

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR



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Hard times for the teaching of Victorian novels?

A critique of
the Australian
Curriculum: History

Outdoor Education
in the curriculum

Reform in music
and arts education

Why language
is everyone's
responsibility

Plus: The role
of rote learning,
Q&A with our Young
Australian of the Year
and Mary Bluett on
Teach for Australia

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Letter to the Editor

Congratulations to Jacqui Kirkman on her article 'Don't Panic! a hitchhikers guide to teaching the digital native'. She has addressed the associated dangers and implications of using a label like 'digital native' on young people. The Melbourne University 2009 handbook, available online at Educating the Net Gen, confirms that learners may not have the sophisticated capacity that some in the techno-centric world assume exists for them at their fingertips. Jacqui refers us to Selwyn's work that supports this view, detailed in Digital Natives: The Myth and the Reality. Neil explains the limitations these labels have had on teaching in educational settings, for students and teachers.

David White, University of Oxford, uses the phrase 'Residents and Visitors' that dispenses with the categories of age and background. This descriptor supports a more complex and useful exploration of the relationship of the tool and the person. It avoids the generational divisions that phrases like Google Generation, Screenagers, Homo Zappiens or Net Savvy Youth create. These labels tend to create subtle dualisms of age, and as Jacqui explained, really need to be discussed and debated by educators. The labels need to be held up against the light of research evidence and examined for their veracity in practice. Dr Mark Bullen, UBC, set up the site Net Gen Skeptic, that acts to disperse unfounded assumptions associated with young people and technologies. Dr Christopher John's ESRC research project, from Open University, notes that university students find the array of technologies problematic. This aligns with research conducted earlier by Melbourne University. Understanding that students have different skill sets, and experiences, and that social purposes and uses are frequently well developed, but that educational uses may need more refinement and support, has implications. Effective educators proceed to find out what their students know and need to know and do not make assumptions about practices based on age. Rather, good teachers always start with their students, at their point of need, and importantly, build on their students' existing expertise.

Dr Christine Redman
University of Melbourne

A new Australian Curriculum

■ Debra Goldfinch, CEO

Australia is on the cusp of an historic moment in education with the implementation of our first Australian Curriculum from next year in most states and territories.

The Foundation to Year 10 Curriculum in English, Mathematics, Science and History has been published by ACARA. Public consultation has been invited by ACARA on the draft Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum for English, Mathematics, Science and History with the view to having the curriculum materials published in late 2012. ACE intends to work with members to take part in this important consultative process.

Over the lengthy development process, what students should be taught under the auspices of a national curriculum has been hotly debated. Special interest groups and concerned individuals alike have pressed, through consultation processes and public debate played out in the media, for the inclusion of particular learning areas. No doubt this debate will continue after the curriculum is implemented.

In this issue of *Professional Educator* we turn our attention to some of the issues surrounding what Australian students learn and how they learn.

Ian Keese analyses the new History curriculum while Martin Comte and David Forrest discuss the history of curriculum reform in the Arts. Don Watts and Keith McNaught argue the case for the use of rote learning in knowledge acquisition and Fiona Mueller reminds us of the importance of building a strong foundation in English language for all students.

Earlier this year the 200th anniversary of the birth of Charles Dickens was



Love or hate Dickens there's no doubt his work remains influential today.

commemorated. Love or hate Dickens there's no doubt his work remains influential today. Grace Moore provides a detailed account of the place of Dickens and other Victorian-era novels in schools today and we've asked some classroom teachers what they think of working with Mr Dickens.

At the time of writing, the place of Outdoor Education in the Australian Curriculum remains in doubt. Tonia Gray, Peter Martin and Ian Boyle note some of the benefits they believe students gain from participating in this form of experiential learning.

Young Australian of the Year Marita Cheng discusses her desire to increase the number of women entering the engineering profession. We also debate the place of free play in early years learning.

Following on from the piece by Teach for Australia Associate James Gutteridge in the last issue, Mary Bluett, Victorian Branch Secretary of the Australian Education Union, provides her thoughts on this controversial program.

All of the issues surrounding the roll out of the first Australian Curriculum certainly can't be addressed in one issue of this publication and we will likely revisit the curriculum in future issues. As always, we hope that the articles in this edition prompt some thoughtful discussions.

We appreciate feedback from readers through letters to the editor. If you would like to share your thoughts on anything you read in *Professional Educator* please drop us a line to ace@austcolled.com.au

Why I think Teach for Australia is a costly mistake



Mary Bluett
Victorian President
of the Australian
Education Union

At a time when money is tight and school education is subject to a range of cutbacks, it is hard to understand why governments continue to fund a program with such exorbitant per capita costs and exceptionally high attrition rates.

The idea of placing unqualified 'teachers', who sign up for a two year teaching taster experience, in classrooms with some of the country's most disadvantaged students defies professional and common sense. Yet this is the concept behind Teach for Australia.

The May 2012 edition of *Professional Educator* included the personal account of Teach for Australia Associate James Gutteridge who was among the program's first cohort in 2010 and has decided to remain in the teaching profession.

James described his journey through the Teach for Australia program and his eventual conclusion that 'I now realise that education is perhaps the most powerful force for change in society and 'I now realise that teachers, despite the lack of recognition, are amongst society's most important leaders.'

James' newfound enthusiasm for the teaching profession and his desire to make a difference to the students he encounters is commendable. James also noted in his article that teacher unions have been critical of the program. He's right. The lack of evidence of the program's effectiveness, high attrition rates and costs of its implementation lead me to conclude that importing the program into Australia from the US has been a costly mistake.

Teach for Australia is a program designed to place 'top graduates', destined for other careers, in two year teaching positions. These graduates are given a taste of what it's like to be a teacher before they move on to their original occupational choices, including as lawyers or bankers or airline executives. Some, like James' may also decide to remain as classroom teachers.

Instead of having a required minimum qualification of at least one year of postgraduate teacher education (soon to be raised to two years) they enter the classroom unqualified after only six weeks of study. They have a 0.8 teaching load and are not directly supervised by a registered teacher.

The secondary schools they are employed in are defined as 'disadvantaged' with significant

numbers of the students coming from low SES, Indigenous and rural/remote backgrounds. The OECD report *Equity and Quality in Education* (2012) describes the difficulties of teaching in such schools where the disadvantaged backgrounds of students are amplified by their concentration in the same school.

Placing unqualified 'associate teachers' in these schools flies in the face of other government-funded initiatives which recognise the complexity of the teaching task there. For example, the National Partnership agreements which provide incentives for more experienced teachers and principals to work in hard-to-staff disadvantaged schools.

When the noted American educationist Linda Darling-Hammond was in Australia in 2011 she described how the parent scheme of Teach for Australia – Teach for America – was now being seen in some disadvantaged communities as just another part of the educational inequality experienced by their young people.

A coalition of more than 70 organisations representing stakeholders such as parents groups and disability rights organisations wrote to Congress calling for the end of the practice of allowing people to teach in high need communities, and particularly to students with special education needs and English language learners, who have not completed their training and who have not got the benefit of much stronger preparation and expectation of staying in the profession.

The American experience is relevant because the Teach for Australia package was one of several initiatives imported from the United States by Julia Gillard when she was Federal Education Minister. It was another case of applying an expensive off-the-shelf 'solution', contentious in its country of origin, to a very different Australian context.

Australia does not have the same problem as the United States with large numbers of unqualified teachers in its schools. We have relatively uniform teacher registration processes



across the country and are moving towards a national system of quality assurance.

The philosophy behind the American program, described as a type of 'Peace Corps-style rescue mission' (the brightest graduates from elite universities postponing their real careers while they go teaching in disadvantaged schools), can be seen as condescending and unprofessional in an Australian context and an affront to mainstream teacher graduates and the profession as a whole.

The notion that a graduate with a high grade point average in their first degree and only six weeks of teacher education lectures can make more of a difference to the learning achievement of students than fully qualified teachers is without any evidential base. The conclusions of a range of independent research studies comparing the effectiveness of Teach for America participants with fully qualified graduate teachers show that this is not the case.

The research also documents the high US attrition rates (estimates of over 80 per cent for a single cohort) which are built into the design of the program. The Teach for Australia program is sold to applicants as a two year only 'commitment'. Its first cohort of 45 Associates, including James Gutteridge, entered Victorian government schools in 2010. By the beginning of 2012,

James is one of only 20 who remain as teachers in any school system.

The high attrition level becomes of even greater concern when the cost of placing a Teach for Australia participant in a school is compared to the cost of the teacher education of a mainstream course graduate. The latter is around \$10,000 per annum.

The Federal Government provided \$22 million to the Teach for Australia program over four years. By the end of the first four years 128 Associates will have participated in the program. This works out at over \$100,000 per student per annum.

At a time when money is tight and school education is subject to a range of cutbacks, it is hard to understand why governments continue to fund a program with such exorbitant per capita costs and exceptionally high attrition rates.

The Teach for Australia organisation's level of PR hype and self-promotion is quite extraordinary. Its website identifies its 'great impact so far'. It claims participants have improved VCE results in a range of subjects and lifted one school's Year 7 NAPLAN performance. It also lists a number of coordination positions participants allegedly now occupy.

Whatever the truth of these anecdotal claims, they are clearly not research-based

evidence of the program's effectiveness. Just as the various profiles and articles in the media about positive experiences of some individual participants who are clearly passionate about the possibility of making a difference are not.

Take away the hype and you are left with a costly recruitment program for a few individuals, a high drop-out rate, the placement of unqualified people in classrooms with high need students, no research evidence to justify its funding and a negative impact on the profession as a whole.

Would doctors, engineers or lawyers tolerate this state of affairs in their professions?

Source interview with Linda Darling-Hammond in *Professional Voice*, V.9.1, p.53 www.aeuvic.asn.au/292740.html

ACE welcomes broad discussion on the issues affecting educators including teacher education.

We invite comments on this article for inclusion in our next edition.

Rote is an essential feature of teaching and learning



Emeritus Professor Don Watts
and Professor Keith McNaught

Can we find a logical explanation for why we expect that those seeking to learn in school and then to proceed to university will have gifts of such a scale that hard work is unnecessary?

A significant part of the commentary on the outcomes of schooling suggests that 'learning by rote' should have no place in contemporary teaching. There is a widely held view that rote learning is an historical hangover in teaching and learning. Learning by repetitive confrontation with factual material is seen as a waste of brain capacity at a time when computer-based information services better serve one's information needs. This fails to recognise that some things must be learned and mastered and be available for immediate application, particularly those facts and experiences that form the foundation for the development of concepts and theory and of more sophisticated understandings.

There are facts, relationships, theories and concepts that must be learned, by rote since they form essential parts of students' inventories as they progress through the sequences that lead to understanding. There is potentially a relationship between the loss of rote learning of rhymes, poems and chants in the early education years and the recent dramatic increase in auditory processing disorders.

These observations demand a more enlightened discussion about what we should be teaching our children so they have understandings and factual knowledge that enhance their options for success in further study and training. These assets enrich their lives in terms of employment options and empower

them to make informed judgments on the many complex issues that face a participatory democracy.

The recognition of the sequential relationships within knowledge in the planning of learning is critical. When ignored, planned learning is replaced by teaching through a smorgasbord of seemingly unrelated experiences. It is thus by ignoring the importance of sophistication in the conceptual development of disciplines that syllabi become burdened by the demand for the teaching and re-teaching of seemingly unrelated material.

The teaching of subjects as a sequence of unrelated learning challenges seems to be possible in some learning areas, at least for a period of time. These subjects are seen in schools as 'easy'.

Subjects often mislabelled as 'hard' are simply those where linear and sequential learning is of critical importance. The 'easy' subjects, in contrast, tend to present a collection of material tainted by faddish ideas and undemanding content based on social commentary.

The 'hard' subjects demand the mastery of an essential core of sequential knowledge which brings coherence and understanding to what otherwise would be unrelated factual rote learning. Subjects, such as mathematics and the physical sciences are not necessarily more difficult but demand that mastery of previous learning has been achieved. It is this mastery

that demands an understanding of the value of 'rote,' which delivers the readiness to advance along the interlocked sequences of learning.

This inter-relatedness of learning experiences in developing knowledge is not limited to science and mathematics. It is also clear that the success in the study of foreign languages is underpinned by the repetitive demands of establishing a vocabulary. Musicianship demands hours of practice in order to progress to more difficult work.

The idea that there are aspects of education and learning that demand complete mastery provides no dilemma in some areas of learning. Would anyone seriously question the dedicated repetitive learning and training required in the life of a concert pianist or a ballet dancer? Some of this work can be seen as simply skills training. However, this completely ignores the intellectual understanding and historical background that converts even a faultless playing of notes or a perfect sequence of movements into virtuoso performances.

