



Engaging diverse voices across sites of curriculum making in Australia: realities and possibilities

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Abstract

Research to date has pointed out that during periods of curriculum reform, public debate gets politicised resulting in an over-emphasis on top-down approaches to curriculum making. As a group of curriculum inquiry researchers, we are concerned that teachers, students, school leaders and community organisations are often sidelined as integral curriculum actors in curriculum making processes. This paper challenges top-down, discipline-siloed conceptualisations of curriculum making by bringing together three separate curriculum projects, as illustrations, for the purpose of rendering diverse articulations of curriculum as a social process. We apply Priestley et al.'s (Priestley et al., *Curriculum making in Europe: Policy and practice within and across diverse contexts*, Emerald Publishing Limited, 2021) sites of curriculum making as a conceptual frame, to articulate the diversity of curriculum making activities, curriculum actors and sites of curriculum making in primary and secondary settings. The three illustrations include examining how teachers and students participate in curriculum making about Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia at macro and meso sites; how listening to secondary students as curriculum actors allows them to contribute to shaping school History beyond the nano sites of the classroom and how community and arts-based approaches empower primary students to engage in nano curriculum making (e.g. Hannigan & Kelly, Hannigan and Kelly, Lin et al. Sinner et al. Irwin (eds), *Community arts education: Transversal global perspectives*, Intellect, 2023). By engaging a collaborative approach that uses illustrations to draw a complementary transdisciplinary picture of the realities and possibilities of curriculum making across different sites, this paper makes a novel methodological contribution to the field of curriculum inquiry.

Keywords Curriculum inquiry · Curriculum actors · Curriculum making · Student voice · Community-based curriculum · Transdisciplinary curriculum · Collaborative research

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Introduction

Informed by national and transnational curriculum debates concerned with the complexities of curriculum making (see Green et al., 2021; Johnson-Mardones, 2018), this paper seeks to illuminate some common challenges regarding the engagement of diverse curriculum actors across sites of curriculum making (Priestley et al., 2021). Considering that top-down approaches to curriculum policy—as evidenced by curriculum reviews and reforms worldwide—tend to distract from processes of how curriculum gets made on the ground, this paper seeks to problematise the perception that policy makers in state and national curriculum policy spaces are the most influential curriculum policy actors. In the Australian context, the media attention given to the recent (2020–2021) review of the Australian Curriculum has distorted how the Australian curriculum landscape is viewed by those within and outside of curriculum making processes (see Cairns, 2022; Hickey, 2021; Ross & Dwyer, 2021). As the key body responsible for the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is required to undertake a review every six years and report to the Education Council, which is composed of Australian Government and state and territory government education ministers. The Education Council oversees the review, but as it is spearheaded by the federal minister of education, it tends to reflect the agenda of the government in power, which reinforces the perception that policy makers are the key decision makers regarding curriculum review and reform. These processes make evident that whilst education ministers and ‘most bureaucrats in such roles are not familiar with curriculum policy or theory and are thus dependent on the views of others’ they ‘may or may not choose to be advised by school educational experts’ (Elliott & McLean Davies, 2022, p. 237). Conversely, voices from the curricular landscape that include ‘the lived curricula of teachers and students’ (Aoki, 1993, p. 267)—within and beyond the classroom—and engage with the ‘life-world knowledge’ (Zipin, 2020, p. 111) of children and young people, tend to be side-lined in politicised curriculum debates.

This paper builds on the premise that ‘curriculum making is undertaken by different actors for different purposes in the various settings where it occurs’ (Priestley et al., 2021, p. 14). Supporting the notion that ‘top-down policy prescription, is only *one* mediating factor’ (p. 14), it therefore aims to draw attention to other mediating factors. As researchers who engage in curriculum inquiry from within discrete disciplines such as Languages, History and the Arts, this paper adopts a collaborative approach to curriculum inquiry by bringing together insights from three separate projects spanning a range of disciplines and education contexts, which are interconnected by a focus on teachers and students as on the ground curriculum actors. Specifically, this paper asks: *How can researchers from different disciplinary areas challenge top-down curriculum policy and draw attention to the realities and possibilities of diverse sites of curriculum making in Australia?* Building on the conceptualisation of curriculum as a complex social practice (Priestley & Philippou, 2018), we understand curriculum making to be a broad term that can be used to describe the myriad actions that manifest curriculum.

