

BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Helen has taught in special education settings in Victoria since 1985. She has initiated and developed leading classroom practice in the use of ICT for students with complex special educational needs at local, state and national levels.

Helen's PhD thesis (Farrell, 2006) investigated the impact and local implementation of standards-based curriculum frameworks for students with complex special educational needs.

Helen has held appointments as

- expert curriculum writer and editor, *Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA)* (public sector statutory curriculum authority in the State of Victoria) (2004-2005)
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In February 2009, Helen was appointed to the Editorial Advisory Board of the international journal *Music Educators' Journal* (MEJ) (2009-2012). She was appointed Commissioner to the *Music in Special Education, Music Therapy and Music Medicine* (Special Interest Group) of the International Society for Music Education (ISME) (2008–10) in July 2008. She is a member of the Editorial Advisory Board of the journal *Victorian Journal of Music Education* (VJME) (2007-current). She is past Chairperson of the Victorian Chapter of the Australian Society for Music Education (ASME) (2006-2008). In her “spare time” (she makes time), Helen is senior choral scholar in a leading high profile choir in the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne.

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THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR STUDENTS WITH COMPLEX SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS

ABSTRACT

This paper is in response to international, national, state and local curriculum issues. Curriculum work is taken to embrace curriculum research and theory, and curriculum development and implementation. This paper is a critical reflection on current curriculum work as a day-to-day experience. This paper is about the impact and local implementation of curriculum framework initiatives for students with complex special educational needs. The focus is to develop an improved understanding of the extraordinary complexities that encompass curriculum policy framework initiatives for these students. For most people, a better understanding of these extraordinary complexities may much reduce fear, unease and distrust. The phenomenon would seem logical.

This paper explores ways in which public curriculum policy is developed and implemented in modern societies like Australia (e.g., the National Curriculum Board (NCB), now the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)). This paper is a critical reflection on moves to change curriculum, curriculum policy framework initiatives and the institutional contexts that shape its impact and implementation. Formation of public curriculum policy initiatives are challenged by competing pressures and limitations including an increasing emphasis on ‘partnerships’ and ‘networking’. There are difficulties, complex challenges and opportunities to ensure that *all* students share in the benefits.

TOWARDS INCLUSIVITY: NOTIONS OF INCLUSIVE EDUCATION, INTEGRATION AND NORMALIZATION

Notions of inclusive education (i.e., integration, normalization and least restrictive environment) were espoused by social and cultural theorists Wolfensberger (1972) and Wolfensberger and Zauha (editors) (1973) in the early 1970s. Social and cultural theory appeared to suggest that contemporary society and culture is extremely diverse (e.g., Aronowitz & Giroux, 1991; Collins, 1989; Derrida, 1978; Giroux & McLaren, 1989; Giroux, 1988 and 1990; Lyotard, 1984). This social and cultural theory challenged very powerful economically efficient and politically expedient values with social and cultural values centred on equal opportunity and diversity. Social and cultural theory called for those who advocate social and cultural values to emerge with voices that have produced very positive effects. Social and cultural theory has had a profound influence on social and cultural attitudes toward people with disabilities and impairments. Later social and cultural theorists described paradigms that have shifted the location from the individual with a disability and impairment to social and cultural attitude toward disability and impairment. The paradigms define disability and impairment as a dimension of human difference and not as a defect. The goal is not to eradicate disability or impairment but to celebrate the distinctiveness, to pursue an equal place in society and to acknowledge that differentness is not defective, but valued (e.g., Christensen & Rizvi (editors), 1996; Gill, 1999; Seelman, 2000; Skrtic, 1995; Swander & Lubeck (editors), 1995).

