

Priestley, M, Laming, M. & Humes, W. (2015). Emerging school curricula: Australia and Scotland compared. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 35[3]

Emerging school curricula: Australia and Scotland compared

Abstract

Education policy across the Anglophone world is notable for the emergence in the last few years of new forms of national curriculum. This new curriculum model is characterised by a number of common features. These include a shift from the detailed specification of knowledge to genericism and a focus on skills/competencies, an emphasis on the centrality of the learner, and an articulation of curriculum as assessable outcomes. Despite these commonalities, the new curricula exhibit idiosyncratic features, formed as global discourses are mediated at the level of national contextualisation of curriculum policy. This article draws upon two case studies – the new Australian Curriculum and Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence – to illustrate how, in these cases, new curriculum policy has emerged.

Introduction

Over the previous decade, education systems, at least across the Anglophone world (Sinnema & Aitken, 2013) and arguably more widely (see, for example, Nieveen, 2011), have witnessed the development of a new and distinctive form of national curriculum. Such curricula are widely claimed by critics and advocates alike to be a response by education systems to pressures associated with globalisation, particularly in respect of economic competitiveness and citizenship (e.g., Yates & Young, 2010). Sinnema and Aitken (2013) point to at least four common goals underpinning this new curricular form: to influence and improve teachers' practice (including pedagogy); to improve equity for students; to modernise schooling, meeting the needs of what are often termed 21st century learners; and improve the coherence of national curricular policy.

While national variants evidently exhibit idiosyncratic features, the "new curriculum" (Biesta & Priestley, 2013) is characterised by a number of common trends. These include the following: a shift from the specification of knowledge content as the basis for curriculum planning to a new form of genericism (Young, 2008); an emphasis on the centrality of the learner together with a concomitant move towards active forms of pedagogy and a view of teachers as facilitators of learning (Sinnema & Aitken, 2013); a notion of education as a product, expressed as modular courses and ladders of qualifications (Young, 2008); an articulation of curriculum as assessable outcomes, accompanied by increasingly pervasive regimes of accountability and cultures of performativity (Young, 2008); and (in apparent contrast to the

previous point) a [re]construction of teachers as agents of change and professional developers of the curriculum (Priestley, Biesta & Robinson, 2015).

This paper explores these trends, drawing upon developments across the Anglophone world, and presenting two case studies – Scotland’s Curriculum for Excellence and the parallel development of a new national curriculum in Australia – to illustrate how they are concretised in specific national settings, as local traditions and influences merge with global trends through a process of “glocalization” (Green 1999, p.55) to produce hybrid education systems that retain many distinctive features. We first provide a brief overview of some of the more significant common curricular trends that characterise the new curricula, before describing each case. Finally we reflect upon the implications of such developments for schooling.

New Curricular Trends

Yates and Young (2010) point to the curricular similarities that have emerged within many countries with differing educational traditions, pointing to “governments’ attempts to gain greater control over public education and, it is to be hoped, improve its quality” (p.4) arguing that there is a political subtext of economic instrumentalism in this process of centralisation. In this section of the paper, we give a brief overview of some of these commonalities.

Knowledge and Skills.

Various writers (for example, Wheelahan, 2011; Yates & Collins, 2010) have drawn attention to a worldwide trend for new curricular models to downgrade knowledge. For example, there has

been a shift, evident in the move from the detailed specification of content to be covered towards a more generic approach. This is largely justified within policy and by proponents as enhancing curricular flexibility to address the demands of a fast changing world, where workers and citizens will require the skills to quickly acquire new knowledge, as existing knowledge forms become rapidly obsolete. Hence, we see the development of curricula designed to enable 21st century learners to become 21st century citizens, and especially 21st century workers, thus developing the soft-skills or competencies (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2005) and other attributes (for example, confidence: see Ecclestone, 2013) necessary to make this transition.

