Rethinking National Curriculum Collaboration

Towards an Australian Curriculum

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DEST Research Fellowship Scheme

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Acknowledgements

The DEST Research Fellowship scheme is an inspired initiative. It provides an exciting way to way build strong connections between Universities and DEST to mutual advantage. Since education now lies at the heart of knowledge societies, it makes sense to ensure that there is a healthy and productive relationship between policy makers in government Departments and researchers in Universities. The DEST Research Fellowship goes beyond simply encouraging partnerships. It makes these tangible by supporting the placement of an academic inside the Department.

Being placed in DEST offers academics the rare opportunity to observe an Australian Government Department at work, to contribute to discussions about policy directions, to advise on strategies, and to gain a deep understanding of the policy process. At the same time, it provides Department staff with a fresh perspective, and access to professional networks and expertise in one or more areas of education policy.

I was fortunate to be chosen as the 2002-3 DEST Research Fellow and it proved to be one of the most rewarding and productive experiences of my professional career. My fellowship spanned the period from October 2002 – September 2003, during which time I was located in the Quality Schooling Branch (QSB) of the Schools Group. I engaged in three major activities.

(1) I provided policy advice in a range of areas and about a diverse number of topics; presented five seminars to DEST staff; and was involved in many of the QSB's professional development activities
(2) I represented DEST in the research and professional community - giving 17 invited keynote addresses, participating in national forums and activities, and publishing in a range of journals.
(3) I engaged in a research project - *Rethinking National Curriculum Collaboration: Towards an Australian Curriculum* - which is the subject of this report.

It would not be possible to exaggerate the support that I received from the staff of DEST during the period of my Fellowship. During the year I met staff across the Department, and without fail they were generous with their time and their willingness to talk about aspects of their work. I developed a deep appreciation of the complexity and quality of their work, and their commitment to it. It can be invidious to mention some staff specifically, but I do want to single out the following people:

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2002–03 DEST Research Fellow

Executive Summary

What is the research topic?

The past 35 years have seen various attempts at national curriculum collaboration in Australia. These have been largely shaped by the Constitutional reality that the States and Territories have responsibility for curriculum – a reality that has tended to restrict the range of possibilities for national curriculum approaches. The research project aimed to explore (a) whether the concept of national curriculum collaboration for the compulsory years of schooling is still relevant in a globalizing world, and (b) if so, how it might be advanced in more educationally productive ways, whilst recognizing the constitutional realities of Australia's federal system.

What research methodology and methods were used?

The research was conducted within the critical inquiry research tradition. It involved:

- *Literature review*: This included an extensive review of Australian and international curriculum literature; and the history of previous approaches to national curriculum collaboration.

- *Policy analysis*: This included an analysis and critique of the official curriculum of all Australian States and Territories; and

- *Interviews and seminars*: This included discussions with leading Australian curriculum scholars and educational bureaucrats, individually and in groups.

However, this is not a research report in the conventional sense. It is an elaborated argument that seeks to build a case for a national approach to curriculum using the insights gained from the literature, interviews and the analysis of official curricula across Australia obtained in the course of the research. As the research proceeded, an approach to national curriculum collaboration began to be conceptualized. The emerging ideas were then tested through seminars, talks and focus groups, progressively refined and then subjected to further critical scrutiny. This report describes and makes an argument for the capabilities-based approach that was developed from this process. It seeks to promote discussion and debate about the official curriculum and about approaches to developing a distinctively Australian curriculum in ways that address the obstacles that have historically hindered such an important goal.

What are the key findings?

After establishing some foundational definitions in the **Introduction,** a brief history and critique of previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration in Australia is constructed in **Chapter 1.** This critique is then used to develop a number of principles that should inform further national work. These are that:

A national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with:
- a clearly articulated rationale, purposes and philosophical reference points
- a theorized and articulated view of curriculum

- a strong research and conceptual base
- a process that engages the professional community in the conceptual phases
- a process that seeks to build a constituency of support
- a recognition of the political realities produced by the Australian Federal system

The history of national curriculum collaboration demonstrates that these principles have rarely been in evidence, and so the principles are used as the basis for developing an alternative approach in subsequent Chapters. Thus, in **Chapter 2,** the challenges of the contemporary world and their impact on schooling are described, and this context is used to develop a rationale for a national approach to curriculum that goes beyond the traditional 'railway gauge' argument. In **Chapter 3** dominant approaches to the curriculum are critically analysed and alternative approaches to these are proposed, using democracy as the reference point for the argument. The alternative approach starts with the identification and description of capabilities rather than knowledge-content.

This theoretical work is grounded in **Chapter 4** with a proposal for an **Australian curriculum** made up of two parts: one part organised around richly described capabilities and operating at the national level; the other part comprising the official curriculum of the States and Territories. The model proposes that educators teach THROUGH the knowledge-content of the States/Territories curriculum, FOR the capabilities. This contrasts strongly with the dominant model of official curriculum which focuses on the teaching of subjects/Learning Areas as ends in themselves. Thus the capabilities and the procedural principles which describe them are the common national elements of an approach which offers national curriculum consistency while allowing significant room for local interpretation.

What are the policy implications?

The approach suggests a way to achieve a national curriculum for the compulsory years of schooling
The proposed capabilities-based Australian curriculum provides a means by which the Australian government might take a leadership role in achieving genuine national curriculum collaboration in the compulsory years of schooling. Importantly, it does not threaten the curriculum autonomy of the States, and yet it engineers a comprehensive approach to national curriculum work that goes beyond the traditional model to better meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Other advantages are that the approach uses much of the current curriculum architecture although in a different way; provides a common and educative focus for an approach to national accountability (capabilities); will encourage an exciting and ongoing curriculum conversation across the profession; and suggests a way to conceptualise the curriculum in equity terms.

Any such development must engage the profession and the broader community in deep and ongoing discussion and debate. National curriculum collaboration can only succeed if participation in the conceptual issues is open to many, not just a selected few making decisions behind closed doors. It is crucial therefore that consideration is given to the process that will be employed in its development. In relation to the

concept of a capabilities-based curriculum, the Australian Government could sponsor an initial broad-ranging professional discussion about the nature and type of capabilities. This could start with a re-examination of the National Goals of Schooling, but would obviously extend much beyond these. The curriculum conversation might be led by a body like the newly formed National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership (NIQTSL).

At the same time as a broad professional conversation is occurring, it would be important to establish some research projects on different aspects of the model as it developed. These might be funded through the Australian Research Council's Linkage Grants Scheme, involving partnerships between Universities, Departments of Education and teachers. The outcomes of these research projects would feed back into the development process. Once the approach has been conceptualised it would be crucial to consider such matters as the implications for teacher education, professional development, resource and materials development, processes for sharing experiences and insights within and across jurisdictions, forms and processes of accountability and so on. The strategies developed for each of these should be consistent with the philosophy of the overall approach.

The approach suggests a way to achieve national consistency in the post-compulsory curriculum
There could be an Australian Certificate of Education that records student achievement against each of the capabilities at the end of Year 12. Since the capabilities would be the same as those for the compulsory years of schooling, this approach would produce a seamless curriculum, albeit with the post-compulsory phase being at a greater level of complexity. A part of a student's record would include the pathway through which she/he has travelled to develop each of these capabilities, whether that has been through so-called academic subjects or through vocational education subjects and work experience. Since such an approach would take the emphasis off the subjects themselves (i.e., the organisation and teaching of knowledge-content) and onto the capabilities, it would alter the dynamic that creates hierarchies of subjects. That is, the capabilities suggest a way to achieve parity of esteem. Once again each State/Territory would decide on this part of the curriculum. The process of subject accreditation would require course developers to demonstrate which of the capabilities the subject will develop and how.

The approach suggests a way to ground the concept of life-long learning in and for a knowledge society
Since the capabilities define what people are able to do and be, in a knowledge society they are capabilities that need to be developed throughout a person's life, not just during the years of schooling. Put another way, in a knowledge society the idea of curriculum must go beyond the formal institutions of education to embrace workplace, community and recreational settings. The capabilities-based approach is one way by which to ground the concept of life-long learning in a knowledge society. The development, maintenance and enhancement of capabilities is something that should be a common community aspiration, and there are any number of ways that might happen. For example, why should processes for the development of government policy not require an educational impact statement (will this policy enhance or hinder the process of capability development?) in much the same manner as environmental impact statements are required? Could those who develop public

spaces be required to consider how the space might be used to enhance certain capabilities? Whether or not these are practical ideas, the point remains that an always provisional list of capabilities provides a focus for the rhetoric of life-long learning.

The approach suggests a way to organise the work of DEST
If the concept of capabilities is common to formal, semi-formal and informal education in Australian society, then it might be one way to conceptualise the work of the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). This could happen in a number of ways. For example: (a) capabilities could provide a framework for connecting up the work of DEST, linking the various Groups and their many projects by providing a common language and set of conceptual tools for mapping what is already happening and charting new directions; (b) particular Branches could be organised around capabilities rather than specific programs. This would provide an educational rather than a programmatic rationale for organisational structure; (c) cross-Group teams could be organised to coordinate the tracking and development of specific capabilities. This would provide a mechanism as well as logic for across-DEST communication and coordination.

Conclusion

National curriculum collaboration is crucial to the future of Australia as it seeks to grapple with the complexities of globalisation, the speed of knowledge production, and the challenges of diversity. If Australia is genuinely to become a knowledge society, then the curriculum of its educational institutions is a matter of public importance. But traditional concepts of curriculum and models of national curriculum collaboration that look for lowest common denominator answers will not serve Australia well in the 21st century. This report argues that there is a better way, one founded on a commitment to fully developing the capabilities of all citizens to participate actively in the shaping of a learning society and to live enriching and productive lives.

Introduction

The educational context

The past decade in Australian education has been characterised by frenetic curriculum activity in the compulsory years of schooling. This has taken the form of major overhauls of official curricula in all States and Territories and the piloting of alternative curriculum approaches. In part this activity has been prompted by the massive changes wrought by economic, political, cultural and environmental globalisation, and the growth of information and communications technologies. Thus, in the midst of such change, education is being called upon to meet the demands of new economies, facilitate life-long learning, and provide students with the capabilities to participate actively in changing polities and cultures, to appreciate diversity and to understand and handle the speed of communications. The official curricula of the various State and Territory jurisdictions is a textual representation of the results of formal responses to this dramatic change.

In the midst of this State/Territory-based activity, there have also been attempts to engineer some national curriculum agreements. These initiatives have varied in nature, from the ill-fated attempt to establish a single national curriculum from1989-1993, to national collaboration on particular aspects of curriculum through materials production and professional development activities, to the establishment of National Goals for Schooling, and to the process of accountability through national benchmarking. During this time, the States and Territories have been careful to ensure that their control over curriculum has not been threatened. The most recent manifestation of national curriculum collaboration came in the form of a decision by the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) at its annual meeting in July 2003, to develop national curriculum consistency in Maths, English, Science and Civics.

Thus, the Australian curriculum response to the massive social, political, economic and technological change that is swirling through our society is shaped by the constitutional fact that the States and Territories control curriculum. Australian Government involvement in curriculum can only be achieved with the consent of the States. Not surprisingly therefore, national curriculum collaboration is largely a political process, involving the engineering of consent by the States/Territories through the carrot and stick of Commonwealth funding, or through the identification of areas of curriculum commonality. It will be argued in this report that this has had a counter-productive effect, limiting creative curriculum responses. Clearly political realities cannot be ignored, but there may be alternative approaches that better meet the challenges of the contemporary environment. The purpose of this report is to explore those alternatives starting with a focus on curriculum before considering the political issues, rather than the other way around. Since it is the official curriculum as the statement of curriculum intention of each of the jurisdictions that is the reference point for curriculum discussion, and thus the common element in any of the approaches to national curriculum collaboration, this report will focus on that aspect of curriculum. But before commencing that task it is necessary to clarify some of the key concepts that will be used throughout the report, specifically 'curriculum' and 'official curriculum'.

Clarifying key terms: curriculum and official curriculum

The concept of curriculum has many definitions. Given that the term appears so frequently in educational discussions, it is important that there is a least an understanding about what is meant when it is used, even if there is no widespread agreement. One of the ways to distinguish between different meanings is to look at the scope of the definition. One approach is to understand curriculum as a noun. For example, many equate curriculum with a syllabus or framework. That is, curriculum is taken to mean an official document of stated curriculum intention. This is still the dominant understanding of curriculum in many systems of education, and it largely limits curriculum planning to questions about the selection and organisation of knowledge. A slightly broader version defines curriculum as product, and has a long tradition that has been refined during most of the 20th century (e.g., Bobbitt, 1918; Tyler, 1949; Taba, 1962). This view constructs curriculum as a technical exercise involving the setting of objectives and the measuring of outcomes, thus narrowing education to being a limited and technical activity. It is not an understanding of curriculum that is adopted in this report.

An alternative version understands curriculum as a verb, that is as a process involving the interaction of teachers and students in classroom and other social contexts, rather than as a set of documents. Thus, curriculum covers what actually happens as students learn, as well as what teachers do to organise that learning. This shifts curriculum work from an activity focused on technical 'how to' problems, to one that is focused on understanding and dealing with the 'why' questions. Seeing curriculum as a contextualised social process raises critical philosophical, social and political questions about what is taught, how and to whom. Of course this view of curriculum is very broad and needs some clarification before it can suffice as a working definition. For example, there is much debate about whether it:

- includes the implicit or hidden curriculum (those things that students learn as a result of the ways in which the school is planned and organised), or the null curricula (those things that are not included and that therefore convey a message about priorities [Eisner, 1994]).

- distinguishes between what is planned and what students actually receive – that is, the official, taught, learned and tested curricula (Smith and Lovat, 2003);

- includes the formal curriculum, such as those things that are actually timetabled, and the informal curriculum - such as activities at lunchtimes, after school and at weekends, such as sports clubs, societies, school camps.

It is not necessary to canvass all of these issues here because of the specific focus on the official curriculum in this report, but it is crucial to recognise that they exist. However, it is important to point out that this report is based upon the broader view of curriculum as process, and adopts Kelly's definition of curriculum as *'the totality of the experiences which the pupil has as a result of the provision made'* (1999: 7). Within this definition, it is possible to recognise two curriculum moments:

- the *preactive* curriculum: those things that are planned in national, State/Territory, district, school or classroom arenas; and

- the *interactive* curriculum – those things that actually happen.

These different curriculum moments are concerned with many of the same set of things, such as assessment, pedagogy, content, evaluation, organisation, process and structures, but at different stages of the curriculum process. This understanding of curriculum is represented in Diagram 1 below.

Diagram 1: Two Curriculum Moments
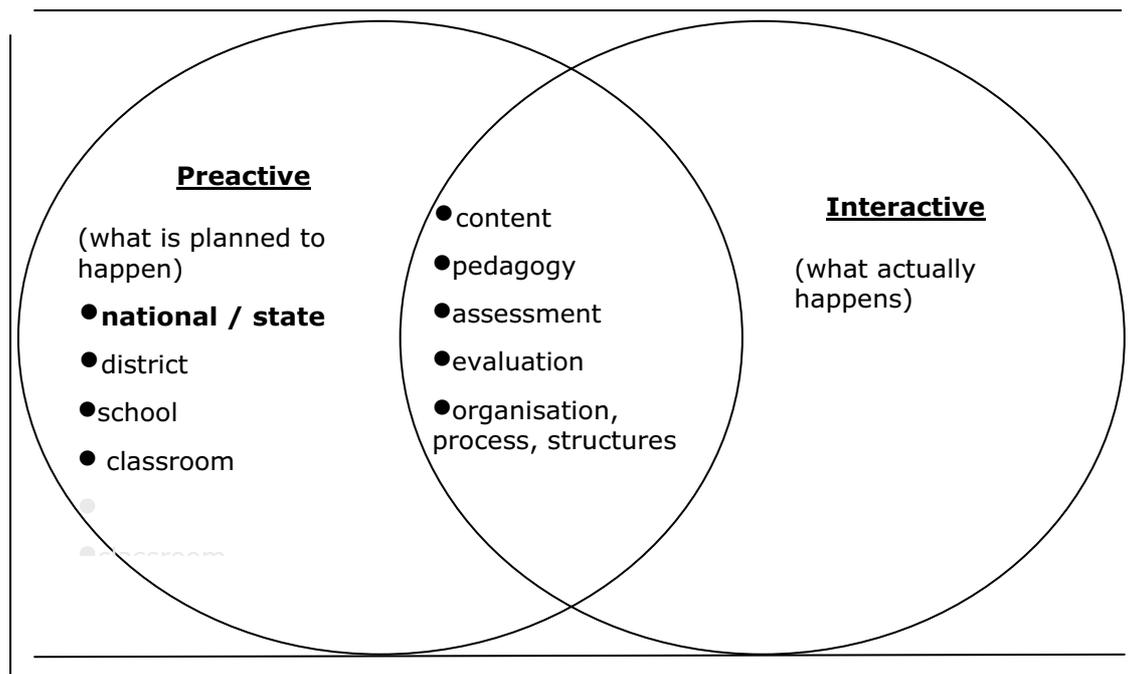
This report is interested in one aspect of the preactive curriculum moment – the formal curriculum which is represented in Diagram 1 as the national/state arena. It is often referred to as the ***official curriculum*** because it represents the curriculum intention that is developed and mandated by an educational jurisdiction. In Australia, the official curriculum is what the States set as the curriculum in Frameworks and courses of study. In most States/Territories there is an official curriculum for the compulsory years of schooling, and a separate official curriculum for the senior secondary years. Although many of the issues canvassed in this report relate to both, there are some issues that require different analyses and so the decision has been taken to focus on just one area - the compulsory years of schooling.