In response, the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed the year 1981 *International Year of Disabled Persons* in December 1976. It established an Advisory Committee for the *International Year of Disabled Persons* in 1977. In December 1980, the theme of the *International Year of Disabled Persons* was expanded to ‘full participation and equality’. *The World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in December 1982:

at least 10 per cent of children are disabled ... they have the same right to education as non-disabled persons and they require active intervention and specialised services... [but] ... most disabled children in developing countries receive neither specialised services nor compulsory education ... there is a great variation from some countries with a high educational level for disabled persons to countries where such facilities are limited or non-existent ... there is a lack in existing knowledge of the potential of disabled persons ... [furthermore] ... there is often no legislation which deals with their needs and a shortage of teaching staff and facilities ... disabled persons have in most countries so far not benefited from a lifelong education ... significant advances in teaching techniques and important innovative developments have taken place in the field of special education and much more can be achieved in the education of disabled persons ... [but] ... the progress is mostly limited to a few countries or only a few urban centres ... the advances concern early detection, assessment and intervention, special education programs in a variety of settings, with many disabled children able to participate in a regular school setting, while others require very intensive programs ... (preamble to resolution 37/52, 37th regular session of the United Nations General Assembly, 3 December 1982)

That an appropriate time frame during which recommendations of *The World Program of Action Concerning Disabled Persons* could be implemented, the General Assembly proclaimed the years 1983-1992 *United Nations Decade of Disabled Persons* (General Assembly resolution 37/52).

There have always been children with disabilities and impairments, but there has not always been special education. Notions of equal opportunity and diversity have thus meant increased support for many more students with disabilities and impairments. Many education systems throughout the world have accepted responsibility for the education of all students

irrespective of disability or impairment. Policy and program initiatives in special education sectors appear to have led to more inclusive educational systems and improved practice in recent decades (Yell, 1998).

CURRICULUM POLICY FRAMEWORK INITIATIVES: FOR CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE WITH COMPLEX SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS TOO?

Development and implementation of public curriculum policy initiatives are the collaborative achievement of many sectors of an education community that embody the aspirations that a developed education community holds for the next generation of students, teachers, educators, subject specialists, researchers, professional teaching associations and community groups. By the end of the 1990s, a variety of standards-based curriculum policy framework initiatives had been developed and implemented in education systems throughout the developed world in the wake of a long wave of recession and economic stagnation, and political conservatism of the 1980s that marked the end of the postwar economic boom. Learning outcome descriptors in standards-based curriculum framework initiatives make it clear what students should know and be able to do at key stages or levels providing a robust framework for program development and implementation (e.g., Brady & Kennedy, 2003 and 2005; Reid & Thompson, 2003).

Thompson and Thurlow (2001) considered that standards-based curriculum frameworks have led to improvements in educational opportunity for students with programs that are developed and implemented against a taxonomy of learning outcome descriptors. However, many education systems in the developed world appear to have been entirely consumed with the development and implementation of economically efficient and politically expedient standards-based curriculum policy framework initiatives accompanied by close and continuous mandatory assessment and reporting, and testing.

Moreover, the development and implementation of public standards-based curriculum policy framework initiatives may turn out to be quite contrary to the aspirations expressed in the policy initiative. Public standards-based curriculum policy framework initiatives do not provide guarantee of uniformity or quality of experience. Development and implementation of public standards-based curriculum policy framework initiatives may create quite different experiences for different individuals. Curriculum policy work is an economic, political, social and cultural construction which seems to typically serve the interests of particular social and cultural groups at the expense of others. Curriculum policy work involves identifying these interests and informs more appropriate action.

Difficulties, complex challenges and opportunities surround such a large and unwieldy movement. Difficulties, complex challenges and opportunities are most apparent for students with complex special educational needs. Special educators' feedback regularly indicates the apparent inflexibility of standards-based curriculum framework initiatives and its perceived inability to cater to different learning styles. The unique and diverse qualities and characteristics in patterns of thinking observed in students with complex special educational needs somehow appear to be obscured and smothered by the pursuit of universality and generalisability of standards-based curriculum framework initiatives. Behavioural indicators that may seem particular, irrational, or even unnatural, but may define thinking in students with complex special educational needs somehow appeared to be marginalised. This in turn appears to result in the devaluing, perhaps the eradication of, qualities and characteristics not able to be assessed and reported, or tested against a more appropriate taxonomy of learning outcome descriptors. "Standards" appear to become insensitive to the diverse qualities and characteristics that may be observed in students with complex special educational needs.