There are two main facets to this shift. Whitty (2010) has drawn attention to an overt shift from knowledge to skills as the focus of the curriculum. This is evident in the specification of key capacities to be achieved by education – for example, Scotland’s *Curriculum for Excellence* aims to develop students as Successful Learners, Confident Individuals, Effective Contributors and Responsible Citizens (Scottish Executive, 2004a). Such a shift appears to over-simplify and dichotomise the complex relationship between knowledge and skills, obscuring the relationship between different forms of knowledge (for example, *knowing that* and *knowing how* – Pring, 1976). Young (2009, p.4) has questioned whether such generic skills can indeed be developed free of contextual knowledge and “free of the domains in which they are realised”.

A second feature of this shift has been an increasing emphasis on inter-disciplinary approaches to organising the curriculum. Young and Muller (2010) have pointed to what they see as the key dangers inherent in a weakening of traditional subject boundaries: an erosion of

the distinction between academic knowledge and everyday knowledge; and a risk that disadvantaged young people will be denied access to powerful knowledge (see also Rata, 2012, who warns of the social exclusion inherent in new curricular forms).

Such issues are a genuine cause for concern, although Wheelahan's (2010) idea of a crisis of curriculum may be unduly alarmist, and one should be wary of conflating issues; as Whitty (2010, p.34) points out, "knowledge is not the same as school subjects and school subjects are not the same thing as academic disciplines".

Pedagogy.

A further common trend in curriculum design concerns the positioning of the learner at the heart of schooling. Biesta (2010) refers to this trend as the "learnification" of education. According to Biesta, this tendency reflects an unproblematised acceptance that learning is a good, and a failure to address educational questions, such as "what are we learning?" and "why are we learning it?". This discourse shift is accompanied by a growing popularity in policy circles for active forms of pedagogy more associated with progressive models of education. These include cooperative learning, critical skills pedagogies and formative assessment. According to Yates and Collins (2010), this is evidence of a merging of neo-liberalism and social constructivism; "a fascinating rapprochement of ... a child-focused developmentalism and an economic instrumentalism" (p.92). As above, there are dangers of conflation in taking such a view. It is certainly clear that the new curricula have adopted the language and methods of progressive education. It may be, as Wheelahan (2010) suggests, that such adoption is simply part of a long-standing trend whereby neoliberal discourses have appropriated progressive

language, while maintaining technical-instrumental goals for education. This trend was described by Bernstein (1990, p.88) as a “new pedagogic Janus” which “recontextualises and thus repositions within its own ideology, features of apparently oppositional discourses”. The theoretical underpinnings of such pedagogy are rarely made explicit in the new curricula, which exhort teachers to utilise active forms of learning, whilst not articulating any form of learning theory, including social-constructivism. Such trends were predicted by Arnold (1996), “Conspicuously absent is an engagement with traditional educational discourses – learning theory, curriculum theory, pedagogy and so forth – all seem to be irrelevant to the re-formulation now underway” (p.226).

Second, much of the language of the new curricula remains in tension with the apparently constructivist pedagogies espoused, using metaphors such as “delivery” of learning, or talking about learners “accessing” learning; such language sits uneasily with progressive methodologies and their underpinning theories of learning.

A related point lies in the development of modular courses and qualifications frameworks (Young, 2008), which also clearly position education as a product to be delivered by teachers and accessed by students. Such developments are part of an increasing trend to view knowledge in terms of its social and economic utility, rather than for its intrinsic value (Yates & Young, 2010; Yates & Collins, 2010), with the goal of learning as accreditation, rather than becoming an educated person.

The Role of Teachers.

Recent curricular policy seems, at first glance, to have explicitly eschewed the prescription inherent in earlier curricula, drawing, for instance, upon theories of transformational change (for example, Senge & Scharmer, 2006). Intrinsic to such policy is a renewed vision of teachers as developers of curriculum at a school level, and more widely as agents of change. The Australian Curriculum is muted on the subject of teachers; but their role is discussed explicitly in Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence which:

aims to engage teachers in thinking from first principles about their educational aims and values and their classroom practice. The process is based upon evidence of how change can be brought about successfully - through a climate in which reflective practitioners share and develop ideas (Scottish Executive, 2006a, p.21).

