AN HISTORICAL STUDY OF NATIONAL CURRICULUM STANDARDS IN AUSTRALIA 1975-1995

Colin Marsh

Introduction

Over the decades educators have debated and made assertions about curriculum standards. Many of the pronouncements were little more than rhetoric. Assertions about new national standards in terms of curriculum content or processes are of little importance unless conditions are created to produce these new levels.

Australia has had its share of pronouncements, plans and blueprints. National initiatives are especially sensitive within the Australian scene because of states' rights in terms of delivery of education (Kennedy 1986). Consequently it is instructive to trace some national initiatives over a twenty-year period, 1975-95, to ascertain what have been some of the achievements, along with the inevitable impasses and failures.

Some commonly used terms

To examine the topic it is necessary to consider such terms as "core curriculum", "standards" and "national standards/curriculum".

Core" curriculum, according to Goodlad (1987) has taken on various meanings as a result of societal pressures and educational trends. Some common interpretations include:

- subjects or topics within a subject that all students are required to learn
- the concepts, skills and orientations considered to be basic to a single subject
- central unifying principles relating to the organisation and integration of knowledge, to social values, or to the process of learning and understanding.

The first two interpretations are clearly content-oriented whereas the third allows for a wider consideration of what is "core". Thus "core" might be basic knowledge of the disciplines (for example Hirst 1965, Bruner 1960) or decisions about what is worthwhile in our culture (Peters (1975) Stenhouse (1975)) or a basis for social and cultural reconstruction (Brameld 1945, Skilbeck 1979).

Then there are questions about who does the planning and development of a core curriculum - is it feasible at the individual school level or should it be a national level initiative? Some writers argue that the matter of producing a satisfactory core curriculum for all students at a school must be resolved at the school level and that no national-level plans can ever be satisfactory. Yet, recent developments in the UK, and New Zealand seem to indicate that national-level curriculum is desirable, and in these countries, has been implemented. There have even been some discussions about the prospects of a world core curriculum (Gorter 1987).

"Standards" is a term which appears and reappears in the educational literature. At the present time in the USA, "National standards" is a vogue term which is being widely discussed (for example, O'Neil (1993), Simmons and Resnick (1993), Eisner (1991). According to O'Neil (1993), the National Council on Education Standards and Testing define national standards as including:

> - content standards (what students should know and be able to do),
> - student performance standards (the levels of student competence in the content), and
> - system performance standards (to assess the success of schools, districts, states and the nation as a whole). (pp 4-5)

Wiggins (1991) reminds us that although a standard may represent excellence and quality there is no single model, rather a variety of exemplars to achieve this end. He argues that we need to apply a set of criteria for judging the quality of student outputs rather than using standardised tests testing inputs. Outcomes-based approaches to national standards appear too on the Australian scene as will be noted later in this paper.

National Curriculum Standards in Australia in the 1970s.

Although it would be possible to analyse examples of "content standards" operating within different state systems of education in the 1970s, and in earlier decades, a major initiative which had the potential to raise the prospects of national curriculum, or at least a common curriculum throughout Australia, was the Federal Governments' decision to establish the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) in Canberra in 1975, with Malcolm Skilbeck as the inaugural director. As noted by Louden and Browne (1989)

> the centre had quite broad functions but essentially its purpose was to produce school curricula and associated educational materials which, because of their quality, would be widely acceptable in Australian Schools and whose widespread use would bring about both improved teaching and learning. (p. 8)

Although the CDC was quite successful in developing specific curriculum materials in the science and social science fields (for example, Australian Science Education

Project), it experienced considerable difficulty in producing plans for a core curriculum.

For a start, the general public, via the media and various interest groups, expressed a dissatisfaction during the 1970s and early 1980s with the offerings of school subjects, in a period of shrinking educational budgets and high levels of unemployment, especially for school leavers. Following on from related events and official inquiries in the United States and the United Kingdom, the Australian public had been clamouring for more emphasis upon basic skills of numeracy and literacy (a narrow form of core curriculum); for greater attention to be paid to the diversity of ethnic groups and lifestyles; and generally, more opportunities for equality of educational opportunities across the sexes and ability levels.

Research studies in Australia had come up with rather confusing conclusions. The Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) Numeracy and Literacy study by Keeves and Bourke (1976) seemed to indicate to some interest groups that ten-year olds and fourteen-year olds were achieving at lower levels in reading, writing and number than their peers in earlier periods. A follow-up study by the authors (Bourke et al., 1981) indicated that for the period 1975-80, achievement levels were sustained overall, with increases in reading levels for fourteen-year olds, in writing tests for ten-year olds, and in numerations tasks for ten-year olds and fourteen-year olds. A study by Piper (1976, 135-6) on essential social learnings desired by various interest groups in Australia concluded that "groups were generally more in agreement on items which were considered to be *not essential* than on those considered to be *essential*", but there was strongest support for inquiry and decision-making skills, personal development and the skills of social interaction.