In the same way our culture finds no problem in recognising the extraordinary repetitive demands made on even the most gifted in creating a great athlete, tennis player or professional footballer.

Can we find a logical explanation for why we expect that those seeking to learn in school and then to proceed to university will have gifts of such a scale that hard work is unnecessary?

There seems to be political commitment to seek mastery in numeracy and literacy in our primary schools. However, we exist in apparent bewilderment about what we should be attempting to achieve through lower secondary schooling.

There is evidence that there are insufficient teachers qualified to teach higher level programs, particularly in mathematics and physical sciences (Brown, 2009). Too many Australian school students complete 'hard' subjects, particularly in lower secondary, with teachers without competence or training in these areas. Rather, gridlines and timetables determine who teaches which class, resulting in fragmented learning, and the destruction of linear and sequential development in young people.

Decisions of convenience force many into soft options based not on capability but on a school's capacity to teach 'harder options'. These young people deserve a chance to be challenged in ways that test them and provide an opportunity to prove their promise.

The impact of this period determines

what can be studied in Years 11 and 12 and is starkly exposed by the obvious lowering of the standards achieved by many of today's university entrants (Goodrum, Druhan & Abbs, 2011). More significantly, industry complains about the lack of readiness for work and training providers are concerned about the limited command school-leavers have over basic elements of previously expected school outcomes. Increasingly universities find it necessary to provide remedial courses and bridging programs.

It is clear that except for those with advantages in their home and school environment and for some with innate ambitious intent who work at a higher level, there is evidence that little is retained from school that provides a useful grounding for the next stage of learning.

The adoption of 'soft options' in middle and upper schooling has essentially invalidated the ATAR scores used to rank the readiness of students for university study. Western Australia's 'three stages' of courses have resulted in higher numbers of students completing less demanding courses, and having significantly fewer students achieve an ATAR than is the case in other states. Higher scores in soft options distort the data used in the school rankings.

There is little assessment that attempts to examine absolute standards of achievement. The scores we give our children are almost entirely based on a comparison with their peers'. Ranking of scores produces a distribution of marks for a population and the score follows from a child's position in that population. Many parents would validly express concerns if they were made aware of how many of the learning objectives their children failed to meet. They would only be partly relieved if they were told that a high percentage failed to meet more objectives than their child.

Our greater concern is that by neglecting the place of rote learning we are, in effect, setting the bar too low. We fail to challenge too many of our children in the critical middle school years.

There was merit in the old ways in which children were told they had 'failed'. This information did no harm if supportive attitudes and endeavour led to new levels of effort. Too few school reports confront parents and students with the realities and thus support complacency.

Boss and Sims (2008, p. 135) state: 'To live is to experience failure. There appears

no way around it. Sooner or later, everyone fails.' We do students an enormous disservice to deny this reality to them, as failure is a stepping stone to success, and develops resilience.

There is no wisdom in sentencing students to soft options simply because they are not meeting standards in middle school that bear a sequential relationship to future career objectives. The value of rote is that it empowers the learner with a foundation on which they can plan better futures. It is certainly better to insist on retained learning than to ask universities to pick up the task of bridging when, in many cases, nothing is retained on which to build the bridge.

Professor Keith McNaught is Director of the Academic Enabling and Support Centre, on the Fremantle campus of the University of Notre Dame Australia. He has taught in primary, secondary and tertiary education for 30 years, and held various school leadership roles as both a Deputy Principal and Principal. Keith's doctorate was related to his passionate interest and involvement in Mathematics Education.

Emeritus Professor Don Watts held a Personal Chair in Chemistry at the University of Western Australia before becoming Director of the Western Australian Institute of Technology, Vice Chancellor of Curtin University and then of Bond University. He retired from the position of Executive Director of the Northern Territory Education and Training Authority in 1995 and since then has been an Emeritus Professor at the University of Notre Dame, Australia.

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The Sanctity of Play

Has the Early Years Learning Framework struck the right balance between developmental and academic outcomes?

■ Jesse Dean

Traditionally the role of a child care teacher (sometimes diminutively referred to as a childcare 'worker') has been framed as a maternal guide, rather than an educator. This mindset, still prevalent in some circles, undermines not only the legitimacy of the instructor, but the importance of teaching young minds.

Extensive research tells us that early childhood education is the foundation for lifelong achievement, with recent research suggesting children who access good quality pre-school education achieve better results at university. How to lay this framework however, remains contentious.

The first nationally endorsed framework for early childhood learning, *Being, Belonging and Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (EYLF), introduced in 2009, encourages a move away from free-play to a combination of play-based learning and intentional teaching. This pairing may have seemed incongruous to those who have been in early childhood for any extended period of time, with 'teaching' being traditionally seen in opposition to play.

According to Sue Grieshaber, co-author of *The Trouble with Play*, 'the challenge for educators who might be used to free play, and for those involved in adult-centred approaches, is to find a balance between free play and adult generated curriculum experiences and to know how to capitalise on child-initiated play to extend children's learning in play-based ways.'

Professor Bridie Raban suggests that early learning providers are still adjusting to the changes. 'As with all



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responses to change, there are a range of reactions from hoping it will go away, to fully embracing the opportunity to re-evaluate and re-direct the work of a service towards continuous quality improvement.'

The framework also seeks to move from a focus on the psychological development of the individual child to seeing cognitive and social development as complementary. This is set out explicitly in Outcome 5 ('Children are effective communicators') of the EYLF that emphasises literacy and numeracy skills.

This linkage is evident in Dr Kathleen Buchanan's early childhood drama classes, run at the Fintona Girls' School Early Childhood Centre.

Initially the concentration in drama lessons is on non-verbal communication skills and movement. Children are invited into the drama space with non-verbal cues and gestures. Their attention and curiosity are captured immediately by clear instructions through mime.'

'This simple procedure enables the children to make connections between movement and meaning-making.'

When verbal communication skills are introduced, students are then focused on using different communication methods to develop relationships and boundaries, with activities such as puppetry, improvisation, storytelling and role-play. Sharing the space enables the children to gain an understanding of the social skills required for empathetic communication.'

The understanding of 'personal' and 'shared' space is taught with a piece of string. Each child makes their own personal space in a unique shape before being transformed into different shapes that connect with others. 'The social connections are developed through the collaboration and the willingness to share the space as a whole,' said Dr Buchanan.

Content knowledge and intentional teaching

Intentional teaching, as the name suggests 'involves educators being deliberate, purposeful and thoughtful in their actions'. This includes an increased focus on literacy and numeracy in early childhood,

through the active extension of children's vocabulary, talking explicitly about rhyming and speech sounds, engaging children in the meaning of printed texts, and using 'real-life resources to promote children's use of mathematical language'.

This has prompted concerns that Australia is following the path taken in the United Kingdom, where formal education around the 'three Rs' begins between ages 3-4. This has received strong pushback from academics and practitioners alike, who believe this is the 'schoolification' of early childhood learning.

Dr Judy Willis, a US-based neurologist and teacher, suggests that the quantity of information that young children are being asked to learn is placing them under undue stress, which in turn manifests as behavioural problems. Instead she suggests, if children cannot be at home they should be 'in a loving place where the child feels they can explore, and natural curiosity is encouraged, not regimented'¹.

Dr Susan Krieg², Early Childhood Program Coordinator at Flinders University sees things differently. She argues that while teaching content knowledge goes against traditional early childhood pedagogy, bringing together

¹ Lateline www.abc.net.au/lateline/content/2012/s3482571.htm

² Krieg, S., 2011. The Australian Early Years Learning Framework: Learning what? in *Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood*, 12(1), 46-55.

play and subject-based learning allows children to apply concepts and methods of inquiry from subject disciplines, giving children the opportunity for 'authentic' learning.

'The Early Years Learning Framework provides the pedagogical principles that underpin teaching and learning in the early years but the ideas and concepts that might be considered important for young children to learn are stated in very broad terms.'

Being a framework rather than a curriculum 'the ideas and concepts that might be considered important for young children to learn are stated in very broad terms,' said Dr Krieg. 'This openness is deliberate and indicative of the wide range of interests that young children have about their worlds.'

After two years of implementation, the test may be how the framework aligns with the National Curriculum, which is due to start next year. While ACARA believes the continuity of pedagogy is addressed in the outcomes of the two frameworks, they acknowledge that children will continue to enter primary school with differing levels of preparedness.

This question has been addressed by ACARA, who recommend teachers in the first years of school, 'use their professional judgement and pedagogical repertoire to accommodate the varied learning experiences and diverse backgrounds that children bring to school', as well as applying principles and practices of the EYLF in their teaching. Teachers may then 'gradually introduce the content of the Australian Curriculum as learners demonstrate the ability to access it'.

As research and evaluation continues, the validity of these approaches will become evident.

Jesse Dean is Policy Research Officer with ACE National Office

What the experts say

Prof Bridie Raban – Senior Research Fellow with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER)

The Early Years Learning Framework offers all early childhood educators a single national framework for the first time. This enables families and staff as they move round the country to have similar and clearer expectations and understandings. However, the definition of early literacy (copied directly from the NZ Early Childhood Curriculum) is misleading and entirely inappropriate for supporting further literacy development into the early years of schooling. In particular, the Victorian government has adopted this definition straight into the VEYLDF which covers the age range 0 – 8 years! Teachers in the early years of schooling may well have some views on this definition, especially with a view to NAPLAN assessments at Year 3.

NAPLAN results over the next 10 years may see the impact of the EYLF, but students will never be equally prepared for school. That is a much larger issue than early childhood settings alone can deal with. Of course early childhood settings are a part of the bigger picture, but further integrated support for families through health, welfare, community as well as education and care services need to be involved in an inclusive range of provision (available for all families).



Dr Susan Krieg – Senior Lecturer and Coordinator of the Early Childhood Program, Flinders University

Early childhood educators view learning as a holistic process that involves social, emotional, physical and intellectual change. Early childhood education is premised on the understanding that from the moment of birth, children participate in, contribute to, and make sense of their worlds through play, experience and interaction with significant others. Early childhood educators therefore work in ways that sustain children's dispositions to learn. Ultimately, if in the process of learning new skills, children lose the dispositions to use them, the educative process has been in vain.

A play-based, child-centred pedagogy and curriculum enhance children's dispositions for learning. Given that these dispositions of exploration, flexibility, creativity, persistence, efficacy and precision are the starting points for deep learning, it is difficult to understand how this play experience could ever be construed as being detrimental to children's intellectual development.

The Early Years Learning Framework provides the pedagogical principles that underpin teaching and learning in the early years but the ideas and concepts that might be considered important for young children to learn are stated in very broad terms. This openness is deliberate and indicative of the wide range of interests that young children have about their worlds. However, alongside this openness, research tells us that the educator's capacity to sustain and extend young children's learning is directly related to their capacity to recognise whether the child's intent might be enhanced through drawing on some of the 'big ideas' developed in the disciplines. Recognising, sustaining and enhancing young children's intent and interests demands a sophisticated pedagogy that draws on deep understanding of the methods of inquiry found in the disciplines. Because children's interests are so diverse and are connected to local contexts, a national prescribed curriculum is not going to facilitate this awareness.



Dr Kathleen Buchanan – Drama Specialist, Fintona Girls' School

I believe caution is required to ensure that a narrow framework based solely on intellectual development does not overshadow the holistic approach to education of young children. It is important to permit uninterrupted play in a safe environment, to encourage children to extend their thinking and develop their social interactions.

The arts (whether music, visual arts, or performing arts) provide a vehicle for expression, giving children the necessary tools to express themselves using a combination of play and stimulating challenges. The integration of the Arts in Early Learning leads to deeper learning through different thinking and expressive skills to promote both intellectual and social development in young children while providing the most appropriate stimulus for brain development.

Early Years Drama views play as a powerful vehicle to foster and extend children's learning. Children are engaged in the fun of learning and the understanding of others through their social interaction. They learn to take turns, respond appropriately and express their feelings through verbal and non-verbal communication skills. It is through intentional teaching strategies used in Drama that enhance learning in the play context. Focus on listening and observation skills is promoted to assist children to make connections between prior experiences and new learning.

The main conceptual development within Early Learning Drama is to cultivate the children's imaginations. This can be developed through symbolisation. Subtle shifts in thinking through group learning situations using kitchen utensils can transform the ordinary into 'other' objects. Chairs also can be transformed into all manner of vehicles and play-stations. Furthermore, the children can work together in a collaborative approach in 'cubby' and 'habitat' buildings using chairs and fabric. All these activities extended the children's imaginative process to allow them to gain ownership of their creations and their learning.



What are your thoughts on the issues raised in this article and by the expert commentators? Write to us at ace@austcolled.com.au



Hard times for the teaching of Victorian novels?