Such assumptions have been shown to be highly problematic. A major problem lies in contradictions within policy. The Australian Curriculum is a case in point: the curriculum overview “makes clear to teachers what is to be taught across the years of schooling” (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority [ACARA], 2012a, p. 10), but the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership professional standards for teachers – commissioned at the same time by the same body – are much closer to the CfE in emphasising teachers’ creativity. Reeves (2008), notes that these contradictions can be seen very clearly in the effects of accountability practices that continue to accompany the new curricula, despite their renewed emphasis on teacher autonomy; and in the cultures of performativity that have been shown to develop in schools as a result of these practices. Smyth and Shacklock (1998, p.17) have noted the manner in which teaching has been “structurally adjusted to

accommodate to ... global pressures". This has been achieved by what they describe as "a dramatic shift in the boundaries of control, from direct, overt and bureaucratic forms of surveillance, to more covert forms that take expression in the way work itself is structured".

Resulting cultures of performativity have been widely claimed to have a number of serious consequences for education systems. These include "the expunging and depletion of educative values and purposes out of schooling" (Smyth & Shacklock, 1998, p.27), and a widespread disappearance of concern for what constitutes good education (Biesta, 2007; Biesta, 2010). A growing emphasis on short term instrumental goals has been linked to "playing the game" (Perryman, 2012), through artifices such as the fabrication of the school's image (Keddie, Mills & Pendergast, 2011), the concealing of "dirty laundry" (Cowie, Taylor & Croxford, 2007) and even more serious corruption and cheating (Sahlberg, 2011).

Australia and Scotland Compared

The above, brief description of emerging curricular trends illustrates some commonalities in worldwide curriculum policy making. In the following vignettes, we seek to illustrate how these supra-national trends are translated into national curriculum policy in two specific cases: Australia, which is challenging a long tradition of devolving curriculum to state governments, and Scotland, which has a long and proud tradition of curricular independence from the UK national government in Westminster, and where curricular policy has been traditionally presented as "guidance". In particular, we seek to show, in each case, how supra-national trends are mediated by local traditions to produce hybrid models of curriculum, manifestly influenced by global discourses, but maintaining distinctive local features. We

examine the various commonalities and differences through the lens provided by the three categories used above: *knowledge and skills*; *pedagogy*; and *the role of teachers*. In each case we first outline the political context for the introduction of new national curricula.

The Australian Curriculum

The Australian Curriculum illustrates many of the trends identified above. Relunched in 2003, the current version is a continuation of a process begun in the 1980s. The rationale has been that a common curriculum would serve the needs of the national economy, equip school leavers with essential knowledge and skills (Dawkins, 1987); increase national cohesion; promote economic growth (Brennan, 2011), improve efficiency, and benefit students who transfer across state boundaries (Reid, 2005). However, there has been little serious consideration of the theoretical principles underpinning curriculum reform. For example, the ACARA has not produced a theorised view of curriculum. Instead, their published documents imply that curriculum is either a statement about what should be taught, or a set of teaching materials, prompting the criticism that the national curriculum is in fact a syllabus (Brennan, 2011).

The Political Context.

Development of an Australian national curriculum is symptomatic of the long struggle between the federal and state governments for the control of education, which has continued since the 1960s. The initial impetus came from the Labor government's release of three interlinked education policies, *Skills for Australia* (Dawkins, 1987), *Strengthening Australia's*

Schools (Dawkins, 1988b) and *Higher Education: a policy statement* (Dawkins, 1988a) designed to refashion education into a tool serving the national economy under federal control.

The proposal was met with cautious agreement, largely because the majority of states had Labor governments at that time, and work began on developing a comprehensive national curriculum. By the time it was completed in 1993, the more influential states had conservative governments, who were not willing to surrender control.

The second attempt at creating a national curriculum is remarkable, in that it represents a shift in the conservative attitude to federalism in Australia. Governments led by Prime Minister Howard (1996-2007) intervened in policy areas that had always been regarded as the responsibility of the state governments with the intention of controlling all aspects of public policy (Craven 2005).