During the 1970s, a number of State reports recommended the need for a core curriculum. For example, the Scott Report (1978) which studied assessment procedures in Queensland schools, recommended that a core and elective program should be established in that state. The TEND Committee Report (1978) argued strongly for a process-orientated core curriculum for Tasmanian primary and secondary schools. In Victoria, the Green Paper (1980) produced by the Minister of Education strongly recommended a centrally prescribed core curriculum "to ensure that the demands of society with respect to basic skills and education are met".

It was in the midst of all these developments that the CDC embarked upon its Core Curriculum Program.

The responsibility for the program was given to a thirteen-person Working Party under the chairmanship of Sir Mark Oliphant, a distinguished physicist and former governor of South Australia. The plan for curriculum development activities provided for the Working Party to commission specific studies, and (after sufficient discussion and deliberation had occurred), for it to produce a final report.

The Working Party first met in November, 1977 and proceeded to commission the following studies:

(a) Case studies of how a core curriculum was currently operating in Australian schools. (Three teams of researchers were used from the Victorian Education Department, Monash University, and Murdoch University).
(b) A survey and review of relevant local and overseas literature (undertaken by a research team from La Trobe University)
(c) Case studies of the interrelationship between core curriculum and values education (undertaken by a research team from Kelvin Grove College of Advanced Education).

The Working Party found the task of formulating a national core curriculum and establishing appropriate guidelines to be a very daunting one. Not surprisingly, it did endorse the principle of a national core curriculum for Australian schools, but (over the period 1978-9) had great difficulty in framing the guidelines. The guidelines included in an early draft report of the Working Party laid the emphasis upon:

- the impact of science and technology on society and the individual;
- an introduction to Australian political, social, economic, legal and religious institutions;
- an introduction to the cultural heritage of Australia;
- health and physical education; and
- creative activities and experiences.

Anticipating an unfavourable reaction, the draft report of the Working Party was not released for publication. The situation was complicated in the latter months of 1979 by persistent and vocal calls by the media for a narrow form of basics core curriculum and a nation-wide literacy testing program, and moves by the Victorian government to enunciate a very restricted (and possibly retrogressive) approach to core curriculum for the state schools. These events galvanised the CDC staff into action and in a very short period of time an in-house document, "Core Curriculum for Australian Schools" was produced and released in June, 1980.

Core Curriculum for Australian Schools was a slender document of only twenty-four pages and intended as an introductory discussion paper. The authors commenced the booklet with their preferred definition of core curriculum: "a set of basic and essential learnings and experiences which can reasonably be expected of all students who pass

through our schools" (Curriculum Development Centre, 1980, 4). They then proceeded to elaborate upon this, culminating in a discussion of three major dimensions. The definition appears to be highly generalised and it is difficult to refute.

The ensuing discussion about their definition of core curriculum gives some pointers about the philosophical underpinnings of the authors of the document. For example, they distinguished between "learnings" that are chiefly classroom orientated and "experiences" which are explained as wider learnings. Also, "basic " is described as a foundation for other studies, such as literacy skills, and "essential" is explained as those learnings and experiences which are required by students for their effective participation in cultural, economic, political and interpersonal life in society. The die was cast then for a social-orientated view of core curriculum and with the emphasis upon students experiencing wide-ranging skills.

The authors outline three key dimensions of their core curriculum, namely *learning processes, learning environments and areas of knowledge and experience* (Figure 1). They take considerable pains to explain that they are not putting forward merely a subject- orientated core. In fact, in a companion paper, the senior author, M Skilbeck (1980c, 16), described a three-dimensional matrix to indicate the interrelationships between the three.The first dimension concentrates upon learning process and experiences. Various ones are listed, including:

1. Learning and thinking techniques
   (e.g. problem solving)
2. Ways of organising knowledge
   (e.g. use of themes)
3. Disposition and values
   (e.g. truth telling)
4. Skills or abilities
   (e.g. in reading, using tools)
5. Forms of expression
   (e.g. story writing)
6. Practical performances
   (e.g. field excursions)
7. Interpersonal and group relationships
   (e.g. in group work)

(Curriculum Development Centre, 1980, 16)

The emphasis is upon providing students with a variety of learning experiences. The expectation is that students will acquire "powers of thinking, expression, judgment and communication". In total, they represented an impressive array of desired skills, similar to but more generalised than the "living skills" developed in New South Wales.