■ Grace Moore

The University of Melbourne

In an address to mark the bicentenary of Charles Dickens's birth in February of this year, the British Minister of State for Schools, Nick Gibb, proclaimed that every pupil should have read at least one work by Dickens by the end of their teenage years. Highlighting the parallels between Victorian Britain and the present day, Gibb outlined the alarming rates of illiteracy both globally and nationally, and pointed to the 'shadows of Dickens's world in our own'.

The Dickens Day speech was part of a drive to raise literacy standards in schools, but also to help students to understand the richness of their literary heritage. Gibb noted that students tended to be drawn to the same types of novels when making choices about their exams, and he also highlighted the apparent lack of interest in writing from the nineteenth century. According to Gibb, out of 300,000 students sitting the English Literature GCSE exam (for sixteen-year-olds), only 1700 students elected to study a pre-twentieth-century work, and only 187 chose to write on Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*.

The distinguished Dickens biographer, Claire Tomalin seized upon Gibb's speech and while noting the ongoing relevance of Dickens's writing, she suggested that today's teenagers are simply unable to cope with reading sprawling novels that go on for hundreds of pages. According to Tomalin, 'Today's children have very short attention-spans because they are being reared on dreadful TV programmes. They are not being educated for long attention-spans'. Teaching the nineteenth-

century novel in the twenty-first century is something of a challenge and as my university-level students juggle more and more demands on their time, they do seem to have less and less stamina for the works Henry James described as 'loose baggy monsters'. However, it is worth pausing to reflect on whether students will rise to the challenges posed by a longer piece of fiction, or whether the Victorian novel's days in the classroom are numbered.

Anecdotal evidence from high school teachers suggests that Tomalin is mistaken in her readiness to dismiss the literary tenacity of today's teenagers. A UK-based teacher friend reports that she teaches Dickens to children as young as eleven, combining close-reading of the novels, with carefully chosen film clips, role-playing and empathetic writing, whereby the students write creative pieces from the perspective of a character. Stephanie Marshall, who has taught Dickens in an Australian regional secondary college, agrees that Dickens is accessible to her students. She notes, though, that some of her pupils struggle with the language and expression in nineteenth-century novels and often need assistance in contextualizing the work. Margot Thompson, Head of English at Loreto Mandeville Hall in Toorak, says that some of her students are initially confronted by the lengthy, winding sentences that characterize Dickens's writing. However devoting class time to unpacking the complexities of mid-Victorian syntax helps the students to familiarize themselves with a form of expression that is very different from the short tweets and text messages that teenagers so often use to communicate.

Every teacher I spoke to on this matter emphasised the importance of reading Dickens aloud, both to help students concentrate on the differing sentence structures and to help them appreciate the often uproarious humour of his writing. Dickens himself famously engaged in a number of reading tours, bringing his characters to life through highly dramatic performance that thrilled his audiences and often elevated his pulse rate to a dangerous level. That Dickens's prose can continue to speak to a twenty-first century audience is clear from the popularity of television adaptations such as Andrew Davies's magnificent *Bleak House* (2005). Davies's production endeavoured to capture the nineteenth-century reading experience, partly through the suspense generated by its short episodes, but mostly through its fidelity to Dickens's writing. Viewers who were familiar with the novel expressed delight and the apparent seamlessness with which Dickens's own words were transposed from page to screen.

While not a substitute for reading the original novel, period dramas can help students to orient themselves in the nineteenth century and to gain a sense of context. Novels like Dickens's can also be made more accessible through a session or two on the work's historical climate. Victorian realist writing was so inextricably tied to questions of social and political reform, that students with no background in English history can struggle to understand how *Oliver Twist* responds to the Poor Law Amendment Act of 1834, or why Dickens was so troubled by the state of education in a factory town like the fictitious 'Coketown' of *Hard Times* (1854).

Claire Tomalin's comments on teenagers and their lack of focus rather downplay the fact that Dickens's first readers experienced his novels in instalments. Far from needing to knuckle down to two or three hundred pages in a single sitting, the serial format, with its dramatic cliff-hangers, left readers desperate for more and this perhaps points to a teaching strategy. The Community

Reading Project offers one strategy for readers who may feel daunted at the prospect of a lengthy Victorian tome. Based at Stanford University in the USA, the project allowed members of the American public to experience the excitement of reading a novel in parts. Beginning with Dickens's works, but later branching out to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, the project sent out weekly facsimiles of the original serials through the mail. There was no charge involved and anyone residing in North America was welcome to participate. The program provided support for readers through its website, offering detailed notes and contextual information, as well as reproductions of the original engravings to accompany the text. Archived copies of the novels remain available as PDFs on the project's website and while the program remains dormant for the time being, the organisers pledge that it will be revived as soon as funding becomes available. Teachers seeking to bring Dickens to life can draw upon this treasure trove to make reading Dickens both accessible and fun.

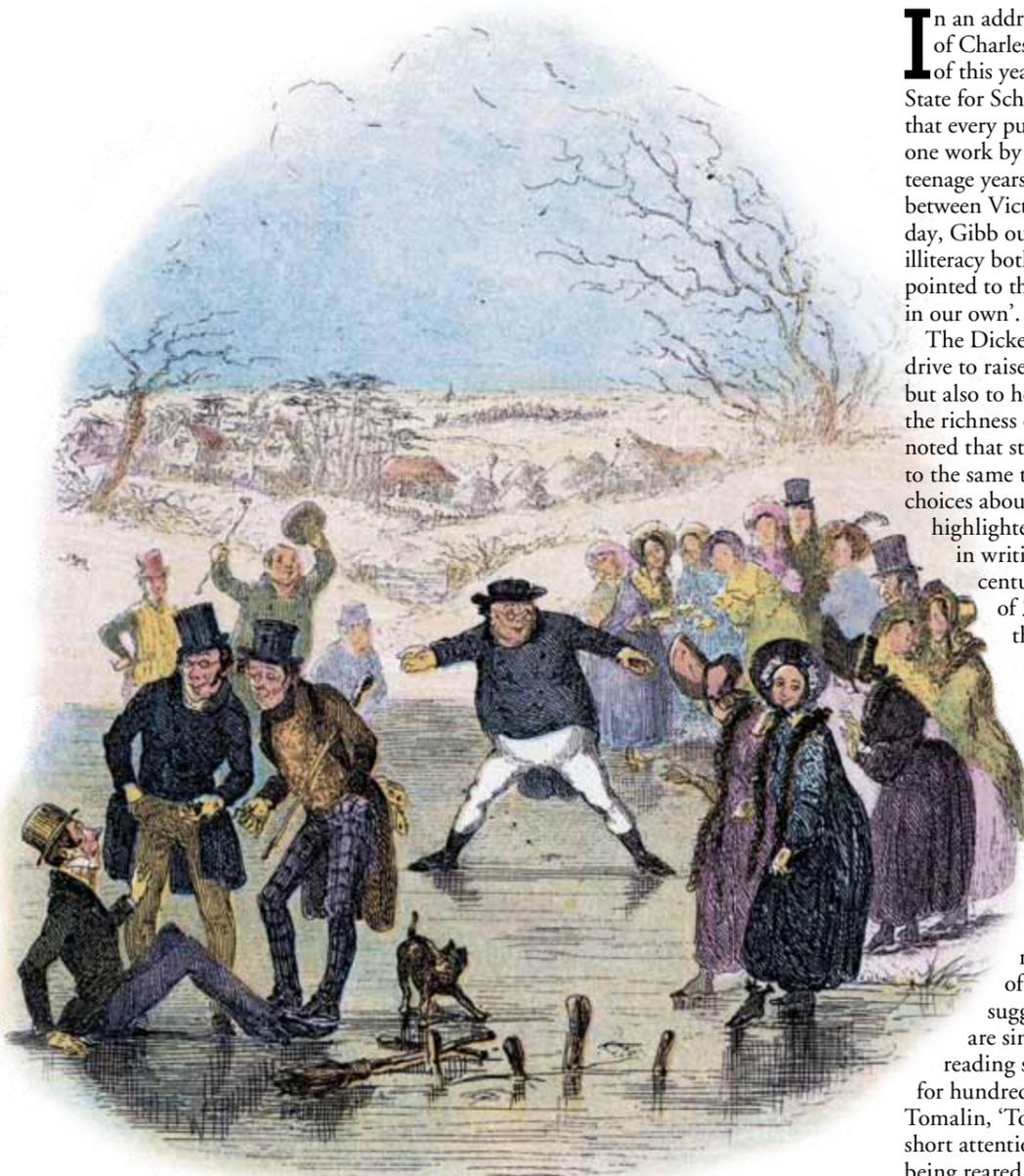
Of course, the broader question underpinning both Nick Gibbs's speech and Claire Tomalin's remarks is whether students actually benefit from reading works by a novelist born 200 years ago. Dickens famously spoke out against the 'one size fits all' style of education in *Hard Times*. His schoolmaster protagonist, Thomas Gradgrind, learns the hard way that education must be nuanced and creative, as well as adapted to the needs of the individual learner. While Dickens is undoubtedly a very great writer, we should pause to consider whether every child should have to read his works and what we would expect these young readers to gain through engaging with the nineteenth century. Moreover, as Peter Carey highlights in his novel, *Jack Maggs*, there are also questions about the relevance of Dickens's writing outside of the UK. Carey revises the story of Dickens's convict, Magwitch, to emphasise his colonial past and to ask why a man transported from Britain would choose to leave a life of prosperity in New South Wales to return to the homeland from which he has been exiled. Modern-day adaptations like those by Carey and the New Zealand novelist Lloyd Jones can offer another way of making 'classic' novels relevant to today's readers and can open up fascinating debates about whose voices are privileged in Victorian writing.

Many of the social issues raised by Dickens's novels remain remarkably relevant. With its spectacular depiction of a stock market crash, *Little*

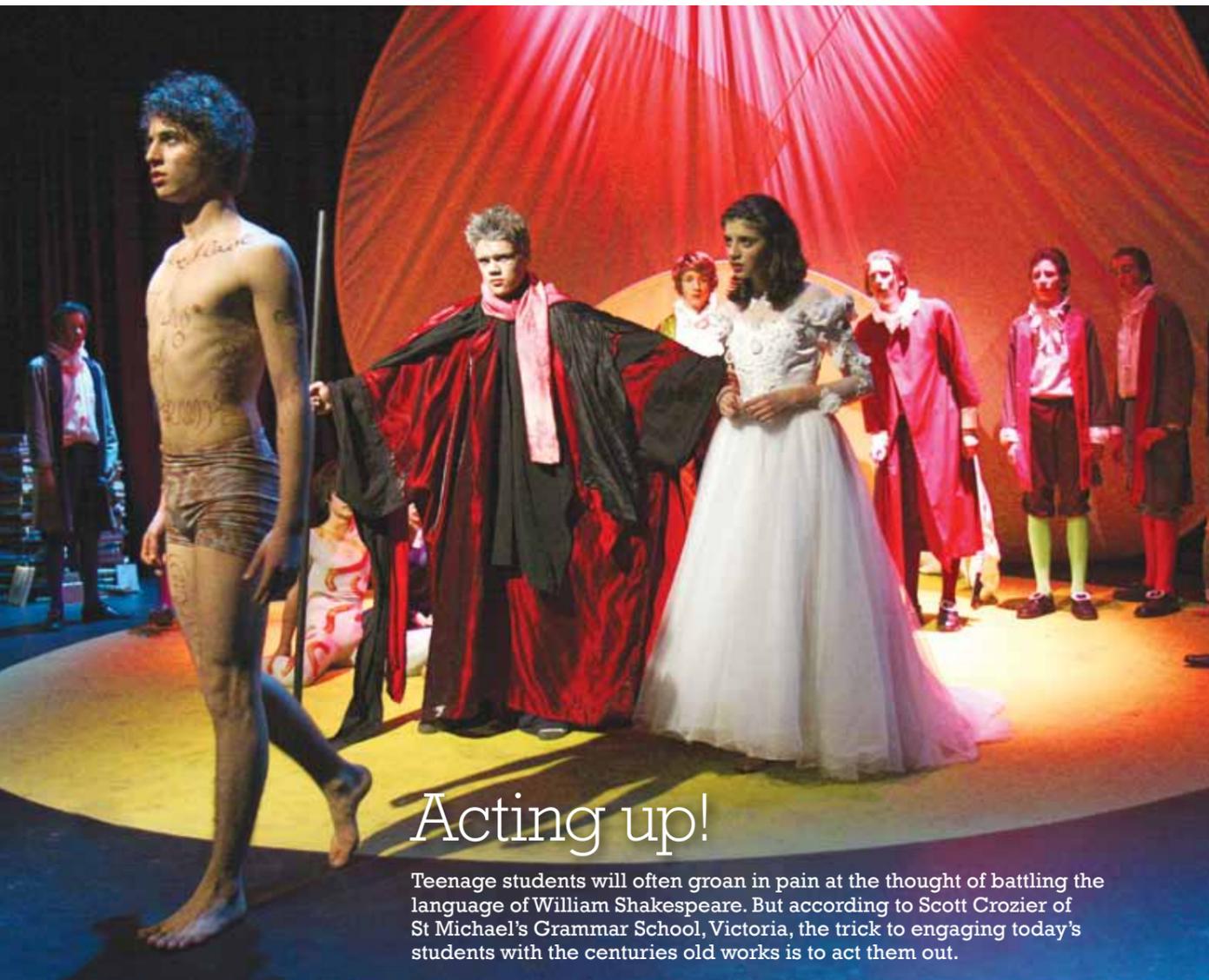
Dorrit anticipates the chaos of the Global Financial Crisis, while Dickens's compassionate portraits of suffering and social inequality are vivid reminders of the stark divisions that remain between the wealthy and society's poorest members. While it's important to reflect upon how he speaks to us across the centuries, Dickens remains topical and engaging. To suggest that our teenagers lack the concentration and analytical skills to understand his novels is to seriously underestimate their capacity to stretch themselves and, indeed, to downplay the role that all teachers can play in bringing the works to life. We need to adopt the lesson of *Hard Times* and to understand that different students will need to approach these challenging texts in a variety of ways. However, the joy of reading Dickens is the sheer looseness and bagginess of his works, and within this format there is surely something that will speak to every student.

