FRAMEWORKS IN A GLOBALISING WORLD:

SOLUTION OR PROBLEM?

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Introduction

There’s an old saying that the more one learns, the more one realises how little one knows. This is basically the problem - writ large - facing all educators at the end of the twentieth century. Increasingly we are becoming aware of just how much, and how little, we as a society, know. Consequently, we are also becoming aware of just how much, and how little, of this rapidly expanding knowledge base it is humanly possible for us to teach, or for our students to learn. Yet as teachers we are also concerned that our students won’t know enough of what they should know.

What is enough for the twenty first century? What does should mean in a post-modern age? There is no doubt that the central problem of curriculum is increasingly, as Lundgren put it, a representation problem. The issue is what do we represent of the world, in all its diversity and complexity, in the curriculum of schools? Where do we start? Where do we finish? Around what and whose knowledge and experience do we draw the borders? Whose knowledge and experience do we value most? What is in and what is out? Does everyone get the same thing? Or do we cater for individual, group, regional differences? Who is advantaged and who is disadvantaged by the choices? Who decides and on what authority? It is clearly impossible to represent it all so someone has to make a choice. These issues have always been central to curriculum decision making but there are vast societal changes occurring which are making the conceptualisation much less the development of curriculum an increasingly difficult and controversial task.

One of these is the changing nature of social relations, which is having profound effects on cultures and individuals around the world. Old boundaries of nationhood, geography, race, ethnicity, class, age and gender have become fluid and are shifting. Individual and cultural values everywhere seem under challenge. What were considered “authorities” (the government, the church, the schools, the elders) have lost much of their legitimation. People question and nothing can be taken for granted. The changes being experienced emerge particularly from increasing exposure to ‘the other’ through the influence of international and national news and entertainment media, information technology, and the expansion of consumer products, as well as greater mobility and features of late modernisation including the push to significantly increase the education levels of most of the world’s populations. Some of this may be thought of as cultural globalisation. Increasing cultural globalisation is, paradoxically, experienced as pressure towards both homogeneity and heterogeneity at the same time, leading towards a resurgence of localised cultural identities as well as the development of globalised identities. There are winners and losers in this process. Yet at times, individuals and groups experience both the push to difference and the push to similarity as threats. With traditional boundaries shifting and fluid there is no doubt that social relations everywhere are being affected.
One implication for schools is that the increasing diversity of learners and their needs means that schools must be plugged into these changing social relations. They must find ways to represent both quantitatively and qualitatively the diversity of students and their diverse and new needs. The shift over the twentieth century from elite to mass schooling is just one face of this epochal change. Schools have key roles in mediating culture, knowledge and social relationships. They must be actively inclusive to recognize and respect the diverse needs and interests of as many students as possible.

Another contextual factor is the changing global knowledge economy. Among other features, this includes: an exponential increase in the quantity of knowledge; an acceleration in the rate of development of knowledge; an acceleration in the transfer of knowledge globally; a growth in the centres of knowledge creation; and a huge development in knowledge mediated industries and services. The needs of the knowledge-based economy are on the agendas of governments everywhere including Australia (BHERT, 1999). Changes in knowledge are also related to the changing nature of social relations, in particular, in the demise of the so called ‘canon’. Canon here refers to a body of work that is universally accepted as the standard and derives from religious usage where it is that which is determined to be sacred. What is sacred today? Forms of knowledge and ways of acquiring them that were previously considered essential are now seen by many as parochial, elitist, imperialist, patriarchal, sexist, racist, and irrelevant precisely because they did not reflect the diversity of human experience but rather historically based power structures. Traditions, foundations, disciplines cannot automatically be regarded as the source of correct or best knowledge – they have to have the case made for them, along with other forms of knowledge. Knowledge has become vast, complex and democratised.

Schools have traditionally played a crucial role in knowledge transmission and there is no doubt they contain the kinds of knowledge processes that are sought today. Yet possibly the most significant feature of the current changes is the democratisation of knowledge and expertise. It is not clear that schools have yet entirely come to terms with this factor. Schools are centred in the knowledge enterprise yet they are increasingly facing significant pedagogical competition from multiple sources and through new forms of information technology. Schools must find ways to come to terms with not only the huge expansion of knowledge, its forms and its sources, but they must also come to terms with the fact that students are acquiring much if not most of their knowledge from places other than formal schooling. To ignore this is to ensure the irrelevancy of schools.