The second dimension is *learning environments*. This was given very brief coverage in the document but described in more detail elsewhere by Skilbeck (1980b, 12-13). The emphasis is upon a variety of environments in addition to the classroom. Suggestions include field work visits, workshop experiences, outdoors, and community institutions. In particular, it was noted by the authors that a diverse range of learning environments is needed to give all students an opportunity to perform well and not just the academic minority who excel in the classroom environment.

The *substance* focus is the third dimension and this is outlined in terms of nine broad areas. In doing so, the authors attempted to break down the hitherto undue concentration by schools upon traditional subject areas. On several occasions they repeated the need for teachers to develop a program which didn't over-emphasise content but also incorporated appropriate learning experiences, situations and resources. The nine areas are suggested as foci which should be studied by students throughout their schooling, namely:

1. Communication
2. Scientific and technological ways of knowing and their social applications
3. Mathematical skills and reasoning and their applications
4. Moral reasoning and action
5. Social, cultural and civic studies
6. Environmental studies
7. Arts and crafts
8. Health education
9. Work, leisure and lifestyle.

(Curriculum Development Centre, 1980, 18-19)

Merits of the CDC document

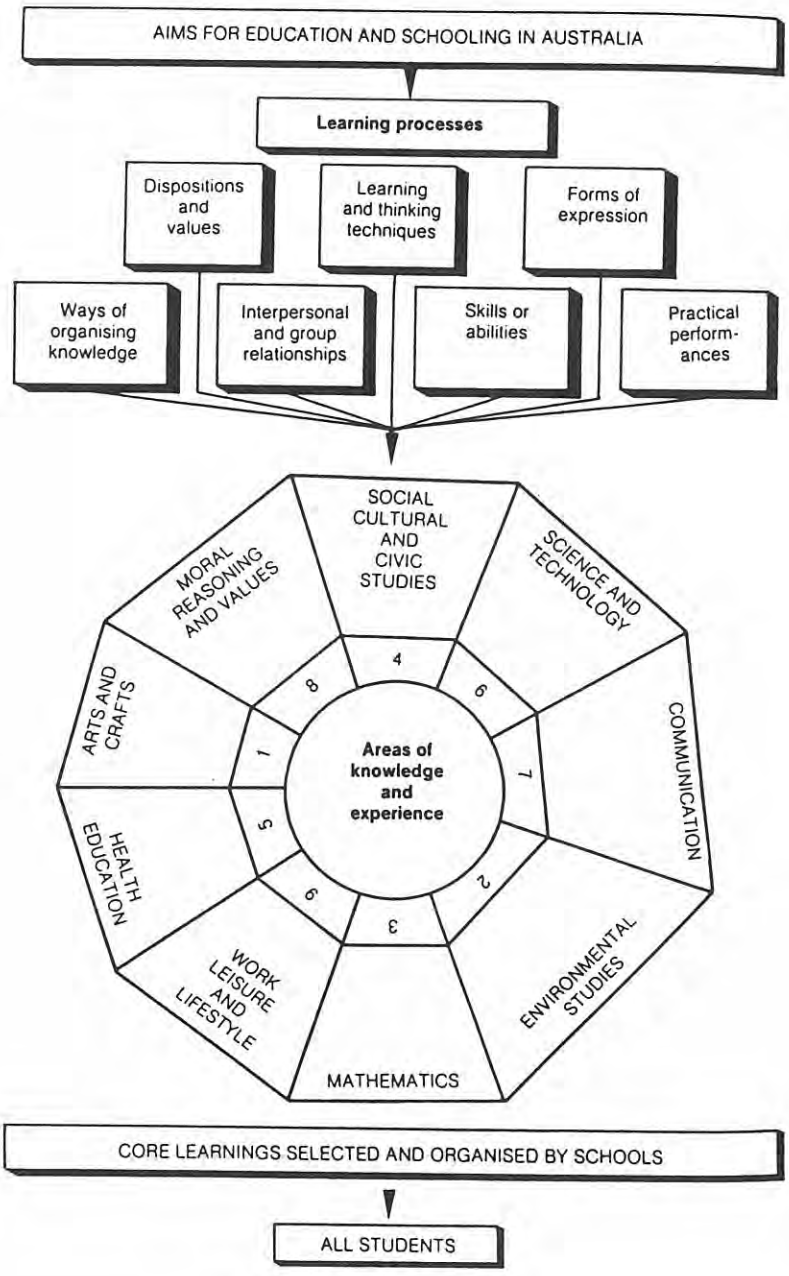
There are a number of benefits in establishing publicly what kind of a curriculum might be implemented into schools in Australia. Lawton (1980) took a strong stance on this when he commented that

> Without such a public document, the children and their parents are defenceless against incompetent or misguided teachers. But it is not only parents and children who benefit from a core curriculum. Teachers too are protected by the existence of some kind of national agreement. (p.9)

This may be too lavish praise for the discussion document, but it is still fair comment to note that it was the first national statement on core curriculum and so might be regarded as a landmark document.