Details of the Stanford University Community Reading Project may be found here: www.dickens.stanford.edu

Dr Grace Moore is a lecturer in English at the University of Melbourne School of Culture and Communication



MR. PICKWICK SLIDES



Acting up!

Teenage students will often groan in pain at the thought of battling the language of William Shakespeare. But according to Scott Crozier of St Michael's Grammar School, Victoria, the trick to engaging today's students with the centuries old works is to act them out.

Image courtesy of St Michael's Grammar School

Scott Crozier was first exposed to Shakespeare when he was part of the audience for an expat production of the 'Scottish Play' in Port Moresby in 1963 and later became besotted with the language as a high school student in Queensland. While teaching at Scotch College Melbourne, Scott went on exchange to The Abingdon School in the UK – importantly just an hour from Stratford – where he was able to observe the best of Shakespeare. He returned from the UK with a mission to head an English Department and to give students the opportunity to engage in Shakespeare as he had.

The simple answer to how to engage students with Shakespeare is to act it! The scripts were never written to be read; they were performance blue prints. To make it accessible take the universality of the play and give it a context that works for students now. I recently directed a production of *Romeo and Juliet* set in warring Bosnia inspired by newspaper reportage of a young Christian and Muslim couple shot in no-man's land running away from the fighting; a *Midsummer Night's Dream*, which I ended up taking to Singapore, set in the scaffolded back lanes of a modern city at night; and *The Tempest* where the comic characters, reminiscent of punters on their way home from a hard day at Flemington in November, were dumped in a foreign land in a timeless context. This is what grabs the kids. The language then permeates them by osmosis. The idea is easy; the language comes second but when they get it they realise just how powerful the language is in expressing those universal ideas.

Living the story rather than just reading it in print helps students to relate to the themes

in Shakespeare. These stories and themes are still relevant hundreds of years after they were written because the issues faced haven't changed much apart from the themes around the ruling Tudor regime.

If as a teacher you find yourself struggling to get students to engage with Shakespeare let them see it. I vividly remember seeing Zeffirelli's *Romeo and Juliet* as a 16-year-old. Baz Lurhman did it for recent 16-year-olds. There are some excellent DVD versions of recent production of most plays that would work.

There is still an important place for Shakespeare on any reading list. Avoiding introducing Shakespeare to students is as bad as blotting out a whole segment of their heritage. Like it or not, so much of our figurative language alone was constructed by Shakespeare let alone the universality of what he wrote about.

Scott Crozier is Dean of Pastoral Care and Students, St Michael's Grammar School. He has produced numerous student productions of Shakespeare including *The Tempest* (pictured).

What the Dickens!

The new *Australian Curriculum: English* neither prescribes nor prohibits the teaching of Dickens. To allow flexibility in the implementation of the curriculum within the different jurisdictions and at school level, the English curriculum does not include a list of prescribed texts.

'Throughout the consultation process leading to the development of the national curriculum there was a general consensus of opinion against the prescription of texts,' Professor Robert Dixon Chair of Australian Literature at the University of Sydney and a consultant to the to the national curriculum process since its beginning in 2008 explains.

Instead 'illustrative' texts are included to help teachers identify texts that are most appropriate for their students.

In the new draft senior secondary English curriculum, examples of suitable texts are included to 'stimulate thinking about teaching resources in relation to the subject and are not intended to be prescriptive.'

The literature strand in the *Australian Curriculum: English* Foundation to Year 10 aims to 'engage students in the study of literary texts of personal, cultural, social and aesthetic value. These texts include some that are recognised as having enduring social and artistic value and some that attract contemporary attention.'

Professional Educator asked teachers and academics for their thoughts on teaching Dickens 200 years after his birth. Here's what some of them had to say:

The general parameters of the curriculum are for students to engage with literature from all periods and from Australia and other parts of the world. There are certainly opportunities within those parameters for teachers to select Victorian era novels. Given that the nineteenth century was an important period in the development of the novel, and given Dickens's own important role in the development of the novel, the curriculum parameters would not only allow teachers to set Dickens but would encourage it.'

Professor Robert Dixon
Chair of Australian Literature
The University of Sydney

I have just begun a close study of *David Copperfield* with my Year 11 Advanced English class. The students have had time to read and have been set research tasks on Dickens's life and times preparatory to class study. Reactions to the text have varied from 'too long, won't read,' 'is there a film version?' to 'love this, miss'. I plan to focus on characters initially, focusing on Dickens's skill in drawing people such as Miss Murdstone, Uriah Heep and Mr Micawber. This will build on earlier lessons where we focused on narrative writing and building realistic characters in their own short stories.

There are parallels with our current political climate to be drawn from *David Copperfield*'s observations as a parliamentary reporter and a rich vein to be mined in the observations of Australia and Australian media towards the end of the novel.'

Kris Smith
Hurststone Agricultural High

There is no doubt that Dickens's characters and settings have much to offer students in any educational context. Portraits drawn, read or listened to provide rich material for the classroom. Drama, creative writing, language and grammar exercises can be successfully developed around the likes of Scrooge, Mr Pumblechook, Miss Havisham, Oliver and Fagan, and the settings likewise prove valuable for historical recreation, comparative evaluations and imaginative activities. While plot summaries will engage students, the reading of many of Dickens's novels will not. Given the rich range of texts available today, only well chosen extracts seem worth the effort.

Christine Davis
Loreto Kirribilli

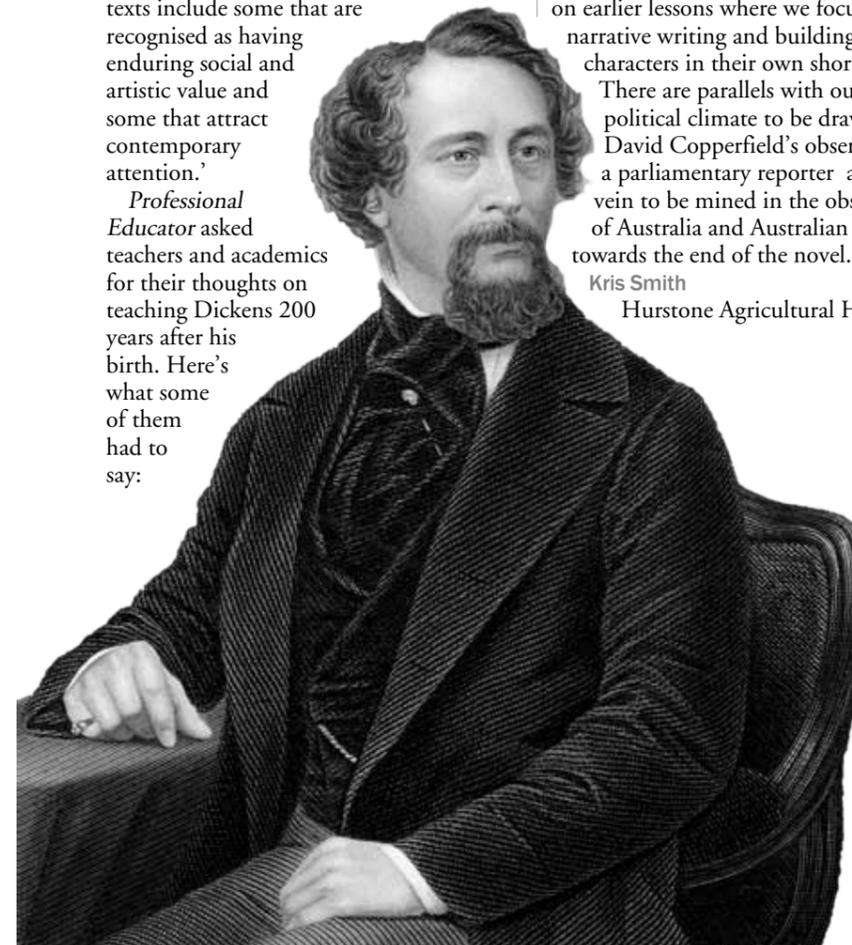
I think Dickens continues to have a great ideal to teach teenagers because he is such an accomplished writer.

For example, I often use the opening chapter of *Great Expectations* as a wonderful example of the manipulation of point of view in first person narration. A straight forward way to proceed, for a class at Year 11 level, is to read through the chapter, which is really quite short, and then discuss the students' responses. How do they feel about Pip? How do they feel about the convict? Do they feel any sympathy for him? At this point we may try to account for these responses or I may move directly to showing the equivalent scene in one of the film versions.

I use this exercise to explore how point of view can shift in first person narrative as a prelude to an exercise in which students are asked to write in first person about a time when something happened to them which they subsequently saw in a rather different light because the older version of themselves understood things they could not understand at the time. The exercise is not to tell the reader about the later understanding, but as Dickens does to enable us to be aware of both the younger and the older reactions. Students learn a lot from Dickens and apply it with relish.

Derek Peat
The McDonald College

We welcome further comment from teachers on Victorian-era novels or other texts. Tell us about your favourite books to teach at ace@austrcolled.com.au



Outdoor Education and the Australian National Curriculum



- **Assoc. Prof. Tonia Gray**
University of Western Sydney
- **Assoc. Prof. Peter Martin**
University of Ballarat
- **Dr Ian Boyle**
University of Sydney

Our students are often unaware of the power of the outdoors and how simple slow quiet time in nature can provide unexpected wonder and learning.

Australia is on the cusp of an educational renaissance, with the introduction, for the first time of a national curriculum. However, the future of Outdoor Education in the school curriculum occupies a perilous position. Severely marginalised in the initial draft of our new Health and Physical Education (HPE) curriculum, the place of Outdoor Education in the new era of a national curriculum is under threat. Understandably, Outdoor Education Australia (OEA), the professional body responsible for overseeing Outdoor Education, is deeply concerned that experiential education in natural environments is fast becoming a rarity for young children. What is particularly disconcerting for OEA and echoes the notion put forward by Richard Louv (2008) in his book *Last Child in the Woods*, is that a child in nature is an endangered species and quite clearly, the draft HPE curriculum exacerbates this stance.

Proponents have repeatedly argued that Outdoor Education is a rich and valuable source of holistic educational experiences. By its very nature, Outdoor Education promotes health, well-being

and lays a foundation for environmental stewardship, experiences not normally available in mainstream education. In the first draft of the HPE paper that will guide curriculum development, there is only limited acknowledgement of the subject's importance. OEA is presently lobbying the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and arguing for its distinctiveness and need to be included in the national curriculum final draft.

In June 2012, ACARA will be releasing the final draft of its scoping paper for HPE. It will outline propositions for HPE, strands, aims, proposed structure, scope and sequence of content. In addition, the scoping paper for HPE contributes to general capabilities and cross curriculum priorities. Based on this premise, it will be the main guide for the shape of the HPE learning area into the next decade and beyond.

Of pressing concern for OEA and practitioners in the field, is that Outdoor Education is not being considered as a national priority within the newly drafted curriculum.

Each phase of development in the new national curriculum has included

different subjects and learning areas. The third and final phase includes the Health and Physical Education (HPE) learning area. Historically, Outdoor Education has a tradition as being within the HPE learning area. The HPE learning area has been delivered in schools via a range of subjects such as Physical Education, Health Studies, Health and Human Development, Outdoor Education, and Home Economics.

