

What can schools do? Knowledge, social identities and the changing world

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What *can* schools do?

In this lecture I want to talk about changing times and the research I've been doing and, more generally, about how I see curriculum as a field for university study. The main argument I will be making about curriculum is that it is a field that requires quite challenging intellectual work and collaborations, as well as an appreciation that very practical, pragmatic, political and personal issues are an inescapable part of the field. I want to sketch out some of the challenges facing curriculum in these changing times: in particular the changing forms of knowledge and of work, and the challenge of developing curriculum that looks forward not just back; issues of identity and social values and diversity and inequality and the need to go on looking sensitively at what we are doing in education in relation to these; and the problem of ever-changing innovations in technology and ever-changing reforms of schools and the problems these pose for teachers and for schools as a place for students to be heard. I want to talk about curriculum as a place where big questions are taken up and put into practice, not always well. And where we need to do research that brings together a range of complex issues, as well as the more familiar testing and surveys of who gets what, or what technique produces the best test scores on x.

Knowledge, social identities and the changing world

I'm going to begin with some examples of the changing world and changing times.

I recently discovered that civics and citizenship education is now, after fifty years or more in the wilderness, an Australian national curriculum priority area, together with literacy, mathematics and science, and ahead of all other areas (languages, the arts, physical education, ICT, etc.), a priority agreed on by all state ministers of education as well as the federal government. Why are civics, citizenship and social values now important, when they didn't seem to be for most of the past four or five decades? And how do you actually create good citizens?

I also recently heard about another development, this time in science. The University of Melbourne has established a multi-million dollar new building and institute, Bio21, and put together in it people from different disciplines across medicine, science, engineering, professional areas, even social scientists who work on bio-technology in various ways, with the idea that new forms of collaboration and knowledge-building need to get under way. Half of the old Chemistry Department is now in this building, and half is in the old Chemistry building in a different part of this campus. It is not clear whether the previous type of Chemistry Department will continue many years longer in the form it has had up to now or whether some chemists at least will begin to identify in other ways, and work with other types



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of people in their research, and whether new types of PhDs will begin to be done. This need for new cross-disciplinary work and collaborations has also been much discussed by the Australian Research Council (ARC), and by the Academies of Science and Social Science and the Humanities. So what does all *that* mean in terms of how we divide up the school curriculum and how we think about pathways of building knowledge?

Or take some other recent developments. In 2001, the federal parliament set up an inquiry into the schooling of boys, named this as an area where there seems to be a problem, where different things needed to occur; and in 2003-4, it carried out another inquiry calling for new approaches to vocational education in schools. The OECD recently produced its final reports on the DeSeCo Project, a project set up to draw on international best-thinking about what are 'key competencies for personal, social and economic well-being' in the 21st century. It named the three key areas for personal, social and economic well being in the 21st century as 'interacting in socially heterogeneous groups; acting autonomously; and using tools interactively'.

All of these developments are, potentially, issues for curriculum. How well is schooling today dealing with the type of people young people are today? And how well is it preparing students for the more global world and changing forms of work that are the world of the future?

Tonight I want to talk about some of the challenges facing schools and the people who work in education in these changing times, and some of the different research projects I've been engaged on which relate to these. But I want to begin with a few thoughts – and whinges² – about the context we work in today in taking up these challenges.

Curriculum research is not just about controlled testing

As I speak two important inquiries are underway, launched by Dr Brendan Nelson, the federal Minister for Education, which will directly impact on the work people like myself do. One is an inquiry into what quality research in universities looks like, and how that can best be measured every year. The second is an inquiry into teacher education and whether it is sufficiently 'evidence-based' and producing competent classroom-ready teachers. My talk tonight is part of a submission I would make about these things, because in both cases I'm worried about whether these inquiries are going to come up with too narrow a vision of what schools are about and of what research and scholarship is about. People who think that the *only* issues for people who work in university education faculties are how to produce a good teacher in their first week on the job, or who think that the *only* good research should look like a classic experiment or a randomised controlled trial, have got it wrong. (Those, incidentally, are not some exaggerated straw man ideas I've plucked out of the ether. The focus on the first day in front of the class issue has dominated press coverage of the inquiry into teacher education. And the idea that the only good research is of the randomised controlled trial form was the idea behind President Bush's landmark 'No Child Left Behind' legislation in the USA, and the subsequent setting up of an Institute of Education Sciences in that country.) What I want to talk about tonight is that we need a range of good research going on, research that is appropriate to the complexity of the issues; and, even more than that, we need good quality thinking and lively conversations between all of us, inside and outside education faculties, about what we are trying to do in schools and other education institutions. The questions we need to look at include what is working and not working, but also where we are going.