The paper begins by positioning curriculum making as framed by the tensions between top-down curriculum policy and the realities and of new possibilities of diverse sites of curriculum making and their actors. We then introduce Priestley et al.'s (2021) conceptualisation of sites of curriculum making as our conceptual framing, before providing an outline of our methodological approach. This is followed by three illustrations of different sites of curriculum making in Australia, including the 2020–2021 curriculum review of the Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia cross-curriculum priority; a national student survey about senior secondary History and a community-based project in a primary school. Overall, the paper argues that increasing the visibility of diverse curriculum making in Australia can challenge the lop-sided perception that curriculum policy making is controlled by a small group of powerful curriculum actors.

Contextualising curriculum making

The widespread politicisation of curriculum reform and accompanying policy, media and public commentary positions curriculum making as a hierarchical, contentious process in which politicians and curriculum policy experts at the state and national levels exert authority over what teachers are expected to 'implement' or 'teach' (e.g. Priestley & Philippou, 2018). Indicative of the neoliberal education reforms that are underpinned by a 'standardising discourse' (Reid, 2019, p. 3), and curriculum policy which sets measures of school academic achievement by 'narrow metrics' (Zipin, 2020, p. 111), these approaches overemphasise competition, performance and uniformity. Curriculum inquiry scholarship has long been concerned with such incomplete representations, with a focus on 'contradict[ing] widespread perceptions of curriculum as (merely) an official text designed by government official authorities to be faithfully implemented and passively 'received' in schools' (Priestley et al., 2021, p. 1). Instead, it aims to 'illustrat[e] how curriculum work involves highly dynamic processes of interpretation, mediation, negotiation and translation, across multiple layers or sites of education systems' (Priestley et al., 2021, p. 1).

Importantly, recent curriculum inquiry scholarship has drawn attention to new forms of curriculum and processes of curriculum design. For example, Hizli and Priestley (2018) point to the 'increasing expectation for teachers to act as agents of change, actively engaging with curriculum design and delivery' (as cited in Hughes, 2020, p. 290). However, such developments sit in tension with the eagerness of governments to proffer ready-made or 'off-the-peg' (Hughes, 2020, p. 290) curriculum to schools and the exponential growth in the commercial curriculum marketplace industry. McKnight (2021) argues that this is an 'attempt to remove the teacher from the equation through log-on learning via purchased programmes' (p. 306.). In Australia, a recent report by the Grattan Institute titled *Ending the Lesson Lottery* (Hunter et al., 2022) points to the undervaluing of 'the subject-matter knowledge, curriculum expertise, and time required to bring the curriculum to life in the classroom' (Hunter et al., 2022, p. 3). Whilst it argues that teachers and schools require greater support for enhancing curriculum planning that is relevant to their particular school contexts and students, the report positions governments and sector leaders as

instrumental in ‘monitoring’ the ‘implementation’ of curriculum planning and providing a ‘suite of comprehensive, high-quality curriculum materials that they [teachers] can choose to use and adapt’ (p. 4). Although schools are likely to welcome investment in the development of curriculum resources, calling on governments and sector leaders to ‘lighten the burden of curriculum implementation’ (p. 3) reinforces a top-down discourse and implies that the standardisation of curriculum resources will ‘solve’ complex issues.

Taking into account that stratified curriculum policy drives a normative interpretation of what knowledge counts, and a dominant narrative of what knowledge is valued, curriculum inquiry represents ‘important work that can speak back to [these] instrumentalist views’ (O’Connor, 2023, p. 89), so that it ‘takes in multiple and competing agendas’ (Yates, 2018). Essential to this work is identifying how ‘different social actors, as individuals and as groups or bodies, understand or envision curriculum in different ways for different historical, political, sociocultural and/ or biographical reasons’ (Priestley et. al., 2021, p. 1). The research presented in this paper contemplates the diversity of sites of curriculum making, by making visible the range and dynamics of places, social actors and voices engaged in curriculum making. Moreover, in recognising that teaching curriculum as the ‘same knowledge is not best for all’ (Zipin, 2020, p. 112), it brings into view that disciplinary and life-based knowledge need not be mutually exclusive, but ‘can interact in curriculum in mutually enriching ways’ (p. 112).