Another positive attribute of the CDC document was its focus on "basic and essential learnings and experiences".

Fig 1 *The core learning environment (after Curriculum Development Centre, 1980)*



By emphasising "basic", the authors gave due recognition to clamourings from various sources for basic skills training in numeracy and literacy. But the focus wasn't restricted to just this narrow view of required learning. By also including essential learnings and experiences, the authors ensured that due consideration was also given to social and interpersonal skills needed by students for sociocultural participation. These basic and essential elements were considered to be the core but not the total curriculum. This caveat enabled the authors to sidestep criticisms that they were omitting valuable elective experiences, but it landed them with another problem namely that they were prescribing a very overcrowded curriculum, as noted by Tripp (1981).

The ideological stance of the CDC document was squarely in the realm of cultural reconstruction. Although criticisms can be levelled about how students and teachers undergo their cultural mapping and how criteria for balance are determined, the approach had several positive aspects. For example, students are actively encouraged to examine contemporary cultural activities (social mobility, ethnic diversity, class stratification, dislocation of relations between school and work), and to shape and develop "a common, shared, equitable, flexible culture" (Skilbeck, 1980b, 7). This approach does offer a counter to Apple (1976), Bernstein (1971) and colleagues who maintain that schools inexorably reproduce class-stratified societies. The authors of the CDC document suggested that students can be given the opportunities to explore new patterns and to break out of the social class mould.

The CDC document, in keeping with recent devolution policies in some Australian States, maintained a close link with school-based curriculum decision making. The authors took pains to emphasise that staff in schools should define the core for themselves in terms of such aspects as the form it should take, the sequence of activities and other related decisions. Other overseas writers at the time such as Holt (1981) and Reid (1981) took similar stances. For example, Reid (1981) put his view succinctly

> It is the proper province of the individual school to determine how local and national policies on the general content of the curriculum should be translated into specific teaching programs adapted to their own students and communities. (p.29)

By taking this direction, the CDC authors partly avoided the criticism that they were establishing their own form of indoctrination devised by a national body and to be implemented in its entirety by all schools, although this did not satisfy all critics (for example, Tripp and Watt, 1984).

Finally, it should be noted that the CDC document attempted a reconceptualisation of existing school subjects. The nine groups did not represent new subjects but they did redefine areas of concentration, which reflected more accurately social realities due to the complexity and speed of social and technological change (Skilbeck, 1980c, 7).

Deficits of the CDC document

One major criticism which has been levelled at the CDC document is that it provided insufficient detail on the learning processes and environment dimensions and so, by default, teachers would tend to concentrate on teaching the content listed in the nine areas. Lawton (1980, 12) also noted this in his analysis of the CDC document and suggested that "a further stage of planning must still be undertaken before handing over the task of syllabus writing to schools". Obviously the CDC authors faced a dilemma on this matter. In keeping with their avowed support for school-based decision making they did not want to be seen to be too prescriptive. Skilbeck (1984) reassures on this point

> The CDC project was quite definitely not aimed at producing a syllabus: the Centre was not able nor did it express a wish to exercise any kind of control over schools. (p.177)

Yet, there were very real constraints for class teachers charged with the responsibility of translating the document into a working plan. The "dreams" are often shattered by overwhelming constraints of the "reality" (Toomey and Chipley, 1981, 21) such as lack of staff consensus of values, community apathy, lack of resource materials, staffing instability, different priorities by various ethnic and cultural groups (Musgrave, 1984). Tripp and Watt (1984) emphasise the difficulty in getting a consensus on values and conclude that

> there is less agreement than is realised or claimed about the basic goals of schooling, and that disagreement will not be settled by more factual evidence ... political ideologies, ideal models of the way society ought to be, must be involved in any position about what is needed ... (pp 133-135)

As we have mentioned above, the core as envisaged in the CDC document was in itself more than enough to occupy the total school time, without even considering non-core electives. Obviously, class teachers would need to choose very sparingly from the list of nine areas as a full consideration of any one area could consume enormous amounts of school time. There does seem some basis for Tripp's (1981) comment that

> a core as broad as that suggested by the CDC must

> consume most of the available school learning time, so those limited options which may be squeezed in will be available only to those who can quickly complete their core studies. (p.52)

Further development on the issue

When the CDC documents was first published in June 1980, major daily newspapers were strong in their praise. For example, the Australian (25 June 1980) described it as

> A far-reaching set of proposals which could transform Australian school education.