Both the changing nature of social relations and the changing global knowledge economy are part of the significant societal changes which are making the problem of what to represent of the world in the curriculum more difficult. As already suggested, both of these factors relate to increasing globalisation. It is useful to explore this phenomenon further.

Theorising Globalisation

Globalisation as a concept can be considered as a sought after dream or a dreaded evil, an empirical reality or a rhetorical myth, a new phenomenon causing world-wide change or an extension of the long term process of modernity. Whatever it actually is, it is clearly the hegemonic discourse of the late twentieth century (see Porter & Vidovich, 1999 for discussion of globalisation in relation to higher education).
The concept has been extensively theorised by Giddens and by Harvey (Hall, Held & McGrew, 1992). Giddens sees globalisation as a transformation of time and space in which the development of global systems and networks reduces the hold of local circumstances over people’s lives. This is a continuation of part of the process of modernity in which social relations are disembedded from their local contexts of interaction and recombined across time and space. Harvey also conceives of globalisation as involving a change in our experience of time and space, but he stresses the speeding up or the “intensification of time-space compression”. In other words, we live fast lives in a fast world.

Globalisation is a complex concept used with increasing frequency by different commentators who may be focusing on different dimensions. Furthermore, aspects of globalisation are experienced by people throughout the world, but the experiences themselves are not all the same for all people. Adopting a multifaceted approach, Taylor, Rizvi, Lingard, and Henry (1997) describe globalisation as “a set of processes which in various ways - economic, cultural and political - make supranational connections” (p53-54).

Economic globalisation typically refers to the international integration of economies and systems of communication. It involves the increasingly global nature of markets, capital and labour, and of the production and distribution of goods and services. Many firms operate across national boundaries in many dimensions of their business: their capital may come from investors literally all over the world, components of their products may be made in different countries, assembled in another, marketing may be organized from headquarters in another, and the final products sold in an array of still other countries. The push by many politicians and their economic advisers for ‘free trade’ and the elimination of tariff barriers so as to open up the world markets is another aspect of economic globalisation, in this case, possibly reflecting political rhetoric more than present reality for many countries. The ‘ideal’ of liberalisation of world trade, however, clearly represents the dominant economic paradigm of the day. Of course, the internationalisation of trade between nations is itself hardly new, nor is the integration of national economies—what was United Kingdom imperialism and colonialism, if not this? However, it can be argued that late twentieth century global economic connections have taken on some new and compelling aspects which transcend national borders in different ways.

The ‘reality’ of economic globalisation can and has been questioned by Hirst and Thompson (1996) who argue that the economic evidence does not, in fact, support a dramatic change in the degree of internationalisation of the world economy, nor in the growth of genuinely transnational firms, nor in a shift of investment and employment to the developing countries, nor in the extent to which world economic forces are unable to be regulated. Instead they see globalisation is more an ideal vision for economic liberals of how they would like the world to be, and the direction in which they are trying to push it.

Cultural globalisation refers to the perceived increase in cultural connections. It involves a paradoxical push towards both homogeneity and heterogeneity as mentioned earlier. In one sense, many people in many countries feel that increasingly diverse immigration, multiple languages, challenges from other religions, and different cultural lifestyles are threatening their cultural identities with too much diversity (from Pauline Hanson in Australia to Mahathir in Malaysia, Newt Gingrich in the United States, and La Pen in France). In another sense, much of the cultural ‘threat’ is experienced as a push towards similarity rather than the introduction of difference, for example, the extent to which we are all becoming consumers of the same
exotic items such as hamburgers, pizza, chow mein, Nike apparel, Toyota automobiles, Walt Disney, backwards baseball hats, and black American slang.

Sometimes this latter circumstance is referred to as the McDonaldisation of the world, particularly when it is seen as a form of specifically American cultural imperialism. At other times this kind of globalisation is seen more broadly as Western cultural imperialism. For example, leaders in Asia such as Prime Minister Mahathir of Malaysia, frequently deride ‘Western values’ as compared to ‘Asian values’. Their targets are usually Western democratic politics and libertarian social values. They argue that Western style democracies are inappropriate in Asia, where strong leadership is needed, that Western social values are permissive and lead to moral bankruptcy and social disintegration, and that the freedoms of the individual upon which Western democracies are based are overbalanced in relation to the needs of the group. They claim that Asian values are built more on concern for the whole society. Counter views doubt the existence of ‘Asian values’ and instead see this argument as an appeal to Asian authoritarianism. These different perspectives are presently being played out in the context of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the ‘rescues’ of troubled Asian economies, and in the recent United Nations and Australian involvement in East Timor and Indonesia.