Curriculum is about the ‘what’ of education

Curriculum isn't as obscure a word as poststructuralism, but I think many people are a bit unclear about what it means to be an academic who works in curriculum – what it means to do curriculum research. Isn't a curriculum something that is handed down by the government, or the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, or the board that runs the International Baccalaureate? It is in part, but that doesn't mean that what curriculum is about is something cut and dried, something that doesn't warrant research, scholarship, dialogue, debate. Curriculum is about conceptions of what should be in those frameworks that get handed down, and it is about how that should be done; but it also involves research on unintended effects, and on what happens in practice. Curriculum questions are difficult because they involve both big picture thinking and attention to everyday pragmatics. Curriculum questions look at the substance of what school does; they go beyond just seeing schooling as a black box that produces scores and outcomes patterns. Curriculum asks us to think about what is being *set up* to be taught and learned, what is actually being taught, what is actually being learned, why agendas are taken up or not taken up, who benefits and loses, whose voice is heard and whose is silenced, what future is being formed for individuals and what future is being set in train for Australia as a whole. Curriculum is concerned with effectiveness, but also with expansiveness and voices, and who gets a say.

Asking the impossible of schools

Curriculum questions are complex, but they are made more difficult by a public discourse that pretends that impossible things can be achieved. The title I gave for tonight's lecture, *What can schools do? Knowledge, social identities and the changing world*, probably sounds a bit awkward. Wouldn't it have been better to reverse the order of the two parts of the title: *Knowledge, social identities and the changing world: what can schools do?* I deliberately did not use that second order because it reflects the problem of seeing schools as fixers that I want to talk about first. Parents, media commentators and politicians are constantly discovering new social problems (or old ones for that matter), or social issues, or new needs, and as a first knee-jerk reaction thinking that if only something simple, some x was done in schools, we could solve that problem. If you read the press, or listen to the media, or read government inquiries on different topics, you'd be truly impressed with what schools can supposedly do if only they got their act together. No adult would live in poverty; students and teachers would be on task 24/7; there would be no bad drivers, no drunk drivers, no crime, no sexism or racism or discrimination of any kind; everyone would eat healthy diets and be active and slim; every particular school would be better than all its competitors, and every student would complete year 12 and get an ENTER score³ over 99 so they could all go on to do medical degrees at the University of Melbourne; although at the same time schools would also be producing a diverse range of enterprising young people who would fill the shortages in all the skilled trades (and in unskilled ones for that matter), and be entrepreneurs who would develop new inventions and turn around Australia's balance of trade.

Schools *are* some of the most important social institutions we have, and they *do* have major effects both on individuals and on the shape of the culture and country we go on living in, and I want to talk about that shortly. But we do, routinely, have impossible expectations about schools, and blame them for not fulfilling impossible *and conflicting* hopes. The fact that some people don't do as well as others in schools isn't (or isn't just) a failing on the part of schools; it is part of what schools as a system *are set up to do* – to save universities and employers some of the burden of deciding for themselves who they will take on. If you don't in principle want some people to do worse than others, you don't set up final certificates that



decide in advance what proportions can be awarded various grades, and you don't insist on a final tertiary entrance score that lists everyone on a relative standing from 1 to 100.