The current tensions and debates around curriculum and knowledge present a timely opportunity to challenge the status quo of curriculum making in Australia. These include discussions around what counts as knowledge or the best knowledge in curriculum policy, what gets enacted and valued as knowledge across different curricular contexts and what it means to be engaged in curriculum praxis and scholarship in these critical times (Green et al., 2021; O’Connor, 2023; Zipin, 2020). As such, part of our aim here is to contribute to scholarship that valorises school-based curriculum scholarship, teachers, students and a diverse range of education community members as curriculum workers (e.g. Mockler, 2018; Yates, 2018; Zipin, 2020) and decentre the political discourses and institutional narratives that can dominate public debate about curriculum making in Australia. In so doing, we investigate on the ground curriculum actors and social practices. Our intention is not to reinforce a binary orientation of top-down and bottom-up curriculum making, rather, by engaging in blurring the boundaries between multiple sites, we seek to facilitate diverse curriculum conversations that see schools, teachers and students as more than passive receivers of curriculum (Priestley et.al., 2021).

Conceptualising sites of curriculum making

Recognising curriculum making is consistently challenging and complex work that occurs across multiple sites (Priestley & Philippou, 2018; Wong, 2021), we draw on Priestley et al.’s (2021) *sites of curriculum making* as our conceptual framing. Although this conceptual frame was developed to illuminate the complexities of curriculum making in Europe, it is designed to be ‘context neutral’ (Priestley et al.,

p.14) and translates to the Australian context. As O'Connor (2023) notes, 'this framing of curriculum captures the breadth of concerns captured in curriculum inquiry but also offers some specificity' (p. 90), making it a useful framing applicable to a wide range of international contexts. Its specificity is articulated through five key sites of curriculum making—nano, micro, meso, macro and supra—which are set out as a heuristic rather than a hierarchy of levels (Priestley et al., 2021). This heuristic function is reinforced by the way it seeks to capture three key ideas about curriculum making: (i) it is constituted by 'different kinds of activity of social practice across different layers in any education system'; (ii) it 'produces different forms of curriculum in different settings' and (iii) it 'is undertaken by different actors for different purposes in the various settings' (Priestley et al., 2021, pp. 13–14). This emphasis on the differences between actors and sites reinforces that the dynamics of curriculum making vary between early childhood, primary, secondary, community and tertiary settings—comparisons of which could be the focus of future research.

Without wanting to simplify the narratives of each site offered by Priestley et al. (2021), in the interest of efficacy and space, we synthesise them as follows. Supra curriculum making includes the transnational curriculum work that occurs beyond state and national jurisdictions, as exemplified by the OECD and UNESCO (Priestley et al., 2021). The macro site of activity is where curriculum making tends to get regulated at the national and state level, though can involve actors from across other sites. In Australia, key actors include the ACARA and state-based curriculum authorities. Activities at the meso site are seen to support the work of schools through the production of curriculum support materials and resources by curriculum actors such as subject associations, publishers, governments, curriculum authorities and other educational organisations (Priestley et al., 2021). Micro curriculum making is conceptualised as that which is undertaken in schools by principals, school leaders and teachers, beyond but connected to the classroom. The activities in which teachers and students interact characterises the nano site of curriculum making, typically occurring in classrooms and other pedagogical spaces. Importantly, this framing prompts us to reflect on the realities and possibilities for the movement of curriculum actors within and across these sites.

Our collaborative approach

Acknowledging that 'no research project can engage with all these elements simultaneously, and curriculum inquiry scholarship necessarily takes different approaches to understanding these different facets' (O'Connor, 2023, p. 90), this paper engages a collaborative approach by bringing together three distinct research projects to draw a complementary transdisciplinary picture of the realities and possibilities of curriculum making across different sites: (i) how teachers and students participate in curriculum making about Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia at meso sites; (ii) how listening to secondary students as curriculum actors allows them to contribute to shaping secondary school History beyond the nano sites of the classroom and (iii) how community and arts-based approaches empower primary school students to engage in nano curriculum making.

