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ARTICLE

Disrupting Aotearoa New Zealand's Curricular Consensus: From 'World-Leading' Curriculum to Curriculum Refresh 2007–2021

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Abstract
This article seeks to explain how Aotearoa New Zealand moved from a consensus that the New Zealand Curriculum (NZC) should grant a high degree of autonomy to teachers, to an emerging view that it ought to be more prescriptive about content. To do this, it takes an assemblage approach to policy analysis, understanding policies as constantly evolving 'bundles' of divergent components temporarily woven together. The article first explores the complex intermingling of Third Way priorities, knowledge economy discourses, educational progressivism and narratives of 'harmonious' biculturalism which constitute the 2007 NZC. It then explores the sustained critique of the NZC from the 2015 parliamentary petition calling for compulsory teaching of the New Zealand Wars, up to the government's 2021 'curriculum refresh' announcement. It is argued that this 'refresh' moves to reassemble the NZC so that it accommodates a series of demands made of it in recent years, including demands the curriculum take a more active role in redressing the impact of colonisation, and demands from both business-aligned groups and academics that the curriculum become more 'knowledge-led'.

Keywords New Zealand Curriculum · Outcomes-based curriculum · Skills-based curriculum · Knowledge-led curriculum · Assemblage theory

Introduction

This article seeks to address a fairly simple question. How, in a short period of time, did Aotearoa New Zealand go from a wide-degree of consensus that the outcomes-based, high-autonomy *New Zealand Curriculum* (NZC) was 'world leading', to witnessing wide-spread calls that the NZC was inadequate, and ultimately seeing a

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government plan to 'refresh' it? To address this question, this article tracks debates over, and ultimately changes to, the NZC from its publication in 2007 to the government's 'refresh' announcement in 2021. It draws on an assemblage approach to policy analysis to do this, a positioning which allows us to see the NZC not as a stable, unitary entity but rather as a bundle of various discursive elements always open to re-arrangement (Prince, 2010; Savage, 2020). It is important to note from the outset that although both the English-medium NZC and the Māori-medium curriculum, *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa*, are being refreshed, this article will focus on the NZC, as this curriculum is the one that has been the focus of the vast majority of public debate, and is also the document I am best placed to speak to as a Pākehā researcher with experience exclusively within the English-medium sector.

The article begins by showing how the NZC, in its 2007 form, was an assemblage of four key discursive components: (1) Third Way ideas about citizenship which combine orientations towards economic competitiveness with limited forms of social inclusion, (2) knowledge economy discourses, (3) 'harmonious', state-centric narratives of biculturalism and (4) child-centred educational progressivism. It then moves to discuss the rise in critiques of the NZC following the 2015 parliamentary petition organised by Ōtorohanga College students to demand the compulsory teaching of the New Zealand Wars. Two key lines of critique are identified: one calling for the curriculum to play a bigger role in addressing inequities that arise from colonisation, and another calling for a more 'knowledge-led' curriculum that is clearer about exactly what students need to know to both succeed in the world and to access disciplinary knowledge. Finally, the article ends by arguing that the 'refresh' represents an emerging process of disassembly and reassembly of the NZC. By seeking to incorporate ideas from key critiques of the 2007 NZC into the assemblage, the state is able to ensure the NZC remains an effective "apparatus for governing" (Savage, 2020, p. 325).

Assemblage Theory as Theoretical Frame

This article uses assemblage theory, particularly the idea of 'policy assemblage', as a way of understanding education policy making. Originally emerging from the work of Deleuze & Guattari, an assemblage can be understood as any "gathering of heterogeneous elements consistently drawn together as an identifiable terrain of action and debate" (Li, 2007, p. 266). Policy assemblage approaches understand policy in this way, as a comingling of various 'component elements' which are "stitched… together": they form a "patchwork" which, despite the appearance of stability and unity "never fully cohere[s]" (Prince, 2017, p. 336). It is possible to think of these component parts broadly, looking, for instance, at laws, key actors, agencies, technologies of governance and so on which constitute 'policy-as-enacted' (Savage, 2020). However, it is also possible to take a more discursive approach, thinking of policies as "discursive assemblages" (Baker, 2019): bundles of different ideas, priorities and ways of seeing the world that constitute recognisable but inherently unstable frameworks. It is this more discursive approach that is adopted in this article. There are a wide variety of competing accounts of exactly *how* to go about an

assemblage analysis (Baker & McGuirk, 2017; Prince, 2010; Savage, 2020). In this paper, I draw in particular on what I understand as two key precepts in assemblage thinking: what Savage (2020) refers to as "heterogeneity, relationality and flux" and what Baker and McGuirk (2017) refer to as "processuality".