It is evident that what cultural globalisation actually means is also in dispute. Featherstone (1993) has illustrated the complexity of the meaning of global and of local culture while pointing out that “one paradoxical consequence of the process of globalisation, the awareness of the finitude and boundedness of the planet and humanity, is not to produce homogeneity but to familiarise us with greater diversity, the extensive range of local cultures” (p169). Hargreaves (1994) also associates the intensification of globalisation with a resurgence of more localised identity, and Appadurai (1990) describes a growing tension between cultural homogenisation on the one hand and simultaneous cultural heterogenisation on the other.

Political globalisation has the same dual quality in its combined centrifugal and centripetal forces. Over the last decade large political entities such as the United Soviet Socialist Republic (USSR), and the nation of Yugoslavia have disintegrated and are breaking up along ethnic, religious and geographic lines. On the other hand, the European Union is pulling together many political as well as economic aspects of a previously disparate Europe. There are many complexities within countries as well, for example, the United Kingdom, is both joining the larger European Union and moving towards more autonomy for its sub-units, such as Scotland and Wales, at the same time.

Tying together political, cultural and economic globalisation are the newer international movements such as environmentalism and feminism. The impact of feminism on countries antithetical to its tenets and to its interpretations of liberation for women has and is genuinely causing great difficulties for many traditional regimes. The power of the world-wide environmental movement, more important to every generation, has huge implications for governments and business. With the world-wide media eye on these issues it becomes harder and harder for traditional leaders to cut down rain forests or re-shroud women without an international reaction. An even more recent development is the beginnings of an international indigenous peoples’ movement tying together the experiences of many nations’ indigenous people in such a way so as to force changes in individual countries. Those in such political and social movements actively make international connections, define problems as having certain
basic similarities for all people, in particular using the language of human rights, and in effect, contribute to the challenging of local and/or traditional culture and politics in many countries.

One basic issue for the west in globalisation is the relationship of the economic to the political. Even if increasingly strong economic webs are being woven and national economies are globalising, national polities are much slower in following. For the past few hundred years in the West, basic human rights have been pursued primarily as citizens of nation-states. It is within national borders that we elect those who govern us—we elect no one at the international level. While all nations participate in international organizations, the most obvious being the United Nations, and make international commitments, citizens do not expect that those organizations will have much power when it comes to their daily lives within their own borders.

Hindness (1994) has pointed out that the change that is supposed to be globalisation is precisely that national economies can no longer operate as autonomous functional systems, yet this is exactly what the notion of accountable democratic government in the West has been based on historically. If governments can no longer control key features of their economies, or manage effectively economically (whether through Keynesian or monetarist strategies), then the power of government has been substantially reduced, leaving the possibilities as mainly piecemeal social interventions and a residual police power, “a model of government that is largely beyond the scope of any democratic project of public accountability” (p237). Hindness concludes that the present problem is not simply one of changed economic conditions to which democratic institutions must adapt, but “It is also that a certain kind of image of the national economy is central to the social democratic dream itself and indeed to the programs of many of social democracy’s mainstream political opponents” (p239).

**Nation State Responses to Globlisation**

In one sense it can be claimed that state responses to globalisation, particularly to its perceived economic dimensions, have been similar across OECD countries: a turning to markets instead of the state for answers, supply side economics, privatisation, competition theory, the promotion of free trade and reduction of protective tariffs, and both macro and micro economic reform. Different countries have responded differently, some incorporating market ideology into state response (Keating), while others have transferred state responsibilities to the markets (Thatcher and Reagan). There can be little doubt that there has been an intensification of economic competition between many nations, regions and industries with dramatic changes in state policies, markets and work. The changes have been described by Drache and Gertler (1991) as follows:

First, larger markets: the nation-state can no longer satisfy the accumulation needs of transnational and corporate players, so markets need to be enlarged by integrating national markets into large trading areas. Secondly, increased capital mobility: as world trade has continued to increase faster than domestic production, corporations have exhorted individual nation-states to dismantle trade barriers; this has accommodated both the meteoric growth of the international finance economy and the drive towards increased flexibility of production systems. Lastly, greater specialization: as world trading intensifies, countries seek to concentrate on those industries in which they are most competitive while abandoning firms in mature high-cost sectors. Thus in the new global economy nations are struggling to find new ways for state policy to enhance their economic performance (pxii).
However, it is also the case that there is significant differentiation at the nation-state level in terms of the nature and timing of their response to economic globalisation which is related to different histories, geographical characteristics, forms of government, and cultural traditions. This is particularly the case in some Asian countries in the recent economic downturn, eg Malaysia’s successful thumb-nosing of IMF solutions.