New collaborative possibilities can arise when researchers come together for ‘learningful conversations’ (McKay & Monk, 2017, p. 1261). Articulating the connections between our respective research areas—which focussed on discrete curriculum learning areas, including History, the Arts, and Languages—generated a novel collaborative space for us as researchers to engage in transdisciplinary thinking and explorations within our localised university research ecologies (Barnett, 2011). In addition to building a more collaborative and cohesive research community at the institutional level, this enabled us to contribute to national and transnational research debates. We consider this as especially relevant for the field of curriculum inquiry, where—by asking what problems and questions are critical now (Green et al., 2021; Yates, 2018)—greater awareness of and engagement with common curriculum challenges can further the reconceptualisation of curriculum work transnationally.

In the following sections, we engage the device of research illustrations to draw attention to the ‘multi-way flows of influence, information, and activity between the various layers’ (Priestley et al., 2021, p. 12) and sites of activity where the complex processes of curriculum making occur. Each of our studies relates to different curricular contexts and engages distinct theoretical and methodological framings. However, whilst we acknowledge that data were generated by different methods and instruments across the projects, all three illustrations presented in this paper are tied together by methods of generation of analytical approaches to qualitative ‘texts’, including interviews, qualitative survey responses and thematic or discourse analytic work. Another theoretical and methodological commonality is the focus on the voices of curriculum policy actors in and through these texts, as well as the silences of, and gaps and fissures between these voices.

As such, our approach to using research illustrations in the way we do in this paper is, and must be, an intentional departure from the traditional ways of presenting methodology and methods within the conventions of a research paper. However, we argue that this ‘breaking up of the boundaries’ of methodology and methods simultaneously facilitates a ‘tying together’ of our research projects by our overarching and collective application and reflection on how we engage Priestley et al.’s (2021) framework of the five key sites of curriculum making across these projects. This approach drives our view that curriculum making occurs, ‘across multiple sites, in interaction and intersection with one another, in often unpredictable and context-specific ways, producing unique social practices, in constant and complex interplay, wherein power flows in non-linear ways, thus blurring boundaries between these multiple sites’ (Priestley & Philippou, 2021, p. 154). Notwithstanding their methodological diversity, collectively, these illustrations seek to contribute to broadening the terrain where curriculum work is done, and to multiplying and amplifying the voices of curriculum actors who often find themselves confined to the fringes of curriculum making.

Stifling teacher and student participation in macro and meso curriculum making

The first illustration investigated the dissonance between curricular intentions and realities apparent in the review of Version 8.4 of the Australian Curriculum in relation to the cross-curriculum priority, Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia. This analysis formed an integral part of a recent comprehensive investigation into the historical and contemporary parallels between Australia and Asia relations, Asia education policy and the development and enactment of Asia-related curriculum (Cairns & Weinmann, 2023). Although policy constructions of 'Asia literacy' have been problematised for many decades, very little attention has been given to this through a curriculum inquiry lens (see Other & Cairns, 2018). The 'gap' between curriculum processes and Asia curriculum policy actors is one of four key curriculum dilemmas identified in our analysis (see Cairns & Weinmann, 2023 for discussion of all four). What follows expands on this by detailing the involvement of the Asia Education Foundation (AEF) in macro curriculum making during the 2021 Australian Curriculum review process and the effects on students and teachers as curriculum makers.