In adopting a broad definition of the curriculum and then focusing on one element of it such as the official curriculum, it is important to recognise the need for consistency within and between elements. Thus, this report will move backwards and forward between a focus on the whole and on one part, ensuring that each is consistent with the other, and with the overall curriculum purposes and orientation. Nonetheless, it is clear that there can be no one-to-one correspondence between what is planned (preactive moment) and what actually happens (interactive moment). One of the mistakes of the view of curriculum as product is the implication that whatever is

planned as curriculum is put into effect. Of course this is rarely the case in an activity involving so much human interaction. But if what happens in classrooms rarely corresponds to what is stated in official documentation, why is it important to study the official curriculum?

Why study the official curriculum?

This report is based on the assumption that the official curriculum is one of the key elements that hold education systems together. That is, the official curriculum is a public representation of what are considered to be the purposes of education, and it provides a focus for public and professional debate about these. It is a bulwark against education systems comprising stand-alone schools with no common purposes. It serves this function because it places a focus on what the community as a whole deems to be valued knowledge rather than organising the curriculum around what might be attractive in the educational market-place. In this sense the official curriculum is an important site in any democracy. For this reason alone it is a crucial focus for analysis.

But the official curriculum also has a number of important effects. The language of the official curriculum has a huge influence on the nature of professional discourse, not least because of the way in which it organises knowledge and names professional practices. The way in which it is organised largely determines educational careers, shapes professional associations, and informs the allocation of resources. The ideology of the official curriculum marks the stance of an education system, legitimating some activities and delegitimating others. Ivor Goodson sums it up in the following way:

> *What is most important to stress is that the written curriculum .... (has) not only symbolic but also practical significance: symbolic in that certain intentions for schooling are thereby publicly signified and legitimated; practical in that these written conventions are rewarded with finance and resource allocation and with the associated work and career benefits* (Goodson, 1994: 19).

It is not surprising therefore that when national curriculum collaboration is considered, the official curriculum is the common element – whether it be attempts to influence the official curricula of the States/Territories or to introduce a single national official curriculum.

The official curriculum can be embraced, tolerated or resisted, but it can't be ignored. For these reasons alone it is an important focus of study. But more than this, the way in which it is constructed is not ideology free. Its purpose and its form are shaped by and shape particular ways of seeing the world and the purposes of education. The way in which it is organised, the process of its development, the extent to which it liberates or constrains teachers and students – these are all matters that are the subject of human decision making. They are not natural. Just as it is made, the official curriculum can be unmade. And yet it will be argued in this report that there has been and is a dominant form of curriculum construction that is very hard to dislodge. The purpose of this report is to propose some different ways of thinking about the official

curriculum, not only in terms of where it functions (State or national arenas), but also in terms of its purposes, its form and its organisation. All of these issues will be touched on during the exploration of the problems and possibilities of national curriculum collaboration in Australia in the 21st century.

In **Chapter 1**, I explore previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration, specifically how the concept of national has been understood, the view of curriculum involved and the lessons learned. This exploration is used as the basis for the development of a set of principles to guide future attempts at national curriculum collaboration.

In **Chapter 2,** I examine the changing contemporary social, political and economic contexts in order to establish the sorts of capabilities it would be expected that education should foster. These capabilities are then used as the basis for the development of a rationale for national curriculum collaboration that goes beyond the old railway gauge metaphor.

In **Chapter 3,** I establish a number of democratic reference points for considering the official curriculum. I use these reference points in an analysis and critique of the dominant approaches to the official curriculum, and conclude by identifying the characteristics of more democratic alternatives.

In **Chapter 4,** I use the theoretical tools developed in the previous Chapters to propose a capabilities-based curriculum as a new way to think about national curriculum collaboration. The advantages of this approach are canvassed, and the Chapter concludes with some thoughts about the processes that might be employed to introduce and sustain it.

Chapter 1

What Can be Learned from Previous Attempts at National Curriculum Collaboration?

Introduction

In Australia, school education is the constitutional responsibility of the States. This means that since the formation of public education systems from the 1870s, the official curriculum has been a State-based curriculum. Of course, there has been a great deal of similarity between State curricula, as well as a great deal of stability (Marsh and Stafford, 1988), but there have also been some key differences. The States/Territories have always jealously guarded their curriculum sovereignty, overtly or passively resisting attempts to engineer national approaches. As Piper (1997) points out:

> *A persistent underlying theme in the history of national attempts at curriculum reform in Australia has been the efforts of the state and territory bureaucracies either to control the process, or to undermine it; a predictable response, but one not necessarily in the national interest, nor indeed in the interests of students in Australian classrooms (p. 9).*

Thus the question of collaboration between the Commonwealth and the States/Territories about curriculum development and reform in the 21st century is as much a political as it is a curriculum and educational question. Since this report is being written at a time when yet another attempt at engineering national curriculum collaboration is underway in Australia, it is timely to undertake a critical history of previous attempts – what happened and why they failed – in order to glean some historical lessons. The purpose of this chapter is to tell the national curriculum story and to propose some principles that might inform future developments.

The story of national curriculum collaboration

Until the 1960s, the States maintained very separate curriculum identities, confining their curriculum collaboration to visits by key bureaucrats designed to exchange information and ideas. The remarkable similarity between the various official State-based curricula was brought about by the dominance of prevailing ideologies, such as narrowly based subjects and the division between academic and technical subjects, rather than any planned attempts at collaboration. Until the early 1970s, State curricula were oriented to building each State, and the centralized administration of State education ensured that there was uniformity of provision across each jurisdiction. That is, parents could assume that schools, wherever they were located within a particular State, would provide the same basic education to all children (Seddon, 2001: 315).

However, once the Commonwealth began funding school education in 1963, the educational dynamic changed. This decision brought another player into the

curriculum field, one with an interest in linking funding to collaborative national curriculum endeavour on projects that connected to the perceived national interest. The entrance of the Commonwealth to school education coincided with a time when the expansion of secondary education brought about by the post war baby boom and migration was causing the States to reconsider the school curriculum. Along with the growth of the school population went an expansion in subject offerings as education authorities sought to meet the needs of an increasingly diverse student population who were staying at school longer. As the curriculum expanded so the differences between the various State-based official curricula grew. This curriculum diversification was complemented by the growing recognition that traditional curriculum offerings failed to accommodate cultural differences.

From that time, the tension between the nation-building aspirations of the Commonwealth government on the one hand and the constitutional responsibility of the States for education and thus for curriculum on the other, became a defining characteristic of Australian education. The story of the subsequent attempts at national curriculum collaboration can be organized within the following four periods.

Period 1: 1968-1988

The approach to national curriculum collaboration during the 20 year period between 1968-1988 involved various attempts by the Commonwealth to influence state-based curricula indirectly. In 1968 the then Federal Minister of Education and Science, Malcolm Fraser, described the relationship between the Commonwealth and the States in the following way:

> *The improvement of the quality of Australian education depends to a considerable extent on devising curricula and associated materials which reflect the changing needs of Australian life. This is the responsibility of the education authorities in the States, but the Commonwealth has a special interest in reducing the unnecessary differences in what is taught in the various States and hence the very real difficulties faced by children who move from one State to another. While the Commonwealth believes much can be done to break down unnecessary barriers between States, it is not seeking to impose uniformity or centralized control of education. On the contrary the projects which the Commonwealth would support would be ones which encourage individual initiative among teachers* (quoted in Bowker, 1972: 166-167))

This rationale for a national approach to curriculum – that is, a concern to establish commonality of official curricula across State boundaries so that students who move from State to State are not disadvantaged - has been a recurring theme ever since 1968. Another recurring theme present in Fraser's statement is a concern by the Commonwealth not to appear to be trespassing upon the constitutional responsibilities of the States. Since curriculum is one of these responsibilities, a key Commonwealth strategy has been to seek to influence the official curricula of the States by indirect means, such as funding curriculum projects that develop teaching resources in (nationally) strategic curriculum areas.

Piper suggests that although the inauguration of the Australian Science Education project (ASEP) in October 1969 - a jointly funded partnership between the

Commonwealth and States designed to develop science materials for schools - marks the 'advent of national curriculum development in Australia' (Piper, 1997:11), it was the establishment of the Commonwealth Schools Commission in 1973 that provided the real impetus for national educational collaboration. This body was not controlled by State education authorities and it was able to encourage curriculum reform through specific funding allocations (Seddon and Deer, 1992). The subsequent establishment of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in 1974 as an independent statutory body confirmed the Commonwealth's role in curriculum, and 'legitimated the concept of national curriculum development' (Piper, 1997: 13). For the short time that it functioned, CDC was a lively contributor to curriculum development, managing a number of curriculum projects including the famous Social Education Materials Project (SEMP), and developing and distributing a well known discussion paper on the core curriculum in 1980. CDC was absorbed into the Commonwealth Department of Education in 1981 and in 1984 it became a Division within the Schools Commission where it managed a number of curriculum projects before being abolished in 1987.

The approach to national curriculum development during this 20 year period was one that sought to influence the official curricula of the States without challenging their curriculum authority. Whilst a number of advances were made, the approach was hampered for two reasons. First, the sensitivity to the curriculum autonomy of the States resulted in many of the projects being organized on a federal model where key aspects of projects were located in State-based teams. This tended to dilute a national perspective and allowed States to maintain their control of the official curriculum. Second, the project-based focus of the national collaboration during this period meant that curriculum change was piecemeal and open to shifting political whims. There was little opportunity within this approach to grapple with some of the tricky conceptual curriculum questions or to develop a coherent and consistent view of curriculum and approach to curriculum change.

Period 2: 1988-1993
If the period from 1968-1988 had been one of working indirectly to effect national curriculum collaboration, the five year period from 1988-1993 was a full on frontal assault. In May 1988, John Dawkins, then Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education and Training, unveiled the policy statement: *Strengthening Australia's schools: A consideration of the focus and content of schooling* (Dawkins, 1988), declaring that:

> *Australian can no longer afford fragmentation of effort and approaches must be developed and implemented in ways which result in real improvements in schooling across the nation* (Dawkins, 1988:30).

Dawkins believed that education was central to micro-economic reform, but that schools and the curriculum had to change if they were to contribute to it. This change needed to be orchestrated at a national level in order to remove duplication and smooth out the anomalies that were apparent across the various State education systems. This time however, the Commonwealth was looking to do more than indirectly influence curricula through the development of materials. This time the strategy had shifted to pushing for a single national curriculum, albeit one that could be adapted to meet different needs in different parts of Australia:

What is required is the development of a common framework that sets out the major areas of knowledge and the most appropriate mix of skills and experience for students in all the years of schooling, but accommodates the different or specific needs of different parts of Australia. There is a need for regular assessment of the effectiveness and standards of our schools. A common curriculum framework should be complemented by a common national approach to assessment. We need to examine how schools can report to parents on their aims and achievements; how school systems can report to the nation on how well our schools are performing against established goals (Dawkins, 1988: 4-5).

The mainly Labor dominated State governments leant cautious support to the Dawkins initiative. Thus, in April 1989, the Australian Education Council (AEC), a body comprising the Commonwealth and State Ministers of Education, announced the Hobart National Declaration on Schooling. This set out an agreement on national goals for schooling and announced an intention to establish a national curriculum agency, commence a process of national collaborative curriculum development, and introduce an annual national report on schooling. Predictably, the various State Directors General of Education sought to preserve their control over curriculum policy. In the first instance they did this by commissioning a mapping exercise of existing curricula across the States and Territories, aiming to prove that since curriculum similarities already existed across the State systems, further national development was unnecessary (Piper, 1997: 18). They agreed that these curriculum maps would form the basis of national statements, although they insisted that no State or Territory would be obliged to adopt them.

And yet as the project unfolded, the momentum for a national curriculum gathered pace. After the mapping exercise, in 1991 the curriculum was organized into eight Learning Areas and work commenced on describing these in terms of what became known as Statements and Profiles. Writing teams based in the various States were asked to write and then consult within very short timelines, and the new curriculum was ready to be submitted to the June meeting of the AEC held in Perth in 1993. By this time, the political complexions of the States had changed, and a number of them were starting to get cold feet, fearing loss of control over the curriculum. The national Statements and Profiles were not endorsed, and were referred instead to the Hobart meeting of the Council in December 1993. At that meeting they again failed to receive endorsement and were then referred back to the States to do with as they pleased. The most ambitious attempt at national curriculum collaboration in Australia's history had foundered on the old rock of State-Commonwealth suspicion.

Period 3: 1993-2003
The decade following the failed attempt at a national curriculum saw a return to the more indirect strategies for national collaboration that characterised the first period. However, this time it was against a backdrop of previous experience at national collaboration, and in the presence of a number of curriculum structures and products that had been developed in the earlier period. These created an environment that encouraged and facilitated national curriculum cooperation, albeit with the States still wary about threats to their curriculum autonomy. For example, a number of States adopted the eight learning areas, either completely or in a modified form; the Curriculum Corporation (jointly funded by the States and the Commonwealth) began

to play an active role in common materials production; and the National Goals of Schooling were referred to frequently in State curriculum documentation, and indeed were revamped at the 1999 Adelaide meeting of the Ministerial Council for Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), a successor to the AEC.

For its part, the Commonwealth began to fund and supervise a number of projects that aimed to influence State and Territory curricula and the professional practices of teachers. A key example of this is the Discovering Democracy program which has been running for nearly eight years, producing curriculum materials, hosting events for teachers and students, and linking professional development activities across the States. Other examples include the Quality Teaching Project which places an emphasis on teacher professional development in the areas of literacy, numeracy, maths, science and technology, and the use of national benchmarks in literacy and numeracy to enable State/Territory comparisons to be made. Such programs can certainly influence the curriculum priorities of the States, relying on the lever of funding to engineer State compliance. However, approaches that attempt to steer from a distance can sometimes be ignored or used for rhetorical purposes only (the national goals may be in this category), producing a piecemeal and/or superficial approach to national curriculum collaboration. By 2003, it was clear that the Commonwealth Minister of Education was becoming impatient with the strategy of indirect influence. A new phase was about to unfold.

Period 4: 2003 - ?
In June 2003, the Commonwealth Education Minister, Dr Brendan Nelson, caused a minor stir across the nation when he made a vigorous call for a national curriculum:

> *We have eight different educational jurisdictions, eight different commencement ages, eight different curricula. We would not be giving service to young Australians if we just accept that there are eight jurisdictions. I see it as our responsibility to prepare the next generation to be well-equipped as global citizens, to be proud and well-developed Australians as much as they are New South Welshmen or Queenslanders or Western Australians* (Shanahan, 26/6/2003: 1).

The similarities between this call and that of Minister Dawkins 15 years earlier are striking. In the ensuing weeks, Dr Nelson broadened his agenda to include a push for common school starting ages and common year 12 assessment processes across the country.

It was clear that the Commonwealth was signaling an intention to assume a leadership role in relation to national curriculum. But Dr Nelson's call drew a sharp response from the State and Territory Ministers of Education who argued that a national curriculum process was already well underway. They pointed to an outcome of the July 2002 MCEETYA meeting where the Ministers had asked a MCEETYA taskforce to review the current status and use within the States and Territories of the 1993 National Statements and Profiles and to provide advice back to the Ministers on how the States and Territories can collaborate further on consistent curriculum outcomes. In other words according to the Ministers, Dr Nelson was simply suggesting something that had already started.

Whatever the result of the political point scoring, what became clear is that the issue of national collaboration was moving into a new phase. And yet nothing had changed. Reminiscent of events in 1988, the MCEETYA taskforce commissioned a 'curriculum mapping exercise', the purpose of which was to identify areas of overlap and difference in the official curricula of the States. The outcomes of the mapping exercise were then used to justify a proposal to develop four statements of learning for each of four curriculum domains – mathematics, science, civics and English. These statements are to build upon the areas of commonality identified in the mapping exercise in order to inform the curriculum work of the various jurisdictions. This proposal was accepted at the July 2003 MCEETYA meeting, and at the time of writing this report, development of the statements of learning is underway. It appears that the States/Territories have once again been able to stave off the spectre of a national curriculum, this time by constructing the concept of 'national curriculum consistency' – a lowest common denominator approach that makes an official curriculum out of only those content elements that already exist!

Why has national curriculum collaboration been so hard to achieve?

The purpose of providing this brief history of attempts at national curriculum collaboration during the past 35 years has been to identify some of the approaches that have been used and the reasons for their comparative lack of success, in order to guide the process of thinking about alternative approaches. So what have been the impediments to national curriculum collaboration? The fact that education (and thus curriculum) is a constitutional responsibility of the States and Territories has been a major stumbling block. It produces a mutual suspicion and has resulted in either (1) the States/Territories resisting or blocking initiatives that appear to challenge their curriculum authority, or (2) the Commonwealth diluting national curriculum initiatives until they are politically acceptable. This political reality must be addressed in any new attempt at national curriculum collaboration. That is, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a recognition of the political realities produced by the Australian Federal system*

But the political impediments are only a part of the national curriculum story: there are also educational factors that have stifled the various initiatives, in particular the understanding of curriculum upon which they are based and the processes of curriculum development that produced them. These are hidden factors and are rarely analysed when national curriculum collaboration is being discussed. However it could be that they hold the secret to resolving the political issue of curriculum territorialism. In this section it is argued that there are three major ways in which previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration have fallen short in curriculum terms: (1) they have failed to establish an adequate rationale, (2) they have failed to develop a rigorous theoretical base, and (3) they have failed to take account of what is known about curriculum change. Each of these will be examined in turn in order to derive some tentative principles for national curriculum collaboration. The principles will then form the basis of the reconceptualisation of national curriculum collaboration that will occur in the subsequent Chapters of this report.

