

National Curriculum Symposium

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Preface: These are my notes of the sessions. I've recorded all viewpoints so you can see the disparate thinking. There were no new announcements; it seemed to be catering for an audience who has yet to attend other forums. This event coincided with the release of the final draft framework papers for English, mathematics, science and history. The lecture theatre was at capacity. The purpose of the day, according to Prof Robyn Ewing (Acting Dean) and Margery Hornibrook (Symposium Convener) "is to have robust and broad discussion about the proposed direction a futures orientated national curriculum should take in the 21st Century".

NB. We have until 28 February to provide advice to The National Curriculum Board.

Welcome: Professor Derek Armstrong (DVC Edn, Uni of Sydney)

National curriculum raises important questions about the identity of the nation, our personal identity as Australians, professional identities and different professional groups, what an understanding of knowledge is and how that knowledge should be imparted for our future benefit. It gives us an opportunity to think about education as a system and about its role in a *hitherto* unknown future. Underpinning any curriculum is an idea of learning, more particularly, the role of pedagogy in learning.

Keynote Address: Prof Kerry K Kennedy (Head of Department of Curriculum and Instruction at Hong Kong Institute of Education)

"A National Curriculum for the Twenty First Century: What do Susan Ryan, John Dawkins and Julia Gillard have in common?"

Prof Kennedy has worked at UC, ANU, USQ and the Australian Government's Curriculum Development Centre. Out of Australia since 2001. Contributing author to publication *Curriculum Stocktake*. He has constructed his position from that of an outsider with a staunch interest in national curriculum reform in Australia.

Curriculum is a significant social and political arena. It sets out what it expects future generations to know and do. The issue of import is the deeper cultural meanings rather than specification of content. He reviewed the political agendas of previous Fed Govt's.

Susan Ryan, 1st Labor Minister of Education. Issues of curriculum were in policy statement of ALP and Hawke Government's establishment of Curriculum Development Centre with Garth Boomer as President, but closed down by Malcolm Fraser's Government. Nomenclature of 'national consistency' is secret code for national curriculum. This mirrors actions of current Labor Government in the opening trimester of their appointment. What differs might be their impetus and motivation. Ryan period was transitional period and pursued progressivist agenda in the initial instance, but turned to a neo-liberal transfer.

One of first tasks of John Dawkin's era was curriculum mapping across the states. The express aim was to expose inconsistency. Kennedy worked on the maths mapping. There were very few inconsistencies; differences lay in the ages of students. The National Curriculum Statement and profiles were produced out of this exercise (see MEECTYA). These documents acted as a resource for states and territories. The centre was wound down, and what emerged was the Curriculum Corporation, a forum of Ministers to look at how curriculum exercises might be conducted in the future.

Julia Gillard has started in neo-liberal mould, but the near collapse of the international economic system might lead to a rethink of the position and location of school curriculum. It might also mean that curriculum may not be built solely on economic concerns; rather it should be located in social, cultural and moral terms. We should not be afraid to talk about moral education. Government should not reify economic imperatives at expense of all else. Times are ripe for a major shift. Economic rationality is not enough to sustain a nation. A vision for a school curriculum is not about correcting deficits; it is about creating a futures vision. It's not primarily about students moving across states and territories with ease. The success will be getting the vision right and then getting the whole country to agree and implement it.

The vision is creating a future for young people that can draw on the best a nation has to offer. The issue remains for the lack of participation at the secondary level. Increasing participation must have same priority. Participation must be linked to substance that produces important outcomes. We must prioritise the most disadvantaged groups.

What might a vision look like? What should we expect of future citizens?

- Posses broad interdisciplinary understandings that cross traditional knowledge boundaries;
- Have a commitment to environmental sustainability and protection;
- Be aware of their role in the global community even though they maybe firmly located here in one locality;
- Be innovative, creative and ethical;
- Solve problems;
- Think critically;
- Participate in and contribute to a vibrant civil society;
- Be politically active and aware;
- Possess well developed interpersonal skills and the capacity to work collaboratively; and
- Continue their learning journey in both formal and non-formal contexts throughout their life span.