The Age (27 June 1980) concluded that

> It is probably the most succinct, lucid and coherent argument yet seen in this country on the controversial issue of what schools should teach.

The CDC commenced a comprehensive program of dissemination for the core document. Workshops and seminars were arranged in all States for schools, parent groups, education and teachers' centres, State and Catholic offices and tertiary institutions. On-going and newly created projects dealing with the nine areas of knowledge and the learning processes and experiences, were developed and extended by CDC staff.

In many States, meetings were held by education system offices to ascertain the extent to which their schools might become involved in a core curriculum. The Northern Territory, in particular, took on the massive task of implementing a common core curriculum for Years 1 - 10, to be phased in gradually between 1981 and 1984. Less ambitious undertakings occurred in the New South Wales state education system and in the Catholic education system in Western Australia. Core curriculum considerations were incorporated into major reorganisations plans for State education systems in Victoria and Tasmania, as stated in their respective documents (Green Paper, 1980; White Paper, 1980, in Victoria; and White Paper, 1981, in Tasmania).

Writing in 1980, Skilbeck (1980c, 25) was optimistic about the impact the CDC document would have in generating discussion, debate and policy decisions.[It is] one step in this whole process of clarifying, enlarging and developing the idea of core curriculum. It promises to be with us for a long time.But predictions have a habit of not being fulfilled. Dr Skilbeck was invited early in 1981 to take up the joint position of Professor of Curriculum Studies at the University of London Institute of Education and Chairman of the Schools Council. A few months later the Committee to Report on the Review of Commonwealth Functions recommended that the States should fund up to one half of the costs incurred in running the CDC. It took several years, and a change of government for the CDC to gain a reprieve from what appeared to be its imminent demise. In these intervening years, without the driving force of the previous director, the core curriculum debate faded away.

Although the term "core curriculum" seems to have lost its prominence in the remaining years of the 1980s, the concept reappeared in various State inquiries (Keeves, 1982; Swan and McKinnon, 1984; Beazley, 1984) and in ministerial papers in Victoria 1983-84).

Another thrust for national standards in the 1980s and 90s

No sooner had the CDC initiative faded away along with several state initiatives, that a new charge was made, this time by politicians. They used rhetoric about education in crisis as their vehicle for exhorting the need for fundamental change in schools. The leader par excellence in this task was the then Commonwealth Minister for Education, John Dawkins who asserted in various documents during the 1980s but especially in *Strengthening Australia's Schools*, that there was a crisis.

> We need a curriculum that is relevant to our time and place in the world. A curriculum that is sound in content and which instills positive habits of learning, and attitudes and values such as initiative and responsibility, the pursuit of excellence, teamwork and competitiveness.
>
> What is required is the development of a common framework that sets out the major areas of knowledge and the most appropriate mix of skills and experience for students in all the years of schooling, but accommodates the different or specific curriculum needs of different parts of Australia.
>
> There is a need for regular assessment of the effectiveness and standards of our schools. A common curriculum framework should be complemented by a common national approach to assessment. We need to examine how schools can report to parents and the community on their aims and achievements; how school systems can report on broader objectives, strategies and educational outcomes; and we need to develop a method of reporting to the nation on how well our schools are performing against established goals.
>
> (Dawkins 1988, pp. 4-5)

In the daily *Australian* (30 August 1990), the Federal Minister continued with his "crisis" rhetoric

> The Australian community in general, and the industrial, commercial, business and academic sectors in particular, do not want our schools to churn out literate robots capable of repetition and regurgitation, but incapable of exercising the adaptive, interpretative and creative flexibilities of mind that are increasingly being demanded of all participants in our technologically-sophisticated world. (p. 10)

These assertions by Dawkins seemed to indicate that the standards of education currently existing in States and Territories were not high enough and that details of student achievements were not being reported adequately to parents and the community. Yet it was not clear whether education in terms of current curriculum content and school organisation was in crisis or not. Has it been other factors, such as social, economic and political that have caused the rhetoric about crises? It may be that the rhetoric of educational reform may be more significant than the reality.