Previous approaches have failed to develop a rigorous rationale for national curriculum collaboration

Previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration over the past 35 years have been justified on the basis of three major arguments. It will be suggested that these do not represent a powerful rationale - individually or collectively - for a national approach. The first argument maintains that there is need to promote greater consistency across education systems in order to benefit students required to transfer across State/Territory boundaries. In 2003 for example, the Education Minister Dr Nelson pointed to the 80,000 students whose families move States each year and claimed that these students are disadvantaged. And yet, it is difficult to maintain an argument that an entirely new curriculum edifice should be created for the 3% of students who are mobile. For a start there may be other, more powerful, ways to facilitate student transition, such as through the introduction of student portfolios. But more importantly the mobile student argument is a technical one. It fails to offer guidance about the nature of the curriculum which is the purpose of a powerful rationale. Supporting mobile students may be a side benefit of national curriculum collaboration, it should not be its raison d'etre.

The second argument is based on the economic rationale that national curriculum collaboration is necessary because it promotes efficiencies through the sharing of scarce resources across systems, such as curriculum materials and curriculum development. This view is flawed on a number of grounds, not the least of which is that it assumes a particular model of curriculum that requires standardized resources, and that the most efficient way to deliver such a curriculum is by centralising the production of these resources. The rest of this report will argue that this is an impoverished view of curriculum, so it is sufficient here to make the point that such an argument can only be sustained if the nature of the resources is identified and justified. This may or may not suggest that there are economies of scale at a national level. It should be the curriculum arguments that drive national collaboration rather than the economic ones. That aside, the argument needs to be based on some empirical evidence that points to the level at which resource sharing starts to become productive. Such evidence is not available.

The third argument has been more implied than argued in any substantive sense. It is that a national approach will help to produce a sense of national cohesion, a feeling that we are all Australians. Separate State/Territory curricula can work against this aspiration it is claimed. This argument holds some promise when considering curriculum questions because it provides a starting point for evaluating current curriculum approaches and for shaping new approaches. But it is undeveloped. Aside from rhetorical flourishes about national identity, the official arguments for a national approach fail to build a case in any substantial sense. In a globalizing world, at a time when the nation-state is undergoing such fundamental changes, it is surely necessary to construct an argument about the purposes of education in the contemporary world in order to be able to establish whether such purposes are best pursued through national collaboration and if so what such an approach might look like.

Perhaps the most powerful way to understand the nature of the three arguments outlined above is to examine the language that has been used in the service of national curriculum collaboration over the past 35 years. The dominant metaphor connecting the arguments has been that of the railway gauge. The suggestion has been that just as

the various States and Territories had different railway gauge widths in the 19th and early 20th centuries resulting in time wasting inefficiencies and the needless duplication of stock – a state of affairs that eventually resulted in the decision to standardize the gauge – so too is the existence of many State curricula wasteful and inefficient. The problem with this metaphor is that it reduces curriculum to a 'thing', a product that can be standardized in order to get the country running on the same educational track. While there have been a number of approaches to curriculum that are consistent with this metaphor, this report will argue that such an understanding of curriculum is conceptually flawed. A different metaphor will be suggested in the next Chapter when a rationale for national curriculum collaboration in the 21st century is developed. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a clearly articulated rationale.*

Previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration lacked a well-developed theoretical base

One of the surprising aspects of the national curriculum collaboration story is the fact that so many of the various approaches and initiatives that have been taken in its name have been based upon unstated assumptions about curriculum itself. This unproblematic approach to curriculum has resulted in approaches that have lacked theoretical substance, and that have simply recycled the dominant curriculum tradition and so have been easily ignored or subsumed within existing practice. Even if this has been adequate in the past it is surely not appropriate to meet the challenges of contemporary times. Three examples will be used to explain this point.

- *Previous approaches have failed to articulate a view of curriculum:* As pointed out in the Introduction to this report, there are a number of possible views of curriculum, each of which shape particular approaches and practices. It is clear that the history of national collaboration has been informed dominantly by an understanding of curriculum as product, although this is rarely enunciated. Thus, in periods 1 and 3 the majority of initiatives involved the production of teaching resources to support or influence the official curricula in the various States/Territories; in period 2 the focus was on producing a national official curriculum in the form of Statements and Profiles; and the current initiative involves constructing national 'learning statements'. There would be nothing wrong with this focus on documentation if it was occurring within an agreed broader and articulated view of curriculum. This would at least ensure that there was some consistency between the preactive and interactive moments of curriculum practice. But in the absence of such an understanding, curriculum is rudderless, amounting to being little more than a set of (unconnected) curriculum artifacts.

  But there is more to this critique than curriculum coherence. The lack of a theorized understanding of curriculum has a lot to do with the maintenance and reproduction of the suspicion existing between the States/Territories and the Commonwealth, and therefore with the impasse whenever national curriculum collaboration is mooted. It is inevitable that constructing curriculum as a product establishes a binary of single national curriculum versus State-based official curricula. This binary then limits the possibilities for national collaborative work. Thus, if it is argued that Australia needs a single national curriculum (as during period 2), then the States assume a

jurisdictional protectiveness. Failure is inevitable. On the other hand, if it is assumed that the only alternative to a single national curriculum is to maintain the various official curricula of the States and Territories, then national curriculum collaboration is reduced to trying to achieve progress based on minimal change acceptable to the States. This lowest common denominator alternative is the approach being adopted by the current MCEETYA curriculum consistency exercise, where the aim is to organize a national curriculum approach around what is, not what might be. This is hardly an approach that meets the sorts of challenges of contemporary times, as will be argued in Chapter 2. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a theorised and articulated view of curriculum.*

- *Previous approaches have lacked a research base and so have been conceptually flawed*: All too often decision making about the official curriculum has been conducted as a political, rather than as an educational, exercise. Decisions are made, and often justified, on the basis of 'practical' experience or 'common-sense', and theoretical and empirical research is dismissed as impractical or out of touch. Not only does such an approach sell the education profession short by denying that professional knowledge is anything more than accumulated experience, it also results in conceptually confused initiatives. An example of this was the committee decision to establish eight learning areas as the basis for the national Statements and Profiles curriculum in period 2. These learning areas do not stand up to close scrutiny, comprising on the one hand single subjects or disciplines (e.g., Maths, English); and on the other hand aggregations of subjects (e.g., Studies of Society and Environment, Arts, Health and Physical Education) under the guise of integration of disciplinary knowledge. And yet there was little attempt to justify this decision in research terms. As Collins argues:

    > *Attempts to group school subjects into larger, related kinship groups have been a fraught process everywhere….the question of what bundles are satisfactory, either as 'themes' running across subjects (like 'the arts'), is a major epistemological question. There will not be eight bundles just because this seems to be a nice common sense number. Areas of Knowledge can't be created with the stroke of a pen* (Collins, 1994: 10).

Such conceptual confusions have political as well as educational effects. In the case of the national Statements and Profiles, the conceptual sloppiness produced by the differing approaches to the epistemology of the Learning Areas resulted in incompatible statements being cobbled together with little chance of forming a coherent whole. The resultant flaws drew strong criticism from different areas of the education profession, and so delegitimated the project. It is hardly surprising that when the AEC effectively derailed the project in 1993 there was barely a word of protest (Ellerton and Clements, 1994; Marsh, 1994). In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a strong research and conceptual base.*

- *Previous approaches have failed to articulate philosophical reference points*: The process of curriculum making cannot be conducted in a philosophical vacuum. It is more than a set of techniques or procedures. It involves making ethical, moral and value judgments, choosing between different purposes, and deciding on priorities. That is, curriculum work is not an objective and scientific endeavour, although it has its roots in a curriculum tradition that tried to make it so. Curriculum work must have a clearly articulated and coherent philosophical stance as a reference point for decision making. Through each of the periods of national curriculum collaboration described above, such a stance was rarely articulated leaving the philosophical assumptions to be inferred. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with clearly articulated purposes and philosophical reference points.*

Previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration failed to articulate a view of curriculum change

The 35 years of attempts at national curriculum collaboration have largely been organized around traditional models of curriculum change. These involve decisions being taken at government level, development work being outsourced to education 'experts', and the product being handed to teachers to implement. The key aspect of this process is the classic split between conception and execution, with the conceivers and developers of the 'product' usually not being the people charged with its execution or implementation. Sometimes the process of development involves 'consultation' with the implementers (i.e. the teachers), but this consultation always occurs after the conceptual decisions have been made – that is, it involves consultation about means not ends, technical detail rather than conceptual issues.

The national Statements and Profiles curriculum initiative in period 2 is an example of this process at work. Thus decisions about the organisation of knowledge (the eight learning areas) and the nature and purpose of the statements and profiles were taken by a small number of education bureaucrats and endorsed by the Ministers at an AEC meeting. Development work was undertaken by State-based writing teams, with drafts being circulated nationally for comments by teachers within absurdly short time frames. The current development of learning statements is almost an exact replica of this process.

What is the problem with this approach to curriculum change? Apart from the impoverished view of teacher professionalism reflected by the approach, the model is counterproductive to advancing national curriculum collaboration. There are at least two reasons for this claim:

(1) The model runs contrary to all that is now known about curriculum change – especially the fact that unless those who are expected to implement curriculum are engaged in the conceptualisation phase, the curriculum initiative will either be ignored or simply fitted within existing understandings/paradigms and shaped to reflect these (e.g., Fullan, 1993; Eisner, 2000). It is the process of thinking through the knotty conceptual issues that enables educators to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, to recognize alternatives and to understand what is needed to make new approaches successful. *Clearly a*

national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a process that engages the professional community in the conceptual phases.

(2) The model fails to develop a deep constituency of support for new approaches. Rather than building exciting professional conversations about issues, problems and possibilities, and engaging teachers in the sort of professional dialogue that whets intellectual appetites and stimulates the circulation of ideas and the exchange of different viewpoints, the model shuts out the profession, pretending there to be certainty and right answers. By excluding teachers and their professional associations from this professional dialogue and limiting their involvement to a desultory and time-challenged consultation process, the model foregoes the building of professional support and commitment to national projects. Not surprisingly when projects collapse, as the national curriculum project did in July 1993, there is hardly a professional voice raised in protest. People cannot identify with something into which they have had so little input. It is not going too far to say that it would be difficult for States and Territories to resist approaches to national curriculum collaboration if the professional community was committed to them. And commitment comes from genuine not superficial involvement. In summary then, *a national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with a process that builds a constituency of support.*

Principles for national curriculum collaboration

This Chapter has involved a brief history and analysis of previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration with a view to deriving some tentative principles from that experience. They are that:

A national approach to curriculum should be based on and consistent with

- ***a clearly articulated rationale, purposes and philosophical reference points***

- ***a theorized and articulated view of curriculum***

- ***a strong research and conceptual base***

- ***a process that engages the professional community in the conceptual phases***

- ***a process that seeks to build a constituency of support***

- ***a recognition of the political realities produced by the Australian Federal system***

When stated starkly like this the principles appear blindingly obvious. And yet they have never been the basis of approaches to national curriculum collaboration. Indeed, at the time of writing this report another attempt – the 2003 MCEETYA national curriculum consistency initiative - is underway, bearing all the hall marks of previous approaches. It is hard to avoid the conclusion that this initiative has been established to yet again provide the appearance of national curriculum activity while ensuring that nothing changes. The purpose of this report is to argue that it is in the national interest

to construct a new approach, and to do so as a matter of urgency. Such an approach needs to attend to a number of the principles that have been suggested in this Chapter. National curriculum collaboration is fundamentally an educational question. It is far more than simply selecting a model on the basis of what is politically possible, though clearly that is important. In the next three Chapters some flesh is put on the bones of these principles by developing a possible approach to national curriculum collaboration that is consistent with them. Such a project must be informed by a sound rationale and it is that task that is the focus Chapter 2.

Chapter 2

Towards a rationale for National Curriculum Collaboration in a Globalising World

Introduction

Educators are preparing young people for a world that is difficult to imagine, and are doing so at a time when the old and the new are intersecting. That is, many of the old structures and ways of doing things are still dominant, even while technological change and globalisation in its various guises are compressing time and space and changing the very nature of the way in which we communicate and understand and organise ourselves. This mixture of the old and the new, the certain and the uncertain, is a recurring motif at this juncture in our history. For educators it raises a number of significant questions about the purposes of education and the nature of the curriculum. Thus the starting point for thinking about what a national approach to curriculum might mean in the 21st century must be a consideration of the broader contexts in which schools operate.

In this Chapter a comparison is drawn between the world for which many of the current forms and practices of schooling and curriculum were designed, and the trends and conditions of the contemporary world. This comparison is used to suggest that although the concept of a national approach to curriculum is still relevant, the arguments for it, and the form that it might take, should be very different from those that were used in the 20th century.

The context of schooling: from certainty to uncertainty.

The first three quarters of the 20th century in Australia was an era of great stability of institutions and practices and a belief that rational and scientific methods could be used to solve social as well as technical problems. Certainly, there were changes and risks but these were handled within some established frameworks such as the nation state at the international level, and an industrial economy, a welfarist social settlement and institutions of government with well tried bureaucratic procedures at the national and State levels. This stability and the strong attachment to scientific rationality made these times of some certainty (Kelly, 1992).

One of the institutions that both reflected and reproduced this stability was the Australian school – an institution that was seen as central to the task of nation building. Everything about the structure and organisation of the Australian school, from its single teacher with a group of students, age/grade linear progression, division between a 'heads' and 'hands' curriculum, growing reliance on measurement (eg IQ tests) and so on, bespoke of technical rationality and of certainty. In the American context, Tyack and Tobin (1994) call dominant characteristics like these a 'grammar of schooling', by which they mean that just as the grammar of language frames how we can speak, so certain structures and processes frame the ways that we educate. Each of these grammars is deeply sedimented and is therefore very stable and slow to change.

However, if the first three quarters of the 20th century can be characterised as an age of certainty, the significant changes that effected Australian society in the past quarter of a century are most tellingly summarised as 'the end of certainty' (Kelly 1992). Since the 1970s, the dominant institutions and practices of the Australian nation-state have been challenged by globalisation, increasing diversity, and changes in information and communication technologies. Not surprisingly, schools have been caught up in this incredible change. This is bringing pressure to bear on the grammars of schooling. But they are not all simply being replaced. It is far more complex than that.

Since the mid-1970s, educators have sought to create, manage, shape and respond to the practical effects of these complex developments. There has been no single pattern of response, no general trend. Rather there has been a kaleidoscope of responses based upon a mix of personal histories and beliefs, policy trajectories, the nature of social relations, local contexts and organisational practices. A glimpse of practice seemingly frozen in time can be replaced in the next moment by a totally new version of a traditional relationship. Jostling uneasily alongside the traditional 'grammars' of schooling are new discourses of 'learning society', 'cyber communities', and 'on-line learning'. The story of these extraordinary times is partly the story of this mix of old and new. But if sense is to be made of it and what it means for curriculum there is need to look more closely at the nature of the changes that are occurring. This will be done by canvassing some of the key changes in each of the three areas of practice central to the purposes of schooling: the economy, the state and civil society, and individual identity.

Economy

By early in the 20th century Australia had moved from being a largely agrarian and mining economy to one that incorporated a developing manufacturing base that grew for the next 75 years. Industry adopted the characteristics of mass production for mass consumption. This involved things being manufactured through long runs where workers were seen as appendages to machines, and customers were seen as a homogenous group. Forms of scientific management which divided and sub divided labour in order to maximise efficiency and productivity were introduced into workplaces in many sectors of the economy; management was organised hierarchically; and single career paths involved a slow but steady progression up the promotion ladder.

The industrial economy called for a certain sort of worker and schools were central to providing this. Thus, the division between academic and vocational curriculum, highly prescriptive syllabi, a focus on external examinations, and rigid discipline were all designed, at least partly, to sort and select people for certain careers and to develop the sorts of skills and, importantly, dispositions, that suited the ways in which work was organised. That is, schools both reflected and reproduced the conditions of and for industrial capitalism.

Since the 1970s however, globalisation and the growth of ICTs has so irrevocably changed national economies that the term new economy is the shorthand version for its characteristics which are said to be 'informational', 'global' and 'networked' (Castells, 2000: 10). Of course, the extent and impact of these characteristics has varied from country to country, but there have been many common elements. For

example, in most western nations over the past twenty years the fastest growing occupations have been in the service industries and information sectors of the economy with declines in the agricultural and production sectors of the workforce. Advances in such areas as micro-electronics, information and communication processes, robotics and biological technology have altered the nature and organisation of jobs and thus the sorts of skills required. The concept of mass production is changing to 'flexible specialisation' involving multiskilled and adaptable workers, working in collaborative teams, using screen-based technologies, producing a range of semi-customised goods for niche markets where products are adapted to customer needs.

Castells (2000) contrasts what he calls the 'generic' workers of the 20th century factory floor engaged in repetitive assembly-line labour, with the 'self-programmable' worker of the new economy who has the capacity to constantly develop new (and transferable) skills for new situations. The labour of this self-managing worker is, according to Hartley 'directed more towards the manipulation of symbols and people, away from the manipulation of materials' (Hartley, 2003: 82). For Edgar (1999), the new organisations in the new economy are 'learning organisations' where 'rigidity of attitude and authoritarian hierarchy in the workplace are enemies of innovation and competitive edge' (Edgar, 1999: 10). The old stable career paths are being replaced by people moving freely between companies, swapping jobs regularly while accumulating portfolios of experience. Thus, workers of the new economy, it is claimed, need to be flexible and motivated, and be able to transfer skills, collaborate, conceptualise, analyse, problem-solve, and work with diversity. The assets of firms in the new economy are located more in the skills and resources of their employees, than in their plant and equipment (Carnoy, 2000).

Of course that is the sanitised version of the new economy. In fact it is much more complex than that. For a start, in Australia the new economy has not simply replaced the old - both coexist uneasily or are blurring at the edges. And while the new economy has benefited some, it has brought with it or reinforced a number of problems for others. For example, there has been an increase in casualised and part time work, longer hours for those in full time employment, growth in disparities of income, and a heightened fear of insecurity of employment (Gregory & Sheehan, 1998; Tanner, 1999). Poverty and unemployment still impact more on some localities and groups than on others. Some claim that the apparent democratisation of the workplace is simply a smokescreen for new and more insidious forms of worker control through self-management. Other writers argue that the mobility of the workforce destroys company loyalty, resulting in a 'moral corrosion' of society as people lose the capacity to develop long term bonds and commitments (eg Sennett, 1998).

