Aligning curriculum materials with the Australian Curriculum: What is happening in the field and what needs to be done?

Michael Watt

Overview

Introduction
The study is introduced by background information about the development, structure and implementation of the Australian Curriculum, focusing on the different timelines states and territories are using to implement Phase One subjects.

Rationale
Aligning curriculum materials is the first of several implementation actions states and territories need to take in transitioning instruction to the Australian Curriculum. Policymakers should establish a working group, representing key actors in the materials’ marketplace, charged with developing a national strategy for aligning curriculum materials to the Australian Curriculum. Initially, the working group needs to consider how curriculum materials are developed, selected and used in states and territories at present. Then, the working group needs to identify a delivery chain to disseminate new curriculum materials to teachers and students.

The purpose of the study is to conduct an analysis to provide information for the working group to design a national strategy by examining five objectives.

- Examine the concept of the materials’ marketplace.
- Review literature about the production of curriculum materials by the publishing industry, and the procurement, selection and use of curriculum materials in education systems.
- Survey a sample of publishing companies to ascertain the extent to which they align curriculum materials to the Australian Curriculum.
- Report a case study on the National Digital Learning Resources Network.
- Report a case study on Queensland’s Curriculum into the Classroom project.
Conclusion
The study concludes by summarising the findings for each objective and presenting sets of recommendations for the working group.

The Materials’ Marketplace

The first section of the paper examines two aspects of the materials’ marketplace.

Concept of a materials’ marketplace
The attributes of Komoski’s Schema of the Materials Marketplace are presented in a separate handout.

Australia’s materials marketplace
The Australian Publishers Association commissioned an analysis of the variables operating in Australia’s materials’ marketplace, which had four main findings.

- Schools procure materials by three systems: book-list; book-hire; or class-set. Book-list systems are largely confined to independent schools, except in Victoria, which operates a book-list system for public secondary schools. Book-hire and class-set systems operate extensively in public and Catholic schools, and predominate in primary schools.

- Sales of materials by publishing companies to schools show that book-hire and class-set systems fail to deliver sufficient materials and perpetuate schools holding out-dated materials. Sales of materials by publishing companies per secondary student are approximately twice the amount per primary student.

- An outcome of the failure to deliver sufficient materials to schools operating book-hire and class-set systems is the widespread practice of teachers producing teacher-developed resources by photocopying textbooks.

- The federal and state governments’ promotion and investment in digital resources has led to a significant imbalance in funds with significantly less provided for purchasing print-based materials.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Marketplace Setting</th>
<th>Predominant Values</th>
<th>'Evaluators'</th>
<th>Evaluative Criteria</th>
<th>Evaluative Feedback</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Education</strong></td>
<td><strong>corporate</strong></td>
<td>developers/ producers (companies)</td>
<td>feasibility (Can it be made at a reasonable cost?) marketability (Will it make it in the market?) profitability (Will it make an acceptable profit?) acceptability (Will it be accepted by committees and teachers?)</td>
<td>Feedback loop necessary for continuous improvement of materials' ability to communicate effectively to learners is hardly, if ever, closed. The ultimate consumers' experience with materials seldom is a factor that shapes the decision-making of the education industry, state agencies, school boards, and/or school selection committees. (This is less so when good teachers, who are sensitive to learning needs are given the permission, the training, the time, and support to select materials.)</td>
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<td><strong>Industry</strong></td>
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<td><strong>State</strong></td>
<td><strong>societal</strong></td>
<td>screeners/ adopters (committees)</td>
<td>contents (philosophy and coverage) acceptability (ethnic, racial, religious, sex fairness) useability (by teachers and learners, durability) cost (initial and continuing)</td>
<td>educational/social bottom line (Should it have its day or should it stay?)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Education Agencyes</strong></td>
<td><strong>group</strong></td>
<td>selectors/ prescribers (teachers)</td>
<td>contents (appropriateness, coverage, objectives) understandability (by learners) useability (ease of use and durability) likeability (reactions of kids)</td>
<td>instructional bottom line (Will it play?)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>or Local</strong></td>
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<td><strong>School</strong></td>
<td><strong>pragmatic</strong></td>
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<td><strong>Districts</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>School Buildings</strong></td>
<td><strong>personal</strong></td>
<td>user/ learner (ultimate consumers)</td>
<td>when in school: Do I enjoy it? Does it make clear what I am to do? Can I do it? Of what value is it to me?</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>and/or Classrooms</strong></td>
<td><strong>affective</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td><strong>and Homes</strong></td>
<td><strong>utilitarian</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Businesses</strong></td>
<td><strong>personal</strong></td>
<td>(ex-students)</td>
<td>when an adult (non-teacher): Was it of value to me? Is it what I want my child to learn? Did it help prepare me to function well as an adult? Will it prepare my child well for the future?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>and Homes</strong></td>
<td><strong>utilitarian</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>and Spiritual</strong></td>
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Research Studies