There are, incidentally, some good reasons why we do have grading, and I'm not personally against it. For the last few years I've been doing a project on vocational education across different institutions, and part of that system in the Technical and Further Education (TAFE) sector and other places was designed to just have competency-based assessment, where people were assessed as either competent or 'not yet competent'. But we found in that project that students, colleges and employers were all critical of that system and were calling for grading; there were good reasons why they wanted different levels of effort as well as achievement recognised. So I'm not against grading on principle, but I do object to public discussions and policies that don't take account of that differentiated outcome as part of what schools are *required to produce* rather than as evidence of their failing. Some parts of schooling are a zero sum game, but we are not allowed to acknowledge that.

People often talk about education as if the only issue is what happens in an individual learner, or in the efficiency and effectiveness with which a particular item or skill is learned. These things are important, and a lot of my colleagues are involved in research on how to improve learning of maths or science or reading. But another important thing about schooling is not about the individual exchange but about the overall picture, about the fact that schooling is a *system*. As a system, schooling does two main things. First of all, it teaches people things (both intended things, like the formal curriculum that draws so much attention every time it is changed, and unintended things, like the things young people learn from how their teachers really act, and from what their fellow students value). And secondly, it sorts, selects and discriminates. This is what schooling in a democracy is set up to do: to convey the knowledge or develop the young generation in ways that the society considers important; and to do some of the preliminary sorting that decides who will get access to which courses and jobs and futures. It's no wonder that both of these things continue to attract so much criticism. Picking out what knowledge is important is no longer a simple matter of looking backwards; it is also about looking forwards, and talking about whose or which knowledge is to be valued. And the sorting is never satisfactory because we'd like everyone to get top marks and we swing back and forth between approaches like national standards and a common curriculum that put everyone on the same path and in the same competition, and approaches like the plan to revive technical colleges that decide early on who you're going to be and set you off on that track.

Schooling can do terrific things – it can open your eyes to ideas and creative endeavours, can make you think you are worth something, can develop people who can competently and confidently go about their work and their lives as citizens, can produce future citizens who treat others with respect. And it can do very negative things – convince you that you are worthless and don't know anything, produce future citizens who have not got good foundations for operating in the contemporary world; produce future citizens who don't care if others get trampled as long as they themselves are OK.

In recent times, some of the concerns of the 'bleeding heart' equity people, such as myself, about those who are losing out or being trampled on in the system, are being taken very seriously in the heart of the hardheaded economics camp of the OECD. In the world now, issues of what they like to refer to as 'social cohesion' – of how people of different religions and cultural backgrounds and gender treat each other – are real issues. Talk about 'social capital' and 'resilience' is suddenly important. Identities and values are on the map. It's not much use as a nation upping your average maths performance score in the international league tables by .0001% if people stop behaving civilly to each other. And, as I will discuss a little later, the more researchers and expert committees look at the new types of



work – at what jobs are going out of existence, what kinds of competencies are needed, and how you need to be a so-called flexible, autonomous life-long learner – the more they start talking about identity issues, and that the important work of curriculum is not just about learning particular things, but coming to be a particular type of person, a person who can operate successfully in a changing world, a person who can work locally and internationally with others who are different.

So part of what a curriculum researcher does is to try to keep an eye on these big pictures: what is going on in universities and in the OECD; what are sociologists, economists and others showing about the changing nature of work; what re-shaping of education systems is being set up in Australia and in other countries. I think of curriculum research as a kind of conversation in which we are trying to feed in and examine different claims about what is happening now and different visions of where we might go.

But these days if you work in universities you are not allowed to just read books and think and teach and write. You have to earn money for the university. To be taken seriously, it's not good enough to have good ideas or to know a lot; you have to be seen to be winning research grants, and the bigger the better. I have a lot of qualms about this direction we've taken. I think it's leading to a lot of short-term projects with quick results rather than time to digest and work with ideas and findings. But it's a reality, and there are important things that do require empirical research in the curriculum area, and I now want to talk about the funded research I've been doing myself over the past 10 years or so. The types of projects I've taken on are ones which take up a significant issue of the changing world (new technology, changes in gender relations, new forms of work) and find ways of studying on the ground how is this situated, what is actually going on, how is this working, what are its problems. The empirical research project (the study of 'what is going on?') is only part of the project. Overall we are trying to engage with visions of changing needs, with policy imperatives and with realistic views of how things actually work, what are real effects on the ground.