This mix of old and new, possibilities and dangers, is of direct significance to schools, if one of their key tasks is to develop in students capabilities to participate in the economy. Importantly, the new economy rejects the certainties of the old industrial economy. It suggests a stance that recognises the tentativeness of knowledge, and the need for flexibility and adaptability. It therefore has implications not only for what is taught but also for how it is taught and how schools are organised and structured.

The state and civil society

After Federation in 1901, the new Australian nation set about building the conditions for a stable democracy inside its clearly delineated borders. Kelly (1992: 1-16) describes how in the first generation after Federation an emerging national consensus was turned into new laws and institutions. This became an Australian settlement, the planks of which were white Australia, protection, arbitration, state paternalism and imperial benevolence. It structured an homogeneous Australian society where difference was assimilated and it built a view of Australia as one people with one history. The settlement was held together by a number of ideologies and strategies that legitimated the authority of the state, and Australian schools were key institutions in this task. For example, schools contributed to establishing some of the conditions for a stable democracy, including the provision of a basic literacy and numeracy that enabled people to read newspapers and books and to vote. And schools were also central to building loyalty to the Australian nation through attention to the flag and the national anthem, teaching a version of citizenship education that coincided with the dominant view, and inculcating obedience and respect.

Since the 1970s this understanding of Australia has been steadily dismantled, both by changes within the nation state and by external forces. The contemporary social world is now a complex mix of local and global trends. Technological change and the rapid growth of the global market economy sit alongside the re-emergence of chauvinistic nationalism and local ethnic and cultural groups. Richard Falk (1999) describes a new political contest between economic market-driven 'globalisation from above', and 'globalisation from below', with grass root movements (eg., feminist, environmentalist, human rights movements) pushing an alternative global civic society agenda. Not surprisingly, the complexity of these trends is exerting pressure on many of the institutions and practices of nation-states, including the concept of citizenship and the structures and practices of democracy. One example is at the level of the nation-state, the power of which is becoming increasingly constrained as transnational companies straddle national boundaries; and as regional and international groupings and organisations influence the conduct of nations (eg Held, 1999; Monbiot, 2003).

Another example is at the level of civil society. The rapidity of the global movement of ideas, people, goods and information is creating an increasingly diverse society. This has enriched Australian society and created many more sub-communities that communicate through such means as the expanding range of commercial and non profit media (Internet, multiple pay TV channels etc) (Lumby, 1999). At the same time, however, this very diversity can produce fragmentation which raises issues about how to negotiate diversity to produce social cohesion (Kalantzis, 2001).

These two examples are sufficient to demonstrate the changing notion of citizenship and the challenge to democratise some of the new spaces where decisions that affect our lives are being made. It is clear that there are now multiple dimensions of citizenship as the boundaries between the local, national and global blur; and as diversity displaces homogeneity. In the Australian context, Marian Sawer (2003) points to the emergence of a multiplicity of citizenship discourses, some attempting to resurrect a social-liberal understanding of citizenship, others focusing on the development of more inclusive notions of citizenship that accommodate social, cultural and gender difference. This civic pluralism makes schools even more central

to the task of developing capabilities for citizenship, but it radically shifts the nature of that task.

Individual identities

The conditions of our lives in the private sphere are also undergoing significant change and reshaping identities. In an age of certainty the dominant model in the domestic economy was the nuclear family, with men in paid employment and women at home in unpaid work. Home technologies such as the radio and TV were mass produced for mass consumption, and a limited range of stations and print media meant that there was a shared audience for a common culture. These technologies contributed to shaping a sameness of individual identities. There was a dominant version of what was considered to be 'normal', which established a reference point against which those who did not meet it (eg homosexuals, unassimilated migrants, or the 'handicapped') were judged as different if not deviant. As the Charter of the Australian Council of Deans of Education points out:

> *Education played an important role in creating this old kind of identity. The curriculum led students inexorably in the direction of a common culture. Boys did woodwork while girls did domestic science. And the whole enterprise was geared to the normal child, from the normal family* (ACDE, 2001: 42-43).

Contemporary times have reversed almost every aspect of this common culture. Over the past thirty years in Australia, changes as disparate as the increasing numbers of women entering the paid workforce, a 300% increase in divorce rates, a blurring of the separation of the private and public spheres (eg., doing paid work from home), the increasing diversity of Australian society and so on, have led to a growth in alternative lifestyles, changes in masculine and feminine identities, and altered understandings about what constitutes a family.

And the explosion in digital technologies has shifted us away from an era of mass communication to one where individual and group needs are satisfied through narrowcasting, a plethora of cable TV channels, and the millions of sites on the internet. We are invited to select and design our identities, a possibility exaggerated by the pervasiveness of marketing in consumer capitalism. Here manufactured identities are purchased through the selection of products sold as life styles branded by multinational corporations (Hamilton, 2003). As a consequence we inhabit many more narrowly defined communities, in each of which we are a different person. Our identities are now multi-layered rather than one dimensional. At the same time the new technologies are changing the nature of interpersonal relationships. According to Tanner (2003), technologies like mobile phones are expanding our range of contacts, but eroding the depth of our relationships.

For schools, all of this has significant implications for the task of assisting the development of personhood. For a start, students are turning up to schools with far more diverse backgrounds than ever before, belonging to a myriad communities, and with constant exposure to the stream of information and images, colour and sound, that form the backdrop to their daily experience. What does this challenge say about the dominant grammars of schooling and its curriculum?

The new curriculum challenges

Clearly the extent of societal change and the accompanying move from certainty to uncertainty of social practices and institutions has significant implications for the purposes, organisation, structures and processes of schooling. Not the least of these is the official curriculum – both in its content and its form. There is an urgent need to consider the most appropriate responses to meet these new challenges. The curriculum of the 20th century with its orientation to knowledge as something to be acquired in order to understand and control the world, promoted a view of teaching as transmission and learning as acquisition. These approaches are not tenable in a world where knowledge is no longer fixed, where boundaries are blurring, and where people need to be flexible, creative, innovative and transformative. Obviously the curriculum must reflect the capacities needed to meet the challenges thrown up by new forms of work, citizenship, and communication. Kress in arguing for 'design' as being a central category of the school curriculum, maintains that what is needed is:

…….a fundamental realignment of the curriculum: a realignment from a curriculum focused on knowledge as a stable, even if complex, 'entity', to a curriculum focused on uses of knowledge-as-information in relation to specific domains of application (Kress, 2000: 141).

This report focuses on the implications of these challenges for the concept of national curriculum collaboration. Do they reinforce the need for greater national consistency, or is such a concept simply a throwback to modernist times long past? What does it mean to think nationally about curriculum work in contemporary times? In short is there a contemporary rationale for national curriculum collaboration? An answer to this question must take into account the new contexts in which educational decision making occurs, including such factors as:

- *Complexity and ambiguity:* There is a need to recognise that the certainties of an industrial age are no longer present. Sharp binaries, certain solutions, linear, controlled and rationalist approaches to educational decision making are impediments to innovative thinking and to educational policy making. Instead there must be a recognition of how these have been replaced by the blurring of traditional boundaries, and of the provisionality and tentativeness of knowledge.

- *The mix of old and new:* It is important to recognise that despite the breadth and rapidity of the sorts of changes described above, it is not a matter of simply replacing the old with the new. Many educational institutions and practices may have been designed in and for another time, and yet they cannot be changed by fiat. There are constraints such as physical infrastructure and resources, and the fact that many educators have long held commitments to particular beliefs and ways of doing things. The challenge is to work with complex combinations of the old and the new to reshape education.

- *Multiple dimensions:* The fact that people are now members of multiple communities at the local, State, national, regional and global levels, and that there is a continuous and complex interplay between these arenas, has a profound significance for the question of what it means to educate for life in

the 21st century. For a start, the once simple correspondence between State-based curriculum and the development of the State and nation, is shattered. Curriculum should reflect a much more dynamic and interactive relationship between these arenas.

- *Diversity of population:* One of the dominant characteristics of the Australian population now is the diversity of its population. At the mid-point of the 20th century, the British component made up over 90% of the population, the majority of whom were born in Australia (Dixson, 1999), and Australia regarded itself as a white outpost in the Pacific, still with strong ties to Great Britain. Fifty years later, Australia is a 'multicultural country, increasingly linked geo-politically to the Asia-Pacific region, but also located irrevocably within a global space of flows and networks' (Ang, 2001: 4, quoted in Green, 2003: 29). What does this say about the concept of a national curriculum?

- *Managing proximity not distance:* The dominant grammars of State-based official curricula were established at a time when distance (both within Australia and with other parts of the world) shaped Australian identities and its modes of communication. Indeed, the development of a communications infrastructure including roads, railways, telegraphy and shipping, as well as communications media such as newspapers and radio, were integral to nation building. They also were central to curriculum work, effecting not only what was taught and how, but also the organisation of education systems including the official curriculum (Green, 2003). What does it mean in curriculum terms when Australians today are, to use Osborne's observation (reported in Green 2003: 20) managing proximity rather than conquering distance?

These factors, and others, surely suggest that unidimensional curriculum approaches are moribund. The old binary of State versus national official curriculum relates to a world of certainty. It serves no useful purpose in a context where traditional boundaries are blurring and where there is no obvious centre of gravity. As Seddon argues, supra-national and sub-national social forces will create curriculum 'by diversity and dissent rather than by an over-arching and encompassing nation-building project' (Seddon, 2001: 308). Kress puts it this way:

> *The demands of the nation state and of its economy had provided an overarching frame of coherence through its authority and its needs. This frame is becoming less available as a stable point of reference and is being replaced by far less stable, less predictable contingencies and requirements. The relative stabilities of the class societies of industrialised states, with their economies founded on industrial mass production, are being replaced, or at the very least overlaid, by the highly fluid arrangements of lifestyle groupings. The demands generated in this new arrangement are diverse and the new curricula consequently have no immediately available, secure basis for broadly integrative principles of coherence* (Kress, 2000: 138).

However, lacking a 'secure basis for broadly integrative principles of coherence' is not an argument for doing nothing, or adopting a laissez-faire approach. On the contrary, the new environment suggests that it is even more important to plan education and thus curriculum. There **are** jurisdictional boundaries: they exist both in

law and in practice. They do matter. But it does raise questions about the adequacy of traditional approaches, including how the idea of national curriculum collaboration is understood and rationalised. The question of what this means for curriculum in the 21st century in Australia, and therefore for the question of national curriculum collaboration, is one that is central to the future of this country. It can't be wished away by recourse to old certainties or repeating a mantra of well worn clichés about railway gauges. What then is a rationale for national curriculum collaboration in the 21st century?

Nation-(re)building in a globalising world: beyond the railway gauge metaphor

In the 20th century, a clear and unequivocal role of schooling was that of making citizens and workers for the project of nation building. Of course there were disagreements about the best ways by which that goal might be achieved, but the Australian nation state itself provided both an authority and a coherence to the task, and the official curriculum of the various States was a public representation of it. Thus, when the matter of national curriculum collaboration entered the educational landscape in the last third of the century, the arguments were largely technical ones, relating to student mobility and the efficient use of resources. It was the question of States' rights that largely determined how far collaboration would go, not the rationale for national collaboration. The nation building role of schooling was assumed and the official curriculum of each State/Territory was one of its building blocks. The complexity and ambiguity of the social, political, cultural and economic shifts that are shaping our world suggest that these approaches are no longer adequate. As Bill Green asks:

> *If curriculum is indeed 'the collective story we tell our children about our past, our present and our future' (Grumet, 1981: 115), what messages and meanings are we now charged with transmitting, with communicating, with offering up to their reading and their learning, their hybrid forms of cultural production? Their re-telling? What challenges are we faced with now, as curriculum workers, with what seems like no binding agreements in place, anywhere, as to the existence of a common, canonic, core culture, and the capacity lost, as Seddon (2001: 15) writes to 'understand curriculum as a common entitlement and as endorsed knowledge which is publicly validated and authorised as it is passed from generation to generation'? (Green, 2003: 29).*

As has been outlined in this Chapter, Australian society, like the societies of other nation states, is undergoing a radical transformation as established ways of organizing and working and living are under challenge. In such an environment people have to adjust to new ways of understanding the world, doing things and living together. This is as much a collective as an individual challenge, not least because many of the established ways of making civil society work are also changing. It demands moving well beyond the nation building phase of the 20th century and into a process of nation re-building, involving a reconsideration of many established practices and institutions. But how do people develop the knowledge and skills to meet these challenges? This is a curriculum question par excellence.

Green (2003: 28) reminds us that curriculum does not just happen, it is a transformative practice, producing knowledge and making meaning. At a time of significant change in the nation-state, the curriculum presents itself as the major means by which the citizenry, collectively and individually, can develop the capabilities to play a part in the democratic project of nation-(re)building. As Edwards and Kelly (1998) argue the curriculum should:

> *...cater appropriately to the growth and development of every capacity...., promote the acquisition of those understandings which will facilitate intelligent participation in democratic processes..., offer genuine social and political empowerment, and ...in general enrich and enhance the life potential of every individual* (Edwards and Kelly, 1998: 16).

Young people will develop and use the capabilities of which Kelly speaks in a variety of contexts as they live out their multiple identities as citizens of the Australian nation-state and as global citizens; as workers in regional, national and global economies; as contributors to local and national cultural life; as family and community members and so on. But although the arenas in which these capabilities are exercised may vary, the capabilities themselves will surely be common. Put another way, although the capabilities will be brought to bear differently in different geographical, cultural and social contexts, they will be the same capabilities.

If this analysis is correct, then identifying these capabilities is an ongoing task for any democracy. Given that the national arena is the common denominator for Australian citizenship – all Australian citizens can participate in the election of a national government, for example – then it surely makes sense to consider an ongoing national conversation about the most important question facing any society: what are the capabilities we want our young people to develop? Since this question presumes ongoing democratic dialogue in the community about the sort of society we want – including the ways in which we can hold together those things we have in common whilst respecting diversity - it is preeminently a *national* question, being one that goes right to the heart of Australian democracy.

If it is accepted that educational institutions are key sites for the development of these capabilities in a democracy, then the argument for a national approach to curriculum starts to take shape. From this perspective, one aspect of an official curriculum might be the formal representation of the capabilities derived from a national conversation at any point in time, albeit ongoing, unfinished and tentative. However, although the capabilities would need to be richly described, they could form only part of the curriculum. The other part would comprise the means by which the development of the capabilities might be realized, including knowledge-content. Given the many contextual factors that impinge on the choice of strategies to develop the capabilities, it is clear that this part of the curriculum should be a local matter that should be the province of the various State/Territory jurisdictions. Local interpretation might of course involve drawing upon regional and global resources as well as local ones.

 In other words, the official curriculum is not a single entity – it involves an interaction between different components in different arenas. This is very different from thinking about national curriculum collaboration as it was conceptualized in the late 20th century - either as a single overarching and universalist document that takes

the place of official State/Territory curricula, or as the maintenance of separate State/Territory curricula with an identification of what is common. Rather it reconceptualises the official national curriculum to be both a commodity and a process. It is a mechanism for nation-(re)building, emerging through open discussion at the national level, whilst allowing for curriculum practices that reflect the complex, fluid and interactive relationships between local, State, national and global contexts.

There are a number of implications of seeing a national curriculum approach in this way. First, the rationale understands curriculum to be not only an education matter, but also a democratic matter. At a time when the Australian nation-state is grappling with the sorts of challenges described in the first part of this Chapter, one of the key issues is how to engage broad community discussion. The curriculum stands as one arena where people can discuss issues which go to the heart of community life, such as: what are the valued knowledges in societies and communities characterised by diversity?; what are the capabilities that people need to live enriched lives?; how can our education institutions represent and expand democratic life? This is a different way of conceptualising the role of the official curriculum. It breaks the nexus between formal, institutionalised schooling and curriculum, suggesting instead that in a knowledge society, curriculum should be thought about in a range of community sites. One way of thinking about the official curriculum in this democratic sense is as the regularly updated minutes of an ongoing public conversation about what it means to be an Australian in the 21st century.

Second, looking at the official curriculum in this way disrupts some old binaries. One of these is the juxtaposition of State versus national curriculum that bedeviled the sorts of attempts at national curriculum collaboration described in Chapter 1. In this model, rather than the State and national arenas vying for curriculum control they are mutually interactive, drawing from each other as well as linking with wider regional and global contexts. From this perspective many of the standard justifications for and objections to national curriculum collaboration appear quaint and irrelevant. As has been demonstrated in this Chapter, the new contexts of globalization and technological change demand radically different ways of thinking about the content and processes of curriculum.

Third, conceptualising the curriculum in this way challenges the railway gauge as a metaphor for national curriculum collaboration, redolent as it is of a 19th century colonial issue and a one track approach. A single national curriculum may have been an appropriate metaphor for curriculum as a nation-building technology in 20th century industrial society, but it is surely inappropriate for a knowledge economy of the 21st century. If a communication metaphor is needed for the curriculum of the 21st century, then the nodes, networks and interactivity of information and communication technologies might be better suited to the fluidity and diversity of contemporary times. This metaphor is suggestive of a national approach to curriculum that functions as the common element connecting the multiple contexts and environments in which education functions and for which young people are being prepared.

But of course all of this is speculative. And although it provides a rationale for and a different way of looking at national curriculum collaboration, the idea needs to be grounded. That task will be attempted in Chapter 4. First however there is need to consider in more detail some more of the principles adumbrated in Chapter 1 –

specifically a philosophical point of reference to guide curriculum work, and a theorized and articulated view of curriculum that is consistent with it. These tasks are addressed in Chapter 3.