A useful analyses of past, current and future state responses, with particular relevance to education, is that of Brown and Lauder (1996) who argue that strategies for economic and educational development can be linked to different ideal type models of national development referred to as Fordist, neo-Fordist and post-Fordist modes which have different implications for education.

Fordism refers to the standardised assembly-line model of mass industrial production which transformed industry in the first half of the twentieth century, though Brown and Lauder argue that it also applies to the concomitant expansion of mass consumption, along with mass production, orchestrated under Keynesian demand management in the post war period until the early 1970’s. Fordism corresponded with the dramatic expansion of compulsory secondary education and mass tertiary education. Here education and training were seen as necessary to national development. Such rhetoric was pervasive and state funding was seen as crucial. Yet the relationship between schooling and the economy was seen as indirect and simple -- resources going into schools would result in better education levels which would result in economic and national growth and development.

Neo-Fordism emerged in the seventies and refers to the New Right’s commitment to markets, competition and privatisation, as well as efficiency and effectiveness in the state’s smaller role. In terms of education policy the key words are choice and diversity and the ideal is markets of diverse competing institutions from which parents and students can choose. Here education and training are seen as appropriately demand led, with minimal state involvement. The employment markets will lead the way and determine the areas of training demand. The state has a residual role in relation to basic levels of education and equity.

Post-Fordism is the newer nineties centre-left project of what they call the ‘left-modernisers’ in which the goals are seen as a combination of economic efficiency and social justice. Here the education and training goals are to move towards a high skill, high wage ‘magnet’ society (attractive to those with skills) permeated by a ‘culture of learning’ which is seen as the key to prosperity. Here the state sees training and education as a national investment and the state acts as a strategic trainer.

Brown and Lauder (p6) argue that neo-Fordism was the New Right reaction of both Thatcher’s United Kingdom and Reagan’s America, while the newer British Blair government and the American Clinton government are moving more in the direction of post-Fordism. The Australian Hawke-Keating Labor governments arguably pushed elements of both neo and post-Fordism, but the present conservative Howard government is firmly back in the neo-Fordist camp.

Brown and Lauder also suggest that while neo-Fordism has been shown to be flawed, post-Fordism still has major issues to resolve if it is to be an effective strategy for national development. In particular, the problem that simply investing in education and training does not in itself lead to a high skill, high wage economy; that unemployment is not solved automatically by creating a high skill society; that high skills do not necessarily mean high wages; and that
issues of social justice are not solved by the operation of the global labour market. Nevertheless, they see post-Fordism as the most progressive direction of the future and they conclude that “The creation of a post-Fordist economy will depend upon an active state involvement in investment, regulation and strategic planning in the economic infrastructure alongside a commitment to skill formation through education and training” (p21).

Issues in Education Reform

I would like to turn now to the implications of a globalising world for the present array of education reforms occurring in Western Australia and Australia generally. The development of national curriculum collaboration in Australia in the late eighties was driven by the federal Labor governments, complemented by Labor governments in most states for a time, and spurred by the belief that developing international competitiveness and the opening of the Australian economy to those forces demanded a transformation of Australian industry and its workforce. Federal Labor took the middle view (compared to Thatcher and Reagan) that markets and competition could not resolve all issues and argued that it was crucial to gear up the state itself to also become more competitive. Hence we have seen more than a decade of public sector restructuring including that in education. Education bureaucracies, as part of the state, were to become more efficient and effective, and schooling and post compulsory education (both universities and vocational and technical education) were to be reformed so as to ensure that Australia’s workforce was transformed ‘in the national interest’. Double barrelled restructuring and reform have been the order of the day in education for some time, as well as in many other areas of the state and the private sector.