The first idea here, that of 'heterogeneity, relationality and flux', highlights the complex, open nature of any given assemblage. In focusing on heterogeneity, assemblage theorists emphasise the multiple different parts of an assemblage—they are not unitary objects but rather gather many components together. This does not mean an assemblage is a random grouping, however. Instead, we must understand that these "components have been strategically arranged with the view to forming an apparatus for governing." (Savage, 2020, p. 325). This means that although heterogeneous, assemblages tend to appear to not be so: the act of assembling means that "forms of coherency are… established out of multiplicity" (Savage, 2020, p. 325). These components must be understood too in a *relational* way, that is not just on their own but as having significance and effect in large part out of the way they interact with one another. Finally, the idea of 'flux' highlights the constantly shifting and changing nature of assemblages as they are re/dis/assembled under constantly changing circumstances.

The idea of 'flux', which acts as a more descriptive claim regarding *what* an assemblage is, relates strongly to the idea of processuality as an "epistemological commitment" assemblage theorists take on (Baker & McGuirk, 2017). A commitment to processuality is a commitment to understanding the *process* of re/dis/assembly, and mapping out how this often "proceeds in a haphazard and disjunctive fashion" (Prince, 2010, p. 170). Crucial in adopting a processual outlook is attention to the social, cultural, political and economic context and understanding how this affects the assemblage process (see Bacevic, 2019), and in particular, when it comes to policy assemblage, to the "political and technical work [that] is required to make the assemblage cohere." (Prince, 2010, p. 172).

Assembling Aotearoa's 'World-Leading' Curriculum: The 2007 NZC

The 2007 NZC is a highly complex document which carefully assembles a variety of heterogeneous discourses so that they appear as a seamless whole. I will examine four key components the assemblage consists of, while acknowledging there are many others. These are: (1) a Third Way conception of citizenship which balances a 'thin' conceptualisation of equality imagined as 'inclusion' and with a desire for economic productivity, (2) knowledge economy discourses, (3) a state-centric vision of a 'harmonious' bicultural nation and (4) child-centred educational progressivism.

In order to understand these components as 'assembled' in relation to each other, it is useful to consider the NZC in terms of its 'front end', which outlines, among other things, the NZC's 'vision', 'principles', 'values' and 'key competencies', and the 'back end' which outlines a series of achievement objectives (AOs) for each 'learning area'. The front-end of the NZC essentially constructs a vision of an ideal student-cum-citizen. Benade (2011) has shown how the combination of 'values' the NZC outlines essentially coheres with the Third Way ideology embraced by New

Zealand's Fifth Labour Government. It does this in the way it "attempts to bridge the gap between aims of education that have a principles-driven and social outcomes agenda and those that stress preparation for successful participation in the economic life of the country" (Benade, 2011, p. 152). Therefore, we see values like "diversity" and "community and participation for the common good" sat alongside values like "excellence" (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 10) and a vision of young people who are "enterprising"—a concept which appears often in the NZC (see Benade, 2008; Oldham, 2017). As Benade (2011, p. 156) notes, values like 'excellence' "imply competitiveness and presuppose that differentiation will be an outcome". The front end of the curriculum therefore ultimately rests on somewhat 'thin' notions of 'social justice', which from a Third Way point of view is always achieved "through social 'inclusion' rather than through equality as such" (McAnulla, 2010, p. 306). Social stratification and economic differentiation is imagined as inevitable, indeed necessary from the Third Way perspective (Hall, 2005), but there is nevertheless a concern with how to account for difference and to make sure all students-cum-citizens do not feel excluded from society.

Further unpacking both the more economically-oriented and the more inclusionary goals of the NZC helps us also to see the work the front-end NZC does to tie other discourses into the assemblage. To begin with the economically-oriented goals, the focus on 'values' and 'competencies' does not just facilitate the 'stitching in' of Third Way ideas about balancing economic interests with social cohesion, but also feeds more directly into what Yates and Collins (2010, p. 90) call "industry-led agendas… [which] have a new emphasis on the kind of person they want to be formed". This economically-oriented vision is grounded in an idea that we are now in a 'knowledge economy' where skills and competencies like those just mentioned are more important for economic success than, say, the disciplinary knowledge older curricula focused on (Robertson, 2005; Wood & Sheehan, 2012; Yates & Collins, 2010).