Chapter 3

Rethinking the Dominant Grammars of Curriculum

Making democracy a reference point for the official curriculum

In Chapter 2, the rationale for national curriculum collaboration that was developed implied the need to reconsider established ways of understanding national curriculum work. In particular, an argument was made for understanding the official curriculum as supporting a process of interaction between the local, State/Territory, national and global arenas. At the heart of the rationale were two fundamental ideas: (1) that a central purpose of curriculum should be the development of capabilities for living in a democratic society, and that this should happen at a national level; and (2) that the interpretation and development of these capabilities is a local matter that should be the province of the various State/Territory jurisdictions. These two ideas have implications for the ways in which the concept of an official curriculum is conceptualised and for the nature of that curriculum, and the purpose of this Chapter is to undertake the necessary theoretical and conceptual work. But first it is important to establish the philosophical reference points that will inform that task.

The curriculum, no matter how it is conceptualised, is shaped by and reflects the content and organisation of society, including the distribution and relationships of power. That is, what is chosen to be in the official curriculum and the ways in which it is enacted serves particular social ends - whether it is through establishing what is 'valued knowledge' and what is not, and/or who should have access to that knowledge and in what proportion. As Seddon (2001: 10) argues:

> *...curriculum has implications for the distribution of authority and influence in society. Curriculum contributes both to the establishment of individual and organisational centres of power, and to constraints on the exercise of that power. In a nutshell, curriculum determines both students' learning and teachers' work in ways which institutionalise hegemonic conceptions of what it means to be an educated person (Wexler, 1992; Levinson et al, 1996). Such conceptions have long term significance for individuals and for society because of the way they confirm and buttress – or question and erode – prevailing patterns of economic and social privilege (Teese, 2000).*

If this is the case, then it is clear that curriculum is both constructed by and helps to construct the form, nature and extent of Australian democracy. This tangled relationship between curriculum and democracy means that curriculum cannot be understood in isolation from the political, economic, social and cultural conditions in which it is produced and practised. As Carr (1998: 324) points out:

> *...curriculum in any contemporary democratic society always reflects the definition of democracy which that society has accepted as legitimate and true.*

Similarly, attempts to challenge the validity and legitimacy of a society's dominant definition of democracy always find expression in attempts to challenge the form and content of the curriculum in society's schools.

In this sense then the official curriculum reveals the ways in which the society interprets democracy at any historical moment. Just as importantly, debates about curriculum reveal how extant versions of democracy are being questioned, revised or challenged.

This Chapter explores the connection between curriculum and democracy. Specifically, it will be argued that the dominant curriculum tradition has been constructed upon a thin version of democracy and that this has impoverished Australian democratic life. However, rather than dismissing it as an irretrievable technology of regulation and control, it will be asserted that the official curriculum could be an important site for the development of deeper forms of democracy. The conclusion will sketch out what might be the characteristics of such a curriculum. The chapter begins, though, with an argument for a particular view of democracy, the purpose of which is to shape some principles and criteria that will guide the subsequent analysis.

Education and democracy

Conceptions of democracy are not fixed, they have been contested in philosophical and empirical scholarship and through intense political struggle: as a consequence, they have changed and developed over time. However, it is possible to discern two established versions of democracy which will serve as the points of reference for the analysis. It is important to recognise that it is not being suggested that these versions exist in some pristine state: it is much messier that that. But each version of democracy constructs a particular view of education which serves to shape policy and practice in certain ways.

The first version, a contemporary 'realist' conception of democracy, assumes that democracy flourishes best in an individualistic society with a competitive market economy, minimal state intervention, a politically passive citizenry and an active elite political leadership (Carr & Hartnett, 1996). Young (2002) describes this version as an *aggregative* model because it interprets democracy as a process of aggregating the individual preferences of citizens in choosing public officials and policies. It continues to be the dominant model of democracy in Australian society, although there have been many groups and individuals who have fought to establish less elitist versions. The perspective of this report is that the aggregative model is a thin and impoverished version of democracy that fails to offer any normative principles by which to evaluate the quality of preferences beyond private individual decisions. As Young (2002: 20) argues, the model 'lacks any distinct idea of a *public* formed from the interaction of democratic citizens and their motivation to reach some decision'.

The second version, a classical conception of democracy, constructs democracy as a moral ideal, a form of social life constituted by the core values of 'positive' freedom and political equality. From a classical perspective, democracy can only flourish in a society where there is an informed and active citizenry who participate in political debate and public decision making on equal terms, and with a minimum of

bureaucratic control. Young (2002) describes this as a *deliberative* model of democracy because it understands the democratic process to be primarily a discussion of problems, conflicts and claims of need or interest where, through open and public dialogue, proposals and arguments are tested and challenged. That is, decisions are made not by aggregating individual preferences, but by a collective determination of what are considered to be the best reasons.

Young maintains that this model of democracy involves a number of normative ideals for the relationships and dispositions of the deliberators, such as inclusion, equality, reasonableness and publicity. She suggests that a useful way to conceive of democracy is as a '*process in which a large collective discusses problems such as those that they face together, and try to arrive peaceably at solutions in whose implementation everyone will cooperate*' (Young, 2002: 28). In a deliberative democracy education has collective, shared and public purposes, and is built on the recognition that the political values of freedom and equality are interdependent rather than antithetical (Carr & Hartnett, 1996: 16). By fostering the deliberative capabilities of citizens, schools are one of the major sites for the development and sustenance of democratic publics. It is this version of democracy which broadly informs this report.

In particular it is argued that a deliberative model of democracy which includes in decision making those who are significantly affected by the problems and solutions under discussion on an equal, respectful, and non-dominating basis, is more likely to result in decisions that are socially just. Young (2002: 33) defines social justice as '*the institutional conditions for promoting self-development and self-determination*', and maintains that deliberative democratic processes are most likely to contribute to countering injustice and to promoting justice by fostering these two ideals. That being the case, a central question facing any society is how to create and sustain the necessary democratic conditions within the spheres of the state and civil society. What is the role of education in establishing these conditions?

The sites of the state and civil society provide opportunities for democratic exchanges between citizens, and between citizens and public officials. Indeed it is the strength of these connections that determines the strength of a democracy. The public sphere functions as the connector, where people can hold decision makers to account and influence policy. The health of the public sphere relies on (a) the availability of public sites for people to meet (the media, parks, cyberspace, community halls etc), exchange views and decide on action; (b) the capacity of citizens to form and communicate independent opinions in clear, civil and respectful ways; and (c) the quality of communication which is inclusive and encourages multiple and contending discourses. This calls for a citizenry with communicative competence (Habermas, 1984/1988), and it is the educational institutions of a democratic society which bear the burden of developing the range of capabilities needed for the public sphere to function effectively. Ranson puts it powerfully when he says:

> *The challenge for our time is to renew the purposes and institutions of democracy, which allows citizens to participate in the creation of a society that enables each to develop as a person but also to contribute to the good of the community as a whole. Civic responsibility and individual development are perceived as mutually reinforcing, creating the conditions in which 'anyone might do best and live a flourishing life' (Aristotle). Change*

depends on new institutional reforms that can tie educational purpose to the renewal of the public domain. The task is to re-create, or to create more effectively than ever before, a public and an educated public that has the capacity to participate actively in the shaping of a learning society and polity (Ranson, 1994: 103).

This is not a technical task. It gives schools a deeply moral purpose that must shape not only the curriculum but the ways in which education systems are understood, organised and practised if they are to promote deliberative democracy. Kelly (1995) suggests that a democratic aspiration for schooling demands that educational planning be based on a number of democratic principles, including:

- *That education is a human right:* The provision of education in a democratic society is both a moral and a practical imperative. It makes little sense to have a democracy which does not fully educate all of its citizens for an active role and full participation in democratic life and society. This is a task that can't be left to chance or distributed unevenly.

- *That all young people have an equal entitlement to appropriate educational provision:* This principle demands a curriculum that is appropriate to all students, not one that is shaped to meet the needs of students from particular social, ethnic or cultural groups and is incompatible with the backgrounds and experiences of many others. This not only suggests a curriculum that is common to all, but also one which is suitable for all – a tension that demands a reconceptualisation of curriculum towards an approach that exemplifies 'unity in difference, rather than disunity through sameness' (Kelly, 1995: 110).

- *That all young people are entitled to an education that develops their democratic capabilities to the fullest extent possible:* A democratic society requires active public spheres where all people have the knowledge, skills and capacities to participate respectfully in reasoned public dialogue. Only in this way can democracy be extended beyond its current limited form. Thus, all young people are entitled to an education that develops their capacities to contribute meaningfully and distinctively to democratic life, adapt to the ongoing change, complexity and uncertainty of contemporary life; and explore how problems are defined and addressed.

If these principles are central to education in a democratic society, then they need to be embodied in and enacted through the provision and organisation of schooling, a central feature of which is the curriculum. So, to what extent has the curriculum in Australia reflected these principles and the deliberative view of democracy they serve?

An Australian curriculum story

William Reid observes that curriculum is not comparable across nations, despite the efforts of some theorists to construct it as a universal scientific enterprise:

National curriculums are cultural artefacts, in the same way that national songs, stories and festivals are cultural artefacts. As Frederick Rudolph wisely remarked, curriculum 'has been one of those places where we have told ourselves who we are' (Rudolph, 1977, quoted in Reid, 2000).

The history of Australian curriculum – its structures and its content – certainly reveals a lot about Australia's past. For example, the neglect of Indigenous cultures and language in the curricula of the Australian States until the 1970s mirrored the tragic history of appropriation of land and destruction of indigenous cultures that occurred from the time of European invasion. Likewise, the fact that at least until World War 2 Britain was seen as the 'mother country' was reflected in the focus of the curriculum which, until the 1960s, stressed Empire and looked to Europe rather than to Asia for cultural traditions, inspiration and sustenance. These examples show how particular understandings of democracy are (re)produced by the curriculum. In this section the focus is on the ways in which the curriculum has been conceptualised, structured and practised. The purpose of the analysis is to understand what this reveals about both the curriculum and Australian democracy.

Until the 1870s in the various Australian colonies, education was provided by religious societies and private institutions with only minimal regulation by the state. Those children who attended school (and many working class children did not) did so only long enough to obtain basic literacy and numeracy. It was the children of the wealthy who completed a (classical) secondary education at elite private colleges, with many proceeding on to University. The move to state-provided education occurred in most Australian colonies during the 1870s, but contained within it a weak democratic impulse. Public schools were established to cater for working class children whose families could not afford private education; and there was to be a strict separation between church and state, with public monies being used to establish and run public (state) schools only. In the first instance, however, compulsory public education was confined to basic or elementary schooling, the main aim of which was to 'gentle the masses' for purposes of social control (Miller, 1986). Secondary education, for which one paid fees at private colleges, was primarily for the children of the upper and middle classes who were seen as the future leaders.

The constrained and elitist view of democracy upon which the various State public education systems in Australia were erected in the 19th century, echoed through the 20th century, compromising the various attempts to democratise education. Thus, the history of the first 70 years of Federation can be read partially as an ongoing struggle between egalitarian and democratic educational agendas (based on views of classical democracy) and elitist agendas (based on views of aggregative democracy) seeking to maintain and extend a stratified and hierarchical educational system. For example, while access to education was broadened through increasing the age of compulsion and expanding secondary education and making it free for all children, so were curriculum mechanisms developed to maintain educational differentiation. The justification for this differentiation was based on a liberal meritocratic ideology which assumed that advancement up the educational ladder would occur, not through birth, but on the basis of ability, interest, and effort.

The clearest delineations were between 'hands and heads' education, with academic high schools, and technical high schools offering craft for boys and domestic science

for girls. The structures of the curriculum, age-grade-subject divisions, and apparent merit based assessment processes were all designed to sort and select students. In this way the curriculum worked to sustain class and gender divisions. It was still the case that the vast majority of University students came from the private schools which offered an academic curriculum, while students from working class backgrounds either left school as soon as they reached the compulsory age of 14 years, or were overwhelmingly represented in technical schools. The few working class students who made it to University were cited as examples of the efficacy of the ideology of meritocracy.

Notwithstanding, the rapid expansion of secondary education in the post World War 2 years nurtured the democratic struggle and gains were made. By the early 1970s research into the persistent correlation between levels of school success and particular groups of students by gender, class and race had generated a number of policy initiatives designed to address the inequalities. For example, the academic-technical binary was dissolved in all States in favour of comprehensive high schools, the number of external examinations were reduced, curriculum content and processes began to focus on the knowledge and experiences of those who had been marginalised or excluded by the curriculum, the compulsory age of schooling was raised to 15 years, and school systems started to experiment with more democratic organisational structures and processes. However, while these initiatives made some inroads into the dominant curriculum, they failed to dislodge the dominance of the competitive academic curriculum and the mechanisms used to sort and select students.

The continued strength of the competitive academic curriculum meant that alternatives were delegitimated, pushed to the margins and seen as lacking real academic 'rigour'. In being so represented they began to be counter productive to the interests of marginalised students, condemning them to alternative programs and pathways that were seen as being 'second rate' and entrenching a curriculum hierarchy. The curriculum history of the past twenty years has been a history of attempts to address these issues. For example, there was talk of an entitlement curriculum, available to all and building in the perspectives of marginalised groups, and the need to change some of the established structures, such as the University dominated public examination boards that served to reproduce hierarchies of knowledge and programs.

However, despite this recognition and the range of policies and strategies that have been developed and implemented to address it, very little progress has been made. This point has been made tellingly in the contemporary context by Teese and Polesel (2003) in their book *Undemocratic Schooling*. Using Melbourne as a case study, they starkly demonstrate that there is geography of senior secondary school success - as illustrated by such markers as participation in high status academic subjects, TER scores, and school completion rates – that is overwhelmingly based on socio-economic status. Teese and Polesel (2003: 12) observe that while secondary education may have become a mass system, 'it is far from being a democratic one', pointing to a hierarchical curriculum and a stratified schooling system as the underlying causes. The story from the other States is similar.

This necessarily brief sketch of the Australian curriculum story suggests that the dominant forms of schooling and the curriculum have not met the three criteria

required of education in a deliberative democracy (as outlined above), and so have re/produced an aggregative view of democracy. Thus, the curriculum has tended to be stratified - sometimes overtly, sometimes covertly – developing capabilities unevenly and related to particular roles in life. And the way in which this has occurred has sustained and advanced the interests of individuals who overwhelmingly come from particular social groups. So why, despite progress in a range of areas in the compulsory years of schooling - the introduction of comprehensive schooling and a greater recognition of the need to incorporate the knowledges of particular groups are examples here - does the schooling system still favour some groups over others?

Partly it is because the changes have not gone far enough. There is still need to work on organisational questions and to continue to challenge some of the dominant grammars of schooling. But organisational change is a necessary but not a sufficient condition. The fact is that the curriculum is not just an entity that can be organised in different ways: it also has an internal structure and a logic which largely determine what it is possible to achieve. It will be argued that the deeply embedded grammars of the dominant curriculum are undemocratic and as a consequence they work against attempts to reform curriculum in organisational terms. Put in terms of the focus of this report, a national approach to curriculum collaboration involves more than a consideration of jurisdiction, or an attempt to identify what is common across the jurisdictions. If the intention is to construct a curriculum that serves a deliberative democracy, then attention must also be paid to the deep grammars of curriculum. It is to that task that the report now turns, informed by a rationale for national curriculum collaboration and with deliberative democracy as a reference point.

Rethinking the dominant grammars of the official curriculum

If the curriculum is genuinely to contribute to a deliberative democracy then ways must be found to ensure that the principles and characteristics of deliberative democracy are represented in the processes, policies, and practices of education systems. That is, social institutions like education systems and schools need to *live* deliberative democratic practices, rather than operate as staging posts for their development. As an important piece of educational architecture, the official curriculum must not only reflect these sentiments, but must embody them. To what extent is this evident in contemporary official curricula?

This section involves the identification and critique of a number of the key aspects of dominant approaches to the official curriculum and an argument for more democratic alternatives. The analysis is based on a critical review of the official curricula of the various States and Territories in Australia. Although there are a number of apparent differences between these curricula, such differences are superficial, masking the real similarities. For this reason, the analysis will be generic. Rather than undertake the usual exhaustive State by State descriptive comparison of the sort conducted by the recent curriculum mapping exercise (MCEETYA, 2003), the analysis below seeks to offer a conceptual map of the deep curriculum structures that support the various official curricula.

Although it is argued that such an approach provides a more sophisticated way to understand the nature of the curriculum, the juxtaposition of dominant and alternative grammars could be construed as a crude binary. This is not the intention. Rather these

are broad categories developed for the purposes of thinking about the nature of official curricula. They are representations of emphases which are far more blurred at the edges than appears to be the case when they are described as seemingly self-contained categories. But even where blurring has occurred, it is argued that the combined weight of the dominant grammars creates an inertia that is difficult to shift without wholesale change.

The dominant curriculum tradition and some alternatives

Purposes
The dominant curriculum tradition assumes that the purposes of education are extrinsic to education itself. Invariably this view focuses on the acquisition of knowledge. Sometimes this is related to a specific purpose such as the economy - what Moore & Young (2001) call technical-instrumentalism. At other times knowledge acquisition is seen as an activity in its own right and justified on the basis that there is some knowledge that all people should know about the culture of the society in which the curriculum is planned – what Moore & Young (2001) call neo-conservative traditionalism. The curriculum is the technology designed to organise and deliver that knowledge. The tell-tale sign of the presence of the dominant tradition is when consideration of the official curriculum starts with an analysis of what knowledge should be included or excluded. From this perspective the first curriculum question is: what knowledge do students need to acquire in order to achieve an extrinsic goal?