Global economic pressures were the main instigators for education reform and restructuring but they have been played out within the specifics of Australian history and culture. In particular, they have operated in the context of the complexity of Australian’s federal political system where the states have the constitutional responsibility for schooling, the federal government has the agreed responsibility for funding higher education (though the institutions are created under state charters), and technical and vocational education is a mixed enterprise with states primarily responsible for provision within national frameworks. The story of this lengthy development and the many changes, shifting alliances, personalities, and work on educational issues by vast numbers of educationalists at all levels is a fascinating one, but one which cannot be pursued here. It is worth noting, however, that as suggested earlier, both the global and the local have been equally relevant in the results and in the current state of affairs in education reform.

In Western Australia, there has been more than a decade of change beginning with restructuring for ‘better schools’ and moving towards curriculum reform which in its current form involves the implementation of the Curriculum Framework for years K-12 and its associated policies and practices, a VET review with recommendations, and the present review of the post compulsory years 11 and 12. The stated intention of the WA Curriculum Council is clearly to bring these changes into alignment with each other by 2004.

In this section I would like emphasise some of the dilemmas for the current curriculum and pedagogical reforms, the contradictions and the uncertainties, particularly in relation to what we know of globalisation imperatives. The implications of the present reforms are by no means certain and we cannot reliably predict that the direction that we think we are headed will produce the results that we intend. Nor can we be sure what the implementation process
itself will bring. At the same time, I hope that I have already made clear in the earlier sections on change and globalisation, there is no returning to the past. However, good or bad it was or appears to be now, the forms of schooling of the past cannot serve us well into a changing and unpredictable future.

In discussing these issues I would like to keep a focus on the challenges and their context. One of the most perplexing aspects of social and educational change over the past century has been the tendency to get so caught up in the solutions to the problems, that we lose sight of the problems themselves. Governments, politicians, bureaucrats, academics, and change agents in schools see the huge problems facing them, and sometimes they construct major reform programs to try to solve these problems. Resources, energy and egos then get so involved in making sure the solution is put into place, that the commitment shifts from the desire to solve the problem to the desire to implement the solution.

This becomes problematic in that the reform and innovation implementation literature and research clearly show that things seldom happen exactly as policy makers thought they would. There are inevitably multiple understandings by many different people at many levels of the intent, the implementation processes, and the expected results. There will be people of good will and people of ill will and both will pursue their own slants. Central office staff, principals and teachers are busy people with many demands placed on them and the reforms will assume different priorities in different places and times. Sufficient resources for implementation may or may not be made available from governments (they seldom are). Teachers may or may not be provided with sufficient professional development (they virtually never are). The intended beneficiaries of the reforms – the students – are of vastly different levels of maturity, ability and background and while it may be possible to test for short term gain it will be almost impossible to ascertain the more far reaching goals for a long time.

In education policy, as in most social policy, politicians in particular, have short term objectives which usually coincide with their terms in office. Major educational change takes a very long time but demands from governments are usually to show that a new program ‘works’ as soon as possible. Again the focus turns to the solution rather than the problem and potentially good solutions get turfed out prematurely because they haven’t proven their worth in political time rather than real time. This is the full circle where the solution becomes the problem – and teachers and other educationalists often get the blame. Educational research has a similar problem in that the more substantial the educational change desired, the harder it is to evaluate it rapidly, in isolation, and in terms of its lasting character.

In relation to the current educational reform agenda, my plea would be, given the truly substantial social, political and economic changes in front of us, it is crucial to not lose sight of what we can understand of the challenges, while we explore the presently mandated and proposed solutions. These solutions may or may not work, in their present forms and we must be flexible and willing to monitor, adjust, adapt and change our approaches as experience and circumstance dictate. This is particularly the case when it is precisely diversity and fluidity and lack of certainty that are the problems we are facing.

The present array of educational reforms is well known and its language involves words with which all involved in the field in Australia would be familiar: national statements and profiles, national curriculum collaboration, key learning areas, curriculum frameworks, outcomes-based education, common and agreed outcomes, benchmarking, performance
standards, explicitness, breadth and depth, seamless curriculum, school based, vocational education and training, and so on. As already noted, all states have been working, sometimes collaboratively, often in their own terms, on variations of educational reform with these themes for some time.

For example, in Western Australia a review of school curriculum in 1995 determined that the priorities should include a common curriculum direction which was seamless across levels and had wide involvement in its construction. Subsequently, a Curriculum Council was set up with the responsibility of developing, with consultation, a Curriculum Framework for all schools. The Curriculum Framework sets out what all students should know, understand, value and be able to do as a result of schooling in WA from K – 12. It adopts a learning outcomes focus with eight Learning Area Statements. This is the mandated part and requires reporting by schools on the knowledge, understandings, skills, values and attitudes acquired by students as developed by school programs designed to achieve these outcomes. There is currently a Review of Years 11 and 12 to determine just how the Curriculum Framework and the outcomes approach will be implemented in the post compulsory years.