The second section of the paper covers two fields of research on curriculum materials.

Publishing Industry
Little research has been published on the production of curriculum materials by publishing companies and government agencies. Two historical studies discuss how colonial boards imported textbooks and basal readers from Britain, published adoption lists of textbooks, and later published textbooks. In the early decades of the twentieth century, state education agencies were contracting publishing companies to produce materials for schools in their states.

Procurement, Selection and Use of Curriculum Materials
Several large-scale studies have investigated these issues.

- A study, conducted in Western Australia in 1979, investigated principals’ and teachers’ perceptions about processes used in 41 primary schools to select and use mathematics and social studies materials.

- The Australian Publishers Association’s Textbooks in Secondary Schools Project conducted two studies in New South Wales, one in 24 public high schools in 1988 and the other in 20 independent schools in 1989, to investigate the purchase of materials, selection procedures and the use of materials.

- A study, conducted in Western Australia in 1988, investigated teachers’ perceptions about processes used in 80 district and senior high schools to select and use science materials.

- The Curriculum Corporation conducted a nationwide study in 163 schools in 1994 to investigate purchase and selection procedures.

- A nationwide study, conducted by the author, investigated principals’ and teachers’ perceptions about processes used in 82 schools to select and use materials.
Publishing Industry

The third section of the paper covers two aspects referring to the publishing industry.

Australian Publishers Association
In 1994, the Australian Publishers Association established the annual Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing, which has enhanced publishers’ role in developing materials.

Survey of Publishers
The components of the study are outlined below.

- **Statement of the Problem**: The purpose of the study was to identify publishers’ perceptions about the impact of the Australian Curriculum on the content of their companies’ new materials, the influence of the Australian Curriculum on particular features of their new materials, and the effect that reference to the Australian Curriculum had on the educational design of their new materials.

- **Methodology**: A questionnaire was administered to a sample of 16 Australian Publishers Association-member publishing companies. Six publishing companies responded to the survey.

- **Results**: There were three main findings. First, the influence of the content in Phase One subjects on publishers was higher than the content in phases two and three subjects. Second, the Australian Curriculum was very important for identifying and incorporating knowledge, skills and processes into the publishers’ new materials. Third, the Australian Curriculum affected subject matter content coverage in publishers’ new materials more than other aspects.

- **Product Evaluation**: Each publisher submitted a material they claimed to be aligned to the Australian Curriculum. Analysis of each material showed that five materials were correlated to content descriptions in the Australian Curriculum, and one material was linked to the content of the Australian Curriculum.
National Digital Learning Resources Network

The fourth section of the paper covers the National Digital Learning Resources Network.

In March 2000, the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs authorised the Conference of Education System Chief Executive Officers to oversee the Schools Online Curriculum Content Initiative over three phases.

- The first phase involved conducting a series of feasibility studies and reaching agreements between partners participating in the initiative.

- The second phase involved renaming the initiative the Learning Federation, determining six priority areas of science, mathematics and numeracy, literacy for students at risk, studies of Australia, innovation, enterprise and creativity, and languages other than English that encompassed 25 projects undertaken between July 2001 and June 2006.

- The third phase involved building a sustainable supply of online curriculum content between July 2006 and June 2009.