Meanwhile, the forms of 'inclusiveness' articulated in the NZC achieve other aims as well. In particular, when understood in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi,[1] the NZC's ideas about what inclusion looks like actually function to shore up the hegemony of the settler-colonial state and deny broader possibilities of difference. One way of thinking about this is to consider what is emphasised in the NZC in this regard and what is not. For instance, the words "diverse" and "diversity", when specifically referring to cultural diversity, occur 19 times in the NZC. This includes

[1] For readers not familiar with the Aotearoa New Zealand context, it is important to understand two central documents referred to in this section: The Treaty of Waitangi and Te Tiriti o Waitangi, both signed in 1840. The Treaty is a document which invited Māori to cede their sovereignty to the Queen of England. However, Te Tiriti, the document Māori actually signed in almost all cases, is a misleading translation of The Treaty which gives the Crown only 'kāwanatanga' or limited powers of 'government', while acknowledging Māori retain 'tino rangatiratanga'—sovereignty or self-determination over their lands and treasures. The fact that Te Tiriti guarantees Māori tino rangatiratanga and does not envision the emergence of a unitary nation state, and that these facts are ignored in the NZC, is the most important point here. This summary of these documents is unfortunately extremely brief—for a more detailed analysis see for instance Mikaere (2011).

references in the NZC's forward to "New Zealand's diverse, multicultural society" and its "increasingly diverse" population (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 4) as motivations for the creation of the then-new curriculum. In contrast, the Forward does not mention either Te Tiriti or The Treaty at all as a reason for the NZC's creation, and indeed, Te Tiriti only receives one reference in the entire NZC. Where we do hear of 'The Treaty' (which is of course importantly distinct to Te Tiriti—see the above footnote and Mikaere, 2011), it is placed in a subordinate position—its primary place is only as one of eight 'principles', sat alongside others such as 'high expectations' and 'cultural diversity'. We read in this section that:

> The curriculum acknowledges the principles of the Treaty of Waitangi and the bicultural foundations of Aotearoa New Zealand. All students have the opportunity to acquire knowledge of te reo Māori me ōna tikanga. (Ministry of Education, 2007, p. 9)

This framing of 'the treaty' positions it as the foundational document of a unitary nation state, which is something different to what Te Tiriti, the document Māori signed, actually outlined: the continuation of tino rangatiratanga or Māori self-determination, alongside some form of Crown governmental presence (Mikaere, 2011). The violent conflicts that have erupted since the signing of Te Tiriti are also clearly neutralised here, and the NZC is able to, in the words of MacDonald (2020, p. 2) commenting on the Aotearoa New Zealand schooling system at large, "enact harmonious notions of partnership that silence historical colonial violence". This discourse of 'harmonious biculturalism' is connected to what Bell (2006, p. 254) identifies as the "historical amnesia of biculturalism". By tying in a discourse which imagines a unitary nation with "bicultural foundations" (i.e. as 'bicultural' from the start), the NZC is able to avoid the history of colonialism and violence at the heart of the creation and continual maintenance of 'New Zealand' as an idea. This "nationalist rhetoric" (Bell, 2006, p. 254) centred on a unifying vision biculturalism dovetails with the Third Way goal of creating citizens who can manage a degree of 'diversity' and while still strongly orienting themselves to the needs of the national and global economy. Possibilities for fully addressing the colonial past, acknowledging the potential of different, non-national forms of citizenship within Aotearoa (such as iwi [tribal] or hapū-based [sub-tribal] conceptions of citizenship vis-à-vis tino rangatiratanga) or non-Eurocentric ways of being and doing are not possible within the NZC's thin ideas about inclusion. The selective nature of this discursive assemblage and the way both Third Way discourses and ideas of 'harmonious' biculturalism are brought into relation with one another means that only certain limited forms of "cultural diversity" are possible.