Since its inception in 1992, the AEF has been a pivotal federally funded policy actor in Asia education. Its past policy advocacy was conducted independently of curriculum authorities, and publicly accessible submissions outlining the AEF's policy agendas demonstrated transparency. However, the AEF's role shifted during the 2021 curriculum review process, when it collaborated with the ACARA on a draft revision of the Asia cross-curriculum priority prior to public consultation. As this process was not documented in the final report (ACARA, 2021), details about the process could only be gleaned from an AEF blog post, which states, 'We consulted with a range of experts and drew on our own research and experience to provide input' (Curry, 2021: para. 11). The AEF indeed has a considerable network of experts, and longstanding experience working with students and teachers. However, the currency and empirical research base of the AEF's research (published in-house) and the details about the consultation process were not elaborated on in the post. We interpret this as the AEF extending its role to policy *narrator*—enabling it to play a key role in interpretation and meaning-making (Ball et al., 2012) within a macro site of curriculum making.

Whilst curriculum making is a complex and dynamic process mediated across multiple sites (Priestley et al., 2021), authorising a key policy actor within the macro site to give privileged input into the revised Asia curriculum narrative reaffirms the discursive practices that maintain official curriculum development as a top-down process in which 'key decisions about curriculum philosophy and paradigm have already been made' (Luke, 2013, p. 13). This is not conducive to engaging teachers in consultation in meso and macro curriculum making, especially when they already feel disenfranchised (see Cairns & Weinmann, 2023):

I always get from them [state and national curriculum bodies] that decisions have been made. It is just bread and circuses for the plebs [...] They will

let you have a say, but in the end, decisions will get made by a pretty small group. (Callum, teacher of History)

The public consultation phase of the review—which included an online survey and an open submission process (ACARA, 2021)—further demonstrated teachers’ reluctance to engage as only 20% of the 143 online survey responses received for the Asia priority were from teachers (ACARA, 2021, p. 30). Although ACARA invited student participation, students were not listed in the respondent profile (ACARA, 2021, p. 30).

Privileging influential organisational curriculum policy actors, positioning them as curriculum gatekeepers, limits the range of policy roles available to teachers and students within the macro site of curriculum making at state and national levels (Priestley et al., 2021, p. 13), and is likely to perpetuate curriculum narratives that are removed from the experiences of curriculum enactment. This illustration supports the well-established argument that the experiences and understandings teachers and students bring from their lived realities of curriculum within the nano curriculum making sites of schools, classrooms and local communities (Priestley et al., 2021, p. 13) have much to contribute to the development of official curricula; however, they are often positioned at the ‘fringes’ of the macro and meso sites of curriculum making. We argue that our illustration highlights the criticality of addressing the power differentials within and across sites of curriculum making by ‘expand[ing] the range of voices participating in curriculum deliberations’ (Gough & Lee, 2020, p. 237). Giving more intentional consideration to the multiplicity and diversity of curriculum policy actors will be key for a long-overdue ‘reorientating Asia literacy from a top-down policy narrative, towards Asia learning as an inclusive and comprehensive curriculum process’ (Cairns & Weinmann, 2023).

Engaging students as curriculum actors beyond nano sites of curriculum making

This illustration is drawn from a research project conducted by authors one and two of this paper in 2022, on the status of History as a senior secondary curriculum area and examines how students might be engaged as curriculum actors beyond the bounds of the nano curriculum making space of the classroom. Responding to an analysis of enrolment data revealing a decline in senior enrolments in History across Australia (Cairns & Garrard, 2020), this national survey of senior secondary students sought to find out the causes of languishing enrolments. Whilst there is considerable speculation about student perspectives, there is limited research that centres them as curriculum actors and research participants. The project therefore addresses a 15-year absence of student participants in research into history education in Australia (Clark, 2008) and more broadly, a lack of attention given to student input in curriculum making at macro and meso sites in Australian (e.g. Cairns & Garrard, 2020; Horton & McLean Davies, 2022) and international contexts (e.g. Flynn & Hayes, 2021). With these silences in mind, a methodological approach was devised that would mobilise students

as agentic curriculum actors by engaging Year 10, 11 and 12 students via an online survey disseminated on social media. Whilst digital methods are by no means radical tools for engaging young people, they are underutilised in education research (Mackenzie, et al., 2021) and represent a departure from traditional school-based approaches that can constrain students' curriculum making activities to nano sites where teachers have the authority.