The 2007 election of a Labor government produced no appreciable policy change, and work continued on the draft curriculum. Progress was slow and uneven owing to disagreements about the content of the subjects, particularly history and mathematics, and ongoing rivalry between the states; and between the state and federal governments. When different parties have held power at each level, the process has been complicated further by political rivalries (Watson, 2007). A subsequent change of government from Labor to the Liberal-National Party Coalition in 2013 did not produce a major change, but there was a noticeable shift in emphasis. The incoming Minister for Education indicated that he wished to see a less emphasis on the interdisciplinary themes in traditional subject areas, greater promotion of the benefits of western civilisation (Pyne, 2014a) and more focus on ANZAC Day (Cullen, 2014). Funding for

language teaching included in the 2014-15 budget specifically mentioned the introduction or expansion of Classical Greek and Latin (Pyne, 2014b).

Knowledge and Skills

Notwithstanding these ongoing tensions, the state and territory governments share an instrumental view of education, regarding it as one aspect of the broader social, political and economic agenda (Ditchburn, 2012). The state governments rejected the first attempt to implement a national curriculum, but under the influence of the same international discourses underpinning emerging national curricula their own versions emphasised the acquisition of generic skills and interdisciplinary learning at the expense of disciplinary knowledge (Cowley & Williamson, 1998).

In theory, the Australian Curriculum is underpinned by the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, but it demonstrates a more limited conceptual understanding of education. Whereas the declaration acknowledged the importance of social and emotional development, the Australian Curriculum focuses on the acquisition of appropriately certified skills. According to ACARA (2012e), each of the eight learning areas (English, mathematics, science, humanities and social science, the arts, languages, health and physical education and technologies) will contain an overview of the topic at each year level, and two to three strands that elaborate on the content and skills to be learned. For example, the science strands are science understanding, science as human endeavour and science skills. The amount of detail in the strands varies, but they are broad descriptions rather than exact prescriptions and it is likely that the need to address a number of cross-curricular priorities (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Australia's engagement with Asia

and Sustainability) **and** the general capabilities (literacy, numeracy, flexible thinking, creativity, team work, ethical behaviour, problem solving and the capacity to engage with new knowledge) may lead to superficial treatment of subject content.

Pedagogy.

In an echo of Biesta's (2010) comments about the "learnification" of education, the website for the Australian Curriculum describes each student as "entitled" to the knowledge and skills that will enable them to become successful learners, but says little about how this is to be achieved. *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum, V4* (ACARA, 2012e) uses the term pedagogy once only to state that the curriculum has been "established on a strong evidence base, which is related to learning, pedagogy and what works in professional practice" (p. 11). However, the documents assume that teachers will adopt a student-centred approach and employ inquiry based methods, and that inquiry-based methods will increase student engagement and enable students to contribute to their own learning. All outline advocate replacing a transmission model of pedagogy with hands-on activities to allow analysis and interpretation, problem-based learning and self-directed inquiry.

The widespread acceptance of student-centred approaches to learning in Australia can be attributed to the dominance of social-constructivist theories of learning in teacher education courses and the enthusiasm with which Australian schools educators embraced outcomes-based approaches. Outcomes-based education has had a special status in the Australian curriculum reform movement since it was introduced in the 1990s. Malcolm (2001) argues that it was introduced to "develop an assessment technology consistent with learner-centred, learning-centred, constructivist approaches" (p. 206), with the expectation that assessment

would not only determine what was learned, but how it was learned, assist education bureaucracies to centralise control of the curriculum and restrain teacher autonomy. Many policymakers accepted the argument that it would improve retention rates, produce more equitable results among diverse students and improve the quality of teaching and learning. There has been a move away from the more extreme forms of outcomes-based education in favour of standards in response to concerns about the perceived lack of discipline-based knowledge and coherent structure (Berlach & McNaught, 2007), but the curriculum documents continue to refer to student outcomes, and learner-centred approaches dominate classroom practice. How long this will remain the case is open to question as they are under pressure from another instrument of education policy: standardised performance testing.