The move to 'historical amnesia' is furthered in the 'back end' on the NZC, which does not mandate any understanding of the history of Aotearoa New Zealand (Sheehan, 2010). This lack of specific content is carried through to many other subject areas, as the preference is for open-ended, broad-based achievement objectives which mostly specify skills, or things students should be able to do, rather than things they should know (Hughson, 2021). As well as working to maintain this ahistorical 'bicultural' imaginary, this outcome-focused curricular structure also works to incorporate other discourses. The language of 'achievement objectives' very

much mirrors the language of performance management found in the private sector, and furthers the idea that within the knowledge economy, it is not specific knowledge that students need to acquire, but rather, skills and various 'capacities' (Casey, 2006). Additionally, the focus on relatively open-ended objectives rather than content supports the idea of schools as individual, independent entities which to a great degree can chart their own course, an idea established via the neoliberal Tomorrow's Schools reforms of the late 1980s. Finally, the open-ended nature of the 'back end' of the curriculum aligns nicely with an educationally-progressivist child-centred discourses – in particular the idea that content selection should be centred primarily on the needs and interests of the child. Yates and Collins (2010, p. 90), writing about the similarly-structured Australian curriculum, describe this as the unique weaving together of a "child-centred mind-set on the one hand, and a growing impact of 'evidence-based' auditing and bench-marking on the other".

It is therefore the case that the 2007 NZC "draw[s] heterogeneous elements together" (Li, 2007, p. 264), all of which, through the way they sit in relation to each other, support the upholding of a relatively 'content-free' approach to the curriculum. Economically-oriented ideas concerned with the needs of the 'knowledge economy' and child-centred positions are both relatively seamlessly "stitched… together" (Prince, 2017, p. 336) through the NZC's skills and competency-based approach. This focus also conveniently allows the continuation of 'historical amnesia' through which the settler-colonial state attempts to maintain its hegemony, something which is also facilitated via the use of particular interpretations of 'the Treaty' and biculturalism. A Third Way conceptualisation of citizenship makes space for limited forms of 'inclusion' which intertwine comfortably with the limited vision of biculturalism put forward, while still directing students towards the development of competencies required for successful participation in the national and global economy.

This particular assemblage was for some time heralded as 'world-class'. This is not to say that longstanding academic critiques of the NZC and its similarly-formulated predecessors did not exist—they did. These criticised the nation's curriculum for, amongst other things, being overly driven by economic concerns and being too focused on outcomes (Benade, 2008; Codd, 2005; Elley, 1994; Peters, 1995). However, ultimately, the disparate elements of the curriculum were "made to cohere" (Li, 2007, p. 264) in a way which satisfied enough people in society, ensuring the document was able to stand strong as an effective "apparatus for governing" (Savage, 2020, p. 325). However, the emergence of a variety of much more vocal, more public critiques of the NZC under changing local and global circumstances through the latter half of the 2010s ultimately began to undermine the legitimacy of this curricular framework, and it is these we turn to now.

Debate and Disruption: The NZC and Critique

As just acknowledged, critiques of the NZC (and its forerunners) certainly existed prior to 2015. However, the beginning of substantive public debate about the NZC's future arguably emerged following the parliamentary petition initiated by

Ōtorohanga College students calling for the compulsory teaching of the New Zealand Wars (Ball, 2020; Belgrave, 2020). Below I will look at two key challenges to the NZC, while acknowledging there were many others. The first was the emergence, manifested most clearly in two petitions, of a set of discourses which challenged the NZC's 'historical amnesia' and its thin conception of 'equality-as-diversity/inclusion', and re-imagined the curriculum as a site to address colonial violence, and, less prominently, as a space for some form of epistemic decolonisation. The second challenge was the emergence of a varied set of claims for a more 'knowledge-led' curriculum, which sought to challenge the idea that the curriculum should be primarily about the development of skills and competencies. Each of these put serious pressure on the "patchwork" (Prince, 2017, p. 336) of the NZC. Attending to these lines of critique will allow us to comprehend the process of dis/re/assembly which follows them.