The eight learning areas of the consultative national curriculum development

The creation of eight learning areas in Australia in April 1991 has been billed as an innovatory, consultative approach to national curriculum development. Only the basic chronology of events is listed here as details of the major initiatives and individuals and organisations involved are described elsewhere (Marsh 1994).

Although some exploratory mapping of Mathematics/Numeracy content occurred across all States and Territories in 1988, followed by mapping of some other areas in 1988-89 (for example, Science, Technology), a total design was not produced until several years later by the Australian Education Council (AEC) and not until the National Goals for Schooling in Australia had been announced.

In retrospect, the neat classification of ten national goals duly announced by State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers at the Hobart Declaration on Schooling on 14-16 April 1989, followed by the announcement of eight learning areas, might be termed as highly commendable, especially in terms of Tylerian curriculum principles.

At the AEC meeting in April 1991, eight areas of learning were confirmed, namely:

English
Science
Mathematics
Languages Other Than English (LOTE)
Technology
Studies of Society and Environment
The Arts
Health (Physical Education and Personal Development)

No amplification of these eight areas were produced at this AEC meeting apart from a recognition that a small working group should focus on structures and processes for national collaboration.

Although State and Territory Directors of Curriculum may have had detailed discussions about the knowledge, skills and values to be included in these eight learning areas, no written documents were forthcoming until the creation of the AEC Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CURASS) in September 1991.

Hannan (1992), the then Director of Curriculum in Victoria, notes that the creation of the eight learning areas were both pragmatic and conservative "this is the break-up nearest to that already in use around the country"(p. 29).

No written document about the eight learning areas was produced by CURASS or the AEC apart from such statements as "Taken together these eight areas provide a comprehensive template of the knowledge and processes typically to be learnt in Australian schools" (CURASS 1992, p. 4). Only guideline documents on procedures and separate "briefs", "national statements" and "profiles" were produced for each learning area.

In summary form, the national goals, national learning areas, and cross-curricular areas are included in Table 1 on the next page for a summary of the goals and Table 2 on the following page for learning areas, cross-curricular areas, groups with special needs.

The national goals have been cited by some writers as a remarkable achievement by the then Federal Minister John Dawkins to persuade ministerial colleagues from each of the Australian States and Territories to work toward and agree upon a set of common and agreed national goals for schooling in Australia. Yet, a closer analysis of these goals reveal that they were somewhat conservative and academic in nature, with some leaning towards general problem solving skills in the environment. Writers such as Kennedy (1992) perceived them as little more than a symbolic statement, even though CURASS documents referred, in hindsight, to the ten national goals as a programme of action.

Of the eight learning areas, four were established subjects, namely English, Languages Other than English (LOTE), Mathematics, and Science. The remaining four represented collections of subjects or even new studies.

As noted by Hartnett and Naish (1990) with reference to the UK scene, it appears equally true in Australia that "the government appeared to lack the time, the desire, and imagination to rethink the curriculum and, accordingly, it resorted to plundering the past" (p. 3). There were marked similarities between the first four learning areas and core subjects which have been taught over the decades in

National Goals The Agreed National Goals for Schooling include the following aims:

1. To provide an excellent education for all young people, being one which develops their talents and capacities to full potential, and is relevant to the social, cultural and economic needs of the nation.

2. To enable all students to achieve high standards of learning and to develop self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, respect for others, and achievement of personal excellence.

3. To promote equality of educational opportunities, and to provide for groups with special learning requirements.

4. To respond to the current and emerging economic and social needs of the nation, and to provide those skills which will allow students maximum flexibility and adaptability in their future employment and other aspects of life.

5. To provide a foundation for further education and training, in terms of knowledge and skills, respect for learning and positive attitudes for long-life education.

6. To develop in students:

- the skills of English literacy, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- skills of numeracy, and other mathematical skills;
- skills of analysis and problem solving;
- skills of information processing and computing;
- an understanding of the role of science and technology in society, together with scientific and technological skills;
- a knowledge and appreciation of Australia's historical and geographic context;
- a knowledge of languages other than English;
- an appreciation and understanding of, and confidence to participate in, the creative arts;
- an understanding of, and concern for, balanced development and the global environment; and
- a capacity to exercise judgement in matters of morality, ethics and social justice.

7. To develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context.

8. To provide students with an understanding and respect for our cultural heritage including the particular cultural background of Aboriginal and ethnic groups.

9. To provide for the physical development and personal health and fitness of students, and for the creative use of leisure time.

10. To provide appropriate career education and knowledge of the world of work, including an understanding of the nature and place of work in our society.