First introduced in 2008 in anticipation of the national curriculum, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) was promoted as a diagnostic test that would show parents how their children were performing against their peers, assist schools to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their teaching program and enable teachers to support students in need of additional help. Publication of NAPLAN scores on the *My School* website, which was ostensibly to allow parents to evaluate school performance and choose the most appropriate school for their child (Gillard, 2010), transformed NAPLAN into a form of high stakes testing that has a distorting effect on teaching (Ditchburn, 2012). Evidence has emerged that teachers are restricting the amount of inquiry-based learning in favour of direct instruction (Polesel, Dulfer & Turnbull, 2012); even though the Australian Curriculum advises that this approach should be kept to a minimum.

The Role of Teachers.

The role of teachers in the Australian Curriculum is moot. The documents state that schools are to implement the curriculum in ways that value teachers' professional knowledge, and exhort teachers to develop teaching strategies that include local knowledge and adapt to local conditions, but they also state that teachers will have clear directions about what is to be taught at each year level (ACARA, 2012e).

In keeping with the skills-based nature of the Australian Curriculum, the subject guides stress the importance of the general capabilities and contain explicit advice about developing interdisciplinary learning tasks, but they also contain explicit prescription of the material to be covered at each year level. The English and History subject guides present general statements and elective topics; the science guide is more prescriptive and the mathematics guide even more so. For example, in the first year of secondary school science, students will study biological, chemical, physical and earth and space sciences, as well as the nature and development of sciences and their influence today (ACARA, 2012d). In mathematics, they will investigate and use square roots of perfect square numbers and solve problems involving addition and subtraction of fractions, including those with unrelated denominators (ACARA, 2012b). The ACARA website also provides suggestions for teaching activities and assessment tasks, information about student achievement and graded work samples. Faced with this volume of very detailed information, teachers, particularly those who are inexperienced, teaching outside their own discipline areas or pressed for time, are unlikely to create alternatives (Polesel, Dulfer & Turnbull, 2012).

Conversely, the National Professional Standards for Teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL], 2011) suggest a more active role for teachers. The

standards, and the national curriculum, were intended to be connected and mutually reinforcing (Ingvarson, 2009), yet there is a disconnect between the documents. In contrast to the dearth of information in the Australian Curriculum about teaching and teachers, the Standards espouse a belief that “nothing matters more to the quality of education in our schools than the knowledge, skill and commitment of teachers” (Ingvarson, 2002, p.4). Reflecting, Australian and international research into teacher effectiveness and teachers’ work (Hartsuyker, 2007, Hay McBer, 2005), they stress the importance of professional knowledge, including content knowledge, and reflective, professional practice in helping students to learn (AITSL, 2011).

Just as the *My School* website was instrumental in transforming NAPLAN from a series of diagnostic tests into a form of high stakes testing, it has transformed the Standards into an accountability measure of the type identified by Smyth and Shacklock (1998) and discussed earlier. According to the ACARA, the *My School* website allows parents to choose the most appropriate school for their children; in reality it has enabled them to make judgments about the desirability of a particular school (Angus, 2012) and the perceived quality of its teachers (Meadmore & Meadmore 2004).

Mechanisms that were created to enable to the comparison of students’ academic performance using easily quantifiable measures have considerably narrowed judgments about what constitutes quality in schooling, and encouraged the growth of a performative culture which has “sidelined schools’ focus on social and equity outcomes” (Keddie, Mills & Pendergast, 2011, p. 76). There have been media reports of students from non-English speaking backgrounds, and students whose performance is deemed detrimental to the school’s test

scores, being excluded (Bantick, 2011); and a number of incidents in which students have received inappropriate assistance from teachers or have had access to the test materials before time (ACARA, 2012c). The final part of the accountability process – an annual performance review planned to commence in 2014 - would have had an even greater impact on the teachers' role. It was no longer sufficient to use student outcomes as a proxy measure; teachers were to be assessed on their student's performance in relation to the Australian Curriculum, classroom observations, parental feedback and their qualifications (Garratt, 2012). Under this plan, NAPLAN test results would also form part of the assessment, which would be linked to bonus payments. There has been little further discussion of this proposal since the change of government; however the Minister for Education announced a review of teacher education in February 2014, with the intention of establishing a benchmark for "world best practice in teacher training". Mr Pyne went on to describe the current status of preservice teacher education as "under-done" (Pyne, 2014c).