By way of background, Kennedy reported that Hong Kong started consultation in 1989 and implementation is in 2012. Hong Kong Teachers have been critical because of workload and demands, but not of content. Kennedy suggested this was because of the lengthy consultation. In China, consultation is a replacement for democracy. Consultation is at the core of a successful process.

ACARA – Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority. We've returned to the model used by Susan Ryan and dismantled by John Dawkins. It's interesting to notice the state support given to this initiative. States know in return for compliance, they will get resources. Caution is that statutory bodies come and go at the will of government. The foundation of any national curriculum is problematic in that in Australia it will not have a direct articulation into all schools. In this sense it cannot be national. The responsibility of schooling still rests with states and territories. We need to

be realistic about underpinnings. The lessons of history are clear – if you establish structures, there is no guarantee that those structures will stay.

The curriculum of schooling is a cultural construction. We need to see it that way so we can understand the size and enterprise of a national curriculum. To this end, the authors of the framing papers enter cultural territory, dangerous territory. The debates are not academic debates. They are about the soul of the nation, the beliefs and values. Curriculum is not a technical field, although there are technical aspects. If you confuse the technical and cultural, you get into dangerous territory. The idea of curriculum is one that we should pay some attention to. We need to look at the community response, not just academics who debate one another. It is not the academic's curriculum – it is the nation's curriculum. Maybe the nomenclature should be "A Nation's Curriculum" rather than a national curriculum. Naming it is quite important – it reflects if it is a cultural or a political exercise.

Schools assistance bill 2008 made direct reference to the implementation of the national curriculum. Implementation of legislation:

- A funding agreement for a non-systemic school, or an approved school system, must require the relevant authority for the school or system to ensure that the school, or each school in the system, implements the national curriculum prescribed by the regulations for primary education or secondary education.

Problems with soft policy. Hard policy is also problematic for it is based on implementation by fear, augmented by absence of knowledge of what the national curriculum is. Systems who have signed up to this have signed up to something they know nothing about. Is hard policy the answer? It is used on the independent schooling sector, but can't be used for departmental schools. This calls the effectiveness of any national mandate into question. It has produced two different ways of dealing with schools (private by legislation; public by agreement/negotiation). Senator Carr said the National Curriculum will be flexible enough to accommodate all schools and programs, including Montessori, IB, Steiner schools, International schools etc. He reassured parents nothing should change at 'their' school.

The issue of curriculum is easy in comparison to the issue of human resources, staffing schools with the best teachers possible, and ensuring their on-going professional development. There has to be a focus on teacher education (but not a review, just appropriate funding, appropriate standards). Partnerships needed between those responsible for curriculum reform and teacher education, teacher professional development. Without the appropriate resources teachers will question if what is being proposed is in the best interests of their students.

Mandating a national curriculum means entry into a constitutional arena. Hong Kong and China support centralised curriculum until 2047, i.e. responsibility for their own serving needs of own. A national curriculum should not be viewed as a panacea for nation's economic or educational ills. It is an attempt to value add, but it will not solve a nation's problems. The issue is for what purposes and how do we go about the process. There are policies which need to be put into place, particularly in relation to implementation support.

To date, the debates in the media have been unedifying. Is it that the community is not prepared for the debate, the procedures for debate? Everyone should be encouraged to participate. Curriculum is about the collective, what is good for all, not for some. In the end, curriculum is for everyone, not for some. It has to be a curriculum for the community, not a curriculum for bureaucrats or academics.

Questions/responses from audience

1. *How do we attract the best people to teaching?*

Korea, teaching is highly prized. Only the top 0.8% make it into teaching. Families are proud when offspring become teachers. Teachers are well paid, pay reduced tax (10%), have access to 6 monthly stints of professional renewal on full pay.

2. *Tension between collection code and interdisciplinary code?*

To be interdisciplinary, does not mean 'integrated' curriculum. To be truly interdisciplinary, there is a need for DEEP knowledge on all accounts.

3. *Student standards internationally?*

Accountability in Asia is not from systems, from families and the examination system. The focus is on working harder not on ability. Students work hard to please their families, create an honour for them. Only 18% of Korean students are accepted to uni, so competition is high. Australia can't replicate the familial view, nor do we want to limit entry to universities to 18% or promote (higher-stakes) examinations. Caution though, curriculum based on accountability sacrifices progressivism.