This method created a space to listen to the unfettered voice of students, who—when away from the formalities of the classroom environment, their teachers, and the social norms of their peers—are agentic in making their own choices about participation and are possibly franker when expressing their perspectives. Participation in the mixed methods survey across all jurisdictions was higher than expected (N = 292) and provided rich qualitative data through which we can really hear the voices of young people sharing their lived experiences of History curriculum. Whilst the students' views were by no means homogenous, both groups of students—those who were continuing their study of history into Years 11 and 12 and those who were not—illuminate the value of studying History for thinking critically about issues and events in the present and for learning lessons that will help in the future (see Cairns & Garrard, 2023). One student who was not continuing with History said: 'I think that history can teach our younger generations about the mistakes of prior generations and the impacts that they have had'. Another student continuing history expressed: 'Because it shows students things that still impact society today which gives us a greater understanding of why the world works the way it does'. Others were less invested in the relevance of school history: 'Most of the history is set in the 1900s, most students just wanna vape and play Fortnite'. Data analysis shows students were unlikely to appraise school history in terms of the historical thinking or disciplinary skills foregrounded by official curricula and that these participants are unique in their tendency to describe History as a subject that is relevant to their lives—a finding that runs counter to existing history education research that suggests young people tend to see it as a subject area that is irrelevant to their lives (Miguel-Revilla, 2022; Popa, 2022).

Notwithstanding the limitations of this approach—including the influence of teacher networks on recruitment, non-probability sampling and attracting and the challenge of recruiting an even more diverse range of participants—this project invites students to reflect on their experiences of school-based nano and micro curriculum making on their own terms and from within the spaces of 'their own lifeworlds' (Zipin, 2020, p. 112). In periods of curriculum reform, student-centred research potentially elevates student voices within meso and macro sites of curriculum making by providing important insights for other curriculum actors in these sites, though this hinges on their commitment to listening and responding to student input. As international examples show, student engagement beyond school-based sites of curriculum making will continue to be a challenge in meso and macro sites unless there are significant cultural shifts in review processes, including designing targeted and relevant methods of student consultation and embedding a culture of listening to students as curriculum actors (Flynn & Hayes, 2021).

Supporting student engagement in sites of nano curriculum making through a community-based approach

Our third illustration draws on a research project, at the primary school level, focussed on student engagement as an imperative that is often sought in sites of nano curriculum making. An organisation of creative arts-based educators (OCAE) with experience in community arts and education invited connections between schools and their community groups to broaden educational opportunities and engage students more deeply with their communities. The OCAE recognised the potential in community groups for student engagement and the possibility to learn ways they could contribute to change whilst at the same time gaining meaningful communication and entrepreneurial skills. The OCAE invited interest and support for this approach to community-based learning from a range of community and/or local council groups. Student groups of up to six students (aged 9–12) co-designed a particular *Change Project* which they connected to a particular community group. They then created a pitch which they presented in order to influence the invited community members to fund their *Change Project*. The project was then activated with, and in, the community, and outcomes were presented at a community event.

This community-based approach to learning diversified traditional sites of curriculum making by expanding the boundaries of the nano site. Working together, the OCAE, students, community groups and researchers explored a ‘curriculum of diversity’ (Huber et al., 2003, p. 347) that focussed ‘on the ways in which the curriculum is being lived’ (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 393) beyond the classroom, out in the community, to construct meaningful learning. The co-designed projects addressed many aspects of the ‘official curriculum text’ (Priestley et al., 2021), the Australian Curriculum (ACARA, n.d.), including literacy, numeracy, community, social and cultural awareness, leadership skills, engagement in arts experiences, historical perspectives, diversity and inclusivity as well as intra and inter-personal capabilities (ACARA, n.d.). As Hickey (2021) notes, ‘today’s teachers are increasingly called on to play an active role in translating a wide range of contemporary social agendas into age-appropriate curriculum content for their students’, and the project used place-based ways both in, and with, the community to make curriculum within their own local contexts ‘alongside a number of other social [community] actors, including their students’ (Priestley et al., 2021, p. 2). The preparation of creative arts-based oral presentations, often accompanied by multi-media and/or visual arts elements, provided opportunities for the use of arts-based methods. To meet the time frames imposed by the OCAE, teachers often had to become creative nano curriculum makers, shifting, and manipulating the standard elaborations to embrace and respond to the needs of the local context, which is not always possible at the supra, meso and micro sites of curriculum making.