What has defined or bound these subjects has been the central theme of human well-being, to which Outdoor Education has added the importance of recreation and education in nature, for both human and environmental futures. How schools will deliver the new national curriculum and which subjects will be developed from the national curriculum guidelines in HPE remains contested, although it seems that Outdoor Education is highly unlikely to exist as a subject in its own right.

The Shaping paper is the first of a four-stage process that includes: curriculum writing, implementation and evaluation/review. The draft *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Health and Physical Education* was released in mid March 2012 and the wider educational community was able to comment via a dedicated ACARA process. It is anticipated that the curriculum writing stage for HPE will commence later in 2012 and then be trialled in schools early in 2013 for later implementation Australia wide by 2014/15.

The challenge for advocates of Outdoor Education is to clarify *how and where* it can contribute to the nominated learning areas, general capabilities or cross curriculum priorities that make up the national curriculum. Traditionally, Outdoor Education as both subject and process has resided within the HPE learning area. However, we are concerned that Outdoor Education does not have a strong or well sequenced presence in the draft Shaping

paper for the HPE learning area. This has led to a need to highlight this shortcoming with the goal of having other educators get behind the push for a more substantive inclusion of Outdoor Education in the final draft of the shaping paper.

So let us have a look at the unique benefits of Outdoor Education and why it should be more prominent in a national curriculum.

What does outdoor education offer that is not available in the mainstream curriculum?

Biophilia Coined by Harvard biologist Edward O. Wilson the most basic definition of biophilia is the love of nature and an affection to all living things (Wilson, 1984). Biophilia is an innate part of our evolutionary heritage or genetic blueprint, consequently the restorative qualities of nature are widely accepted and part of being human. In essence this is attributed to the reality of our hunter gatherer human history in which we lived with intimate connections to nature, a connection that was initially disrupted only a few generations ago with the beginnings of industrialisation. Of interest, John Ratey in his book *Spark* cites anthropologists who believe our hunter gatherer ancestors would have been out in nature actively travelling between 16-19 kilometres a day just to get enough food to survive (Ratey, 2008). Compare this to today's society!

Notably, some scientific disciplines are of the belief that modern environmental crises, as well as many health issues such as obesity and depression have been viewed as symptomatic of a fundamental rupture of the human emotional and spiritual relationship with the natural world. Reawakening or rebuilding our innate affinity with nature is a fundamental goal of Outdoor Education. Such re-kindling is based upon what we understand

about nature, well-being and our human psyche.

Our students are often unaware of the power of the outdoors and how simple slow quiet time in nature can provide unexpected wonder and learning. Rachel and Stephen Kaplan highlighted in their book *The experience of nature: A psychological perspective* the concept of Attention Restoration Theory. This is where time in the outdoors helps recharge and reprogram our brains and rejuvenates and protects us against the stresses of modern society. We often forget that natural environments abound with 'soft fascinations' which a person can reflect upon in 'effortless attention', such as clouds moving across the sky, leaves rustling in a breeze, water bubbling over rocks in a stream, laying under the stars looking for a shoot star (Kaplan & Kaplan, 1989).

It is known that natural settings reduce stress, improve mood states, enhance coping ability and assist in combating depression. It is also recognised as therapeutic and cathartic. Richard Louv who in his book *The Nature Principle: Human restoration and the end of Nature-Deficit Disorder*, suggests that when we are in contact with the natural world, 'we are, in essence, self medicating with an inexpensive and unusually convenient drug substitute. Let's call it Vitamin N – for Nature' (Louv, 2011 p.46). Ironically however, national curriculum planners and key stakeholders have neglected to take an important lesson from this research. The Draft Shaping Paper does not have a clearly identifiable scope and sequence of how experiences out-of-doors contributes to health and well-being.

Access to natural settings and open green space has been found to be crucial for the holistic development of children and adolescents with the quality of their exposure to nature being inextricably linked to young people's health and well-being. The neural consequences of environmental enrichment have been widely examined and children's concentration and work patterns improved after participating in activities in green surroundings. In addition, Richard Louv has outlined recent research which showed that, 'the experience of nature in a neurological sense can help strengthen the activities of the right hemisphere of the brain, and restore harmony to the functions of the brain as a whole' (Louv, 2011 p. 35).

Supporting this brain focus, prominent psychiatrist and educator Dr. Daniel Siegel utilises his latest neuroscience research to promote educational opportunities like

Outdoor Education and how they can greatly enhance the brain's function in ways that mainstream education cannot. The experiences we have throughout our life shape the neural connections in our brain. When we look at the subject inclusions of the national curriculum there is a major focus on the traditional three-R's of education, reading, writing, and arithmetic. If this is all that is given to our students during their schooling it is going to shape their brain in a certain fashion that develops a set of brain circuitry that focuses on the physical world, but ignores a very important secondary set of circuits that is about the mind (Siegel, 2009).

Including learning opportunities that promote an alternate three-R's of education; reflection, relationships and resilience, which are a major focus of Outdoor Education, will help shape a person's brain in a way that allows them a mind with the ability to foster better relationships with themselves, others and the environment. Having an education system that considers this alternate set of circuitry is so crucial for future generations that it should not be missed in the development of our new national curriculum.

Proponents are now suggesting a new paradigm referred to as *mind/body/nature* connection. The national HPE curriculum could do well to expand its current mind/body integration to embrace this third part of self, a part acknowledged in the psyche, evident in the restorative powers of nature, but obscured by modern living. Childhood exposure to nature and the frequency of visits to green, natural places at a young age directly correlates with adult patterns of behavior. Consequently, infrequent visits to green spaces as a child closely aligns with a reduction in visitations during adulthood (Ward-Thompson, Aspinall & Montarzano, 2008).

Outdoor Education has long taught basic skills of being and living outdoors, or knowing how to recreate safely. We know that outdoor activities such as bushwalking are low cost and accessible across the lifespan. Increasingly, as Australians are urbanised and often from cultures beyond our shores there will be an ongoing need for an education that takes account of how to recreate and access national parks and outdoor recreation spaces in ways that are both safe and just. When the most basic skills of being able to safely get outdoors are no longer something that is an everyday part of Australian life, then the benefits briefly summarised above become similarly inaccessible to many. These skills of outdoor living and travel should also be a part of a curriculum that claims to be

national.

The national curriculum could provide a mandate for every child to experience the natural world based not on a scientific or sociological study, but on direct, instinctive and personal engagement with nature. Modern life has narrowed our senses to preference the visual and as a result we need to learn to pay attention to our surroundings, rather than avoid risks and simplistically live carefully. There are a plethora of studies to reinforce the value of sensory exploration, movement and the innate joy of being outdoors. From the perspective of outdoor educators within Australia, it appears that ACARA has a blind-spot when it comes to embracing the positive dimensions of human-nature interaction. As professionals responsible for educating the next generation of Australians, we need to shine light upon the benefits of nature-based experiences to health and well-being. The connection between humanity and nature throughout the life cycle and how to design, develop, implement and sustain this relationship is of paramount importance in our national curriculum.

Assoc. Professor Tonia Gray: is a secondary specialist in pedagogy & learning at the University of Western Sydney's Centre for Educational Research.

Dr. Ian Boyle: is an Outdoor Education Lecturer at the University of Sydney.

Assoc. Professor Peter Martin: Specialises in human nature relationships, professionalism in outdoor education, and rock climbing teaching and its benefits at the University of Ballarat.

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Marita Cheng

Young Australian of the Year 2012

Marita Cheng has been described as an engineering visionary. The Cairns-born student developed a passion for maths and science early in life, encouraged by her family. Her fascination with the impact that science, technology and engineering can have on the world led Marita to pursue studies in engineering at the University of Melbourne. After discovering female students made up only 10 per cent of all students in her course, Marita was inspired to establish Robogals Global in 2008 as a response to the traditionally low levels of participation by women in engineering and technology. Robogals teaches school girls about engineering and the difference that engineers make to our lives. Robogals has run robotics workshops for 3000 girls across 80 schools in Australia and now has 17 chapters across Australia, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

Marita's efforts to encourage more girls to pursue studies in maths, science and engineering saw her named 2012 Young Australian of the Year. Marita Cheng discussed her motivations to establish Robogals and her desire to see more women in engineering with *Professional Educator* editor Louise Reynolds.

LR: Firstly Marita, Congratulations on being named Young Australian of the Year. This is a significant acknowledgment of the work you have done to encourage girls to undertake studies in engineering and technology. What does that recognition mean to you?

MC: I think my feeling of being named Young Australian of the Year was that it was a real acknowledgment to the engineering community and the work that engineers do to ensure that our living standards are so high. I think it acknowledged that the people of Australia saw the lack of engineers, and the lack of women in the engineering profession in particular, was a huge problem and they wanted to acknowledge my work in the field by giving me this award and giving me this platform to continue to share my message.

LR: As we know engineering and related professions are still very much male dominated. What is putting off girls and young women from pursuing a career in engineering and science?

MC: I think there is a societal perception that engineering and science, engineering in particular, isn't a very female friendly profession. And I think that perception is fanned by the girls and their parents and the careers counsellors. So what Robogals is trying to get out there is that engineering is a profession that has an amazing impact on the world through the use of innovative designs and ideas. If we present to the girls that engineering is a profession that can have these profound impacts on the world then more women, more girls, will be willing to go into the profession.

LR: Going back to your own school days, what reaction did you get from your family and friends when you decided to pursue science and engineering as your career?

MC: There were three girls out of my school (a co-ed school in Cairns with about 200 students) who went on to engineering right out of high school and the other two girls were both my friends. I didn't get any weird reaction at all. I got a lot of support, actually, for my decision. I was very good at maths and science so it seemed pretty natural to everyone that I was doing engineering and science.

However, my mother actually wanted me to do medicine when I was in high school because it would lead to a really prestigious and stable

job as a doctor. And so I actually sat my tests that you need to do in order to get into medicine and went to my interview to get into medicine. It was actually in that interview where I decided once and for all that I wouldn't do medicine and that I wanted to do engineering because I realised that you have to do what you're passionate about because it's your life and if you don't spend your life doing what you're passionate about then you're not really living.

LR: Education research indicates that primary school is an important stage in which to spark interest in science and technology. What sparked your interest at that age?

MC: My Mum made me do all my maths homework and made me practice all my times tables and that meant I was really good at maths in school. I think being really good at something made

I think there is a societal perception that engineering and science, engineering in particular, isn't a very female friendly profession.

me like it more and want to pursue it more. My brother was very interested in science and he would tell me all these great facts about science and set me little research tasks to do about science and different famous scientists and that had an impact. I thought 'wow science is something that can have a huge impact on the world and change the way that society views the world.' So I saw it as a very useful and powerful tool and I think that affected my decision to pursue studies in that field.

LR: Jump forward now to your university studies and I understand you found yourself and your fellow female students very much in the minority. How did this motivate you to establish Robogals?

MC: That's right. I went to school in Cairns, which is a smaller city and is also quite remote from the other cities and I thought 'there's only three girls doing engineering from Cairns and that's because Cairns is so small and remote but when I get down to Melbourne there's going to be so many girls doing engineering and I'm going to make heaps of friends, both men and women, and it's going to be great.' But once I got to Melbourne it took me until the end of my first semester at uni before I found all five of the girls in my course out of the class of 50. I was really surprised and it was only when I was in my second year at university that I did anything about it.

LR: Can you tell me a bit about Robogals and how you think it's helping to engage girls in the study of engineering and science?

MC: The idea is to get girls interested in engineering and technology careers and tertiary studies and we do that by going to schools and running robotics workshops. Each workshop will simply start by talking about engineering and the different career

pathways you can take with an engineering degree. And then we'll let the girls build and program the robots to get some hands on experience. Hopefully this increases awareness about engineering to the young girls that we reach out to. And it gives them the hands on experience with it from an early age. When we go and conduct these workshops we're not expecting all the girls to jump up and say 'I'm going to be an engineer once I finish high school because of this.' That would be the best case scenario. What we're aiming for at least is that girls don't discount the study of specialist maths and physics and chemistry because they can see that it's useful to their lives and useful to getting into a more diverse range of careers after high school.

LR: What kind of feedback have you received from girls who have taken part in the workshops?

MC: They have a lot of fun and they really like being able to do something hands on. They learn that things in the world aren't perfect and if they program something it's not always going to work the first time. It might take them another five times of trial and error before they can figure it out. We conducted a survey last year of 350 girls who took our workshops and we found that before the workshop they were 4.2 out of 10 interested in engineering and after the workshop they were 8 out of 10 interested in engineering. So that's a pretty big jump that I'm quite proud of.

LR: What advice do you have for teenage girls who are contemplating their subject choice at school or thinking about what courses to choose at uni who might be interested in giving engineering a go but are reluctant to take that plunge given the reasons that you've cited earlier?