4. *Curriculum should respond to the here and now as it relates to young people's lives, it's not all about the future.*

Kennedy endorsed comment. We need to understand realities of young people. It is a tension for curriculum makers, engaging students in the world of today AND the future.

5. *Request for comment about relationship between national curriculum, league tables, NAPLAN testing, A-E reporting, etc*

ACARA – shows relationship. The reporting mechanisms are unnatural and that in itself is problematic. Professional associations need to continue to highlight these issues. The community has to have confidence in their teachers to report otherwise. Academic literature on teacher judgement – the literature is clear that teacher judgement is very sound.

6. *Consultation concludes on 28 February*

Need to get agreement on nature of consultation and what it means. Those consulted need to see that their input is valued. There needs to be agreement between the parties on how the feedback loop is operating. If that doesn't happen people become sceptical.

7. *Is a national curriculum worth having?*

Depends on the way new statutory body works. In talking about national curriculum Senator Carr said, 'A national curriculum won't affect the way school classrooms work'. For her part, Julia Gillard has been clearer about what the national curriculum will not be rather than what is the curriculum's purpose.

Middle Sessions: "Frame Up - Key Curriculum Areas"

Frame Up English: Professor Peter Freebody (Professorial Research Fellow, Faculty of Education & Social Work, The University of Sydney)

At Sydney Uni 40 years ago, and subject English was a real battle ground back then. PhD (Uni Illinois) in middle years reading comprehension and writing. Equity curve disjuncture in middle years. Lead to questions of knowledge and ways in which individual curriculum areas put reading and writing to specialised kinds of work. Significance of English language education, literacy and literature as equity markers. We have ideas about English, language, literacy and literature studies that place it firmly within that discourse.

Remit: Was kind of thing is English? What is the nature of knowledge, skills, dispositions? Why bother studying it? What might it look like as it grows into the future? What are the imperatives? What are its key responsibilities? What do English teacher do? How can we talk about the qualities

of subject English? We can also think about it historically? What main architectural features can we see in subject English?

- Knowledge about English
- Knowledge about literature
- Knowledge about expanding abilities to read and write

Review of state/territory curriculums revealed some are called English/literacy rather than English being a discrete subject area and literacy being the tools for accessing disparate subject knowledges. What counts as knowledge in subject English? It is the central issue for the framing paper and the central issue of a multi-faceted discipline such as subject English.

Subject English ill-serves Indigenous Australians. Need hard look at kinds of assessment. Frequent references to issues of equity and taking account of linguistic diversity brought to Australia. It is a linguistically rich (and complex) situation and presents challenges to those involved in the teaching of English.

The interrelationship between language, literacy & literature – connectivity and building of cumulative knowledge. Common language to do so. Some conceptual vocabulary that is the way in which we describe knowledge. How are those three elements interrelated in pedagogy, in assessment and in resources? The discipline needs a known and shared apprenticeship. It is always going to be the case that not all will agree, but it is imperative that all involved commit to the profession whilst still engaging in debate.

Explication in teaching in contradistinction to experimentation in learning. These debates obstruct the way we can talk about English. Good teacher MOVES between explication and authoritative and experimentation of transformative pedagogies. The other debate about ‘either/ or’ must go away!

Questions/responses from audience:

1. Do teachers have the knowledge to pull this off?

Many teachers do and some do not. Looking at the empirical work, some things are a bit patchy. Looking at the model of language (ie grammar) in Freebody’s words “it’s not rocket science, good teachers can catch on”. There has to be a vocabulary for talking about how text works. Not aimed at parsing, but at reading better and writing better. That is the challenge for what has to happen next.

2. The challenge for pushing LITERATURE into early years and LITERACY into upper years. It’s a parallel question to grammar. What do teachers get in their pre-service training to skill them up in this regard? The teaching of literature needs to be integrated in intelligent ways with the other elements. Just remember though, 3-4 % of kindergarten kids will study English at university; 97% won’t.