Now, an approach that values learning for its own sake or that suggests that education needs to relate to the national economy or to personal career prospects is adequate to a point. However it will be argued that not only is it far too limited in scope but that it opens the way for a number of undemocratic possibilities. For example, if the extrinsic purpose of education is primarily an economic one then it might be seen as desirable to stratify the curriculum along the lines of the economy, carving up knowledge on a 'heads and hands' basis, just as was done for three quarters of the 20th century. While this may make for economic efficiency it is hardly democratic, involving as it does the partial development of human potential. Or, where the argument is based on the need for certain cultural knowledge, it begs the question of whose knowledge is selected in a pluralist society, invariably favouring those with the power in that society.

An alternative democratic approach to curriculum planning starts with the understanding that education is the process of human development through experience, a view that can be traced back to Rousseau over two centuries ago and since reiterated and developed by many major educational theorists. In this view, education is an end in itself, involving the continuous experience of individuals and groups. This process of development promotes both the individual and the evolution of knowledge and thus the society. Although it can occur in unplanned ways, the purpose of schooling in industrial and post industrial societies is to systematically facilitate growth and development, and the curriculum is the medium through which that process is planned.

From this perspective, the starting point for curriculum planning is an identification of the *capabilities* needed to live enriched lives and to participate actively in democratic

life, and a description of the underlying principles inherent in the capabilities. These principles will guide subsequent practice. The focus in this approach is on the development of understanding rather than on the acquisition of pre-determined knowledge-content. Thus, the initial curriculum question is: what are the capabilities, how do we understand them, and what are the principles and processes that will be used to facilitate their development? Once these questions have been answered knowledge-content can be selected, but only by reference to the principles.

Since the approach is based on a view of education as an end in itself, it has a democratic logic, suggesting that all capabilities should be developed to their fullest potential in all people. In a truly democratic society, educational provision must go beyond an aspiration for economic success or social control. This is not just for the pragmatic reason that people are more likely to be productive citizens and workers if they have not been alienated by their educational experiences, or if their human potential has been fully developed. It is primarily because such an aspiration must surely be the sine qua non of any democratic society. As John Dewey argued, it is a part of the essence of democracy that it 'makes provision for participation in its good of all its members on equal terms' (Dewy, 1916, Chapter 7, summary, quoted in Edward & Kelly, 1998: 8). It makes little sense to construct an education system for a democratic society based on the idea that some capabilities can be developed in some students but not others, or in restricting the range of capabilities developed to those that, for example, only contribute to the economic health of a society. Surely a democratic society demands equality of opportunity and entitlement for all, regardless of wealth, social class, gender or ethnicity. However, as Edwards and Kelly observe, this is

> *...not merely an entitlement to tuition in a range of school subjects, and experience which may or may not prepare one for an active life in such a society; it is an entitlement to a process which will develop all of one's capacities to the fullest possible degree. It thus requires a form of education, and a concept of curriculum, whose emphasis is on individual development rather than on the acquisition of subject knowledge...'* (Edwards and Kelly, 1998: 10).

View of Knowledge
But the undemocratic nature of the dominant approach to curriculum purposes derives from more than simply the possibility that it might be used in undemocratic ways. It is embedded in the model itself, particularly the view of knowledge upon which it is based – a view that has its genesis in the dominant rationalist approach to human knowledge with roots in Western European philosophy. This view understands knowledge to exist independently of the knower and so assumes the dominance of the intellect over other human faculties. That is, true knowledge is achieved by the mind independent of information provided by the senses. Knowledge is timeless and objective, unrelated to the cultural or temporal settings in which it has been produced. This absolutist view of knowledge elevates the universal above the particular. In its curriculum form it is represented by subjects or learning areas that contain what is deemed to be the valued knowledge of a society, and yet it offers no means by which to judge how that content is selected.

It is undemocratic because by presenting knowledge as unproblematic and objective, a curriculum based on this epistemological belief denies the freedom to challenge established understandings through critical reflection. It also ignores the rapidity of social change and knowledge production, justifies the effect of education in terms of knowledge itself rather than in terms of the impact it has on its recipients, and fails to recognise the social relations of knowledge production and the contested nature of knowledge in pluralist societies. Thus although the model has pretensions to value-neutrality, it in fact maintains inequalities. Kelly puts it this way:

> *In a class-ridden society which is also multi-ethnic, it is not possible to break the cycle of poverty, unemployment, disaffection, alienation and social disorder by offering a middle-class, white Anglo-Saxon curriculum to all pupils. In fact to do so is to aggravate and reinforce that cycle* (Kelly, 1999: 51).

If the dominant version of the curriculum understands knowledge to be external to the knower, an alternative view understands that knowledge is acquired through the senses and through experiences. This empiricist view of knowledge has many versions, some of which maintain that since all knowledge is personal and subjective, every individual's knowledge is a result of her/his unique perceptions of the world. This postmodernist view, however, offers no help with curriculum policy. As Moore and Young maintain:

> *If all standards and criteria are reducible to perspectives and standpoints, no grounds can be offered for teaching any one thing rather than any other (or, ultimately, for teaching anything at all!). It is not surprising that such theories, whatever their appeal to intellectuals, have made no contribution to curriculum policy* (Moore and Young, 2001: 449).

Rather than adopt this radical relativist view, I prefer instead to take a stance more consistent with the pragmatist view of John Dewey who saw knowledge as hypothetical, and therefore subject to change, modification and evolution. For Dewey, knowledge is framed through hypotheses according to publicly agreed criteria. This means that knowledge is objective only in the sense that at any time certain knowledge enjoys current acceptance, but this knowledge has no permanent status – it is constantly evolving and changing. Since knowledge cannot be fixed and universal, there is a need for the sort of intellectual freedom that is provided by a truly democratic context in order for knowledge to continue evolving.

View of curriculum and its organisation
When the starting point for curriculum planning is knowledge-content, invariably the official curriculum is understood as a syllabus or product. When this is the limit of the understanding of curriculum, the challenge for curriculum planners becomes a technical one of organising knowledge-content into a form that teachers can implement in their classrooms. This happens in two ways. First, knowledge-content is organised into subjects and over the decades these have become symbolically enshrined as the basis for school curricula (Goodson, 1996: 152). This form of organisation (or variants of it such as Learning Areas) have built up a professional superstructure that shapes the nature of educational debate. Thus, curriculum discussion revolves around what subjects should be omitted, what new subjects

included and so on. The point is that that the debate itself has been framed by the subject structure itself. As Gooodson observes:

> *..by accepting the structural frame, the discussants have accepted an initiative which as symbolic action is likely to make stability and conservation more pervasive and enduring. This is the enduring appeal of subject centred models of curriculum to dominant groups: they allow endless debate about purposes and parameters* **but fragmented and internalized within boundaries that make any pervasive change all but impossible** (Goodson, 1996: 153, my emphasis).

The pervasive influence of subject-based organisation must be taken into account in any model of curriculum change.

The other dominant way in which knowledge-content is organised is through 'aims and objectives', an approach with a long history. In its contemporary manifestation, the aims and objectives movement has flirted with outcomes as a way of organising knowledge within subjects. The aims and objectives movement began with educators like Bobbit (1918) in the United States who were inspired by the progress of science and technology and wanted to bring a scientific approach to educational planning. They developed the idea of objectives which broke the content down in a series of small steps that teachers could work through, testing as they went to check progress. In the 1940s, Ralph Tyler (1949) developed this into a comprehensive 'aims and objectives' approach that set out the four aspects that educators need to consider when planning curriculum - purposes, content, organisation and evaluation. The prespecification of aims and objectives became the mainstay of official curricula from that time. Even when alternatives such as the outcomes approach of the 1980s and 1990s were advocated as moving beyond the tight specification of objectives, the strength of the Tyler model dragged them back within the established paradigm (eg, Spady & Marshall, 1991).

The aims and objectives curriculum planning model is just as undemocratic as the absolutist view of knowledge that spawned it. Its behaviourist tendencies are founded in a passive view of humanity where objectives are described and judged in terms of behavioural change with little account being taken of individual wishes and desires. This is problematic for all forms of learning that purport to be education rather than training or indoctrination, but it is especially problematic for those areas such as music and the fine arts that demand individual responses rather than responses predetermined by others.

What is a democratic alternative to this dominant view? Far from seeing the curriculum as a product or artifact in the form of a syllabus, a democratic view understands the curriculum as process and development – as a verb rather than a noun to use Bill Pinar's powerful metaphor. From this perspective the curriculum is framed both in terms of the capabilities needed to become autonomous, responsible and productive members of democratic societies, and the procedural principles that will inform the kinds of experiences that will help them to become so. For example, if active citizenship is understood as a capability, then there will be an accompanying set of principles describing the key elements and processes that comprise that capability. These principles will inform the experiences planned to develop active

citizenship at every stage of the educational journey. As Kelly observes (1999: 82) '... the adoption of a principle ensures that the end justifies only those means that are compatible with it'. This is very different from the dominant approach where the aim is understood as something that will be achieved at some future time, and the curriculum is broken up into a number of linear steps (usually content-based) with the idea being that an aggregation of these bits will finally result in the whole capability.

View of students and teachers
The notion that learning is a linear activity made up of mastery of pieces of content that, when finally aggregated lead to understanding, is also behaviourist in orientation and so undemocratic. In these ways, the dominant approach to curriculum constructs students as passive consumers of knowledge-content, rather than as active constructors of meaning. Once the curriculum is organised around fixed bodies of predetermined knowledge and broken into pieces to be transmitted to students in a linear way, then the freedom for students to involve themselves in an interactive learning process is severely restricted. Rather, they are the receivers of a transmission pedagogy where knowledge-content is packaged and handed on to them. This is antithetical to a democratic approach where learning is understood as a continuous process of open ended exploration, and where prior plans are made in response to specific local contexts and amended or modified on the basis of experience.

It is not only students who are passive in the dominant curriculum model. Teachers – that is those who are expected to deliver the curriculum – are also prevented from playing an active role in conceptualising the curriculum. Thus, curriculum development is typically conducted by curriculum 'experts', usually outside the classroom, who do the conceptual work. The role for teachers is limited to participation in the consultation processes where they are invited to comment on the 'practicality' of the already developed ideas. Once developed the official curriculum takes the form of a product, a thing to be implemented. Programs of professional development are organised and teachers are introduced to the new product, not with a view to exploring its theoretical assumptions but to ensuring its smooth implementation. In this approach, teachers become implementers of a syllabus, technicians whose role it is to deliver a commodity.

All of these aspects of the dominant curriculum undermine the possibility of education being based upon and developing democratic capabilities. To a greater or lesser extent they are all represented in the official curricula in the Australian States and Territories - with their Learning Areas, Bands and strands, sequences and outcomes – just as they are evident in the official curriculum of most educational jurisdictions around the world. A far more comprehensive model is required. What are the alternatives?

The dominant curriculum tradition imprisons students and teachers because it represents knowledge as inert, assuming that educational excellence resides in the passive acquisition of subject knowledge. It fragments knowledge and experience, and so makes it difficult, if not impossible, to develop the sorts of capabilities needed to live in the contemporary world. As Leggett and Robertson point out:

> *Not only does it set up, for the student, a knowledge structure containing discrete pieces of information but it also fails to develop the ability to make*

connections. The former encourages the belief in the right answer and an intolerance of difference. The latter fails to appreciate things as integrated wholes or to respect the totality of experience (Leggett and Robertson, 1996: 689-690).

A more democratic alternative has a more active view, understanding knowledge (tentative, provisional and interest laden) as the structures used to think about the problems of living in a complex and rapidly changing society. From this perspective, there is a greater hesitancy about asserting the value of particular bodies of knowledge. Rather, children acquire experiences they can use as a basis for framing hypotheses to explain and control the environment in which they live. They are active constructors of meaning, learning to interrogate knowledge, recognise different world views and cultures, and develop powers of discernment, judgment and discrimination. A curriculum based on this view seeks to encourage young people to play chess rather than draughts with our cultural resources, to use Stenhouse's colourful metaphor (Elliott, 1998: 9).

Conclusion: towards a capabilities-based official curriculum

What is the role of an official curriculum when alternatives to the dominant view of curriculum and knowledge are adopted? It is argued that the official curriculum does have a central role in any education system, indeed in any democracy, in representing a broad, although always tentative, agreement about what human capabilities are sought to be developed and what is considered to be the valued knowledge through which they are developed. It spells out the destination for the educational journey, seeking to ensure that all formal educational institutions are heading in the same broad and agreed directions. It is an insurance against some capabilities being abandoned or developed differentially because of the idiosyncrasies of particular teachers or schools. It can also play a practical role in suggesting what 'content' might be covered at particular stages of schooling, thus avoiding needless repetition.

So the official curriculum plays an important role within a broader understanding of curriculum. And it also has effects, not the least of which is that it establishes an educational discourse and marks out a particular educational philosophy. Of course, there is never a one-to-one correspondence between the official curriculum and what happens in classrooms, but it does invite teachers to construct the curriculum in particular ways. This can be constraining, as in the dominant tradition, or it can be liberating. As John Elliott argues:

> *The curriculum, as the language of education, not only refers to things in the world, its content, but also marks the stance the teacher is to adapt towards the use of the student's mind in relation to them. The stances to knowledge marked down in curricula either invite teachers to express and extend their powers of understanding in the ways they represent knowledge to children, or they imprison teachers as transmission devices which represent knowledge as inert information* (Elliott, 1998: 22).

In summary then, the focus of an official curriculum with this 'stance to knowledge' is on developing the understanding of the student, rather than on transmitting

predetermined content or achieving prescribed behavioural change – teaching THROUGH knowledge/content FOR capabilities, rather than the teaching OF subjects. This is not to say that the approach is unconcerned with outcomes. Rather, that these are defined in terms of human development and human functioning, not bodies of knowledge or behavioural performance. This of course has implications for the way in which the official curriculum is constructed and represented.

How then might knowledge be organised in the official curriculum? Of course there is no single right way and indeed given the long history of the dominant approach to curriculum there will be need to trial, research and discuss various possibilities. But the reference point against which various models will be assessed must be the extent to which they enable teaching *for c*apabilities using the procedural principles. Clearly, in the first instance, education systems would work with the way in which the curriculum is currently organised. In Australia, for example, for the majority of States this would mean working through the eight Learning Areas. The focus would be on ways to work differently, asking different questions about the same knowledge-content in relation to the capabilities, rather than seeing it as an end in itself. Another way of thinking about this approach is through Young's concept of connective specialisation, where instead of the insularity of traditional subject specialisms, there is an emphasis on connection - sharing a sense of the relationships that exist between their specialisms and the curriculum as a whole:

> *...whereas divisive specialists see the curriculum from the point of view of their subjects, connective specialists need to see their subjects from the point of view of the curriculum* (Young, 1998: 77).

Through practice, research and professional discussion the adequacy or otherwise of the Learning Areas as forms of knowledge-content organisation would become clear. Changes could be made within the established structures, or new ways to organise this part of the curriculum might be devised. Possibilities for the latter include:

(a) using disciplines as the organising structure, where disciplines are understood as 'the modes of thinking, the conceptual tools, the methods and validation criteria that knowledgeable people (or experts) put into play when addressing complex problems from the point of view of their domains' (Boix-Mansilla and Rogers 1994, quoted in Rogers, 1997: 686). A disciplinary approach is different from the dominant subject-based curriculum, the latter being defined by content and so lacking the characteristics of the disciplines and their various modes of inquiry.

(b) Using central questions and problems by which human beings have attempted to make sense of their experience as the organising structure. This problem-based approach makes the starting point for student experience a problem or set of puzzling questions rather than explicit disciplinary knowledge. The learning experience is constructed by the nature of the problem and the interdisciplinary ways in which it is explored, rather than recourse to the rules of specific disciplines. Rogers (1997) suggests that this part of the official curriculum could be organised around a framework of orienting habits - 'basic' ways of knowing that might be described as habits of questioning or transdisciplinary dispositions.

Consistent with the aspiration for an approach that fosters deliberative democracy, the understanding of curriculum development and curriculum change is also very different in the alternative approach. The dominant model understands the official curriculum as a commodity containing the content that needs to be transmitted to students. It is redeveloped every few years by 'experts', sometimes through consultation with teachers, and then implemented by teachers. The alternative approach constructs the official curriculum as a guiding resource, providing support for inquiry-based practice rather than prescribing doses of content. At any point in time, it represents an education system's current stance in relation to the organisation of knowledge, but it is dynamic, evolving and changing as a result of practice and research. Another way to look at it is from the perspective of the classroom. For Elliott, the alternative model posits the classroom as 'not so much an implementation site as a laboratory for pedagogical experimentation' (Elliott, 1998: 23). The official curriculum represents a wisdom distilled from this ongoing practice and research, and curriculum discussion and debate. As Yeatman (1998: 21) argues, it moves education systems from an *executive* model of curriculum making to a *partnership* model, in which all phases of curriculum - 'developing, formulating, implementing, delivering, monitoring and evaluating' in a climate of uncertainty – are subject to debate and ethical, deliberative decision making by all interested parties.

The focus of this Chapter has been on exploring an alternative to the dominant approach to the official curriculum – an alternative that is more likely to deepen democracy. However, so far the report has dealt with these issues in the abstract. It is now time to turn to the question of how this democratic alternative might be represented practically in a new approach to national curriculum collaboration.

Chapter 4

Towards an Australian Curriculum for a Knowledge Society

Introduction

It has been argued in this report that an approach to national curriculum collaboration must be based on a theoretically rigorous framework, while taking account of the practical issues that comprise Australian educational contexts. As a consequence a number of principles have been proposed in the previous Chapters, and these suggest the need to challenge dominant ways of thinking about curriculum and the processes of national curriculum collaboration. This Chapter aims to ground these principles by proposing a capabilities-based Australian curriculum.

The concept of capabilities

In Chapters 2 and 3 it was argued that if the purpose of education is to promote human development through experience, then the starting point for curriculum work should be the identification of the capabilities that people need, individually and collectively, to live productive and enriching lives in the 21st century. What is meant by the concept of capability?