Table 1 The Agreed National Goals for Schooling

Australian schools, and for that matter, in British schools. In fact, the major strands included in the Mathematics and Science learning areas bore a very close resemblance to key stage learning areas included in the UK national curriculum subjects of Mathematics and Science.

The remaining four learning areas were a curious combination, perhaps reflecting pragmatic decisions and not a little idiosyncratic preference. For example, the inclusion of Business Studies mainly in Studies of Society and Environment reflected the strongly established grouping of the Social Sciences and Commerce in Victoria. As another example, Media Studies was included in The Arts learning area even though in some States, such as Western Australia, it is incorporated with English at the secondary school level.

Although not part of the original eight learning areas, it should be noted that two other areas were singled out for special attention, namely Special Education and English as a Second Language. In keeping with similar assertions by specialist interest groups in the UK, it appears that interest groups in Australia were successful in persuading CURASS that the profiles developed for the eight learning areas should identify and explore achievement opportunities for students with disabilities. The intention was to produce materials, especially at levels 1 and 2, which widened the opportunities for special education students.

National Learning Areas	Cross-curricular areas include
English	The environment
Science	Information technology
Mathematics	Personal and interpersonal skills
Languages Other Than English (LOTE)	Career and work education
Technology	Literacy
Studies of Society and Environment	Numeracy
The Arts	
Health and Physical Education	**Groups with special needs**
Special Areas	girls
	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students
English as a Second Language (ESL)	geographically isolated students
Special Education	children in poverty
	students who leave school early

Table 2 **National Learning Areas, Special Areas, Cross-Curricular Areas, and Groups with Special Needs**

There was also pressure to produce band scales in English as a Second Language (ESL) to assist those students who needed additional assistance in achieving the levels in the English profile. Cross-curricula concerns had certainly been an issue for developers of the National Curriculum in the United Kingdom and were likely to be a perplexing one in Australia too. The six cross-curricula areas listed in Table 2 were featured in numerous CURASS documents and all project team writers were given reminders of the importance of these areas. In draft statements in a number of the learning areas, specific reference was made to all of these six cross-curricula areas. For example, the environment was one of two major conceptual foci in the Studies of Society and Environment learning area. Career and work education was given special attention in Studies of Society and Environment and Health and Physical Education.

Notwithstanding, it is their specific inclusion or not in the profiles where it really counts. If specific 'pointers" and 'outcome statements" do not refer to the cross-curricula areas it is unlikely that they will be considered seriously by school systems or teachers. Furthermore, no teacher guides were produced on cross-curricula areas to assist teachers.

Developers were also mindful to place a high priority upon groups with special needs such as girls and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. These two priorities in particular were enshrined in the national goals and strongly supported in on-going Commonwealth programs. Full-time consultants were employed to participate with writing teams involved in producing national statements and profiles for each of the eight learning areas.

What has been omitted?

In producing the National Curriculum in the UK, the Government indicated on numerous occasions that it was only a part of the total, perhaps 60-70% of the total school curriculum. The rhetoric emphasised that all students were entitled to a broad, carefully planned curriculum.

Similar rhetoric was used in Australia by Federal Education Ministers, emphasising the entitlements for all Australian students. Because the eight learning areas with their corresponding national statements and profiles were never intended to be syllabuses and therefore not directly related to teaching practices, it is not clear whether additional subjects/areas might be considered by systems and schools. As noted above, there were some duplications between learning areas (for example, Studies of Society and Environment and Technology) and it is not difficult to cite subjects that appear to have been omitted such as Road Safety, Philosophy, Current Affairs, Citizenship and Moral Education.

Some potential successes and problems

It is instructive to consider the purported advantages of the curriculum frameworks in the light of recent developments.The AEC Curriculum and Assessment Committee (1992) emphasised four major educational and economic advantages of the national collaborative curriculum project, namely:

Improved quality of curriculum through the utilisation and sharing of the expertise of officers beyond system boundaries.

Cohesion through reduction of unnecessary differences and overlaps in curriculum and thereby remedying present problems for mobile students.

Pooling of resources and resources savings through adoption of programs and materials.

Developing a more consistent approach to student reporting.

It is too early to judge whether any of these purported advantages have been achieved but it does seem to be the case that expertise of officers from states and territories was utilised to the full. There was a tremendous commitment of effort, numerous, intensive interactions between colleagues across Australia (and New Zealand) and a will to produce high quality curriculum materials (Hannan and Wilson 1992).