Thicker Conceptions of Social Justice: Connecting the Past to the Present

It is important to understand the events normally selected as key instances where the NZC was challenged, chiefly the 2015 Ōtorohanga College petition and a 2019 petition by the New Zealand History Teachers' Association (NZHTA) both calling for the compulsory teaching of Aotearoa New Zealand histories, as instantiations of a broader set of ideas about social justice and the role of education as much as drivers of them. Chiefly, we can understand these events as capturing a 'thicker' conception of 'equality' or 'justice', where these outcomes are understood to be achieved less through a dehistoricised push for 'diversity' and 'inclusion' (as was a more popular discourse under Third Way politics throughout the 1990s and early 2000s), and more through understanding (and eventually, acting upon) the idea that past injustices deeply inform contemporary realities. This understanding of equality/justice draws on much broader global shifts in our conceptualisations of these ideas that have taken place throughout the 2010s. These shifts have manifested most prominently in movements like Rhodes Must Fall and Black Lives Matter, both of which essentially seek to articulate the idea that phenomena we often consign to 'the past', like colonialism and slavery, continue to have real impacts and/or directly continue (in mutated forms) in the present. Of course, asserting the ongoing relevance of the colonial 'past' is not a new idea: indigenous groups in particular have been asserting this since colonisation began. However, it is nonetheless true that the 2010s have seen this understanding move to the centre of public debates (Mangcu, 2017).

This altered conception of social justice can be seen clearly in looking at the aims of the two aforementioned petitions. For instance, Bell (2017), one of the organisers of the student-led petition, defended its aims by asserting that "to understand how far we have come, and how far we will go, we must remember, and name, the unjust land invasions, battles, wars, legislation and confiscation." In contrast to the 'historical amnesia' of the NZC and its more limited vision of justice grounded in ideas about contemporary diversity and inclusion, Bell argues that it is directly confronting the colonial violence of our past that will lead to a better future. Elsewhere she has described the petition as seeking "justice" which will be facilitated,

as a “starting point” at least, by a “historically conscious future” (Bell, 2015). The NZHTA petition articulated its vision similarly, asserting for instance that “knowledge of the past is empowering and would allow us to move forward as a truly bicultural country” (NZHTA, 2019). Such ideas were also shared via a variety of opinion pieces, social media posts and so on around the country.

This goal of directly confronting “unjust” events in the past directly contrasts with the 2007 NZC, where reference to these events is entirely absent. It is the case, however, that both of these petitions, especially that of the NZHTA, still seem to imagine dealing with past inequities as a way to further develop, in the words of the NZHTA chair, a “bicultural nation” (Ball, 2020, p. 22). One could read the version of biculturalism argued for here as an instance of what Stewart (2018) has called “rebooting biculturalism”, seeing it less as a tool used to elide the reality of colonial violence (Bell, 2006; O’Sullivan, 2007), and more as something “which in its radical form has the capacity to act as an educational concept for society” (Stewart, 2018, p. 9), making space for both Pākehā and Māori ways of being in and thinking about the world. However, it is also the case that within these petitions at least, concepts like tino rangatiratanga and a deeper commitment to Te Tiriti and its vision of “power sharing in a relationship of equals” (Ruru & Kohu-Morris, 2020, p. 569) are by and large not present: the primary concern is simply that all Aotearoa New Zealand students should acquire knowledge of Aotearoa New Zealand’s past.

Outside of direct challenges to the NZC, however, influential discourses we could broadly define as ‘decolonial’ have become increasingly prominent in Aotearoa New Zealand over the last half-decade or so, and these have made more forceful cases not just for the importance of understanding colonial histories, but also for making space for distinctly Māori ways of thinking and being in the world. In this regard, they can be understood as more directly concerned with tino rangatiratanga. These discourses can be seen in many spheres, including the increasing prominence of kaupapa Māori theory in research (see Hoskins & Jones, 2017), and growing public calls to decolonise everything from the justice system to urban design (Elkington et al., 2020). With relation to education, some of the most prominent decolonial arguments have been in the field of legal education, with Māori legal academics outlining a decolonial vision of teaching and learning in law schools that is “bicultural, bilingual, bijural” (Ruru, 2020). Such approaches have crucially outlined the importance of epistemic decolonisation, that is, the valuing of Māori knowledge forms, or mātauranga Māori, alongside ‘western’ knowledge forms, as part of a commitment to tino rangatiratanga.

Taken together, the more public sets of demands materialised in the aforementioned petitions calling for the teaching of Aotearoa New Zealand histories, as well as the slightly-less-prominent but no-less-influential set of arguments around the need for broader decolonisation in Aotearoa have seen different conceptions of justice and equality gain prominence. This is an understanding of justice and equality that is less amenable or thinner notions of diversity and inclusion within an ultimately unitary, Eurocentric framework, and which instead has demanded both the addressing of historical (and ongoing) wrongs and sought to have Māori ways of thinking and being given equal status within all structures (including curricular structures) in Aotearoa New Zealand.