In turn, the paper considers respective public laws, reports and review initiatives in response to notions such as integration, normalization, least restrictive environment, equal opportunity and diversity in the United States of America, the United Kingdom, Australia and the State of Victoria. There are a myriad of difficulties, complex challenges and opportunities highlighted in respective public laws, reports and review initiatives in response these notions. One common difficulty, complex challenge and opportunity appears to be the development and implementation of relevant curriculum policy framework initiatives for children and young people aged five to sixteen years with even the most complex of special educational needs who are unlikely to achieve at or beyond the first key stage or level of a standards-based curriculum policy framework initiative. Some noteworthy attempts had been made to design curriculum policy framework initiatives from which teachers develop and implement programs to enhance thinking in all learning areas in students with complex special educational needs.

United States of America

In the United States of America, policy and program initiatives have included *Education of All Handicapped Children Act* (Public Law 94-142) (Education of All Handicapped Children Act 1975), *Towards Equity: Education of the Deaf* (Commission on Education of the Deaf 1988), *Procedures Governing Programs and Services for Children with Special Needs* (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction 1993), *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act 1997, amended 2004) and *No Child Left Behind Act: Public Law 107-110* (United States of America, 2001 and 2002).

However, the crux of *No Child Left Behind Act: Public Law 107-110* appeared to be massive and constant standards-based assessment and reporting, and testing. This initiative requires that all public schools test students between grades three and eight in reading and mathematics. Scores determine whether schools are ‘in need of improvement’. There is also a huge league table according to categories such as racial grouping, socioeconomic status, limited English proficiency, gender and special education needs. A school is placed on a list of schools that may require greater support if any of these categories do not demonstrate ‘adequate yearly progress’. These schools may ultimately be tendered to the private school sector.

United Kingdom

Visser and Upton (1995) provided insights into the impact of policy and program initiatives in the English public education system (e.g., Warnock, 1978). They suggested that special educators have continually needed to examine how best to work with colleagues in mainstream primary school and secondary college settings to enable students with disabilities and impairments to gain access and success to a full curriculum. Special educators have not been silent about their need to be included in curriculum reform. However, teachers in mainstream settings so often seemed to be deskilled in so far as they were either told, or felt that they could not teach these students, often having to rely almost exclusively on their own resourcefulness and initiative in developing expertise.

A national standards-based curriculum policy framework for public education system schools for all students of compulsory school age, including specialist schools, was developed and implemented in the United Kingdom in 1995. The *National Curriculum* is organised into eleven distinct subjects (i.e., English, Mathematics, Science, Design and Technology, Information Technology, History, Geography, Modern Foreign Languages, Art, Music and Physical Education) (Department for Education, 1995). Each subject defined four *key stages* (levels) of student achievement.

In the United Kingdom, the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority developed a particularly useful standards-based curriculum framework initiative with 11 *key stages* (levels) of achievement in all subjects (Key Learning Areas) for students with complex special educational needs (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority 2001a, 2001b). The general guidelines recognised that:

most schools work with students across a full range of ability ... including those aged five to sixteen years with severe and profound special educational needs who are unlikely to achieve at or beyond key stage 1 of the *National Curriculum*

Students in England are ranked against the learning outcome descriptors at each of the four key stages of *The National Curriculum* (Department for Education 1995). Schools are ranked on gigantic league tables on the basis of the tested achievements of their students. They have apparently learned to worry about their position in the columns of near-identical results, regardless of the apparent lack of statistical significance (Office for Standards in Education, Department for Education 1997).

