACARA would consider it carefully. Issues that were not frequently noted would not carry a lot of weight.</p> <p>Mark asked if association responses (which represented 1000s of members) would carry more weight. Lynn's response was 'yes'. Mark asked for clarification on the mechanics of 'weighing' association responses vis-a-vis individual responses. Lynn did not elaborate but said there would be a formula.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Importance of responding to doc. • Importance of responding in a range of forums.
<p>Back in group work sections, we had to evaluate the transparency and utility of the dimensions. I worked with the group looking at Indigenous Perspective.</p>	<p>Our group's response:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A worthy goal • Had potential to be included, but not overt in doc (with the exception of Yr 6) • Raised questions centred on efficacy ie. 'who gets to speak for whom' & is this appropriate • Raised questions about teachers' depth of knowledge of Indigenous perspectives