Most state and territory systems significantly reduced their curriculum development budget over recent years. There was little to be gained in developing state materials if they were perceived to be very different to the national learning areas. Financially, state and territory systems were operating within reduced budgets and in addition, they had to contribute fifty percent of the costs associated with the national collaborative curriculum project (with the Federal government providing the balance). Therefore, there was little appetite at the State/Territory level to maintain State curriculum development. Whether this will lead to a reduction of differences and overlap in curriculum when national statements and profiles are fully implemented, is a question which cannot be answered at this stage.

Some other advantages that emerged as a result of the national statements and profiles produced, included the following:

- The national statements represented modern thinking about the learning area (Mitchell 1993). They focused upon what 'might be" rather than just conserving the status quo. Evidence is emerging in some of the learning areas, for example, Science, Mathematics and Studies of Society and Environment, that the national statements were indeed forward-looking and innovative.
- The national statements represented a summation of the best available knowledge about the content in the eight learning areas. "It builds upon some of the best of current practice and provides moral support for the continuance of a range of good practices" (Willis and Stephens 1991:4).
- The knowledge (product) base of the national curriculum statements complemented the employment-related key competencies (process) recommended by the Mayer Committee (1992). "Together, the national curriculum statements and the Key Competency strands recognise, in Lawton's (1981) terms, the importance of both "inputs" and "outputs" as essential components of any curriculum" (Kennedy 1992:35).
- The national statements and profiles reinforced the move towards an outcomes-based education system, in common with many other developed countries. The move towards an outcomes basis is associated with a call for more explicit specification of what should be valued and reported on in schools (Boston 1992:30).
- Professional associations became more visible on the national scene and were active participants in the consultation process and dissemination phases of the national collaborative curriculum project. According to Kennedy (1993:48), "they have emerged as significant voices for teachers at a time when the supremacy of political/bureaucratic decision making seemed unassailable."
- The national statements provided a framework which defined agreed common ground but yet were flexible enough to contain diverse, if not divergent, content, methods of learning and means of assessment' (Hannan 1992:28). The national statements did allow room for States and Territories to make their own adaptations (Eltis 1993).

These assertions about perceived advantages of the National Collaborative Curriculum Project were indeed promising but some caveats also need to be mentioned, as indicated below:

- The eight national learning areas lacked a rigorously developed theoretical base. It is apparent that the division into eight learning areas was a confusing amalgam of traditional subjects and pragmatic expediency. No detailed papers on the rationale for the learning areas was provided by the AEC although various writers expressed a need for this (Willmott 1992, Reid 1992).
- There were concerns about how the profiles would be used. Although Reid (1992) concurs that the National Collaborative Curriculum Project "has been shaped by progressive bureaucrats who are seeking to ward off the worst excesses of the market-driven educational philosophy of the New Right" (p. 15), he argues that there is no research evidence for the profiles approach. It is not clear what learning theory has been the basis for the profiles. If a behaviourist approach is allowed to occur within learning area profiles it will trivialise learning by focusing only upon learning activities which can be observed.
- The professional development implications for teachers were enormous and should not be under-rated (Hughes 1990).
- Consultation with various groups was not a strong

point of the National Collaborative Curriculum Project, although since mid-1992 increased efforts were made to consult more widely, but within extremely tight time schedules. Many organisations, especially parent groups and professional associations, complained strongly that the time schedules imposed were unrealistic and impossible (McTaggart 1991, Morris 1992). The creation of peak national groups of professional associations was a strategy by them to gain greater access to funds from the Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) to facilitate diffusion of information, but it did not gain them access to the important decision-making arenas.

- A major priority of CURASS was to provide uniformity across the eight learning areas by ensuring the same number of levels (eight), in the national statements and profiles and similar numbers of generic strands, pointers and attainment levels in all profiles. There was concern from some learning areas (for example, The Arts (Boughton 1993)) that not all subjects should or could be compartmentalised using this reductionist approach. Some educators were concerned that the inherent diversity between learning areas was diminished by the force-fit procedures required by CURASS.

Concluding Comments

Over the period 1975 - 95 there were two major attempts to initiate national curriculum standards in Australia. The first attempt in 1980 appeared in the form of a brief academic discussion document with subtle pressure put on states and territories to experiment with a core curriculum. The initiative was largely unsuccessful.

The second initiative commencing in 1991 was far more ambitious, driven by politicians and senior education administrators. Despite some set-backs due to state Government rejections of a perceived Federal Government 'heavy-handiness' in 1993, the momentum has been maintained and all education systems are currently trialling the national statements and profiles (but in all cases they are using their own procedures and the documents are labelled as state documents). It may be that this latest initiative will endure or at least will provide a sound foundation for yet another attempt at national standards before the end of this decade.

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