Australia

Australian education has historically had a substantial concern with the education of students with complex special educational needs. Education legislation and practice is essentially based on the principle of equality of access at all levels. The Australian Federal Government, in cooperation with Australian State and Territory Governments has played an increasing role in promoting equity and an education that reflects commitment to social justice. In particular, the *Racial Discrimination Act (1975)*, *Sex Discrimination Act (1984)*, *Affirmative Action Act (1986a)*, *Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Act (1986b)* and *Disability Discrimination Act (1992)* protect the rights of all Australians against unfair treatment on the basis of race, sex, race, marital status, pregnancy, family and carer responsibilities and disability and impairment (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission 1975, 1984, 1986a, 1986b, 1992).

Approaches to special education have changed over time. Typically, there has been separate provision of education (i.e., specialist school settings for students with disabilities and impairments). Since the early 1980s, there has been an increasing emphasis on integrating such students into mainstream schools and classes. The types of provision vary widely as Australian State and Territory governments have the constitutional and major financial responsibility for school education.

Long (editor) (1988, 1994) and Ashman (editor) (1988) provided insights into the impact of policy and program initiatives in Australian public education systems (e.g., Collins, 1984; Cullen & Brown, 1992; Cullen & Brown, 1993 in Victoria). Long (1988, p. i) commented on the fact that the release of the Collins Report (1984) generated:

... much constructive thinking as well as considerable hot air ... successful integration of disabled students with disabilities and impairments has [encompassed] well publicized projects involving several schools, their teachers and students ... (to) ... individual placements managed without fanfare or government funding ...

The 1988 and 1994 volumes include discussion papers on integration perspectives, assistive technology, directions in assessment, cooperative strategies and post-school options.

Ashman (1988, p. v) commented that ‘many problems being confronted by educators today are much the same as they were twenty years ago’. Nonetheless, the challenges of inclusive education continue to assume a position of prominence in contemporary education. The volume includes discussion papers on issues in integration, service provision and research. Issues in integration include the non-restrictive environment, the difficulty of achieving integration in some school systems, similarities and differences in integration between Australia and the United States of America. Service provision includes the integration of young physically handicapped children, the integration of students with a hearing impairment, social skills training, developing curriculum and school organisations and the cry for inservice education for mainstream teachers.

As in many like western countries, Australians and New Zealanders have felt the full effects of policies of privatisation, deregulation and user pays in the name of economic efficiency and political expediency, assets sales programs, commercialisation and corporatisation of social services, welfare, and housing, restructuring of the labour market, and attack on unions through Workplace Agreements since the mid 1980s. For both Australia and New Zealand, it appeared that the real costs of strategies pursued in the name of economic efficiency and political expediency had been disproportionately borne by those already oppressed, the disadvantaged and

the unemployed. In the late 1980s, there appeared to be an increased concern associated with employment and education. Public policy and programs in Australia at all levels appeared to embrace very powerful economically efficient and politically expedient values that signalled changing requirements for a productive work force.

Australian State, Territory, and Commonwealth Ministers of Education met in Hobart (in the State of Tasmania) in April 1989. *The Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (more commonly known as the *Hobart Declaration 1989*) (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 1989) was ratified. Over the following four years, work proceeded on the development of the *National Statements and Profiles* in eight distinct key learning areas (KLAs) (i.e., The Arts, English, Health and Physical Education (HPE), Languages Other Than English (LOTE), Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), and Technology). The *National Statements and Profiles* defined four *bands* (levels) of student achievement in each KLA (Curriculum Corporation, 1994). The Curriculum Corporation (1994) developed a useful *Towards Band 1* with an extended band (level) in each Key Learning Area ‘... with additional performance descriptors of achievement towards level 1 ...’.

Ministers of Education met again in Adelaide (in the State of South Australia) in 1998. Ministers agreed that it was timely to review the goals to take account of the significant economic, technological, social and cultural changes which had occurred over the last decade, as well as preparing for new challenges which would face schools in the future. *The National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (more commonly known as the *Adelaide Declaration 1999*) was endorsed in April 1999 (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs 1999).