Whilst educational policy in Victoria promotes the need for students to have agency (DET, Victoria, 2019), the community-based approach supported alternative notions of success, leadership and agency often not available in traditional

school-based education. Students were able to exercise their own unique skills and abilities in transdisciplinary ways. In some cases, the alternative contexts, and people they engaged with enabled students' neurodiversity, or other skills and abilities, to be recognised. The nano curriculum making (Priestly et al., 2021) also supported holistic teaching and learning of student's capabilities through deeper connection to the students' life worlds (Zipin, 2020).

Adult leaders or teachers expressed surprise at the students' abilities noting how some students, who were usually more reserved, opened up and shared insights into their interests and cultures, or engaged in public speaking for the first time. One community member observed how a student 'shifted in their role from being 'the welcomed' to that of the 'welcomer'; from the newcomer to the one who offers a hand of friendship'. This is an important point given the emphasis on standardised assessment processes which potentially de-emphasise arts, community and transdisciplinary student learning. As teachers are under increasing pressure to 'teach to the test', students respond and learn to perform accordingly (Zakharov & Carnoy, 2021).

The community-based project offered students opportunities to experience success differently, such as being able to work together as a team, express themselves in creative ways and in new contexts, be entrepreneurial, and engage in their project in the best way they saw fit in response to the community's needs. It therefore highlights how support for student engagement is enabled through nano curriculum making but also the foci of this paper; the diverse, enacted and experienced curricular realities of teachers and students. The project expands the boundaries of nano sites beyond the classroom by locating curriculum making in the community and brings in alternative curriculum actors (community members) into the schools and classrooms as the more traditional sites of curriculum making.

Reflecting on the implications of the illustrations

Although the findings specific to each of these projects can be found detailed elsewhere (see Cairns & Garrard, 2020, 2023; Cairns & Weinmann, 2023), taken together, these illustrations intended to make visible the diversity of curriculum making across different sites in Australian educational settings. Rather than explicating these insights as findings per se, we return to the heuristic function of the key ideas that underpin the sites of curriculum making framework (Priestley et al., 2021). Arranging these illustrations side by side allows us to consider important questions and implications for different kinds of curriculum activity and actors.

First, we can see that as social practices, these activities are illustrative of the diverse possibilities for *doing* curriculum making (Priestley et al., 2021). Recognising that curriculum is constituted by complementary and competing activities—whether that be participating in national consultation processes as illustrated by the case of the Asia cross-curriculum priority (or not, as the case may be), reflecting on the experiences that shape subject selection in the senior secondary years, or being pedagogically engaged with issues that matter in local communities—deepens and foregrounds conceptions of curriculum as activity. Drawing from Pinar's (2012) notion of curriculum as verb, or *currere*, and as complicated conversation embodied

by subjectivity and lived experience, this emphasis on activity compels us to envisage curriculum as dynamic and relational. Working with pre-service teachers as we do, we appreciate that this is a challenging concept when first encountered by those that instinctively envisage curriculum as a set of documents, or curriculum-as-plan, rather than as something we do as interpreters and enactors of curriculum. Cutting “holes” in the curriculum-as-plan’ (Pinar, 2012, p. 1) enables us to breathe, to create spaces, to encourage voices and to envisage curriculum-as-lived. Ydo (2021) highlights that reimagining curriculum as responsive and polyvocal will be essential in times of crisis and uncertainty at local and global scales, which speaks to the value of curriculum that responds to the needs of the local community (see the third illustration). Understanding curriculum as different activities also prompts questions about who engages in these activities. Where and how engagement compares across contexts and the discourses and discursive practices that shape these activities reveals links between power relations and knowledge making. As we saw in the first illustration, students and teachers may be invited to participate in curriculum consultation at meso and macro sites but may not feel empowered to step outside of micro and nano sites to participate in these curriculum making activities, because they may perceive their actions as not valued or not making a difference to how curriculum gets made at state and national sites. The second illustration highlighted the need to use more innovative methodological approaches to engage students in curriculum making activities outside of the traditional school-based, nano spaces, which potentially challenges gate-keeping power dynamics.