3. The challenge of local adaptation and central prescription.

It can’t be solved algorithmically from the start. Can’t end up with a document that says ‘do this’ but ‘adapt to local conditions’ - means it becomes a document that does nothing. It provides no architecture. For a young teacher out in a remote area, a curriculum is a protection, it’s a shell that shows what has to be done. There is an issue about considering our curriculum for beginning isolated teachers. At the same time, if it’s over prescriptive it gives teachers nowhere to evolve to meet challenging new times.

Final say from Freebody: consider responsibilities of English as a body of knowledge, or as the interface between a number of bodies of knowledge. What does a good teacher of English know in terms of materials, pedagogy and assessment that professors of English don’t know. Making sure that none of that is damaged in the process.

Frame Up History: Stuart Macintyre (The University of Melbourne)

Stuart offered an opinion on other subject areas in this remit: English, maths and science all enshrined as key learning areas. Teaching of maths and science are also areas of concern in terms of results and recruitment of teachers. English reclaimed as cultural studies and personal therapy.

History compulsory in middle secondary in NSW, often taught by teachers with no particular training in history (despite many highly qualified unemployed teachers being ready to teach history). Used to make up workload of non-content specialist teachers.

History is a form of inquiry, not a factual subject. Often conflated as such. Its disciplinary character is often ignored. Emotional form of self understanding and as such creates fierce debates. Current debates about inquiry pedagogies in contradistinction to factual modes of knowing. History is knowing knowledge and practising it. Student dissatisfaction increases if history is constructed as a sacred legacy that has to be preserved.

The framing paper sets out historical thinking.

- Historical significance (what should be remembered)
- Questions of evidence (how it is found and interpreted)
- Continuity and change (how we organise and make connections)
- Cause and consequence (interplay of human agency)
- Historical perspectives (act of understanding past involves empathy and moral judgement, capacity to enter into past)

Emphasis to Australian history in early primary, at latter primary to say more about Australia and world history. Purpose of world history focus is to take people into circumstances unfamiliar to them. It is the nature of history that those accounts be subjected to scrutiny. It has to go beyond more than what is near or dear to us. Many young Australians find Australian history and its facile moralism boring. They want to make their own discoveries and make their own responses. We will understand Australian history better if we better understand other continents and their people.

National curriculum board wanted to talk about cross-curricula inquiry. Yes, history can contribute to these elements. Coverage of content was seen as ambitious. Framing paper says historical understanding has to be developed systematically. Need to guide teachers with limited experience. Need to avoid scripting for teachers. If you're going to achieve anything, need to make resources available.

Frame up Mathematics: Professor Peter Sullivan (Monash University)

Curriculum needs to foster:

- Development of expert mathematicians
- Expert users of mathematics in the professions
- A workforce capable of meeting all numeracy requirements
- Citizens able to use the mathematics they need.

Some key decisions:

- Mathematics success creates opportunities and all should have access to those opportunities inclusive for all to end of year 9 (and compulsory in year 10) ie no streaming, don't give kids restricted diet of mathematics. This requires some rearrangements of schools, supporting kids to catch up, current ways don't work.

- The future orientation is about thinking and also about appropriate use of technology (proficiency with technology and without) and this may be contentious. The range of technologies is expanding. The paper takes the view that the curriculum needs to incorporate technologies.
- The curriculum will be clear and succinct, and this is about pedagogy. Clarity is needed for interactivity. Not about setting low expectations for teachers. Demands for additional details should be resisted. We have to find a way to identify a way to find the important things about maths.
- Currently teachers feel they rush from one topic to the next, and this is bad for teaching. Preference for studying combined topics in more depth whilst also acknowledging that some topics are more important than others.
- All students can be challenged within basic topics, including the advanced students. Extension by moving to advanced topics is ultimately counterproductive. They've been taught not to do advanced work, but to rush onto the next topic.
- The curriculum **will** be driven from the bottom up, not starting at year 12 and working down.

Numeracy & Cross Curricula Work

- The use of mathematics is important in these disciplines.
- There are some who see numeracy as a separate subject. There are some who think numeracy doesn't exist.
- Decision is to write a numeracy curriculum within mathematics...as well as including references to numeracy aspects of other subjects in mathematics, and to numeracy in history etc.