I realised that you have to do what you're passionate about because it's your life and if you don't spend your life doing what you're passionate about then you're not really living.







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MC: I would say that engineering is a really great course to do because it leads to so many different career pathways. You can go on to become an engineer or you can go on and become really successful in the financial sector or as an executive manager. More CEOs have an engineering degree than any other degree. The reason for that is an engineering degree encompasses a lot of problem solving and higher level thinking of maths and physics. I would encourage girls to stick with their maths and stick with their physics because it leads to a much more diverse range of career options at the end of high school and will allow you to build that higher level thinking muscle in your brain.

LR: So what are some of the biggest challenges facing the engineering profession across the world today?

MC: Some of the biggest challenges are the lack of engineers. There were 70,000 engineers who retired in the five years leading up to 2011 with only 45,000 engineers to take their place. We have a shortage of engineers in Australia and one of the causes of that, I think, is that women haven't really been targeted to do engineering. Fewer than 10 percent

of engineers are female so that lack of diversity is a big challenge in engineering these days.

LR: What different perspectives can women bring to some of the challenges of engineering? How do women look at an engineering problem perhaps differently to men?

MC: As with any problem in life, the person who looks at the problem is going to draw on their own experiences and their own background to form their opinions and then to form their solutions. So if you have a room full of men looking at a problem then they are going to look at the problem differently and hence come up with a different set of solutions to a room of 50-50 men and women. Men and women live together in the world and engineers play a very big part in creating the built environment around us. It just makes sense that women now are sitting at the table creating the built world together with men rather than it being 90 percent of men sitting at that table.

LR: You're clearly passionate in your interest in robotics. What future can you envisage for robotics in schools and teaching and engaging kids with science

and technology?

MC: In schools robots can be used to demonstrate maths and science principles so that kids can see the usefulness in these subjects and how they're applicable to the real world, which will help engagement with maths and science. South Korea last year introduced English teaching robots to help teach their students English so I think there are even more diverse applications as to how robots can help out with teaching.

LR: And finally, what is your ambition for yourself and for Robogals in say 10 or 20 years from now?

MC: As for myself in 20 years, I want to be running a robotics company that I found. In 20 years there will be a lot more women in engineering and the world will see the proof of that through the amazing products that are brought to the world.

Further information on Marita's Young Australian of the Year award can be found at www.australianoftheyear.org.au You can read all about Robogals Global at www.robogals.org

The Australian Curriculum: History – a critique

■ Ian Keese

Teachers of History were pleasantly surprised when the subject – along with English, Mathematics and Science – was included as one of the ‘core’ subjects in the Australian Curriculum. While most secondary schools have Ancient and Modern History in the senior years, History in Years 7 to 10 is usually subsumed under a heading such as Studies of Society and Environment and is often not taught by history specialists. The exception was in NSW where a full History/Geography course was introduced when Bob Carr was Premier. History being included in the first round of subjects for the Australian Curriculum was seen as raising its academic status.

But the big question is whether the implementation of this particular curriculum will be beneficial for the long term health of history as a subject, and this will depend on a lot more than just an 84 page document which is essentially just a list of topics and skills. This framework will be fleshed out as it is implemented nationally. Also crucial for its success will be having teachers qualified to teach it, having the support material and professional development available and the backing of each state and territory jurisdiction for what is in many ways a new subject. A future value of a national curriculum will be having a common language so that achievements in one jurisdiction will be more easily transferred to others.

Structure

Its overall structure is fairly traditional. In the first years it moves outwards from exploring family on to the local area and then to national celebrations and commemorations. Following this in years 4 to 6 it covers some aspects of Australian History from Indigenous history through the impact of European contact and the colonial period up to Federation.

The curriculum for Years 7 to 10 involves a focus on world history from earliest human settlement to today. The traditional areas here are: Ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome; Medieval Europe and the Renaissance; and World War I and

II. However I would question whether devoting 15 per cent of the course or the equivalent of two thirds of one year, to the two World Wars is justified.

There are also a variety of new units such as Ancient India in Year 7, The Ottoman Empire and Mongol Expansion (both in Year 8) and Movement of Peoples in Year 9. However if teachers are not offered support for these new courses in terms of resource material and professional development they are likely to stay with what they know best.

I see a particular difficulty in Years 9 and 10 where it is possible that in most schools any mention of Asia, the South Pacific or the Middle East will be incidental. It seems inconceivable that any Year 9 course would fail to cover the history of Australia up to 1918 (‘Making a nation’) and this would then exclude any Asian study. This again is a consequence of what I consider our obsession with World War I which apart from the ANZAC landing is ancient history to most students. The key elements of this topic could be incorporated to draw the Making a Nation unit to a conclusion, and leave time for either a general survey of Asian History in this period or an in-depth study of one of our neighbours.

Historical skills are mapped out at all stages and these are developed from the earliest years to Year 10 under six headings:

- Chronology, terms and concept
- Historical questions and research
- Analysis and use of sources
- Perspectives and interpretations
- Explanation and communication

Within the Australian Curriculum there are also links across subjects. This is achieved in two ways. First there are three cross-curriculum priorities that, in the words of the curriculum are, ‘embedded in the curriculum and will have a strong but varying presence depending on their relevance to each of the learning areas.’

The three cross-curriculum priorities are:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia
- Sustainability

As an example of the implementation of

sustainability, in the unit on Japan under the Tokugawa Shoguns, students are to explore the forestry and land use policies introduced to cope with the increasing demand for timber. However one could ask, why just these three? Why not include social justice or citizenship? Perhaps even Trans-National relations?

The other cross curriculum links are the seven general capabilities. These appear in all learning areas and ‘encompass the knowledge, skills and behaviours and dispositions that ... will assist students to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century.’ These are: Literacy; Numeracy; Competence in ICT; Critical and creative thinking; Ethical behaviour; Personal and social competence; and Intercultural understanding.

As discussed below, the NSW Draft Syllabus presents an alternative way of doing this. It has grouped cross curriculum priorities with the general capabilities, added a few items and called the combined set Cross-Curriculum Areas.

Implementation in the States and Territories

Most states and territories plan to have the Australian Curriculum in History implemented by 2013. South Australia plans to have History implemented up to Year 8 by 2013 and Western Australia is spreading implementation over 2012 to 2014. The clear exception is NSW which will only begin implementation in 2014.

This discussion is based on publicly available documents at the time of writing (early May) from some of the jurisdictions. Some of these are draft version and others foreshadow supporting documentation, so any conclusions drawn should be considered tentative.

In **Queensland** the current curriculum focuses on what are called Queensland Essential Learnings and Standards (QESL). One of the strengths of the Queensland curriculum is the close way in which the assessment is to be closely aligned to the curriculum.

In its document ‘Reporting Student Achievement and progress in Prep to Year



10; Advice on implementing the Australian Curriculum’ this is spelt out:

To produce the best learning outcomes for students, alignment means that:

- what is taught (curriculum) must inform how it is taught (pedagogy), how students are assessed (assessment) and how the learning is reported (reporting)
- what is assessed must relate directly to what students have had an opportunity to learn
- what is reported to students, parents/carers and other teachers must align with what has been learnt from the intended curriculum and assessed.

Another strength of this system is that assessment is based on a folio of work built up during the course; this allows for a variety of forms of assessment tasks that can cover more areas than would be done in an end of unit examination.

Implementing the new history curriculum poses a particular challenge for Queensland as well as South Australia and Western Australia. In the other states the transition from Primary to Secondary takes place between Years 6 and 7, and this is what is assumed in the Australian Curriculum, where the survey of World and Australian history commences in Year 7. For Queensland, South Australia and Western Australia, where currently secondary education begins in Year 8, this will involve

a large scale re-write of the Year 7 content, and will also have implications for the current close integration with Geography as a SOSE subject.

Victoria does not face the same problems as Queensland in terms of introducing a new content and structure, as its current courses broadly follow that adopted by the Australian curriculum. In a similar fashion to Queensland, Victoria focuses on outcomes, which also have a similar name: the Victorian Essential Learning Standards (VELS).

The VELS are portrayed as three integrated strands: Physical, Personal and social; Discipline-based learning; and Interdisciplinary Learning.

The first and third of these can be loosely compared to the General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum. However at this stage the General Capabilities have not been mapped on a learning continuum from Foundation to Year 10 so in Victoria teachers will continue with the current VELS strands which do have this sequential mapping.

Unlike both Queensland and NSW Victoria has not mandated teaching time for any of the four stage one subjects, leaving it up to each school to decide how best to achieve the essential learnings required.

New South Wales stands out from

the other two in producing a stand alone syllabus, which is currently in draft form. A memorandum issued by the Board of Studies, Catholic Education Commission, Association of Independent Schools and DET at the end of 2011 gave as some of their reasons for having their own syllabus and for delaying the implementation, the need to ‘ensure maintenance of the clarity and learning expectations that exists in the current NSW curriculum’ and to allow the Australian Curriculum ‘to be presented in Stages rather than Years’.

Another difference was that in looking at cross curriculum areas the NSW Curriculum grouped together general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities. The Australian Curriculum has seven items under general capabilities and three under cross-curriculum priorities – a total of ten – whereas the New South Wales curriculum has thirteen: the additional ones are Civics and Citizenship, Difference and diversity and Work and enterprise.

The Draft version of the NSW History Syllabus maintained the same basic content as the Australian Curriculum, but where the Australian Curriculum supplied ‘Elaborations’ – suggested but non-mandatory content – the NSW Syllabus included a series of mandatory dot points (usually ranging between 1 and 4) under

each content descriptor. These all begin with phrases such as:

- outline the main features of ...
- explain how ...
- identify ...
- using ICT and other sources, investigate and assess ...

Wider implications

Making a subject compulsory is no guarantee that this will increase its popularity and in fact the opposite can often be the case. History in particular is easy to teach badly. This may be by learning a series of apparently unrelated dates, a set of causes or a division into 'good' and 'bad' kings – things that belie the complexity and role of contingency. There will be many teaching the new syllabus who have not been trained to do so.

This is where the universities could play a crucial role over the next five or so years. There could be evening classes, weekend schools or summer schools in areas of the history curriculum. However if these are to be successful it is vital that practising teachers be involved in the planning of these courses from the start. Forming links with State Governments and Catholic and Independent school systems could help provide the finance. Universities could also work with the relevant teacher associations to produce online resources or organise study days for students in Years 9 and 10.

One advantage of a national curriculum which has not been sufficiently stressed is that strengths in one system will be more easily transferable to other systems. A rich assessment task from Queensland would require little adaptation to be

used in Western Australia. If a school or an individual teacher wanted a more structured program, they could adapt the New South Wales Syllabus.

Another advantage of a national curriculum is the cost-benefit involved. For example ACARA has begun to produce Work Sample Portfolios which include both the tasks and annotated samples of student work to show what achieving a satisfactory standard means. This is a time consuming and expensive process, and if each state had to produce their own, the cost would be prohibitive. Other tasks could also be divided up amongst the States.

Conclusion

The Australian Curriculum in history is certainly not a perfect document, and I have indicated what I consider some weaknesses. However, considering the time frame in which it was produced and the need to meet the needs of many different jurisdictions it is amazing how good it is. This was a result of a high quality consultative process and the willingness of states to co-operate. My impression is that states and territories are seriously working at implementing the syllabus in as short a time as possible.

I know that most teachers will do their best to implement the curriculum, but in history in particular it is vital that state and federal governments and the academic communities work together to ensure that the potential of the syllabus is realised. I also hope that we do not return to a time when the teaching of history becomes politicised.

Of course, one of the lessons we learn from history is that no matter how well planned a process has been planned, as it plays out over time there will be unintended

consequences. But the current curriculum is a good place to begin and with good will from all stakeholders we can meet these challenges as they arise and eventually produce a world class curriculum.

Ian Keese has degrees in Science and History and taught in city and country schools in NSW, predominantly in the Government sector. He retired in 2003 having spent the last fifteen years of his teaching career as History Head Teacher in schools in western Sydney.

Further reading and websites

National

The Australian Curriculum History: www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/History/Curriculum

A State by State summary of implementation dates: www.acara.edu.au/verve/_resources/Australian_Curriculum_Implementation_Summary_Feb_2012-website_version.pdf

Work sample portfolios Year 8 History: www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/worksamples/AC_Worksample_History_8.pdf

Queensland

Reporting student achievement and progress in Prep to Year 10: Advice on implementing the Australian Curriculum: www.qsa.qld.edu.au/downloads/aust_curric/ac_p-10_reporting_achievement.pdf

New South Wales

History draft syllabus: www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/syllabus-draft-k10/pdf_doc/history-k10-draft-syllabus.pdf

Joint memorandum justifying delay in implementation 31 August, 2011: www.boardofstudies.nsw.edu.au/australian-curriculum/pdf_doc/110831-joint-memo-australian-curriculum.pdf

Victoria

Strategic plan for implementation of the Australian curriculum: www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/vcaa/aboutus/publications/strategicplan2011-14.pdf

Member Profile

Vickie Vance



I'd like people to feel comfortable in having rigorous professional discussions to explore alternative perspectives, treatments and experiences so we can learn and grow as a profession

Vickie Vance, an ACE member since 2006, recently accepted the nomination of President of the Bathurst Orange committee. As one of ACE's newest branch presidents, Vickie is working with colleagues to reinvigorate the activities of ACE for educators across the region.