Curriculum Research Projects

I'll begin with my recent project on new technologies in schools because that's almost an emblematic issue for the world of the 21st century.

The Effects Project: effective learning using new technologies (Hayes, Yates and Alexander and NSW DET ARC Linkage Project 2001-2003)

Few things have had as much high-flown rhetoric said about them in recent years as computers in education. We all know that technological change has transformed certain aspects of our day-to-day lives, and parents are highly anxious about the need for schools to be up to date. It is no wonder that governments for quite some time put a huge emphasis on rolling out shiny new hardware to schools, at a huge drain on their education budgets. People sense that new types of knowledge will be important in the future. It seems like every few weeks a new American guru visits us or makes a splash with what the world of the future will look like. In the Effects Project, carried out in NSW with Debra Hayes and Shirley Alexander in partnership with the NSW DET, we set out to study what was actually happening in schools that had reputations for doing good things with computers. We wanted to take a close-up look at what was actually being taught in classrooms using computers and at whether new types of knowledge were emerging (for instance, does design knowledge and multi-tasking now become more important? Do we need to rethink our ideas that more advanced knowledge is best described by terms like 'deeper' and 'more complex' or is it today about some other way of putting things together? How much is knowledge today appropriately seen



as a linear hierarchy? Do we need to change some basic conceptions about what intellectual development actually looks like?) We also wanted in the Effects Project to look at inequalities and at whether some students were benefiting more than others. Here is some of what we found:

- There is a really *enormous* gap between rhetoric and reality. These schools (all government schools) were selected as ones which were known to have good teachers and practices, but what we most often observed when we went out in schools were malfunctions of the equipment, teacher frustrations with its unreliability, lack of resources, lack of training, teachers trying to scabble around in their own time learning to use the equipment and very little going on that looked at all like transforming learning.
- Too much emphasis on hardware, too little on professional space to work well with it.
- Lack of adequate attention to inequalities and a likelihood of furthering gaps rather than reducing any (in terms of homework, children with good equipment and knowledgeable parents were very clearly advantaged and provision for those who didn't have those conditions was rudimentary; and in the classroom itself, gender stereotyped activities that schools had spent a lot of time getting away from in the 1980s were flourishing because of a heavy emphasis on letting students choose their own activities).
- Schools overall were struggling with what to emphasize and how to be systematic with such a major change. Classes from grade 2 to year 12 could be observed in the same year giving similar introductory lessons on PowerPoint (for that matter we were doing it in Diploma of Education courses in universities too). Often what impressed primary school parents was the technology end product rather than whether children's learning was being advanced.
- However, although the conditions in which schools and teachers were working were very difficult, in some cases the very issue of grappling with such a major set of challenges was used by principals to re-energize their focus on how their school was working, and by teachers to re-energize their thinking about both curriculum and student learning. And for students, novelty itself produced some greater involvement, even where not much different was actually happening.

It would be hard to over-estimate just what a challenge new technology poses to schools (and universities for that matter). To some extent the first response of many education systems and individual schools has been to focus on impression management (shiny new equipment, fancy PowerPoint presentations, school websites), and it is only now, in a second phase, that there is an attempt to regroup and work out more principles and ideas for this area through the different stages of school. But it will keep on changing, and schools and teachers (and universities and university teachers) will have to keep on grappling with the changes. The main lesson that I took from this project, in relation to my theme tonight, is that knowledge and the changing world needs attention from curriculum developers and experts and to be built into curriculum and assessment guidelines, but what it needs and tends not to get is more space in a normal school year for teachers to work on these things and how they are going to work with them.