The 'Knowledge-Led' Agenda

The second group of NZC critiques draw on a set of discourses related to the idea of a 'knowledge-led' curriculum, a concept closely tied to developments in curriculum theory in England. In Aotearoa such critiques have had two main manifestations—in a more pragmatist, broadly economically-oriented form as articulated primarily by the right-wing think tank the New Zealand Initiative (NZI), and in a more academic form by 'social realist' academics. In both cases, an argument is advanced that challenges the idea, strongly related to 'knowledge economy' discourses, that competencies and skills are more important than the acquisition of specific knowledge.

The more pragmatist argument for a 'knowledge-rich' curriculum essentially posits that it is a focus on knowledge instead of skills and competencies that will allow students to succeed in society. In the words of NZI chairman Partridge (2018), the issue is that the NZC is too focused on "21st century snake oil": "transferrable skills like creativity, collaboration and critical thinking". Instead, as Lipson, an NZI researcher, has stated, they believe it is a "comprehensive, coherent and knowledge-based national curricula [that will] help ensure that no matter a child's starting point, they all finish school knowing what they need to succeed" (Lipson, 2020, p. 12). These arguments directly challenge the NZC's focus on competencies, values and skills. This is fairly remarkable given NZI's status as a business-funded think tank, because, as discussed above, the pressure to include such components in curricula is typically understood to have come in large part from industry-led lobbying and the belief that these 'transferable skills' are now required for national economic success (Wood & Sheehan, 2012; Yates & Collins, 2010). Partridge and Lipson cite various ways a knowledge-rich approach will help students, including the improvement of vocabulary and the acquisition of cultural capital that can be more easily transferred to students when it is specified in the curriculum. Their concern is often shaped by New Zealand's declining performance in international comparative assessments such as PISA, which they argue has occurred at least in part due to the lack of clarity in the NZC about what students need to know to perform successfully in these assessments. Finally, they also argue a 'knowledge-led' curriculum will ensure access to disciplinary knowledge, knowledge which in their view has inherent worth because it is "knowledge selected by experts and taken from beyond children's experiences" (Lipson, 2020, p. 43).

While the concerns of NZI could be understood by and large as pragmatist, i.e. as concerned with equipping students with the knowledge they ostensibly need to succeed in the world as it is, this final point above about the value of disciplinary knowledge also speaks to/draws upon a broader social realist argument. Emerging out of the theoretical work of Michael Young in England (see Young, 2007), this more academic argument has found various champions within Aotearoa New Zealand. The social realist position, in its most pure form, holds that disciplinary knowledge is inherently more valuable than other forms of knowledge because, although open to critique, it is nevertheless "objective… because it uses universalised concepts created in disciplinary communities" (McPhail & Rata, 2016, p. 55). Disciplinary knowledge is therefore held by social realists to be more 'powerful' than other forms of knowledge, which means it deserves pride of place in curricula. The social

realist argument has often found a natural partner in the more 'pragmatic' work of NZI, in that both have explicitly critiqued the focus on so-called '21st century skills and competencies' in the NZC. The social realist view has been heavily criticised by some in the academic community, especially when, in more strident formulations, it has ventured into the realm of challenging the value of mātauranga Māori within schooling (Stewart & Devine, 2019). However, various arguments that have drawn on social realism have not always taken this approach (see for instance Priestley & Sinnema, 2014; Wood & Sheehan, 2012). Scholars like these drawing on social realism have tended to downplay the idea that disciplinary knowledge is truly "objective" and instead have drawn on the work of Young and others to highlight what they see as an imbalance between knowledge and skills in the NZC.