Vickie joined the teaching profession as a 'career change' teacher after a career in financial marketing and public relations. Since joining the profession she has worked in all sectors with the exception of TAFE. Currently Vickie works in the Catholic education sector as a district consultant helping schools and teachers to embrace contemporary learning practices through the use of technology. Her role gives Vickie the opportunity to travel and meet educators and hear about their shared concerns and the issues of importance.

'I have been thinking for some time that there is sometimes duplication on one side and on the other, a lack of awareness between systems and sectors locally,' Vickie explains.

'ACE was the body I identified that crossed all those boundaries; it's not aimed solely at executive or leaders, but everyone in all sectors including those at

entry level. I had been aware of an ACE committee locally in the past that seemed to have disappeared so I got together with some colleagues, Jo-Anne Reid at Charles Sturt University and Peter Miller from All Saints' College, to scope out what could be done to re-establish an active ACE committee for Orange and Bathurst.'

Those first discussions led to an 'expression of interest' meeting for local educators in early 2012 where a new committee was established with Vickie as president.

The first event organised by the new committee took place at the Oxford Hotel in Bathurst in early May on the theme of 'Challenges Teachers Face' in what Vickie describes as an atmosphere of energy and excitement. Participants heard from two career entrant teachers who spoke of the challenges they have faced since beginning their school based careers at the start of this year. A third speaker looked back over his long career and described the trials and tribulations he had experienced as a founder of a school and as an activist to have policy changed.

'His comments, while based on experiences some time ago, rang true for current times when he talked of

interference in educational decisions by those outside education,' Vickie says.

Since that first presentation a number of issues have been raised with committee members by educators who hope that ACE will address them in future events and discussions. These include NAPLAN with discussion centring on whether teachers are pressured to teach to the test; AITSL and NSW IT requirements and whether information was filtering through to the 'end users' about the process and reasoning for implementation of registration.

Vickie has received strong support from new members as well as members who have been with ACE for decades who have been pleased to see such a forum established. Vickie and other members of the Orange Bathurst committee are hoping to have regular forums that allow exploration of current topics. 'They don't always have to be polite and passive – I'd like people to feel comfortable in having rigorous professional discussions to explore alternative perspectives, treatments and experiences so we can learn and grow as a profession,' Vickie says.

'Education for a democratic nation of citizens needs to have a space for all voices, however as professionals, I feel we need to promote and assert our professional knowledge rather than letting mass media take public discussions off on tangents. We have a duty to educate not only our students but society at large about the importance of quality education.'

The next planned event will be held in Orange in August and has been titled: '3 to 33 : Literacy across the ages'. Speakers from TAFE and Correctional Services will present their perspectives of the teaching of literacy in contrast to compulsory schooling.

Anyone interested in finding out more about the activities of ACE in the Orange and Bathurst region can contact ACE national office on 1800 208 586 or by email to ace@austcolled.com.au and national office staff will be happy to help you make contact with the local committee.

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Policy development and curriculum reform in music and arts education: Will we ever learn?

■ Martin Comte, RMIT University & David Forrest, RMIT University



We have over 50 years of reports into music – and arts – education – and, in particular, school music, apparently to little effect. Numerous reports have indicated that the teaching of music in Australia has been inadequate. The new national curriculum provided an opportunity to address problems identified in these reports. It seems to have taken us around in circles as this historical review will show.

As Professor Karl Ernst, an American, said in summing-up an Australian UNESCO Seminar on School Music, held in Sydney in 1965: “In my opinion the teaching of music does not have enough prestige in the [Australian] community” (p.275). Another special guest at this seminar was the British music celebrity, Professor Wilfrid Mellers. Of special interest here was his comment that “Carl Orff, was in some ways unnecessarily limited” (p. 280). He could equally have said the same of Zoltán Kodály or Émile Jaques-Dalcroze. Yet, even today, more than 35 years later, some schools still advertise for an Orff or Kodály teacher!

In the early 1970s an extensive study into the Arts and Education was undertaken by two semi-government authorities: the Australia Council (now the Australia Council for the Arts) and the former Schools Commission. The findings were published in 1977 by the Commonwealth of Australia. In the final, *National Report*, we have four objectives for arts education programs:

Access. A primary goal of the whole arts education program is to ensure that every young person has access to experiences in the arts.

Participation. All young people should have opportunities for personal involvement in arts activities provided in

ways which foster continuity and growth.

Confidence and commitment. The benefits for an individual of continued involvement in the arts are cumulative. A test of programs therefore is the extent to which young people develop and retain enthusiasm to continue participation and make practice of the arts part of their lives.

Excellence. Two aspects of the concept of excellence are of importance for arts education programs. The more important is that which encourages all to continue participating in the arts. (*National Report*, pp.3-4)

Who would want to argue against these objectives? In discussing the training of teachers across the broad arts spectrum, the *Education and the Arts National Report* correctly identified that

A high proportion of teachers already in service have little or no feeling for the arts as a result of their own lack of satisfactory grounding. Similarly, a high proportion of those entering training courses, especially training courses for primary teaching, have still not had satisfactory experience while at school; nor have they acquired basic technical skills. ... Intervention is needed to change this situation (p.42)

Less than ten years after the findings of this study were published, the Commonwealth Government asked the Commonwealth Tertiary Education Commission to review existing provision for tertiary level arts education and to examine directions for future policy in this area, resulting in the *Review of Arts Education and Training* (1986). This study was undertaken in conjunction with the Australia Council, which had been a major partner in the earlier *Education and the Arts* study. The report observed: “the strongly held view of many of those associated with the education and training of artists is

that the arts are badly taught in schools” (p.104). Commenting on primary schools, the report said: “we are still tinkering with the notion that we can train a teacher to teach well in every subject area in the primary school” (p.105). It added: “it is not only the teachers in our schools that are the cause of concern. In many art forms there are private or studio teachers who while they are invariably sincere and well intentioned, often lack sufficient skill or understanding to have the responsibility for laying the foundations of technique on which further education builds. The licensing of such teachers in a more rigorous way is seen as a matter of urgency by many higher education teachers across all art forms” (p.105).

To a large extent this problem still exists today with regard to the teaching of instrumental music in schools. Many instrumental teachers do not see their role as educators in the broad sense: rather, they concentrate purely on teaching the skills of the instrument. To a large extent a dual system of ‘music education’ operates in many schools; classroom music operates in parallel with instrumental music. Sadly, far too often there is little attempt to relate these, one to the other, in a whole-school curriculum sense. Related to this is the often vexed issue of ‘external’ music examinations. Such examinations are only common in countries that are or were part of the British Commonwealth. Yet, unfortunately, they are so much part of the Australian psyche of learning a musical instrument that many students, parents, teachers and some schools (especially non-government ones) ‘equate’ learning an instrument to sitting for these external examinations. They seem to have escaped any consideration of national pedagogical

review as far as school music is concerned.

1995 saw yet another publication: *Arts Education: Report by the Senate Environment, Recreation, Communications and the Arts References Committee*. The Senate committee found that

People do acknowledge the value of the arts, in principle – it’s just not their business. ... In teachers (more specifically, primary generalist teachers attempting arts) it seems that a large part of this attitude arises from inadequate teacher training and personal lack of confidence ... but the same ambivalence arises in the attitudes of administrators. Principals recognise that arts contribute to the ‘tone’ of the school but, it seems, the commitment does not carry through to accepting the arts into the mainstream of the school’s educational program. (p.26)

How many more reports do we need to tell us that training in music and the other arts – especially for primary school teachers – is inadequate? How many more reports do we need to tell us that the arts are not fully accepted into the mainstream of a school’s educational program? How many more reports do we need to tell us that primary school teachers’ “own students – among whom are the teachers of the future – suffer; and so the vicious cycle is renewed” (p.49). How many other reports do we need to tell us “that experiences in primary, and particularly early primary, are crucial” (p.49)? It is little wonder that this Senate report added: “It is intolerable that arts – or any subject – should be taught by teachers who, however well-meaning, know themselves that they cannot do the job properly. It is a betrayal of our children” (p.60).

Most recently we have had the Commonwealth sponsored *National Review of School Music Education* (2005) and the *National Review of Visual Education* (2009). While both reviews have informed to some extent the development of the Arts Shape paper for the Australian Curriculum, many of the recommendations have already faded into the collective review memory.

What this historical overview

demonstrates is that the Federal Government or its ‘agencies’ have commissioned reports and reviews into music and arts education for any number of reasons – educational, artistic, and political. Always present in a political cycle is a need to gain a deeper understanding of a current situation, and an explanation of why things are happening (or not) across a range of sectors. Over time, investigators have researched different stages of the educational cycle (from early years through to teacher education) while others have been concerned with specific issues, initiatives, disciplines or key learning areas. Implicit in these investigations has generally been a desire that, over time, change will occur by addressing the recommendations and initial reasons for undertaking the study. But one must question to what extent anything of a substantial nature has been enacted with respect to music and the arts as a result of any of the reports discussed (and there were more!).

The impetus for policy development – and curriculum change – comes about through the perceived and actual need for change. The remit for policy development often comes about through political agendas, and not uncommonly it is these agendas that impact on the eventual adoption of the policy. But as all of us involved in education know only too well, the development of policy does not necessarily translate through to implementation and change.

In Australia a policy tension arises when an initiative is sponsored by the Commonwealth Government while the implementation is the responsibility of the State and Territory jurisdictions. If there is a shared agreement between the parties then there is a chance that obstacles (whether they are statutory, political, philosophical, or contextual) will be overcome and the policy implemented. If the balance of agreement changes at any stage then the obstacles can become insurmountable and the policy implementation is stalled.

Throughout much of Australian educational history the research/review cycle (from research, to recommendations, to policy change and development, to implementation) does not always match the political cycle. So often the sponsorship and carriage of an investigation by one government is not subsequently pursued by another with the same vigour and determination. Most recently we have seen this with the Commonwealth government’s Senate Inquiry into *Arts Education* (1995) and the *National Review of School Music Education* (2005).

Regardless of its origins and foundations,

a policy – and a curriculum – must be forward looking. Both must be defensible in addressing a need or demand of today while speaking to the future. By the time any policy is implemented it will have emerged and transformed over a considerable chronology through the stages of research, comment, adoption, implementation, and eventual evaluation.

In recent years a policy change has often resulted in the adoption of new language. But it is a serious mistake to believe that policy development of *itself* necessarily entails coming up with different language. Sometimes the old language is shelved to avoid the baggage it holds with respect to the past; but this is not always in the best interest of curriculum development. In fact, the adoption of a new language can alienate from the beginning those whom it is most designed to engage.

In any new curriculum document there should be a clear and shared understanding of the language used. It is this shared understanding that enables the practitioner – in our case the arts practitioner – to find meaning in the document. Unfortunately, what has happened frequently in recent curriculum documents is that we have been presented with new terms that have been difficult to translate and apply to everyday curriculum practices. An example of this occurred with the recent *Draft Shape of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts*. The writers initially opted for a generic set of terms that were not common to any of the Arts disciplines. They used the terms “generating, realising and responding (apprehending and comprehending)” to convey the artistic and educational process of the arts in schools; in turn, these terms were supported by a complex model. Unfortunately, because they were not terms that the practitioners in the respective arts forms normally identified with, the message was generally lost. While this was an attempt to articulate the practices of the Arts across the five disciplines it was not generally accepted and – happily – subsequently changed.

While it is important to appreciate that the origin of the word ‘curriculum’ is from the notion of the circle or the circuit, so often curriculum (and policy) writers take us on the ride in an ever expanding circle – eventually bringing us back to what we were doing some cycles ago! Experienced teachers in our country’s schools do not have to be told that the notion of curriculum development is so often a re-engagement with past practices that were overtaken or subsumed by more ‘progressive’ modes and directions and often ‘new language’, albeit indecipherable in a practical sense.

The vexed issue of the move from review through policy development to

implementation – including curriculum implementation – is difficult to resolve. While we continue to have governments and educational authorities ‘reviewing’ what is being done, we must consider how to acknowledge, accept and – if appropriate – implement change. The answer in part is a shared agreement that if a national review is undertaken the findings and recommendations will be adopted in the State and Territory contexts. We cannot have a national approach to education until there is national (bi-partisan) agreement about who is ultimately responsible for all aspects of it: administration, funding, direction, student evaluation and teacher accountability.