**Globalisation Challenges for Curriculum Frameworks and Outcomes-Based Education**

A fundamental argument for these kinds of education reforms relates to the changing world of the future that today’s students will face, and the perceived inadequacies of the present education system in this respect. This is not the place to chronicle those inadequacies, they are readily available in the literature. However, the current reforms provide no guarantees and it is important to keep in mind that they are likely to need adjustment, adaptation and change, possibly significantly, as experience and circumstance dictate. It is this flexible approach and the focus on the problems, not the proposed solutions, that we must maintain to keep going forward.

Thus, if we try to reconcile the curriculum reforms with what we know so far about the processes of globalisation we begin to understand the size of the challenge and some of the issues that may emerge. They include the following:

- There are major changes occurring in relation to knowledge, its accelerated development, its multiple sources, its democratisation and the demise of the canon. The current curriculum reforms are intended to facilitate a common curriculum framework, standards, equity and accountability, but how can a scheme that is highly logical, linear and classificatory respond adequately to this increasing fluidity of knowledge in all its non linear and non legitimated aspects?

- Some of the changes in knowledge relate to the fact that much knowledge is increasingly and readily available and accessible to students outside formal schooling and its curriculum, and in forms that appeal specifically to the young. How can curriculum reforms that increasingly specify and assess what is taught in school be seen as anything more than finding out more about less? How can the reforms come to terms with other knowledge? How can schools not become irrelevant?

- There are major changes occurring in social relationships with old social, cultural and geographic boundaries and expectations disappearing resulting in many new
groups of learners emerging with diverse needs and different expectations. The curriculum reforms are intended to facilitate learning for diverse groups, but how can either centrally determined or the school based development of common frameworks and outcomes respond to these changes in social relationships – including, importantly, those between teacher and student – with the necessary sensitivities required?

- In a similar vein, the increase in the diversity of learners, their needs and expectations logically suggests that relevant differentiation of curriculum may be necessary and desirable. How will a curriculum focused on common learning outcomes and mandated reporting respond adequately to these diverse educational needs?

- We expect (hope?) to be living in the future in a dynamic, open, and free society - will national and/or state curriculum frameworks and common learning outcomes facilitate this? There are societies now with earlier versions of common curriculum and expected results, eg Singapore. Singaporean students excel in some areas such as maths and science, however internal and external critics lament what they see as a lack of independent creative thinking. Will the present curriculum reforms hinder or facilitate individual learners in becoming independent creative thinkers? How will this relate to the facilitation of needed innovation in the wider society of the future?

- Changing knowledge and diverse learner’s needs could be well served by a sophisticated curriculum framework with local adaptations. However, the assessment of common outcomes could easily result in a narrowing of the curriculum so as to meet assessment, reporting and narrow accountability requirements. How do we prevent the assessment tail from wagging the teaching and learning dog?

- Similarly, changing knowledge and diverse learner’s needs could be well catered for within curriculum frameworks, but once the reality of the range of individual performance is confronted, as it must, how can the assessment of common learning outcomes ever be more than minimalist basic standards? Is this sufficient? How, then, will excellence be fostered?

- It is expected that the range of employment options in the future will be different from the present, extensive, involve many changes over a lifetime, and require mobility. Preparation for these varied opportunities will require diverse knowledge offered in a diverse post compulsory system. The current curriculum reforms want a seamless education system including the flexibility to move between VET and universities. While this seems desirable on equity grounds, how can diverse life opportunities, diverse knowledge needs of different kinds of employment, and diverse student needs be met in a common seamless post compulsory schooling framework?

- Globalisation involves international, national and local forces operating back and forth on each other in a process that flows all directions all the time. It is not simply a matter of gearing up the nation of Australia to play in the international markets,
The borderless changes occurring ignore traditional political boundaries. Most of the curriculum reforms have been ‘bordered’ and have been conceptualised as either national reform (defined quite narrowly as bringing the states into alignment) or state reform (pursing state agendas). Will this focus on traditional political boundaries and their perceived needs miss the point of the whole phenomenon and ill prepare our students for a very different kind of world?

