



Editor's introduction

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This edition of *Curriculum Perspectives* commences with Kerry Kennedy's paper on the evolution of those processes that resulted in the Australian Curriculum. As one of the most important articles published on these complex machinations, Kennedy's paper reminds us that any discussion of the school curriculum signals an engagement in a significant social and political arena related to a nation's concept of itself and what it expects future generations to know, value and do. Further, Kennedy cautions that failure to recognise the broader purposes of the curriculum risk a focus on meaningless debates about curriculum as distinct from addressing its "deeper cultural meaning in the life of the nation". In emphasising that a curriculum must be "about the collective" about "what is best for everyone", Kennedy's paper sets the theme for this edition of the journal.

And as the next paper in this collection reminds us, the discussions about what future generations need to know, value and do continue as the current statement on national goals for schooling in Australia which informed the development of the Australian Curriculum, the Melbourne Declaration, undergoes review. In his analysis, Don Carter utilizes Gert Biesta's (2009) three purposes of education, namely; 'qualification', 'socialisation' and 'subjectification', as an interpretive lens to focus attention on what is required for next iteration of the Melbourne Declaration to ensure attention is afforded to all three purposes.

Continuing the focus on theorizing aspects of curriculum and meeting the needs of the nation, Stephen Spain reviews the literature on Systems Thinking as a methodology to observe, learn, analyse and construct curriculum and pedagogy. In examining the Australian Curriculum, Spain proposes how Systems Thinking might provide an innovative methodology to support curriculum development of relevance to current and future contexts.

The next two papers in this edition focus on some specific aspects of curriculum matters in New South Wales in the discussion about how curricula frames what young people need to know, value and do. John Hughes draws from the May 2018 announcement by the (then) Minister for Education, Rob Stokes,¹ of a review of the NSW curriculum to explore some elements of its distinctive style. Drawing from historical and policy analyses and interviews with key actors, Hughes suggests that three principal characteristics can be identified. These are first, an emphasis on the centrality of academic knowledge; second, an insistence on rigour and competitive assessment; and third, a preference at the secondary level for conventional subject matter disciplines rather than an integrated or "interdisciplinary" curriculum.

The paper that follows explores the emphasis on discipline-specific knowledge by examining how a cohort of pre-service history teachers studying at an Australian regional university in New South Wales articulate a narrative of national history. Debates about what aspects of Australia's national history should be interpreted and represented in everyday historical cultures, such as museums and film, and in school curricula, have been hotly contested in Australia. Indeed, the "History Wars" controversy of the 1990s and early twenty-first century indicate something of the polemic surrounding what should be known and valued in the nation's curriculum. Authors Debra Donnelly, Robert Parkes, Heather Sharp and Emma Shaw, employed an open-ended narrative methodology to explore what a cohort of future NSW History teachers know, understand and believe is important about Australia's past. In presenting their findings, the authors theorise what shapes future History teachers' thinking through lens of historical consciousness. Put simply, the complex notion of historical consciousness refers to the

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¹ Rob Stokes served as the Minister for Education from January 2017 until March 2019 in the first ministry of Premier Gladys Berejiklian. Since April 2019, Stokes is the New South Wales Minister for Planning and Public Spaces in the second Berejiklian ministry.

ways in which individuals understand and relate, both cognitively and affectively, to the past.

Over the past decade, *Curriculum Perspectives* has published a range of papers about the strengths and weaknesses of the Australian Curriculum's tripartite structure of learning areas, general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities. By way of contributing to this curriculum scholarship, Rob Gilbert's paper in the Australian Curriculum section of this edition, addresses the question of the curriculum's architecture by focusing on the general capabilities. In doing so, he provides some rich insights into one of the key debates of recent years: what are 'capabilities', and how do they relate to 'knowledge' and 'skills'? Gilbert contends that the seven capabilities identified in the Australian Curriculum serve as potentially important sources of conceptual and epistemic coherence in areas that are different from, but complementary to, the designated learning areas. Gilbert also acknowledges the complexity that this kind of matrix builds up for teachers, and the related dangers of what may happen at an enactment level. As this paper is a revised version of Gilbert's chapter in *The Australian Curriculum: Promises, Problems and Possibilities* (Reid and Price 2018), it serves as 'taster' for this recent ACSA publication.²

The Point and Counterpoint section has been expertly guest edited by another leading Australian scholar, Bill Green, who reminds us that whilst globalisation has, among other things, seemingly weakened the claims of nations to sovereign status in world affairs, there is worldwide push to develop a formal national curriculum, as in Australia, and the re-assertion of the nation as a key reference-point in this process. The papers in this collection are based on presentations within a plenary Featured Panel, titled National Curriculum: International Perspectives, at the 6th World Curriculum Conference, in December 2018. This triennial conference, held under the auspices of the International Association for the Advancement of Curriculum Studies (IAACS), was co-hosted by the Australian Association for Research in Education (AARE) and the Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ASCA). As Green notes, the plenary provided an opportunity to draw in international perspectives on national curriculum as a question

– to be sharply distinguished from more parochial concerns with 'best practice'. The papers from New Zealand, England, Brazil, Norway, as well as Australia, not only report on their own national curriculum development, but also address questions and issues such as What constitutes such curricula? What are their purposes? How best to understand them? I am most grateful to Bill for this opportunity to share these rich perspectives on how the macro-formalisation of school curriculum can be seen at this point in time from the perspective of transnational curriculum inquiry.

As the final paper in this edition of the journal, Wayne Sawyer reviews Bill Green's (2018) *Engaging Curriculum: Bridging the Curriculum Theory and English Education Divide* in the Routledge Studies in Curriculum Theory. Structured in two sections, this important book addresses curriculum as both a concept and a question in relation to matters of general curriculum inquiry first, and then examines English teaching in relation to associated questions of language, literacy and literature in L1 education. These two sections are drawn together via a critical examination of the Australian national curriculum, with particular reference to its implications and challenges for English teaching, in a context of transnational curriculum inquiry. As Sawyer notes, Green enables the readers to see how school subject design, practice and knowledge can be potentially re-thought as curriculum inquiry.

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² Ibid.