The Scottish Curriculum

Scotland too has been re-shaping its school curriculum, in line with the trends described above: giving less emphasis to content and more to generic skills; placing the learner centre-stage and encouraging "progressive" forms of pedagogy; describing the educational process in terms of "experiences" and "outcomes", leading in the upper secondary school to new national qualifications; an expectation that teachers will become curriculum developers and see themselves as agents of change; a drive to raise attainment and promote continuous improvement through systematic evaluation and monitoring. The programme designed to

bring about this reforming agenda is Curriculum for Excellence (CfE), launched in 2004 as a broad statement of principles and developed and elaborated in the years that followed, leading to implementation starting in 2011-12.

The Political Context.

Education in Scotland has always been separate from that in other parts of the United Kingdom. This was true even before the establishment of a Scottish Parliament in Edinburgh in 1999, with a range of powers devolved from the UK Parliament in London. A great deal has been written about “the Scottish educational tradition” (Scotland, 1969, pp.257-276; Smout, 1986, pp.209-230; Grant & Humes, 1993, pp.357-372; Devine, 1999, pp. 389-412), which is often summed up in the phrase “the democratic intellect” (Davie, 1961). Although some aspects of this tradition owe as much to myth as to reality, it is regarded as a vital feature of Scottish cultural identity, linked to cherished beliefs about the importance of equality and social justice. The new parliament provides a forum in which the distinctiveness of Scotland as a nation can be asserted, and this includes the distinctiveness of Scottish education (Humes & Bryce, 2008). In this sense, the revised political order has the potential to allow for greater divergence from policies elsewhere. At the same time, Scotland is subject to global pressures (social, economic, technological and demographic) that affect other countries – pressures which tend in the direction of convergence. Economic forces have led to an international emphasis on skills, enterprise and adaptability. Studies of educational achievement, particularly those conducted by the OECD, have made political leaders extremely sensitive about their country’s position on comparative league tables (for a rather critical analysis of

Scotland's educational system, see OECD, 2007). Sahlberg (2011) has referred to a Global Education Reform Movement influencing the thinking of politicians in many countries and driving policy in uniform directions. Thus Scotland has to negotiate a delicate path between, on the one hand, the desire to remain true to a valued tradition while taking advantage of the scope for a more autonomous future, and, on the other hand, the need to respond to perceived imperatives deriving from a rapidly changing international environment. In 2014 Scotland voted to remain part of the UK rather than seek full independence. However, the political situation remains sensitive.

The starting point for the CfE programme was the report of a Curriculum Review Group in 2004, which was immediately endorsed by the (then) Scottish Executive (Scottish Executive, 2004a). The political administration at that time was a Labour/Liberal Democrat coalition which continued until 2007, when a minority Scottish National Party (SNP) administration took over and adopted the term Scottish Government. At the next election in 2011, the SNP won a sweeping victory. Despite strong rivalry between Labour and SNP, on matters of social policy, including education, there are many similarities between the two. This has meant that there has been no major disagreement regarding CfE as the direction in which Scottish education should be going, although there have been robust debates about how the programme has been managed and promoted (see, for example, Ford, 2011).

The central ideas of the 2004 report are described in terms of *values* and *purposes*. The core values are seen as central to Scottish society, encapsulated in the words inscribed on the mace of the Scottish Parliament – wisdom, justice, compassion and integrity. No extended

justification is given for the place of these values in the curriculum: they are asserted rather than argued for, a feature which has attracted some criticism (Gillies, 2006). The purposes are expressed in terms of four capacities: the curriculum should enable all young people to become successful learners, confident individuals, responsible citizens and effective contributors. Again, these terms are not unpacked in any detail. Priestley and Humes suggest that the 2004 report is best regarded as a broad framework document, designed to form the basis of subsequent policy development (Priestley & Humes, 2010).