The 12 to 18 Project: a qualitative longitudinal study of young people and secondary schooling (Yates and McLeod, ARC funded project 1993-2001)



Databases now provide quite a lot of overall facts and figures about who gets what out of school, what kinds of backgrounds are successful, the retention rate and exam effectiveness of different schools. In this qualitative longitudinal project Julie McLeod and I set out to take a different type of close-up and bottom-up perspective on what young people actually get out of school in these years: how they think about who they are, and the choices they make about where they are going, and how much this is impacted on by the particular school they attend. This was a long study, begun in 1993 with a final round of interviews in 2001, and with over 350 interviews, all carried out by Julie McLeod and myself, and we spent quite a lot of time over 6 years visiting the four schools in the study. This kind of study let us do something that the big databases don't: to look at what happens to *particular* young people with particular backgrounds in particular schools – young people from a similar background in different schools, and from different backgrounds in the same school – and to follow changes in ambitions and values as they happen.

Twice a year, for slightly more than seven years, we conducted lengthy interviews with young people of different backgrounds and at four different types of secondary school. We decided to do this type of study for two reasons. One was that between the 1970s and 1990s there had been a lot of upheaval about gender and equal opportunity: reforms in schools, new legislation, new words like 'sexism' were bandied around that hadn't even existed twenty years earlier. So one of our interests was how young people that have grown up in this sort of world see these issues and their own futures now? We were also interested in the perennial issue of inequalities and difference over time and in relation to post-school work and education, and what difference school makes. It is notoriously difficult to separate family influence from school influence, but by close-up attention to young people from different backgrounds at a particular school, we could look at whether there was some coming together of values and aspirations over the high school years. And by looking at people from similar backgrounds in different schools, we could look at whether different types of schools were producing different possibilities for them.

What is interesting about this sort of study is that it lets us get at some of the texture of how young people today build who they are becoming. What do young people take from their overall time in schools, given that schools to some extent are working with the same state curriculum? That is, what messages do school cultures convey?

I could talk for a long time about this project, but just will highlight here a couple of what I think are interesting perspectives from it.

- *Gender identities in a changing world:* The first finding is in relation to our interest in gendered identities today – what young people were bringing to school, and how they interacted with school. First of all, in terms of formal thinking, the issue of gender seemed like an old-hat issue to the people in our study. They said there is now equal opportunity and they weren't interested in special provision for boys or for girls. But there were signs of different orientations at 14 (girls' daydreams of the future were full of images of energy and of moving forward – driving fast cars, bungy jumping, travelling around the world; boys tended to have little of this expansive projection – their focus was on the short-term of next weekend, especially about sport), and different worries about their future life for girls and boys, especially working class boys. At school now, across the spectrum, both girls and boys expected both men and women to be in paid work for most of their lives, and both had a less clear picture of what their future family life or domestic relationships would look like. The group in our study who most wanted life to be like it was in the past were some boys of disadvantaged backgrounds in a provincial town. Their school was doing a lot to



provide them with work opportunities and dual accreditation subjects, but they basically just wanted to get out of school as soon as possible, to be somewhere like a factory or a worksite where they were treated as men rather than as students. The sad thing was that when we visited them at 18, they were unemployed. The factory jobs were going out of existence. And they were being put off apprenticeships as work dried up. They had at this stage little to draw on to get other sorts of jobs.

The things we were finding here are highly relevant to questions that major inquiries like the ‘boys inquiry’ and ‘career education inquiries’ try to take up. Young people in schools are not blank slates, there to take in whatever we tell them. And, if we are trying to do something about boys from disadvantaged backgrounds and their futures, we have to take account of the fact that they are itching to get out of places that feel like school, as well as of the fact that just giving them what they say they want is likely to set them up poorly for the way work is going in the future.

- *School effects on identity, pathways and social values:* Another fascinating thing about this study was following the impact and role of their school in these young people’s lives over quite a long period of time. The rich private school in our study was one that prided itself on valuing diversity. But what we heard from the different students we talked to here was that the diversity it valued was not social differences, but diversity in being a higher achiever, of being distinctive in some way. The school appreciated achievement in the arts and in sport as well as in academic life, but if you looked or spoke differently, if you came from a different kind of suburb, or if you had Chinese features, you felt uncomfortable. Over time, two of the students we followed felt ground down by the elitism and conformity of the environment, and dropped out and changed schools – this isn’t something obvious from the database statistics about this school. Those who stayed gradually came to feel part of an elite community whose natural next stepping point was Melbourne University, and who would go on being part of an old school network over their lifetime. (By contrast, young people from schools outside Melbourne, who we followed into their university life, felt a bit alone and very strange in the new university environment.)