Three content strands (the nouns, what students need to know):

- Number and algebra
 - Measurement and geometry
 - Statistics and probability
- (3 not 5 strands, traditional terms but not traditional intent)

Expectations for proficiency (the verbs, what students can do):

- Understanding
- Fluency
- Problem solving
- Reasons

Mathematics assessment :

- The curriculum will outline expectations
- But it is cheaper to assess fluency (through multi-choice nation wide assessment) than reasoning (through teacher moderated in-class real learning tasks)
- Assessing only one type of mathematical action will distort the curriculum
- In any case, if national assessments are to inform us on achievement of goals, then all aspects must be included. It requires more than doing something else than choosing a, b, c and d.

Professor Denis Goodrum: Science (University of Canberra)

Challenge to produce a national Curriculum that is not representative of one voice (one state's needs); rather a curriculum that represents one voice of the profession. Other challenge to tackle declining interest in science and plateau of student achievement. Year 7 is primary activity in

Queensland with a generalist teacher, but secondary school in NSW with a specialist teacher. The key to educational change is the teacher. The key to innovation is the teacher. We have to appreciate that:

- Early childhood teacher's expertise is in the child development
- Primary teachers' expertise is usually literacy, then maths then the other curriculum areas find a space
- Junior & senior secondary has a major in science and generally that is the case until now when teachers are teaching out of field, mainly done by PE teachers who have expertise in human body.

With these parameters in mind, this has influenced the nature of the document. Science inquiry is important in learning science. Schools that are doing well have a commitment to science inquiry. Develop science capabilities so future citizens can make decisions based on evidence and reason. Foundation for careers in SET, scientific capable workforce, science for life (meaningful for their life). This is a challenge to make the curriculum relevant. Move away from scientific literacy to scientific capabilities. TPA not happy with move away from scientific literacy. A curriculum has to have flexibility, for locations, for student groups. Differences within jurisdictions are much greater than differences between jurisdictions. Variations across jurisdictions, ranging from 240 mins per week in lower secondary vis-à-vis 120 mins per week in lower secondary. TIMSS result distribution across Australia is a reflection of time spent on task.

Science knowledge reinforces that its static, that its facts. Science understanding suggests information is used to solve problems. Some consternation that there was too much emphasis on the inquiry dimension. The intention was that these things were equal.

Assessment should serve the purpose of learning and there is a need for a variety of assessment approaches. Science is dominated by multiple choice exams which presuppose there is only one answer and also does not allow understandings of how students think scientifically. Suggest rather than test everyone (nationally), do detailed testing of smaller samples. Need rich evidence to make better decisions at the system level. Comment about pedagogy, less emphasis on transmission model, more emphasis on model of student engagement & inquiry. Students can use their own language.

Afternoon Session: English Key Curriculum Group - Issues related to the development of a national curriculum (brainstorming ideas from audience members)

Political: best or most common? Is the primary task to secure political agreement? What advances, if any, can be made in curricular design and teaching and learning practice through this process?

- If we can meet political accord in a reasonable time frame then a greater longevity means outcomes are more likely to be achieved.
- Any political agreement has to have resonance in the funding arrangements.
- Is there a difference between the politics of the states and their approaches to English? It is hard enough to resolve the identity of subject English. Agreement the will to do this is there.
- Knowledge about language needs decisions about consensus about grammatical metalanguage. Traditional grammar is easy to get up but is a discriminatory grammar. Functional grammar is more useful (functional) but requires a huge commitment to PD. In some states have to win the battle of grammar in schools all over again (eg NSW).
- Opportunity to do it on a national level and national curriculum gives it some weight.

- TAFE interested in national curriculum and has concerns about PD for teachers. Not much use of having agreement if it's not tied to money for PD.
- Point of commonality of language, redefinition of terms, keep redefining curriculum and its negative effect on teachers (eg. curriculum capabilities, modality). Can we take away the politics? What is the nation's curriculum not the national curriculum?
- 3 elements define English quite simply: language, literature and literacy. Clearly defined.
- Bevy of new teachers coming out needs this structure.

Organisational: What is the potential to deliver genuine cross disciplinary learning opportunities?