By challenging dominant discourses and power relations that have tended to stratify understandings of the roles and purposes of different curriculum actors, the curriculum making framework facilitates the articulation of the sorts of work or activity practised by different actors. For example, scrutinising the lack of transparency around the AEF’s role in the national curriculum review is an essential starting point for challenging established hierarchies of curriculum actors if we seek to dismantle them and encourage curriculum actors to transcend the perceived boundaries between sites. This is not to say that the AEF should not play a key role in macro curriculum making, rather its (re)positioning as the authoritative curriculum actor can inadvertently reinscribe a top-down style hierarchy. On the other hand, the community-based illustration reinforced the transformative and transdisciplinary potential of curriculum that sought to equally empower all curriculum actors: students, teachers and community members. By participating in the History survey, students could choose to engage as curriculum actors in their own right, not just as subjects that research gets done to in the classroom under the eye of teachers and researchers. Priestley et al. (2021) suggest by conceptualising how actors work within and across sites, ‘this theorization allows for the possibility that there might be two-way or even multiple-way relationships between or cutting across layers’ (p. 14). Whilst there continue to be considerable impediments to this sort of curricular border-crossing in the Australian education context, these illustrations challenge us to envisage what Aoki (1993) describes as a ‘more open landscape that offers possibilities by, in part, giving legitimacy to the wisdom held in lived stories of people who dwell within the landscape’ (p. 267). This highlights the need for curriculum inquiry research that invites the participation of a diverse range of policy actors for the purpose of better

understanding the conditions and practices that facilitate and/or impinge on their capacity to cut across sites of curriculum making. Reflection on the way ‘curriculum making produces different forms of curriculum in different settings’ (Priestley et al., 2021, pp. 13–14) as opposed to investigating curriculum sites and activities in isolation.

Making distinctions between these forms and respecting the contextual differences between settings is increasingly challenging within a neoliberal curricular imaginary, exacerbated by compounding factors such as national teacher shortages and other teacher workforce issues. As a result, this has amplified calls for the creation of standardised lesson banks and curriculum resources to assist teachers to ‘implement’ official curricula and facilitate whole school planning, so they are not ‘wasting time’ doing curriculum planning ‘from scratch’ (Hunter et al., 2022). Our third illustration demonstrates the rich possibilities of doing curriculum planning ‘from scratch’. The Australian Productivity Commission (Productivity Commission, 2022) states, ‘Governments could also increase the uptake of best practice by curating high-quality, evidence-based curriculum resources’ (p. 15). Whilst schools and teachers certainly need support and access to quality resources, quick policy ‘solutions’ to complex curricular issues are likely to reinforce curriculum making as a highly stratified process.

Conclusion

Curriculum may be elusive to define (see Yates & Grumet, 2011) but as this paper demonstrates, the sites of curriculum making framework, formulated by Priestley et al. (2021), offer a valuable analytical tool that draws attention to the messy, contested nature of curriculum, whilst articulating some of the specificities of these complex dynamics. Our collaborative approach that combined insights from multiple projects contributes to reinvigorating curriculum inquiry debates by broadening the understanding of the curriculum landscape from a transdisciplinary position. Building on the premise that curriculum is more complex than is conveyed by dominant narratives during periods of curriculum reform and review, our illustrations foreground that whilst teachers, students, school leaders and community organisations may be perceived and positioned as curriculum decision makers ‘on the fringes’, they are the key curriculum actors who are central to constituting curriculum as social practice. In the current climate of increasing transnational curriculum standardisation, stratification of learning performance, knowledge outcomes and assessment, a compelling case can be made for reasserting the focal role of teachers and students as curriculum actors in translating curriculum making on-the-ground to transform curriculum policy making. Closer engagement with the realities and possibilities of diverse sites of curriculum making is critical to reposition teachers and students as intellectual agents and challenge the prevailing policy legitimisation and discursive domination of macro curriculum making in current top-down curriculum policy practices.

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