Disassembly and Reassembly: The 'Refresh' and the Building of a New Curricular Consensus

By the end of the 2010s, the 'world-leading' discursive assemblage of the NZC had come under sustained critique from a number of corners, sustained critique which was felt much more strongly than the criticisms made of previous New Zealand Curriculum frameworks (see for instance Codd, 2005; Peters, 1995). Progressives in New Zealand society had perhaps in general previously been satisfied with the notions of diversity and inclusion within the NZC, and had found something positive in its ostensibly 'child-centred', content-free approach. However, increasing understandings of the important link between past injustices and present inequalities, and the growing prominence of calls for decolonisation and the concomitant concern with raising the status of mātauranga Māori, rendered the high-autonomy NZC, with its careful avoidance of the nation's colonial past, an increasingly unsatisfactory document. At the same time, industry-led groups like the NZI came to challenge previous orthodoxies held by 'knowledge economy' proponents, by asserting that it was a 'knowledge-led' curriculum, rather than one focused on skills and competencies, which would allow children to find success within New Zealand society – whether measured by PISA or considered more broadly. This view sat alongside more academic concerns that disciplinary knowledge had been "dislodge[d]" (Wood & Sheehan, 2012, p. 17) from the NZC in favour of skills and competencies.

This has led to the emergence of a carefully managed, still-ongoing, programme of disassembly and reassembly of the NZC. The "haphazard and disjunctive fashion" (Prince, 2010, p. 170) of this process is captured well in the Ministry of Education's initial intransigence in the face of calls for change. Reporting to the parliamentary select committee that had heard the petition from Ōtorohanga College students, the Secretary for Education argued that teaching the New Zealand Wars would be "contrary to the spirit and underlying principles of the National Curriculum, and would erode the autonomy of Boards of Trustees to determine the content and context of their teaching and learning programmes" (Hughes, 2016, p. 2). It was the case, he argued, that the "principles" of the NZC "include supporting students to recognise and value each other's cultures [and] that school curricula should reflect New Zealand's cultural diversity and value the histories and traditions of all of its

people" (Hughes, 2016, p. 3), and that therefore, any need to mandate the teaching of the New Zealand Wars was misplaced. This position was supported by the government. In this instance we can see fragility of the NZC as an assemblage, with the newer ideas and discourses emergent in this first petition coming up against the government's continuing faith in school autonomy and values like "cultural diversity".

The government firmly maintained the position outlined above until mid-2019, when, to the surprise of many, the Prime Minister announced a plan to incorporate a compulsory history strand in the NZC (Belgrave, 2020). At this point, discourses and ideas previously external to the NZC were brought inside it, highlighting the "porous and complicated nature" and beginning a complex "negotiation concerning what counts as internal and external" (Bacevic, 2019, p. 83) to the curricular assemblage. The government's initial announcement carefully avoided some of the language around "justice" (Bell, 2015) and decolonisation, framing the move to include this history strand only as a response to "growing calls from New Zealanders to know more about our own history and identity" (Ardern & Hipkins, 2019). However, the resultant draft histories curriculum sought to strongly include many of the discourses discussed above. In direct contrast to the historical amnesia and 'harmonious biculturalism' of the 2007 NZC, the draft document asserted as one of its three 'big ideas' that: "colonisation and its consequences have been central to our history for the past 200 years and continue to influence all aspects of New Zealand society" (Ministry of Education, 2021a, p. 2). Instead of shying away from the colonial past, this proposal imagined it as central to what students should understand. Alongside this, mātauranga Māori is explicitly referenced throughout the document, ostensibly speaking to the desire to move beyond looser notions of "cultural diversity" and towards a deeper understanding of 'equality' between peoples that fully accepts diverse epistemologies. It is the case that reference to mātauranga Māori remains fairly limited in this document—there is constant reference to "paying deliberate attention to mātauranga Māori sources and approaches" (Ministry of Education, 2021a, p. 2) without a clear idea of what these 'sources and approaches' might look like, but nevertheless the difference to the 2007 NZC (which does not mention mātauranga Māori at all) is significant.

As significant as the shifts in content are, the changes to the form of the curriculum are also noteworthy. Although the government's initial announcement imagined incorporating new history content within the "achievement objectives" (Ardern & Hipkins, 2019) structure of the NZC, in the draft histories curriculum this is replaced by a 'understand-know-do' model, where instead of relatively open-ended, skill-based objectives, we get reference to specific knowledge students should acquire, such as the understanding of colonisation quoted above. This shift comes about as a result of the immediate desire to include reference to Aotearoa New Zealand's histories, but also arguably speaks to the broader critique, from both industry-led and academic groups, of skills-based, outcomes-oriented curricula (Lipson, 2020; Priestley & Sinnema, 2014; Wood & Sheehan, 2012).