- If the model of language is rich enough, then it can look at literacy across the curricula. The cross curricula literacies need to be stated.
- Concern that scientific literacy is taken out of science framing paper.
- All teachers need to be teachers of literacy and have the tool of a metalanguage for the specificities of their KLA.
- Analysis and critical thinking in subject English. Need to give students language to be able to express those complexities.
- Take lesson from ESL in the mainstream. It replicates what we should be doing across the curriculum.
- Framing paper missing disciplinary practices across curriculum.
- The disciplinary nature of English is missing.
- No over arching and agreed pedagogical framework defined. Started with content component and tried to build back this way.
- Nervous about where 'subjects' fit into bigger picture of everything else. Eg. History is not used in primary schools. Next iteration we'll have geography and now what are teacher to do? Teach SOSE and History, then SOSE, History and Geography.
- What about uncluttering the curriculum? So much getting done during the week that is unrelated to KLA work.

Professional: What role will there be for teachers? How are they positioned by the process? What degree of detail in the specification of what is to be taught should be there be?

- Teachers are capable and capable of change.
- Subject is sitting here and young people are sitting over here. They've been lost in the process and they should be central. How does English contribute to young people's growth and development. These issues should foreground the policy documents and it's not obvious that they are.
- The national curriculum guidelines provide a protection for teachers. Can that be done with national consistency? It has to be. We need to make it as consistent as possible.
- Need to take care to involve teachers. They are feeling fractured from the process. Recognition of what it is they can do.
- Dilemma of offering specificity devolves into mandating prescription & death by a thousand dot points. Specificity does not bring clarity. Under specifying the knowledge about language is problematic.
- Need to audit classrooms. Also serves to recognise teachers' expertise.
- What about the quality of the support documents? Will there be support documents?
- That PD is a K-12 PD so year 1 teachers know what is happening in secondary and secondary teachers know what is coming before it.

- The support needs to be in teachers' classroom, not talking head PD, position papers or packages (scripted PD programs). What is a notion of professional learning? How can we support professional learning onsite? Give teachers relief time to work with mentors and inquiring into their own practice.

Educational: what additional value will be provided for students and their learning? How will the extraordinary diversity of Australia's student population be catered for?

- Strip things out of English curriculum. for example, is viewing essential for each year level?
- There are a large proportion of students who never get 'there'. This includes the top end and bottom end. What is the disciplinary 'there'? It's not just about equity 'there' it's also about 'disciplinarily'.
- A series of three elements does not make a discipline.
- How compulsory will English be? For whom and for how long? What about the kids who don't want to go to uni? What is subject English for them?
- What is the relation of the three English areas to each other?
- Theory is your best friend. You need a strong theoretical base that builds the principles by which you evaluate a learning structure.
- Collective sense of urgency with low SES and Indigenous students.

Structural: What will the relationship be between the content of the national curriculum and assessment and reporting processes? What should it be?

- You have to decide what type of stance you want to take. What is your theory for assessment? Get the theory up front. English is a region not a discipline of science. Careful not to have informed eclecticism. Framing paper holds all versions together and allows you to integrate. That means everyone can do anything. We think eclecticism is a theory – and it isn't. The assessment will not be eclectic. It will be specific and conservative. Conversely having a tool box of many resources allows teachers to cater for the needs of more learners.
- Opportunity that assessment will be used to support learners rather than mark learners. Preference for rich documentation rather than high-stake standardised assessment.
- Need content that people Australia wide understand. Can't have too broad that there is a misunderstanding. Counter point is that it makes it too specific means it become content focus and not a skills focus.
- Difference between assessment and testing? Get caught up together.
- Naplan sampling preferable over comprehensive testing. (not sure why we're talking NAPLAN as it's a literacy test not and ENGLISH test). Framing paper links assessment of English with NAPLAN. We need to give strong statement in response to this. NAPLAN is about reporting, not about assessment. Page 18 says English should support development of NAPLAN.
- Be sure to assess the repertoires that you are going to teach. Tension between curriculum being broad and assessment being so narrow. Needs to be firmly embedded in assessment for learning practices. It's a concept of alignment.
- Opportunity to improve self assessment, where learners self assess.
- The things that are most highly valued, creativity, critique – can they be assessed? But to take away creative part and critique will be debasing the subject.