At the most disadvantaged school in our study, despite the best efforts of the school and teachers to provide creative and useful curriculum experiences – including integrated curriculum, good use of new technologies, and dual accreditation opportunities – their achievements in database terms did not look good compared with the other schools in our study. The expectations of the students at this school, the history of the parents and their own unhappy experiences with school, and the community reputation of the school as one for losers, tended to overwhelm whatever the school did. Those who made it through got a lot of support from teachers, but a lot didn’t make it, and most of that was not due to internal faults of what the school was doing, but faults of the school’s situation and history, and how it was being set up in its town school comparison.

There’s a new concern with values today, and the Prime Minister a few years ago created a furore by saying that that was one reason there was a drift to private schools – that government schools were both values-free and too politically correct (I’m not sure how you can strictly be both). In our study we found all of the four schools did have some impact on the way those who went to them saw themselves and saw the social world. In one school, young people valued diversity and would speak out about racism even when they left school but were not highly on track with either courses or work in their first post-school year – they were still dwelling a lot on who they were



and what they should be doing in life. In another school, with a comparable intake, young people became highly instrumental over the course of school. At 18 they were on track in new courses and jobs and planning their next step, convinced that this was a dog-eat-dog world, and that where you got was the result of your own efforts. These trajectories matter in relation to the things the OECD is talking about, but they are not things captured in the hard facts and figures databases about who gets what; and they are by and large not the result of the formal curriculum, or even of what the school says in its brochures. They are the result of the school culture overall: of how the teachers act in small day-to-day interactions with students; of how the school is organized; of the history of the school culture and those who go to it.

Vocational Pedagogies Project: Changing work, changing workers, changing selves (Chappell, Solomon, Tennant, Williams and Yates. ARC Project 2002-2004)

A lot of education policies look backwards. The current national inquiry into teacher education is a good example. It's all about effectiveness, not about the changing world and whether what is being taught is right. However, if we look at another government report published only two years ago, we find a different emphasis. That was the Inquiry into Vocational Education in Schools. In this area, and in major studies by the OECD, there is a great deal of attention being given to whether schools need to be teaching or producing other types of things than the examination knowledge we are familiar with: being a lifelong learner, communication in work contexts, being able to work in teams, being flexible, etc. In this study in NSW we looked at how classrooms (in schools, TAFE, universities, community colleges, private training colleges) were going about producing this new worker.

Again, there are a lot of things I could talk about from this project, and we are still working on our reports and analyses of it. Once again, it is a project where we are trying to begin with the big story of what experts are saying about new times and work, and also look on the ground at what is actually going on – who is benefiting, what is being taken up, and so on.

Here I'll just briefly mention three issues concerned with (i) inequalities, (ii) clashing assessment concepts of knowledge and (iii) industry needs versus employer needs versus student needs.

Firstly, the literature on generic competencies and social competencies – and all the talk of communication, and of being autonomous and working in teams – tends to blur whether this is something programs try to teach, or whether effectively the things that are actually being assessed are simply what sort of social background or gendered accomplishments you bring to the classroom. There is a potential here for continuing to reward the advantages that different groups bring to the classroom, rather than opening these issues up in the teaching.

Secondly, especially in school (although I think Victoria has made more progress than NSW in relation to the problem I'm going to talk about), in the dual accreditation program teachers had to juggle two old and conflicting ideas of what knowledge looks like. One is the Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF) idea that knowledge is a skill, that it is what you can do (and teachers had long booklets of skills to check off for each student). The other is the year 12 examination idea that knowledge is something you display in writing and something that can be graded to sort out who has got more intelligence and who will do better at university. Neither of these ideas is much like the ideas of situated and process knowledge that a lot of the workplace literature is getting excited about.