Constructing the new curriculum was seen as a developmental project, signalled in the “building” metaphor used in the title of five key documents published between 2006 and 2011 (Scottish Executive 2006a, 2007; Scottish Government 2008, 2009a, 2011). These focused on particular aspects of the reform: the four capacities; active learning in the early years; a framework for learning and teaching; the development and application of skills; and guidance on assessment strategy for CfE. In an attempt to avoid the familiar pattern of assessment driving the curriculum, proposals on examinations came late in the process. However, this led to complaints that teachers needed to know the likely shape of new national qualifications before they could form a clear idea of the kind of curriculum that might serve as suitable preparation. Similarly, when the final version of the experiences and outcomes appeared (Scottish Government, 2009b) following a process of consultation on draft proposals, concern was expressed that they were too vague and lacked detail. These responses indicate the scale of the challenge in seeking to promote greater teacher agency.

Knowledge and Skills.

The conception of knowledge and understanding that CfE embodies consists of several elements. It includes a fairly traditional specification of eight main areas of the curriculum (expressive arts, health and wellbeing, languages, mathematics, religious and moral education, sciences, social studies and technologies), with learning experiences for each of these set out in sequential levels, covering the age range 3-18. The potential rigidity of this formal structure is qualified in three ways. First, all teachers are expected to have a responsibility for literacy and numeracy. Second, there is an emphasis on inter-disciplinary learning, which crosses subject boundaries. And third, considerable importance is attached to the development of a range of skills – “Skills for learning, skills for life, skills for work” (Scottish Government, 2009a). All of these elements pose challenges for teachers. Setting out the curriculum areas in terms of “experiences” rather than centrally-prescribed “content” means that much depends on teacher judgement about the kinds of materials that might help youngsters to achieve the desired learning outcomes. Similarly, although the expectation that teachers should move beyond their areas of subject expertise to promote flexible, inter-disciplinary learning, has been welcomed by some, it has created uncertainty among others (Humes, 2013a). As for the emphasis on skills, this raises broader questions about the relationship between schooling, economy and society. How much weight should schools give to the cultivation of attitudes and dispositions that are valued by employers, particularly when the economy seems to offer limited opportunities for many youngsters beyond relatively low-skill, low-pay jobs?

Pedagogy.

With regard to pedagogy, there is a strong discursive thread in CfE documents stressing the importance of personal engagement by the learner, evident in the use of the first person to describe the learning process. In the *Progress and Proposals* document of 2006, for example, it is stated that “experiences and outcomes will be designed from the learner’s point of view, using terms like ‘I have . . .’ for experiences and ‘I can’ for outcomes” (Scottish Executive, 2006b, p. 12). However, simply using the word “I” cannot guarantee that deep learning is taking place. That could only be judged using follow-up questioning to test understanding. Again, terms such as “active learning”, which indicate a commitment to progressive pedagogy, are used rather loosely and lack the kind of conceptual underpinning which might be provided by social constructivist theories of learning. Maclellan and Soden (2008) argue that the conceptualisation of learning needs to be firmly based on the insights of psychological research, warning that “without understanding of how learners construct knowledge bases through thinking and reasoning, and the teachers’ role in facilitating such processes, it is unlikely that the intentions of *Curriculum for Excellence* can be fully realised” (p. 29).

The rather “soft” progressive pedagogy of CfE has received criticism from another direction. Some commentators find it incompatible with other policy documents outlining strategies for school improvement and raising attainment (see, for example, *Ambitious, Excellent Schools* which called for “tougher, intelligent accountabilities”; Scottish Executive, 2004b). These stress the need for formal audit, tight quality control and firm management – all

of which lead in the direction of performance-based accountability and drive teachers towards traditional didactic teaching with a focus on examinations (Reeves, 2008).

The Role of Teachers.

Central to the CfE programme is an attempt to re-shape conceptions of what it means to be a professional teacher. It had been claimed that earlier reforms had reduced the role of teachers to “technicians”, requiring them only to implement curricula that had been devised centrally by government agencies and committees of “experts”. Although Scotland (unlike England) has never had a national curriculum prescribed by law, preferring to operate through “guidelines”, in fact most teachers have been content to follow the recommendations set out in official documents. In the development of CfE materials, there was an attempt to engage teachers in the process, the aim being to encourage a new professional outlook, in which active involvement in the shaping of the curriculum was seen as an essential part of being a teacher. The extent to which this has been successful is so far unclear (Baumfield, Hulme, Livingston & Menter, 2010; Humes, 2013b), but the intention was reinforced in the report *Teaching Scotland’s Future*, which recommended changes to the way in which teachers were given both their initial training and opportunities for professional development in the course of their careers. The report makes an explicit link between the “imperatives” of CfE and “the implications for the teaching profession and its leadership” (Donaldson, 2010, p. 2). Promoting genuine teacher agency against a background of previous prescription and a continuing push to raise attainment is far from easy and it will be some years before it can be judged whether a significant change of mindset has occurred.