The term capability has been chosen with reference to the work of Sen (1992, 1999, 2002) and Nussbaum (2000) who have tried to reframe understandings about social justice and equality in development studies and welfare economics. Both have developed what has been called the capabilities approach, arguing that instead of economic growth, the indicator of a nation's quality of life should be capabilities – what people are actually able to do and be. 'Capabilities to function' are the sine qua non of a just society because they ensure not only that people have rights, such as the right to political participation, but that they have the capabilities to exercise those rights. Thus 'capabilities to function' comprise at least two aspects: 'primary goods' which are the knowledge and skills to act, and 'agency' which is the freedom to make choices.

Although educational institutions cannot establish the conditions for 'agency', they are perhaps the most important societal institutions for the development of 'primary goods'. Thomson (1999) describes these primary goods as benefits of schooling, and argues that they have two dimensions:

> *... the first (dimension)... is to do with 'content', the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are to be distributed, what everybody needs to know in order to exercise the capabilities necessary for a decent life, and for material and emotional/physical well-being. There is also a 'process' dimension to benefits which considers the ways in which the distribution of the 'content' takes place within schooling* (Thomson, 1999: 27).

When analysed in this way, it is clear from the available evidence (e.g., Teese and Polesel, 2003) that the benefits of schooling have not been distributed evenly among the population. For example, students from backgrounds of poverty, from particular ethnic groups, from particular locations, and students with physical or intellectual disabilities do less well at school than those from, say, affluent backgrounds and dominant cultural groups. That is, there has been an unequal distribution of 'primary goods' with some students getting more than others. This is clearly undemocratic as well as personally and socially wasteful.

This report is premised on the belief that it is the role of schools to develop the capabilities of all students to the fullest extent possible. Thus an approach that divides curriculum on the basis of, for example, vocational or academic aptitude is inappropriate in a democracy. But just as inappropriate is one that treats all students as though they are the same. The tension between a common entitlement curriculum and a differentiated curriculum – both of which have been justified in equity terms - has troubled educators for decades now. This report has argued that one of the secrets to moving beyond the binary of unity and difference is to reconceptualise the dominant grammars of the curriculum with a view to achieving 'unity in difference rather than disunity through sameness' (Kelly, 1995: 110), and that the concept of a capabilities-based curriculum holds the key. The remainder of this report will focus on how such an approach might be conceptualised and structured. However, before turning to that task, it is necessary to offer some examples of capabilities so that the reader has a sense of the possibilities.

Table 1 suggests the sorts of capabilities that might be considered. These have been drawn from the analysis of contemporary contexts - the state and civil society, the economy, and individual identities - that was conducted in Chapter 2. That is, they represent what personal capacities might be required to live, work, sustain relationships and be a citizen in a nation-state in a globalising world. However, it is crucial to understand that the generation of capabilities like these must come through public and professional participation and dialogue; and that this should be ongoing, with the capabilities always being understood as tentative and provisional. As has already been argued, the expert-driven model of curriculum development is anathema to the concept of a democratic curriculum. Table 1 is therefore only offered as an example to aid the subsequent discussion.

Table 1: Examples of Capabilities

Capability	Key aspects of capability: Knowledge, skills and attitudes related to
Knowledge work	e.g., accessing information, conceptualising, analysing, applying, and producing – including, inquiry, problem posing and problem solving, understanding approaches to thinking, making decisions, justifying conclusions, reflective and critical thinking, understanding different perspectives, ethical reasoning, visualising consequences, scepticism, discernment.
Innovation and design	e.g., curiousity, flexibility, confidence, risk-taking, imagination, responding and adapting to change, enterprise, valuing originality, initiative, understanding context, self-managing, thinking laterally, recognising opportunity, self-motivation, thinking laterally, planning, using design and engineering technologies.
Productive social relationships	e.g., collaboration, teamwork, trust, building social capital, listening, conflict resolution, developing and maintaining friendships.
Active participation	e.g., participating in civil society and the public sphere (lobbying, communicating, questioning, acting democratically, critiquing), understanding rights and obligations, acting in multiple citizenship domains (local, national, global).
Intercultural understandings	e.g., understanding, respecting and valuing diversity, multilingualism.
Interdependence and sustainability	e.g., understanding the inter-connectedness of the natural and constructed world (i.e., environmental, social, political, cultural etc), creating sustainable futures, social and cultural pasts and futures, scientific literacy, understanding systems, building and sustaining environments.
Understanding self	e.g., Understanding the social, physical and emotional self, maintaining social, physical and emotional well being, personal past and futures, self-esteem, identities (e.g., cultural, community, family, gender), relationship between the personal and the interpersonal.
Ethics and values	e.g., empathy, integrity, compassion, equity, social justice, responsibility, resilience, connectedness, diversity, honesty, tolerance.
Communication and multiliteracies	e.g., literacies (ie understanding and using different forms of representation and communication, e.g., literacy and new literacies, visual literacy, technological literacy, information literacy), numeracy (e.g., numerical and spatial concepts), intercultural communication (multilingualism).

Note: These capabilities are intended as indicative examples only.

What is a capabilities-based curriculum and how might it work?

The remainder of this report will focus on grounding the concept of a capabilities-based curriculum, ensuring that its structure and processes conform to the principles and values that have been developed in the previous Chapters. This task will commence with a description of the structure of the dominant model of curriculum which is represented in **Diagram 2a** below.

*Diagram 2a: The dominant curriculum model*

Since the starting point for the dominant model is the acquisition of knowledge-content, a key curriculum question relates to how that knowledge is organised. Ivor Goodson (e.g., 1997) has powerfully demonstrated that forms of knowledge organisation are not natural, they are socially constructed. In the 20th century knowledge-content was typically packaged into subjects, and these have taken on a life of their own with their own hierarchies, status, traditions and professional gate-keepers. Many of these are linked to disciplines. In the last decade of the 20th century in Australia, the dominant form of curriculum organisation changed from subjects to Learning Areas. These are a hybrid mix of discipline-based knowledge and the grouping of 'similar subjects', and are slowly building a professional constituency of support.

When curriculum planning starts with knowledge-content, the form of the curriculum largely determines the purposes of the curriculum – that is, the teaching OF subjects/Learning Areas becomes an end in itself. This makes the organisation of knowledge the focus of curriculum debate in relation to the official curriculum. Thus, when the Learning Areas were formed in the early 1990s, the professional subject associations took up the cudgels, some lauding the new arrangements, others claiming that their subject interests had been neglected or watered down by them.

Another form of this focus on knowledge-content is the argument that the official curriculum is too crowded. A recent example of this is the argument made by the Director of the Curriculum Corporation (Wilson, 2002) for a minimalist subject-based curriculum, made up of a hierarchy of subjects with Maths, Science, English at the top with most curriculum time, and Technology and the Arts at the bottom with the least. However, although each of these approaches has a very different view about how knowledge-content should be organised they are similar in one very important respect: by accepting knowledge-content as the starting point, they fail to shake free from the fundamental grammars of the dominant curriculum.

Where the dominant curriculum tradition has incorporated something like the concept of capabilities it has always been defined in relation to knowledge-content, usually organised through subjects or Learning Areas. This has led to the capabilities being marginalised, despite the rhetoric of curriculum documents. The power of the dominant grammars causes them to be absorbed into the logic of the subjects/Learning Areas, with the attendant problems of content atomisation and linear approaches to learning. An alternative approach is to separate capabilities from Knowledge-content and to understand each as playing distinct but complementary roles. This approach is presented in Table 2b below.

Diagram 2b: A capabilities-based curriculum model
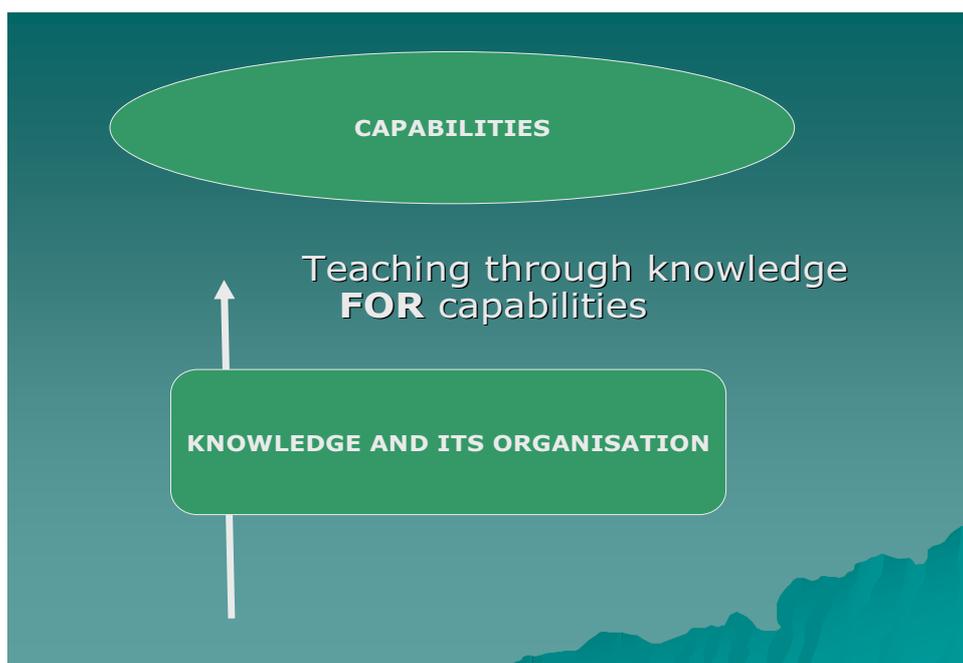
In this model there are two parts to the official curriculum. The idea is to teach through one part – knowledge - in order to develop the second part - capabilities. There are some key features of each part that need to be understood. In the capabilities part, each capability is richly described in terms of procedural principles which describe what it is and what the processes are for its development. The important requirement of these descriptions is that they do not atomise the capability by breaking it into many parts and expressing them as objectives or outcomes. Rather the procedural principles will seek to describe each capability holistically, representing it as a whole rather than as a sum of its parts. There may of course be variations in descriptions of each capability at different points in formal schooling, but these differences will be on the basis of an increasing complexity or sophistication of the whole capability, not an aspiration to develop parts that will be aggregated. The pedagogical challenge is to plan learning experiences with reference to the whole capability, even while one aspect of it might be the focus of a specific experience.

In this approach, the knowledge-content part of the curriculum is no longer the starting point for curriculum planning, as it is in the dominant model. Rather it is the vehicle through which capabilities are developed. This important difference makes the organisation of knowledge-content a pedagogical one, where the educator is selecting

knowledge-content with reference to its role in developing a capability, not as an end in itself. This does not mean that that the knowledge-content part of the official curriculum is unimportant. But it does mean that it plays a different role and that therefore considerations about the organisation of this part of the official curriculum are different from those of the dominant curriculum tradition. For example, while there may be debate about whether to present knowledge-content in say disciplinary or interdisciplinary form, the reference point for decision making relates to technical questions, such as how best to facilitate teacher selection of knowledge-content for capability development. A key function of the knowledge-content part of the official curriculum in this approach is the allocation of particular content to certain stages of schooling in order to avoid content repetition.

In these ways the nature of the debate about knowledge-content is fundamentally altered. In the dominant approach, issues such as disciplinary versus interdisciplinary knowledge are decided upon during the process of constructing the official curriculum. They are determined prior to the process of curriculum planning and teaching in schools. In a capability-based official curriculum, however, such decisions are taken by teachers on the basis of judgments about how best to develop a particular capability in her/his local contexts. Sometimes it might be deemed appropriate to teach within a discipline or subject, at other times the decision will be to teach across a number of disciplines.

The approach also changes traditional modes of assessment and reporting. Instead of assessment being related to how much knowledge-content a student has learned, the focus is on the extent to which the student can demonstrate a continued capability growth. This clearly has implications for the types and forms of assessment that are selected. Similarly, reporting on student progress – both to students and parents/guardians – will change. There are many possible reporting formats but capabilities are common to them all, with knowledge-content acquisition being used as evidence of the development of particular capabilities, not as the sole focus of the report.

How does a capabilities-based curriculum connect with recent curriculum developments in Australia – viz., competencies, essential learnings and new basics?

Recent developments in Australia may appear, at first blush, to be consistent with the capabilities approach outlined above. And yet, there are important differences – the main one being that attempts to articulate 'generic' capabilities beyond knowledge-content have not been theorised in terms of what they are and what role they play. As a consequence they have been drawn back into the dominant grammars of the curriculum, despite appearing to break its shackles. I will use three recent examples – the Mayer competencies, the new basics, and essential learnings – to illustrate this point.

The Mayer competencies grew out of the work of the Mayer committee's investigation into generic employability skills in the early 1990s. After extensive consultation with industry, educators, unions and the community, the committee recommended the development of a number of key competencies in schools and VET

courses. At the level of schools, some educational jurisdictions took up the challenge to incorporate the Mayer competencies into their official curriculum. But these efforts differed from the capabilities approach described above in at least two key ways. First, the Mayer competencies were motivated by an economic imperative with the focus being on competencies deemed essential for work in contemporary times (Mayer, 1992). The comparatively limited nature of the competencies is demonstrated by the fact that the majority of them fit within the first capability – knowledge work - described in Table 1.

More importantly, however, the Mayer competencies were not theorised in curriculum terms. That is their role as curriculum artefacts was not subjected to the same scrutiny as their content. As a consequence, when it came to representing them in the curriculum, they were understood as 'across curriculum' concepts. That is, they were to fit within the dominant grammars of the curriculum, with the focus of the official curriculum remaining the eight Learning Areas as the dominant mode of knowledge-content organisation. Not surprisingly the competencies were marginalised by this process (see Lokan, 1997).

The New Basics Project in Queensland (Education Queensland, 2004) is an exciting and brave attempt to challenge the dominant grammars of the official curriculum. It proposes an approach organised around the three message systems – curriculum, assessment and pedagogy. That is, unlike most official curricula in other States, the New Basics goes beyond a description of knowledge-content, to outline an assessment approach (rich tasks) and an approach to pedagogy (productive pedagogies). The curriculum component is based on a critique of the organisation of knowledge-content as represented by the traditional subject/Learning Areas. It is argued that in these 'new times' knowledge-content should be reorganised on an inter-disciplinary basis, and it achieves this aspiration through the creation of four interdisciplinary 'learning areas'. However, although on the surface this approach appears to constitute a significant departure from curriculum tradition, in fact it remains squarely within this tradition. This is because its starting point is still knowledge-content, albeit now organised in ways that are transdisciplinary rather than disciplinary. In a capabilities-based approach, however, decisions about knowledge-content are taken by teachers on the basis of an aspiration to develop a particular capability. This means that the teacher may sometimes work in interdisciplinary ways, at other times she/he will opt to work within disciplines. The point is that the decisions will not have been made for them.

Another recent development that may appear similar to the capabilities approach being proposed in this report is the notion of Essential Learnings. These currently exist within the South Australian, Tasmanian and Northern Territory official curricula, and have recently been proposed in Victoria. They are much broader than the key competencies, encompassing learnings for all aspects of life. For example, in South Australia the Essential Learnings comprise Futures, Interdependence, Identity, Communication and Thinking. However, like the competencies, they have not been theorised in curriculum terms. In South Australia and the Northern Territory, they have been incorporated into the eight Learning Areas and so defined in knowledge-content terms. As 'across curriculum' learnings, the anecdotal evidence is that they have tended to be swamped by the Learning Areas. Indeed, at the time of writing curriculum officers of the South Australian Department of Education and Childrens'

Services (DECS) are exploring ways by which essential learnings can be developed in order to become more prominent in teaching.

The approach most closely aligned to that being proposed in this report is in Tasmania where Essential Learnings are being developed independently of the Learning Areas. This is an exciting project that is still in the process of being developed. However at this early stage it is difficult to find a comprehensive theorisation of the curriculum role of the Essential Learnings, with most of the official documentation focusing on the content of the five Essential Learnings - Thinking, Communicating, Personal Futures, Social Responsibility and World Futures. Thus there appears to be an unresolved tension between the eight Key Learning Areas (KLAs) and the Essential Learnings, as exemplified in the following passage from the consultation document:

> *'The Essential Learnings will be used differently by different schools …….. Some schools will work from the Essential Learnings, linking to those aspects of the KLAs they see as 'prerequisite knowledge'; others will teach within Key Learning Areas but use the Essential Learnings to audit or check that they are teaching fundamental understandings and making connections between subject matter for learners; still others will integrate the two, teaching to big ideas using Essential Learnings and Key Learning Area knowledge, tools of inquiry and skills'* (Tasmanian Department of Education, 2002: 2).

Given that this is a new approach, it is not surprising that there is still some ambiguity. But it does appear that the project has not yet been able to shake clear of the dominant grammars of the official curriculum. Perhaps the most obvious evidence of this is that the Essential Learnings are expressed in terms of outcomes and so have been atomised in much the same way as the knowledge-content of the dominant curriculum approach. Thus, for each Essential Learning there are key elements, with each element being described as outcomes at five standards and each outcome having a number of illustrative examples of performance associated with aspects of that outcome. In addition, there are culminating outcomes and performance guidelines. The fragmentation of the Essential Learnings and the lack of clarity about the ways in which they relate to the Key Learning Areas make it difficult to see how this approach can do anything other than confirm the dominant curriculum grammars. This assertion is not intended to be negative – the Tasmanian project represents an important step forward in curriculum work in Australia. And its process of development over a long period of time, involving consultation with the community and deep discussion and trialling within the profession, presents a fine model of curriculum development. A new approach to national curriculum collaboration would do well to start with an analysis of the Tasmanian model.