It is so much easier to keep re-inventing the wheel every 10 or 20 years – more reports saying the same thing, and developing curricula that will have a short shelf-life. Of course, we must continue clouding the issue by introducing terms that, although foreign to practitioners in the arts disciplines, at least confound them for long enough until the next review or curriculum development cycle is announced. And, if there is even the slightest concern that this won’t bamboozle classroom teachers enough,

throw in – at whatever level – a ‘project manager’ lacking in experience or empathy for the arts.

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David Forrest is Professor of Music Education at RMIT University. He is Director of Higher Degree Research in the College of Design and Social Context. His recent publications include *Journeyming: Doctoral Journeys in Music Education* (2010), *Doctoral Journeys in Art Education* (2010), *The Curator in the Academy* (2011).

Language is everyone’s responsibility

■ Dr Fiona Mueller
Australian National University

A recent article by the Editor-at-Large of *The Canberra Times* included the assertion that improvements in Australian education hinge not on money but on ‘the value we place on education.’ In the author’s view, ... it is simply wrong to think that differences in outcomes between different classes of schools (in whatever sectors) are the simple consequences of differences in resources poured in... Nor does the ‘drift of students away from hard subjects, such as maths and science, or from foreign languages (or even anything that could seriously be regarded as the study of English) have anything to do with resources.

The scepticism expressed here about the teaching of English in Australian schools is neither new nor rare. In part, this is due to the critical role the subject plays in supporting all other learning and thus in enabling individuals to participate fully in a competitive society. The unique status of English in the curriculum must also be considered in relation to the perceived and real advantages that fluency in this language has around the world. The above quotation arguably highlights the unequivocal connection between an appreciation of the value of English by native speakers and a willingness – or lack thereof – to learn other languages.

Contemporary curriculum development throughout the world makes much of the need to prepare students for a fast-paced global environment in which innovation, collaboration and technological competence are regarded as some of the essential attributes. Within that pedagogical framework, Australia’s evolving national curriculum, guided by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), places a heavy emphasis on the development of foundation skills, especially in English literacy, as part of an appropriate education for the students of the new millennium. Australian children are expected to demonstrate increasingly sophisticated language skills, including, as reflected in particular in the stand-alone national test of language conventions (viz. NAPLAN), the mastery of English grammar and punctuation.

This renewed emphasis on students’ acquisition of a technical understanding of how the English language works, a competency that has been shown to be far easier for those who commit to the study of additional languages, points to one of the profound pedagogical gaps between professional practice in this country and that of some of the countries now regarded as standard-bearers in school education. It must be noted that Finland, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and other highly successful systems make the long term study of several languages compulsory.

According to researcher Irina Buchberger, for example, ‘this has been a reality in the Finnish education system since the early seventies – multilingual Finnish citizens competent in four (European) languages [including English].’ Buchberger asserts that from the Finnish perspective, language competence is ‘a key element in the personal and professional development of individuals.’ In such a learning context, there is no debate about the importance of understanding how languages work – this begins early in the student’s academic career and continues to the end of

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the compulsory years of schooling. In this sense, the 'value' placed on language as an overarching competency is consistently high and the effect of this unequivocal commitment on overall literacy is reflected in international test results.

If the uptake of foreign language courses in Australian schools remains low, as will always be the case unless every educational jurisdiction adopts international practices, the complementary value of this subject area will never be adequately exploited for the benefit of children's literacy and an intellectually profound engagement with other cultures.

Even with changes to teacher training, the pressure will therefore continue to be on English teachers to set the standards and to service the literacy needs of all other subjects.

What will mitigate this pressure and achieve some of the goals identified in the Australian Curriculum?

An expert focus on the English language by all teachers, regardless of which age group or specialist subject is being taught, has the potential to make the most meaningful and enduring difference to learning outcomes.

ACARA's English Curriculum states that:

The study of English involves the development of understanding and knowledge for informed and effective participation not only in English but also in other learning areas. When knowledge, skills and comprehension from English are meaningfully applied to other learning areas, learning becomes more relevant and understanding deepens.

One text currently used to train beginning primary teachers insists that, 'Students with effective literacy skills excel not only in English but also in other areas of the curriculum (Winch et al 2010, p. xxxvii).' Similarly, the Australian Primary Principals' Association has repeatedly stated that 'teaching about language is essential at all stages of schooling and is not confined to the primary school.'

The same message is repeated in teacher training institutions throughout the nation. However, a 1995 joint report from the National Board of Employment, Education and Training (NBEET) and the Australian Language and Literacy Council concluded that 'A review of the literature reveals clearly that past exhortations to incorporate 'language across the curriculum' courses in teacher education programs have regularly been honoured more in the breach than the observance.'

ACARA's *Foundation to Year 10 Achievement Standards* reveal that from Year 2 there is an expectation that children will be able to 'read, monitoring

meaning and self-correcting using context, prior knowledge, grammar and phonic knowledge.' In Year 3, students will 'demonstrate understanding of grammar and choose vocabulary and punctuation appropriate to the purpose and context of their writing.' With reference to Year 7 students, the Standards state that 'When creating and editing texts they demonstrate understanding of grammar, [and] use a variety of more specialised vocabulary, accurate spelling and punctuation.' By Year 10 each learner should be able to 'demonstrate understanding of grammar, vary vocabulary choices for impact, and accurately use spelling and punctuation when creating and editing texts.'

The expectation that current and beginning teachers from Kindergarten to Year 12 can and will rise quickly to the literacy challenges presented by both the Australian Curriculum and the annual NAPLAN testing regime is unrealistic. Current practices do not encourage, much less mandate, a whole-school approach to supporting the development of children's literacy skills, at least not with specific regard to grammar and punctuation.

In secondary schools, any focus on these skills is normally left to English teachers and literacy coordinators, largely because few other subject specialists accept that this is part of their overall role. Many Australian teachers do not have an understanding of language that will enable them to identify and to explain their students' errors, making them more likely to rely on their native speaker intuition about what 'sounds right'. How, then, are common but significant language errors such as sentence fragments, run-on sentences, incorrect subject-verb agreement and the inconsistent use of tense to be addressed across the curriculum?

The funding for professional development in this area has been significant and does reflect some recognition of this nation-wide dilemma. Although many PD programs have been made available at the system and school levels, the fundamental shift in attitude that is required to integrate such learning into every classroom will be difficult to achieve, much less to measure. Deep sensitivity to any accusations of native speaker language deficits, together with the fact that professional development offerings in other areas of the curriculum have far higher status and fiscal priority, will continue to make any real change a challenge.

Further confusion comes from a competing view of contemporary education which holds that there is little point in teaching the 21st century student any content because anything the student wants

or needs to know can be found online. There is an argument that a rigorous focus on grammar is unrealistic, given that voice-recognition software will soon make keyboards superfluous and that the latest communication devices being used by children in classrooms remove much of the responsibility for, or even interest in, identifying and correcting language errors. In some schools, students are encouraged to use a range of language apps to support their study of both English and foreign languages, a teaching strategy that requires pedagogic credibility in order to guarantee the acquisition of broad and deep individual knowledge and understanding of how languages work. Such an attachment to the technology might be compared with the very low uptake of foreign languages in Australian schools in the sense that it is so much easier to rely on others to speak English than to invest time and effort in learning a language.

In fairness to their students, all teachers need to be able to model the necessary foundation skills with understanding and confidence in order to ensure that common errors affecting fluency can be avoided. This will enhance their professional standing and provide clear evidence that the 'hard subjects' – especially language and written communication – are valued.

Dr Fiona Mueller trained as a secondary teacher of French, German, Italian and English and taught in government and independent schools in Australia and the United States for over twenty years and currently teaches Advanced Academic English at ANU College. Fiona is also the founder of Needs Must Professional Learning, a venture that delivers workshops in schools to reinforce teachers' knowledge of English language conventions.

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Upcoming Events

The roll out of the Australian Curriculum in Victoria: The state of play

Region: Melbourne, Victoria
Date: 20 June 2012 - 5:00pm - 7:00pm
Close registrations: 13 June 2012
Price: Members: \$40.00 Public: \$50.00
 This seminar provides teachers, parents, principals and teacher educators with the opportunity to learn about the rollout of the Australian Curriculum in Victoria from speakers Professor Barry McGaw, ACARA; Madeleine Franken, Deputy Principal-Curriculum at Avila College; Dr David Howes, General Manager of the Curriculum Division of the Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority.

Australian Curriculum and ROSA Update

Region: Illawarra South Coast
Date: 20 June 2012 - 4:00pm - 6:30pm
Price: This is a free event
Close registrations: 19 June 2012
 This event will provide an opportunity for participants to hear the latest information regarding the NSW Board of Studies' implementation of the Australian Curriculum and the Record of School Achievement. Guest speaker Carol Taylor is the Chief Executive of the Office of the NSW Board of Studies and Chair of the Australasian Curriculum Assessment and Certification Authorities.

Education on the Square

Region: Adelaide, SA
Date: 18 July, 2012
 Education on the Square aims to promote discussion about relevant and current themes within the education sector of South Australia. Speakers provide a stimulus that is followed by extended discussion.

TeachMeet Hunter CC

Region: Hunter, NSW
Date: 27 July 2012 - 4:00pm
Close registrations: 26 July 2012
Members Price: \$0.00
 TeachMeet: a collegially derived sharing get together of teachers. We have some great people doing a host of creative and collaborative things, and we'd love the chance to share and celebrate.

The 2012 Wyndham Medal Presentation and Fellows Dinner

Date: 3 August 2012 - 6:15pm - 9:30pm
Close registrations: 27 July 2012
Price: Members: \$70.00 Public: \$85.00
Twilight Lecture: Educational Leadership: together creating ethical learning environments.
Region: New England, NSW
Date: 7 August 2012

For further information about these and any other ACE events please visit www.austcolled.com.au

Empowering Learners 2012 ACE Great Debate

Are we adequately preparing today's learners for life tomorrow?

Join the discussion with author, journalist and speaker Madonna King and a panel of experts representing all levels of Australian education.

Sydney 28 August, (and by webinar across Australia for those unable to attend)
 Melbourne 29 August
 Brisbane 4 September
 Adelaide 6 September

Members \$40 | Non-members \$50

Further information on the events and panel members will soon be available from www.austcolled.com.au or from the National Office on 1800 208 586



ACE news

New Policy, Advocacy and Research team

ACE National Office has welcomed two news staff to drive our work in the Policy, Advocacy and Research area. Teresa Angelico has joined us as Manager, Policy and Advocacy and Jesse Dean is our new Policy Research Officer.

Expressions of interest sought for policy committee

The new ACE policy team are seeking interested members to join our expanded education policy committee, with expertise in the areas of

- Innovation;
- Curriculum;
- Social justice; and
- Reporting & assessment

These members will be the brains trust of the policy team, but also our eyes and ears on the ground, letting us know what issues are developing in their area of education.

The Education Policy Committee will speak every three months via phone conference at a mutually agreed time.

The success of this group will rest on its diversity – we encourage members old and new, from all sectors and levels of experience to contact our policy research officer, Jesse Dean, at National Office about being involved.

You can reach Jesse on 1800 208 586 or jesse.dean@austcolled.com.au

Wyndham Medal

ACE congratulates Dr Norman McCulla FACE on being named recipient of the Wyndham Medal, the ACE NSW Branch highest honour. Dr McCulla has been honoured for his considerable achievements and contributions to Australian education and scholarship. The award will be presented at the Wyndham Medal Presentation and Fellows Dinner on August 3rd. More information about this event is available from the ACE website at www.austcolled.com.au



ACE directory

Australian College of Educators

ACE is dedicated to providing an independent voice for educators and advancing the education profession. ACE provides the forum in which educators can inform themselves; discuss and debate issues; and seek to find shared solutions to current educational questions.

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Provides you with an opportunity to connect with a diverse and vibrant community of education practice with a goal to ensure the profession is respected and valued.

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ACE represents educators working in early learning, primary, secondary, tertiary and higher education as well as VET across all sectors of Australian education.

Value of membership

Have a say in policy and procedures that impact on your profession by joining the only Australian professional association representing educators across all sectors and levels of education.

- Contribute to the sector's primary advocacy body for the profession of teaching.
- Attend our events and conference and converse with cutting edge presenters.
- Have access to the ACE website for news and articles relevant to the profession.
- Receive our professional journal, *Professional Educator*, eight times per year.
- Receive a free copy of *Education Review* eight times per year.
- Gain the right to use the letters MACE as a recognised, professional post-nominal
- Be eligible to receive regional, state/territory ACE awards as well as the highly valued Fellowship award.

Welcome to our new members

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