The new Scottish curriculum highlights tensions between curriculum as content, curriculum as process, and curriculum as outcome (Priestley & Humes, 2010). In this, it reflects issues that have surfaced in other countries, including Australia. It also provides evidence of a disjunction between a discourse of teacher agency, which seeks to characterise teachers as autonomous professionals actively shaping the curriculum, and a much more managerial discourse, focusing on the monitoring of standards and the drive for continuous improvement (defined in terms of formal attainment). These tensions go some way towards explaining the continuing sense of unease felt by many Scottish teachers. It has been argued that part of the reason for contrary tendencies within CfE is the under-theorisation of the original proposals (Humes, 2013b), which relied too much on common sense notions of “best practice” and not enough on research evidence and rigorous conceptual analysis. The evolving political situation, in which Scotland tries to be true to its educational traditions while at the same time attempts to shape a distinctive future within a globalised context, is also an important part of the story. It seems likely that policy initiatives will continue to draw on both local and global discourses, leading to developments that have some similarities to what is happening in other countries, but retaining a tone and identity that is distinctively Scottish.

Conclusion

As Levin (2008) has shown, the “political dynamics” around the construction of school curricula are complex, involving systems, key actors, stakeholder interests, time scale and appeals both to tradition and visions of the future. The discourse used to promote curricular reform is thus likely to be hybrid in character, reflecting different strands of influence and

representing a compromise between competing policy agendas. This insight is clearly evident in the parallel development of the national curricula in Australia and Scotland. In both cases, we see the influence of globalisation, as curricula are shaped by and articulated through powerful global discourses about education. These discourses are framed around shared conceptions of the requirements for economic growth, the (technological) skills required by 21st century employees, and the attributes of citizenship approved by both government and corporate interests. Simultaneously, we see a process of glocalisation (Green, 1999, p.55), as local traditions are reflected in emerging curricular forms. Thus, for example, distinctive national and sub-national cultural features, expressive of particular political interests, co-exist alongside curricular elements that are primarily international in origin, powerfully promoted by global trends in business, technology and inter-governmental aspirations.

The pressures in the direction of convergence are very powerful but it is still possible to see significant differences of emphases. Thus, in the case of the two countries considered here, Australia shows higher levels of prescription of curricular content than Scotland, less (rhetorical) trust in teachers, and a greater degree of marketization. Scotland makes little explicit use of market discourses (though official policy documents have quite often invoked related terms such as audit, accountability, effectiveness and improvement). This can perhaps be explained by the country's strong social-democratic tradition and a history of opposition to the worst excesses of England's curricular trajectory (which have included very heavy prescription of content and competition between different types of schools that seems designed to produce winners and losers). Scotland's delicate political position, poised as it is

between continuing membership of the UK and the possibility of independence, has probably caused successive governments to proceed with a degree of caution.

Neither Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence, nor the new Australian Curriculum is underpinned by a well-developed theoretical framework. This leads to tensions and contradictions, perhaps seen most clearly in relation to pedagogy and the role of the learner. The invocation of progressive terminology (active learning, independent enquiry, learner choice) rests uncomfortably alongside the emphasis on targets, outcomes and assessment. A stronger engagement with the rich vein of curriculum theory available in the academic literature might have enabled curriculum developers to avoid some of these tensions. Educational policy, however, rarely proceeds on an entirely rational and logical basis. It is subject to negotiation and compromise as various stakeholders (national and local government, education professionals, employers and parents) try to advance their particular interests. This means that there is always likely to be a limit to the extent to which curricular policy can be "evidence informed" or grounded in fully developed, and internally coherent, educational theories.

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