The developments described above are evidence that Australian educators are aware of the limitations of traditional approaches to the official curriculum. However, it is clear that there is not yet a well-theorised alternative. It will require a substantial curriculum conversation across the profession, informed by the results of research into the various approaches currently being trialled across Australia, before the dominant grammars of the curriculum can be challenged in more than superficial ways. It is argued in this report that a capabilities-based official curriculum suggests one

possibility. The final section argues that such an approach also suggests a way to resolve the impediments to national curriculum collaboration outlined in Chapter 1.
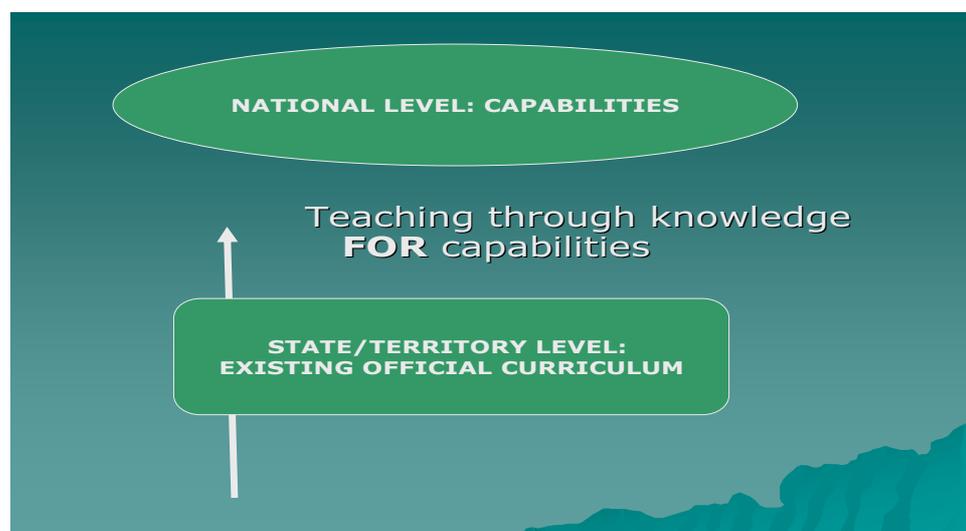
Towards an Australian curriculum

The previous section conceptualised a capabilities-based official curriculum. This section explores the possibilities for using it as a practical alternative to dominant approaches to national curriculum collaboration. It will be argued that the approach addresses all of the principles established in Chapter 1 of this report, and is consistent with the rationale for national curriculum collaboration and the view of curriculum argued for in Chapters 2 and 3. It is called an Australian curriculum in order to capture the flavour of the balance that is proposed between the arenas of the States/Territories and the nation, and to distinguish it from previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration.

The structure of an Australian curriculum

The two parts to a capabilities-based curriculum could form the foundation of an Australian curriculum. Thus, a set of richly described capabilities, such as those contained in Table 2 (page 59), could be common across the country, and might even become the focus of an Australian Certificate of Education awarded at the end of the compulsory years of schooling or Year 12. That is, all States and Territories would agree on the capabilities that would become the focus of teaching and learning in each jurisdiction (i.e., teaching FOR the capabilities across Australia). Indeed, the capabilities could be benchmarked in order to meet accountability demands, and to enable identification of issues or concerns that might become the focus of subsequent professional development programs or research activities. At the same time the States and Territories could retain their existing official curricula (i.e., the knowledge-content part of the curriculum), organised in a manner agreed within each jurisdiction. Teachers would teach through the knowledge-content in order to develop the capabilities. This proposal for an Australian curriculum is represented below in diagrammatic form (Diagram 3):

Diagram 3: An Australian Curriculum

NATIONAL LEVEL: CAPABILITIES

Teaching through knowledge
FOR capabilities

STATE/TERRITORY LEVEL:
EXISTING OFFICIAL CURRICULUM

The process of developing an Australian curriculum
There could be a number of ways in which an approach to an Australian curriculum might be organised such that it was consistent with the principles established in this report. The process of identifying and describing the capabilities should be the first stage of any strategy. The existing National Goals of Schooling, developed in 1989 and refined in 1999, could form a natural starting point for discussion, and in some ways the development of a capabilities-based approach could be seen as a natural extension of these Goals. At the same time, since the capabilities will play a different role from the Goals of Schooling, they will need to be modified and extended significantly.

It is crucial that an Australian curriculum is not developed and imposed by a small group of policy makers, but rather emerges from a wide ranging curriculum conversation in the professional community. There would be two key aspects of this ongoing curriculum discussion and debate. The first would focus on the nature of the capabilities – what they are and why, and what each comprises. The Australian government could facilitate this discussion. The second would be the professional discussion about how to work through the knowledge-content described in the relevant State/Territory curricula. This would occur at the level of individual schools. But it would also provide a focus for a curriculum conversation across the profession. In the first instance, this discussion might be facilitated by each jurisdiction through professional development activities, research, and resource production. In time however, it is possible to imagine a broader conversation across jurisdictions through, for example, the dissemination of examples of interesting practice. In each jurisdiction the local curriculum would be regularly changed as a result of the ongoing conversation, thus converting the official curriculum from being an inert document to one that is dynamic and evolving.

What are the advantages of a capabilities-based Australian curriculum?

There are a number of advantages associated with a capabilities-based Australian curriculum. Most importantly the approach is consistent with the criteria for national curriculum collaboration that have been developed in each of the Chapters of this report. Thus, it is founded upon a strong conceptual base, a rationale for national collaboration and a clearly articulated view of curriculum. As a consequence the approach has a much greater chance of achieving community and professional support than previous attempts at national curriculum collaboration. Many of the following advantages stem from this strong foundation. They are:

It is practical in political and policy terms
The proposal offers a practical approach to national curriculum collaboration because it takes account of many of the political impediments that have hitherto hampered national initiatives. In particular, by using the existing curriculum architecture (e.g., State/Territory frameworks, National Goals of Schooling), it doesn't threaten the curriculum autonomy of the States/Territories – indeed, the existing curriculum frameworks of each jurisdiction are central to the approach. They are not under challenge. At the same time, the capabilities provide the Australian government with a mechanism to directly influence the curriculum agenda, and for there to be a common

national approach. This has a number of practical consequences. For example, it dissolves the State versus national binary that has for so long impeded national collaboration. In addition, it provides a mechanism for resolving the student mobility issue that for so long has been the argument for national curriculum consistency. No matter the jurisdiction, all students will be developing the same sets of capabilities, albeit using different strategies. Students who move from State to State might carry with them portfolios that describe their achievements in relation each of the capabilities.

It addresses destructive disciplinary versus interdisciplinary battles in the profession

A capabilities-based curriculum is also likely to win support from the professional community because it doesn't set up an unproductive disciplinary versus interdisciplinary binary. No matter how knowledge-content is organised in the official curriculum, the decision about whether or not to work within or across discipline boundaries is a professional one that is taken at the classroom level as teachers work through the issue of how best to develop the capabilities. It is not a decision that needs to be pre-determined. As a consequence, the model does not force the many professional associations that have been established around subjects/disciplines to circle the wagons and defend their territory (e.g., Goodson, 1996). Rather, it will encourage an ongoing classroom and eventually whole-of-profession consideration about the many different disciplinary and interdisciplinary ways to develop capabilities. It is an approach that both respects the status of discipline-based knowledge, whilst facilitating interdisciplinary work.

It offers an educative focus for accountability

The approach also provides a focus for forms of accountability that are educative and do not narrow the curriculum. The current emphasis on literacy and numeracy tests and benchmarks has been criticised on at least two counts – that it promotes a constrained view of these important capacities and that it assumes that they can be developed prior to and independently of other capacities. A capabilities-based curriculum offers a mechanism for resolving these issues. In the list of capabilities suggested in Table 2 (page 59), literacy and numeracy are described as part of the broader capability of communication and multiliteracies. Understanding literacy and numeracy in this way means that when governments highlight them for accountability purposes, they are not isolated or constructed as an old version of the '3Rs'. Rather, they are seen as being connected to associated functionings and so defined as part of a larger whole.

Of course this approach to accountability is applicable to all the capabilities. Thus, at various times one or more aspects of a capability might come into the spotlight for accountability purposes, leaving other aspects in the wings as the supporting cast. The spotlight may shift periodically as different aspects are brought into focus, and those previously foregrounded recede into the shadows but remain part of the cast. In addition, it would be possible to eventually benchmark the capabilities and use them as the basis for gathering information about the health of Australian education. This work would require a great deal of trialling and research, but such activity would contribute to the development of deeper understandings about the capabilities themselves whilst providing a logic and coherence to national accountability structures and processes.

It provides a way to conceptualise curriculum in equity terms

The capabilities-based approach provides a way to conceptualise equity by addressing a number of the problems with previous approaches. Thus rather than understanding equity as a curriculum that is common to all – an approach that invariably favours those students whose knowledge is selected as the common knowledge – the capabilities-based approach seeks to promote 'unity in difference, rather than disunity through sameness' (Kelly, 1995: 110). The aspiration to develop the broadly-described capabilities to the fullest extent possible for all students provides the unity. The difference is catered for by the flexibility to select strategies for achieving the capabilities that are appropriate to the needs of students in local contexts.

It doesn't atomise the curriculum

In Chapter 3, the dominant curriculum approach was described as being based on a model that atomises knowledge-content by breaking it down into hundreds of objectives and outcomes. The student is expected to master each piece, eventually putting all the pieces together when confronted with a problem or task. The behaviourist basis of this approach was argued to be inappropriate to an aspiration to democratise the curriculum. By contrast, a capabilities-based approach seeks to develop each capability as a whole, albeit at different levels of sophistication or complexity depending on the age of the students. Working to a set of procedural principles, teachers understand students to be, say, apprentice knowledge workers using the range of aspects of that capability in relation to real issues or tasks, rather than working on pieces of the capability in isolation.

It provides a focus for an ongoing curriculum conversation in the profession

It has been argued in this report that the dominant curriculum model establishes the official curriculum as a 'thing' – something that is redeveloped every few years and then 'implemented'. In this way the official curriculum is constructed as a fait accompli and the role of the teacher is confined largely to technical rather than conceptual considerations. As a consequence, professional conversations about curriculum issues are limited. By contrast, the capabilities-based approach constructs the official curriculum as the starting point for curriculum discussion. This means that teachers are involved in ongoing discussion at two levels: at the wider across-system level where discussion focuses on the nature of capabilities; and at the local level where discussion focuses on how to teach through knowledge-content to achieve the capabilities. In this way the approach offers a way to generate stimulating professional debate and at the same time to focus that debate. The official curriculum can be refined as the conversation proceeds, thus constructing it as an evolving and dynamic resource rather than one that is static and inert.

It resolves the tension between the top-down versus bottom-up approaches to curriculum change

A capabilities-based curriculum dissolves the top-down/bottom-up binary that has dogged curriculum work for so long. This is because the structure is non-hierarchical and flexible. There is an interactive relationship between the capabilities and the knowledge-content, each part requiring the other. This enables a national approach (capabilities) with a lot of room for local interpretation. There will be many different ways to work towards the same capability, suggesting that top-down imposition will be less successful in terms of curriculum change than ongoing professional discussion, exchange of examples of good practice, and the development of

appropriate resources. At the same time, the approach is not entirely locally based and laissez-faire (i.e., bottom-up). The capabilities and the associated accountability requirements ensure a commonality of purpose across Australia.

It offers a mechanism to democratise the curriculum and its processes

In Chapter 3 it was argued that if curriculum has an important role to play in deepening democracy, then a national approach to curriculum should itself be a central part of Australian democracy. A capabilities-based approach lends itself to this because it suggests a way to resolve the tension between (a) the involvement of the general community in discussion about curriculum and (b) the fact that curriculum-making demands professional educational expertise. The structure of the capabilities-based approach (see Diagrams 2b and 3) provides a way to resolve this tension. The capabilities part of the curriculum should be the subject of general community debate and discussion, not least because it offers a focal point for ongoing discussion about the kind of society we want and the 'primary goods' that are needed for all citizens to live productive and enriching lives. These are democratic questions that should involve the citizenry of a nation-state, not be confined to professional educators. However, the knowledge-content part of the curriculum, and the associated pedagogical issues including the selection and organisation of content and models of teaching and assessment, are clearly matters that are the province of professional educators who have the expertise to make judgments in relation to these matters. Thus, the two part nature of a capabilities-based curriculum offers a natural way to encourage democratic involvement in the curriculum of schools whilst preserving the professional integrity of educators.

It presents a number of other opportunities beyond the compulsory curriculum

This report has been focused on the compulsory years of schooling. However in theorising an approach to national curriculum collaboration that meets the needs of the 21st century, it is worth noting that the capabilities-based model offers a number of benefits/strategies beyond the compulsory years of schooling. These include:

- *An Australian post-compulsory curriculum:* One of the running sores of the dominant approach to curriculum in the senior years of schooling has been the divide between vocational and academic curriculum. For much of the 20th century, schooling was organised around this divide. Despite the abolition of technical and academic high schools in the 1970s, and subsequent attempts to establish parity of esteem of subjects through common year 12 certification, the divide is still very healthy. A capabilities-based approach presents one way to break the cycle. That is, there could be an Australian Certificate of Education which would record student achievement against each of the capabilities. Since the capabilities would be the same as those for the compulsory years of schooling, this approach would produce a seamless curriculum, albeit with the post-compulsory phase being at a greater level of complexity.

  A part of a student's record would include the pathway through which she/he has travelled to develop each of these capabilities, whether that has been through so-called academic subjects or through vocational education subjects and work experience. Since such an approach would take the emphasis off the subjects themselves (i.e., the organisation and teaching of knowledge-content)

and onto the capabilities, it would alter the dynamic that creates hierarchies of subjects. It would be the capabilities that would create parity of esteem. Once again each State/Territory would decide on this part of the curriculum. Of course, the approach has implications for the process of subject development and accreditation, placing the onus on the subject developers and/or teachers to ensure the switch from teaching FOR subjects to teaching THROUGH subjects for capabilities. Thus, subject developers would need to show which of the capabilities form the focus of a particular subject, and how they will developed and assessed.

- *An Australian approach to life-long learning in and for a knowledge society:* Since the capabilities define what people are able to do and be, in a knowledge society they are capabilities that need to be developed throughout a person's life, not just during the years of schooling. Put another way, in a knowledge society the idea of curriculum must go beyond the formal institutions of education to embrace workplace, community and recreational settings. The capabilities-based approach is one way by which to ground the concept of life-long learning in a knowledge society. The development, maintenance and enhancement of capabilities is something that should be a common community aspiration, and there are any number of ways that might happen. For example, why should processes for the development of government policy not require an educational impact statement (will this policy enhance or hinder the process of capability development?) in much the same manner as environmental impact statements are required? Could those who develop public spaces be required to consider how the space might be used to enhance certain capabilities? Whether or not these are practical ideas, the point remains that an always provisional list of capabilities provides a focus for the rhetoric of life-long learning.

- *An approach to organising the work of DEST:* If the concept of capabilities is common to formal, semi-formal and informal education in Australian society, then it might be one way to conceptualise the work of the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST). This could happen in a number of ways. For example: (a) capabilities could provide a framework for connecting up the work of DEST, linking the various Groups and their many projects by providing a common language and set of conceptual tools for mapping what is already happening and charting new directions; (b) particular Branches could be organised around capabilities rather than specific programs. This would provide an educational rather than a programmatic rationale for organisational structure; (c) cross-Group teams could be organised to coordinate the tracking and development of specific capabilities. This would provide a mechanism as well as a logic for across-DEST communication and coordination.

Conclusion

The central message of this report is that approaches to national curriculum collaboration are doomed to fail unless they are first thought about in curriculum terms. In this report a proposal for a capabilities-based Australian curriculum has been developed. It has been argued that the proposal addresses the principles for national curriculum collaboration established in Chapter 1, and has the potential to break the

stranglehold of the dominant curriculum model. However, any such development must engage the profession and the broader community in deep and ongoing discussion and debate. National curriculum collaboration can only succeed if participation in the conceptual issues is open to many, not just a selected few making decisions behind closed doors. It is crucial therefore that consideration is given to the process that will be employed in its development. In relation to the concept of a capabilities-based curriculum, the sorts of aspects that might be considered are:

- The Australian Government might sponsor an initial broad-ranging discussion about the nature and type of capabilities. This could start with a re-examination of the National Goals of Schooling, but would obviously extend much beyond these. The curriculum conversation might be led by a body like the newly formed National Institute for Quality Teaching and School Leadership. It would be important not to impose tight time-lines on this national conversation – the over-riding aim is to ensure a depth of analysis and the development of professional commitment. It would be important however, to maintain a public record of the conversation and any emerging consensus, continuously modifying it on the basis of critique and review. This national curriculum conversation has the potential to invigorate the profession. It should not be structured as a consultation, but rather as an ongoing process of professional development.

- At the same time as a broad professional conversation is occurring, it would be important to establish some research projects on different aspects of the model as it developed. These might be funded through the Australian Research Council's Linkage Grants Scheme, involving partnerships between Universities, Departments of Education and teachers. The outcomes of these research projects would feed back into the development process. Once the approach has been conceptualised it would be crucial to consider such matters as the implications for teacher education, professional development, resource and materials development, processes for sharing experiences and insights within and across jurisdictions, forms and processes of accountability and so on. The strategies developed for each of these should be consistent with the philosophy of the overall approach.

National curriculum collaboration is crucial to the future of Australia as it seeks to grapple with the complexities of globalisation, the speed of knowledge production, and the challenges of diversity. If Australia is genuinely to become a knowledge society, then the curriculum of its educational institutions is a matter of public importance. But traditional concepts of curriculum and models of national curriculum collaboration that look for lowest common denominator answers will not serve Australia well in the 21st century. This report argues that there is a better way, one founded on a commitment to fully developing the capabilities of all citizens to participate actively in the shaping of a learning society and to live enriching and productive lives.

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