Education Ministers affirmed commitment to national assessment and reporting against learning outcome descriptors. The *National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* would provide the appropriate framework initiative for assessment and reporting. As part of this commitment, Ministers agreed to the assessment and reporting of learning outcomes in literacy; numeracy; student participation, retention and completion; vocational education and training in schools; science; and information technology. The meeting also noted the need to develop learning outcome descriptors for civics and citizenship education, and enterprise education. A National Education Performance Monitoring Taskforce was established to undertake work on a national initiative for assessment and reporting (i.e., *National Assessment Program: Language and Numeracy* (NAPLAN, 2008)). More is said of the NAPLAN initiative in the concluding section.

The Office of the Board of Studies in New South Wales (BOS NSW) (the statutory curriculum authority in the State of New South Wales) employs a Senior Project Officer (Special Education) at the level of Senior Education Officer (Grade 2) responsible for advice to the Board on K-12 curriculum, assessment and credentialling in the area of Special Education, for the development of curriculum materials for students with disabilities and impairments and managing these projects on behalf of the Board. The BOS NSW developed a curriculum document *Life Skills Years 7-10: Advice on Planning, Programming and Assessment* in conjunction with the Years 7-10 curriculum documents (Board of Studies NSW, 2004). This very useful document contains sample units of work in each Key Learning Area, i.e., teaching, learning and assessment activities against an extended taxonomy of learning outcome descriptors.

Victoria

The development and implementation of education system policy and program initiatives in response to notions of inclusive education, integration, normalization and least restrictive environment for children and young people with complex of special educational needs continued in Victoria. For example, Collins, 1984; Cullen & Brown, 1992; Cullen & Brown, 1993; *Public Education: The Next Generation* (more commonly known as the PENG Review 2000) (Department of Education, Employment and Training Victoria, 2000); *Better Services, Better Outcomes in Victorian Government Schools: A Review of Educational Services for Students with Special Education Needs* (Lake, 2001); and *Blueprint for Government Schools: Future Directions in the Victorian Government System* (Department of Education, Employment and Training Victoria, 2003) had been commissioned.

At the time of writing, the *Better Services, Better Outcomes in Victorian Government Schools: A Review of Educational Services for Students with Special Education Needs* policy and program initiative had not been endorsed by the relevant Minister. Reform in response to this policy and program initiative stalled late in 2003. Staffing numbers in the Student Wellbeing Unit which administered such programs and policies dropped from 33 to 6 in a department-wide purge of jobs. Vital expertise and experience had apparently been lost in successive rounds of redeployment and redundancy. A ministerial working group report into future directions for this policy and program initiative was tabled to the Parliament of Victoria in April 2005. The report expressed profound concern that once innovative policy and program initiatives (i.e., Collins, 1984; Cullen & Brown, 1992; Cullen & Brown, 1993) were apparently ‘unravelling’. Recommendations for change were made. In response, the minister set a timetable into 2008 ‘for

reform to Victoria's "troubled" program for students with disabilities and impairments ... the department [was] now ready to act on recommendations [of the Lake Report, 2001]' (Miller 2005).

The *National Statements and Profiles* formed the basis of standards-based curriculum policy frameworks in many states and territories of Australia (Emery 1995, 1997; Watson 1995). Standards-based curriculum policy frameworks were developed and implemented in Victoria in 1995 (i.e., *The Curriculum and Standards Framework 1995*) (CSF 1995) (Board of Studies 1995). Eight distinct key learning areas (KLAs) (i.e., The Arts, English, Health and Physical Education (HPE), Languages Other Than English (LOTE), Mathematics, Science, Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), and Technology) were developed and implemented. Each Key Learning Area defined six *levels* of student achievement. Separate companion CSF 1995 Course Advice provided exemplary examples of Units of Work corresponding to each level in each Key Learning Area were developed and distributed in 1996.

In 1996, the Board of Studies published *Guidelines for Implementing the CSF (1996) for Students with Disabilities and Impairments* initiative. There appeared to be a compelling case for programs to be clearly related to the CSF 1995 curriculum policy framework initiative. The *Guidelines for Implementing the CSF (1996) for Students with Disabilities and Impairments* initiative supported the principle that individual programs should be developed in conjunction with program support groups for students with complex special educational needs (Board of Studies, 1996). Programs should be tailored to individual circumstances.