If the government had decided to simply 'slot' the emerging histories curriculum into the NZC, leaving the rest of the framework more-or-less unchanged (which appears to have been the original plan), this would arguably have led to the creation of a highly unstable assemblage where the heterogeneity of components would have

been very visible. Therefore, in order to ensure the NZC remains an effective "apparatus for governing" (Savage, 2020, p. 325), a full 'refresh' of the curriculum was announced in February 2021 (Davis & Tinetti, 2021). As well as ensuring there was alignment between the emerging histories curriculum and the rest of the NZC, the terms of the refresh also seek to more clearly deal with the critiques of the NZC discussed above. This is captured in the headline of the press release used to announce the refresh: "Curriculum Refresh for Clearer, More Relevant Learning".

In the release, 'relevance' is framed largely in terms of the need to bring "identities, language and culture" and " te reo and tikanga Māori" more fully into the curriculum (Davis & Tinetti, 2021). This idea is elaborated upon on the Ministry of Education's website, where we are told that the curriculum will be "bicultural" and that "Mātauranga Māori… will be explicitly woven throughout [the NZC]" (Ministry of Education, 2021c). The reference to such concepts represents a continuation of what was seen above in the draft histories curriculum, and an ostensibly fuller commitment to making space for Māori ways of thinking and being (though the extent to which these are fully incorporated remains to be seen). Notably though, framing these initiatives with words like 'relevance' rather than drawing on terms like 'decolonising', or making more explicit reference to tino rangatiratanga as guaranteed in article two of Te Tiriti, indicates the government is engaging in a selective and calculated process of assemblage here. It is perhaps therefore likely that while Māori onto-epistemological positions will have much more presence in the reassembled NZC, they may not achieve fully 'equal' status to non-Māori ways of approaching the world. As a result, it is certainly possible, indeed perhaps likely, that state-centric notions of citizenship and certain types of 'harmonious biculturalism' (MacDonald, 2020; O'Sullivan, 2007), even if modified, may continue to find a place in the emerging assemblage.

Alongside this push for "relevance", the drive for "clearer" learning speaks to the critiques from those who have advocated for a more 'knowledge-led' approach that ensures "all [children] finish school knowing what they need to succeed" (Lipson, 2020, p. 12). There is an intention to review the current achievement objectives structure, moving towards an universal adoption of the'understand-know-do' approach, where the NZC provides "more certainty about what tamariki [children] need to learn" (Davis & Tinetti, 2021). Of particular interest is the move to more clearly acknowledge disciplinary learning, something arguably driven by in particular social realist-inspired critiques. We read that the refreshed NZC will acknowledge senior students need to "engage with more specialised learning framed around subjects" and that there will be a focus on "creating better connections between curriculum learning areas at the earlier years and subject-specific learning at the later years" (Ministry of Education, 2021b).

Overall then, the refresh seems to outline a serious programme of disassembly and reassembly to be conducted over the next 4 years (the project is slated to finish in 2025), which looks to tie in to the NZC a complex combination of decolonial, social-justice oriented, 'pragmatist' and social realist claims for what the curriculum should focus on, taking aspects of each and weaving them together into something which appears coherent and acceptable enough to enough groups in society. Much remains to be seen about how the fully refreshed NZC (and its partner document, *Te*

Marautanga o Aotearoa) ends up; little has been said so far, for instance, on how the current 'front end' may be reimagined. However, it is clear that what will emerge is likely to be substantially different from the way discourses were assembled in 2007.

Conclusion

If one thing is clear from the above analysis, it is that policy frameworks rarely remain stable for long. Instead, they are constantly in flux, as those who govern them continue to labour to make them cohere in the face of continually changing circumstances. Although the path the reassemblage of the NZC is on seems clear, there are a range of other discourses currently existing both within Aotearoa New Zealand's society and internationally that could easily find a place within the emerging structure if broader socio-political circumstances were to change. Perhaps most prominently, the opposition spokesperson for education, Paul Goldsmith, has been heavily critical of the draft histories curriculum, asserting it includes too much "identity politics" (Cooke, 2021). His view represents just one discourse—an 'anti-woke' discourse on the rise within the global political right (see Pilkington, 2021)—that could potentially be woven into the national curricular assemblage. Continual attention to the messy, ever-changing political labour of making policy assemblages cohere will therefore be vital as we seek to understand the emergence of the 'new' *New Zealand Curriculum* into 2025 and beyond.

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