A third issue is that the study let us see some of the things that don't get sufficiently looked at in the policies that governments and industry groups are continually putting out: the



fact that industry or economy needs, employer needs and student needs are not identical and may cut across each other. At entry level, as school teachers were very aware, the employers wanted someone who was competent and obedient. Working in teams meant knowing your place. This isn't the way curriculum documents tend to talk about what they are aiming at in year 12. From an industry perspective, we found there was an emphasis on needing workers who are flexible, who can quickly learn and do new things – who might therefore have a different sense of the industry than the employers they actually go to for their work experience, and who might need different foundations than the ones the employer is concerned with which are how competent they are today. (There is a parallel here of course to the discussions about teacher education.) And taking a student's interest perspective on vocational education, if we are talking about people who are expected to have a number of different jobs or careers, not just one, in the course of their working lives, then what is an appropriate foundation also isn't necessarily just training in minimal competencies and obedience that looks good for the first day on the job. (On the other hand, practical competency and skills matter a lot more than you might think if you read much of the high-flown literature about the new economy.)

In the school classes we studied, the teachers were teaching some students who already worked in the jobs they were being trained for, and intended to go on working in those; and other students who were aiming to go to university and into other types of careers, but who thought that a Certificate 2 in Hospitality or in IT was a useful extra to add to their portfolio. All of these things are just tasters of issues that are highly relevant to curriculum, and that need working on both conceptually and empirically.

Final comments: challenges for curriculum

I've covered a lot of ground here, and I haven't got simple answers. In fact, part of what I've been trying to say is that simple solutions can be over-rated. Another way of putting this is that, as a research field, curriculum is not like a disease, where you might eventually find a cure, and that's that. For curriculum, the world keeps changing. The outcomes of research projects and the use of careful research evidence are important. But the process of engaging in the questions is important in its own right. Talking about these issues and researching and reviewing them are important in producing curriculum quality, not just steps to an eventual final solution.

Curriculum will be better if we acknowledge that there are both complex big picture issues and also nitty gritty issues of how things have to get done in real time and with the actual limited resources of schools. It will be better if we acknowledge that there are both head office issues about how to organise and support the system, as well as issues from the perspectives of students and teachers about what they feel is important, and about what it feels like to have certain things done to them, and we shouldn't let one of these be silenced by the other. Curriculum, I would argue, is a legitimate university field of study. That is, curriculum will be better if we try to draw into the conversation about it people who work in education faculties (and indeed other parts of the university) and whose brief is not just to deal with 'what do I do on Monday?' or 'how do I respond to today's political pressure?' – but those questions do have to be dealt with too.

Overall I have been arguing that the curriculum field is both a highly intellectual endeavour and a necessarily practical, political and pragmatic endeavour. The changing world is difficult and pressured as well as an exciting environment for education and educators. I'd like to see more complex and powerful and interdisciplinary engagements and research on the big questions. But I'd also like room for attention to the small and local as well as the big, and for creative enquiry as well as measurement research. My own final bit of utopian hope for



present times is that I'd like us all – teachers, students, researchers – to be given a bit more time and space to think and read and investigate and discuss these things; to allow us in education, in schools and in universities, to consider the persons as well as the products, to consider where we are going as well as how well we are doing things, and to not all be pressured, in every facet of our activities, to produce performance indicators for each minute of our day.

Notes

- ¹ This address was publicly advertised and given to a large and diverse audience which included university academics and students (both from education and from other fields), school teachers, school principals and people who work in Education ministries and bureaucracies; and other people from the community with some general interest in the topic. Further information concerning the three research projects mentioned in this lecture can be obtained from the author.
- ² Editor's note: to 'whinge', in British and Australian colloquial English, means much the same as to whine, in the sense of complaining in a peevish manner.
- ³ Editor's note: in Victoria, Australia, the Equivalent National Tertiary Entrance Rank (ENTER) is a tool used by the Victorian Tertiary Admissions Centre (VTAC) in tertiary selection. It ranks students' overall Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE) performance against the performance of all other students undertaking VCE in the same year.

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