Some students may not be able to achieve some examples within a level and some strands may be more difficult for students with particular special educational needs. The terms *describe*, *recount*, *tell*, *retell*, *paraphrase*, *talk*, *say*, *speak*, *discuss*, *explain*, *ask* and *converse* are understood as including all forms of verbal and nonverbal communication including signed communication (e.g., Auslan, Signed English) and augmented communication aids (e.g., compic pictographs, compic communication boards, Canon communicator). Similarly, the word *oral* includes signed communication and communication aids. The terms *listen*, *look*, *read* and *watch* include forms of communication such as lip reading and watching signed language. Students with a visual impairment may need materials and books in formats such as Braille, audio tape, large print and tactile symbols. The concept *visualise* may be expressed physically. References to *read* include resources such as Braille and talking books.

A revised standards-based *Curriculum and Standards Framework II* (CSF II 2000) was developed and implemented by the Department of Education, Employment and Training in Victoria (Board of Studies 2000). Developments reflected the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (1999). The CSF II 2000 was organized into the same eight Key Learning Areas. Each Key Learning Area of the CSF II 2000 curriculum framework defined six *levels* of student achievement. A companion CSF II 2000 Course Advice providing examples of Units of Work was distributed in a CD-ROM format.

The *Curriculum and Standards Framework II: Overview* (Board of Studies 2000, p. 11) stated that:

... the *Curriculum and Standards Framework II* is designed for *all* Victorian students ... it provides the curriculum framework for the development of individual programs for students with complex special educational needs ... these programs should be developed at the school level in conjunction with program support groups ... individual programs should be tailored to individual circumstances ... reporting of student achievement will be decided at the local level ... all such programs, however, should be designed within the curriculum described in the *Curriculum and Standards Framework II* ...

A standards-based *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* (VELS 2005) was developed and implemented by the Department of Education, Employment and Training in Victoria (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (VCAA), 2005). The *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* defined three major stages of learning.

- Years Prep to Year 4 (Laying the Foundations). The curriculum focuses on developing the fundamental knowledge, skills and behaviours in literacy, numeracy and other areas including physical and social capacities which underpin all future learning.
- Years 5 to Year 8 (Building Breadth and Depth). Students progress beyond the foundations. Literacy and numeracy becomes more developed. An expanded curriculum program provides the basis for in depth learning within all domains in the three learning strands.
- Year 9 and Year 10 (Developing Pathways). Students develop greater independence of mind and interests. They seek deeper connections between their learning and the world around them and explore how learning might be applied in that world. They need to experience learning in work and community settings as well as the classroom. They are beginning to develop preferred areas for their learning.

An almost identical paragraph to the *Curriculum and Standards Framework II: Overview* (Board of Studies 2000, p. 11), the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards: Overview* (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005a, p. 12) stated that:

the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards* are designed for *all* Victorian students ... they provide a whole school planning document for the development of individual programs for students with complex special educational needs ... these programs should be developed at the school level in conjunction with program support groups ... individual programs should be tailored to individual circumstances ... reporting of student achievement will be decided at the local level ... all such programs, however, should be designed within the curriculum described in the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards*

Disappointingly, VCAA also issued a consultation paper *Victorian Essential Learning Standards: Students with Disabilities Guidelines* that repeated much of the material in the *Victorian Essential Learning Standards: Overview* (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2005b).

Students in government education system school settings in Victoria were tested in relation to the learning outcome descriptors in literacy (the English Key Learning Area), and numeracy (the Mathematics Key Learning Area) in Years 3, 5 and 7. This cycle of testing was known as the *Achievement Improvement Monitor* (AIM).