- At the end of the third phase, the initiative was renamed the National Digital Learning Resources Network and its management was transferred to Education Services Australia.

- Since 2010, Education Services Australia has expanded the repository of digital resources, aligned the digital resources to the Australian Curriculum, used an online platform, the Schools Online Teaching and Learning Environment (Scootle) to deliver the digital resources to teachers across Australia, and established Scootle Community, an online social networking tool to support teachers exchange information and ideas about the Australian Curriculum.

Curriculum into the Classroom

The fifth section of the paper covers Queensland’s Curriculum into the Classroom project.

In 2011, the Queensland Department of Education, Training and Employment developed an agenda for improvement from 2012 to 2016 called United in our
pursuit of excellence. One of its four supporting frameworks, the P-12 Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Framework specifies requirements for each Queensland school to implement the enacted curriculum, develop a curriculum plan and use Curriculum into the Classroom materials, comply with policy statements for developing a pedagogical framework and meeting the needs of student cohorts, comply with a policy statement for administering assessments, and comply with a policy statement for reporting student achievement against learning expectations to parents.

Materials for the Curriculum into the Classroom project were developed over three phases.

- In 2010, the Queensland Studies Authority, the Department of Education, Training and Employment, the Queensland Catholic Education Commission and Independent Schools Queensland developed a collection of resources, which later formed the basis of the Curriculum into the Classroom project, to support Queensland schools implement the Australian Curriculum.

- The Curriculum into the Classroom project was initiated in 2011 by teams of teachers developing materials for English, Mathematics and Science, consisting of school curriculum and assessment plans, band plans, unit plans, assessment materials, topic overviews, and topic outlines and linked resources, which were published in 2012. Later, materials for History and Geography were developed and published in 2013 and 2014 respectively.

- Designed to be more flexible than those developed for Phase One, the materials for phases two and three of the Australian Curriculum consist of school curriculum and assessment plans, band plans, unit plans, assessment materials, topic overviews, and topic outlines and linked resources. The materials for Health and Physical Education were published in 2014, and the Arts and Technologies in 2015.

- Teachers access the materials on OneSchool, OnePortal, the Managed Internet Service or Curriculum into the Classroom download manager on Computers for Teachers’ devices.
Conclusion

The Conclusion of the paper has not been written because of time constraints. I have listed the main findings below and comparative examples from the USA. I would appreciate your feedback focusing on these and other issues to assist in developing a Conclusion for the paper.

Policymaking
Evidence suggests that policymakers are promoting and funding digital materials at the expense of print-based materials. Priority given to developing the National Digital Learning Resources Network and Curriculum into the Classroom supports this contention.
Please offer recommendations to rectify this situation.

Production of Materials
The Australian Publishers Association has established the annual Awards for Excellence in Educational Publishing, which have enhanced publishers’ role in developing materials. Evidence indicates that publishing companies are aligning materials to the Australian Curriculum, but there is no means of providing independent evaluations of alignment to help teachers make informative decisions in selecting materials.
Examples: Examine Educators Evaluating the Quality of Educational Products (EQuIP), EdReports.org and the K-12 OER Collaborative.
Please offer recommendations to rectify this situation.

Procurement of Materials
Evidence indicates that book-hire and class-set systems that form the basis for purchasing materials for most public and Catholic schools fail to deliver sufficient new materials and perpetuate the use of out-dated materials in schools. The selection and procurement of materials is linked to school budgets.
Please offer recommendations to rectify this situation.

Selection of Materials
Evidence indicates that materials are selected in each school by school administrators, curriculum coordinators, resource specialists and teachers working in groups or individually. Selection procedures are decentralised,
highly differentiated, unsystematic and dependent on demographic characteristics, such as the size of the school. Examples: Examine guidelines for selecting materials developed by states, the Publishers’ Criteria developed for the Common Core State Standards, and training programs established by states. Please offer recommendations to rectify this situation.

**Responding to the Request**

Please send your recommendations by mail to Michael Watt, 316 Churchill Avenue, Sandy Bay, Tasmania 7000 or email to michaelgwatt@internode.on.net.