- To succeed in a globalised world is likely to require an openness to international economic, political and cultural influences, but it is also likely to require a will to protect the uniqueness of the local economic, political and cultural and environmental dimensions. The uniqueness of ‘the local’ needs protection not only for its own sake, and not only so as to ensure that the diversity of human culture and environment remains, but also because ‘the local’ may be a thing of value with huge strategic importance both locally and globally. In the current curriculum reforms, is ‘the local’ devalued by a lack of inclusion in the frameworks, and through it being left to individual teachers and schools to add as they see fit and if there is time? This may be inadequate for successful global involvement.

- The responses of nation states to globalisation pressures may be quite different. However, insofar as a country like Australia might try to become a postfordist magnet economy (for which many have argued) which is attractive to highly skilled workers, has a high wage structure, low unemployment, a concern for social justice, and is based on a culture of learning, it is possible the curriculum reforms, well resourced, could contribute to this goal. However even so, there is no clear evidence that such an investment in education and training would lead to a high skill, high wage economy, that high skills would lead to high wages, that unemployment would be reduced by high skills, or that social justice issues would be solved by a global labour market. Furthermore, even if this direction were achievable, are there negative implications for other countries? Should we care?

- The substantial social, political and economic changes that are likely in the twentieth first century, and whatever educational reforms we put in place to try and prepare students for them will inevitably advantage some and disadvantage others. We know how the present system works in this regard and it would behove us to analyse and anticipate the likely consequences of the current reforms rather than assume all social justice issues will go away. It is likely that certain groups and individuals will need different treatment from the beginning. Can these can be identified now, rather than left to emerge as problems in the future in the new system?

- The substantial curriculum changes that are impending and the educational reforms being mooted and mounted involve a significant departure from past modes of pedagogy and teaching for most teachers and principals in schools, and from existing teacher education programs. Will the necessary professional development for staff be adequately conceptualised, resourced and delivered in ways which genuinely assist those immediately responsible for the implementation of these reforms?
• The preposed curriculum reforms have an international as well as national flavour in that such proposals and projects have been in progress in the United States and the United Kingdom as well as Australia for some time. However, keeping in mind the local context, it is well to reflect upon the fact that both those countries have schooling systems that have been historically significantly more diverse and decentralised than Australia. Australia has historically had a highly centralised schooling system based around state education departments in six capital cities, with state mandated curriculum, external exams, and a state wide teaching service. Though more commonality may be desired, it is not the case that it has been absent on a relative basis, internationally. The development of curriculum reforms that provide a common curriculum framework and focus on common learning outcomes has been totally out of the reach in the American system, and difficult to achieve in the British system, yet goals that both might usefully strive for in their own ways. However, bureaucratic and state led approaches to change find fertile soil in historically statist Australia and it is important to understand this when engaged in any broad reform efforts with many roots emanating from other cultures.

Conclusions

Globalisation is a complex and contested process associated with widespread changes occurring economically, culturally and politically. These changes are experienced differently by different groups and individuals and may be both welcomed and passionately fought against. There is little doubt that globalisation is transforming the world and that the twenty first century will be vastly different from the century just concluding. The changing knowledge economy and changing social relations are particularly obvious at this time,

Clearly educational reform is necessary to meet these challenges. However, curriculum reform will be extremely difficult in terms of its central problem, that of representation. What do we represent of the world, in all its increasing diversity and complexity, in the curriculum of the schools in a post modern era? In a rapidly changing world with multiple sources of knowledge, without a canon, with social relations fluid and unclear, is it possible for educational policy makers to construct common frameworks and common learning outcomes that make any sense?

One reality is that schools have to teach something, at least as long as there are schools. And society and educational practitioners have to try to make curriculum relevant to what is known of what will be. The present curriculum reforms, as powerfully argued as they can be, may or may not be appropriate solutions to the problems we face and anticipate, but if those involved can keep their focus on the problems and not the solutions, and embed flexibility as a central feature in the plans, then there is a reasonable chance that we will at least move forward. The curriculum reforms have much to commend them but we must not lost sight of the huge challenges they face and the vastly changing world that we, and our students, all face.
Note: The discussion in this paper on globalisation is heavily indebted to other work in which I am engaged with Lesley Vidovich. My thinking about curriculum reform has also been influenced by discussions with Stephen Kemmis. Thanks to both Lesley and Stephen for their intellectual stimulation.

References