Government management closely and continuously monitors data from AIM. The results:

... provide a source of information that is used to develop and implement new programs for students to ensure they continue to develop these important skills ... at the same time, this information is a useful source of feedback and guidance for students, parents and teachers ... (retrieved from <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au>)

EMERGENT INSIGHTS AND CONCLUSIONS: CONTINUING CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Very powerful economically efficient and politically expedient values such as accountability, quality and effectiveness appear to have been expressed, shaped and endorsed in the curriculum framework initiatives of education authorities throughout the world in the quest to optimise the (education) system's performance (Watson 2003). Furthermore, Dean (1997), Foucault (1983a, 1991a, 1991b, 1991c), Gordon (1991), Green (1998), Henman (1997), Kendall (1997), O'Farrell (1997) and Rabinow (editor) (1991) suggested that power and knowledge are conjoined in the institutionalized practice of governmentality.

Luke and Woods (2007) considered the real problems and risks that have emerged in the past five years of increased and mandated testing, standardised programs, increased accountability and incentives/sanctions for schools, districts and states in the USA who do not reach targets (i.e., *No Child Left Behind Act: Public Law 107-110*). Their case argued that the effects of this policy and program initiative had not been a success. States in the USA had reported test score gains for at risk students. However, these gains cannot be confirmed in reliable, national sample testing. The newly appointed Secretary of Education in the USA is currently considering options for the future direction of this policy and program initiative.

The Cambridge Primary Review (2006-2009) is a wide-ranging and independent enquiry into the condition and future of primary education in England. It is supported by Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and based at the Faculty of Education at the University of Cambridge. It is perhaps the most comprehensive such investigation since the publication of the Plowden Report

in 1967. Following extensive professional, political, academic and lay consultation going back to 2004, the Review concentrates on ten broad themes, central to which are questions of value, purpose, process, content and quality in England's primary schools. The Review combines analysis of the current system with exploration of the national and global challenges which lie ahead; and it is considering how, in the interests of both children and society, primary education should respond (<http://www.primaryreview.org.uk>).

Over the past thirty years, politicians of all persuasions as diverse as Malcolm Fraser, Susan Ryan, John Dawkins, Brendan Nelson and Julie Bishop have made public statements about the need for a more coherent and consistent approach provision across the State and Territories. On 14 April 2008, the current Minister for Education, Employment and Workplace Relations; Minister for Social Inclusion; and Deputy Prime Minister, the Honorable Julie Gillard announced that 'Australians have been debating the merits of a national curriculum for at least the last thirty years ... until now, no Australian Government has been able to produce a plan on how to deliver it ... the Rudd Labor Government, in cooperation with the States and Territories [announces] such a plan which will see a national curriculum being delivered within three years ...' (Gillard, 2008).

In May 2008, the *National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) initiative assessed achievement in literacy and numeracy of students in years 3, 5, 7 and 9 across Australia (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008a). The Victorian Government was apparently 'committed to improving the learning outcomes of every student in Victorian government schools ... the NAPLAN will assess literacy and

numeracy skills in much the same way as the *Achievement Improvement Monitor* (AIM) tests did' (<http://www.education.vic.gov.au>).

On 05 December 2008, State, Territory and Commonwealth Ministers of Education meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, released the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* which set the direction for Australian schooling for the next 10 years. The Goals were developed by Education Ministers in collaboration with the Catholic and independent school sectors, following public consultation on the draft declaration. The Melbourne Declaration supersedes The Adelaide Declaration that was released in 1999 (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2008b).

The formation of the Board of the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was announced in May 2009. ACARA is mandated responsible for:

- a national curriculum from Kindergarten to Year 12 in specified learning areas
- a national assessment program aligned to the national curriculum that measures students' progress.
- a national data collection and reporting program that supports analysis, evaluation, research and resource allocation; and accountability and reporting on schools and broader national achievement

So are there lessons to be learnt for Australian teachers and policy makers from experiences in the United States of America and the United Kingdom? If Australian teachers and policy-makers wish to follow the parameters of US and UK policy, the real problems and risks that have emerged must be considered, that is, the real difficulties, complex challenges and opportunities to ensure that *all* students share in the benefits.

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