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ABSTRACT

Australia's economy slowly emerged from recession in the 1990s. Populist government leaders claimed that their economic restructuring policies of the 1980s were responsible for the economic turnaround. But even with greater national economic optimism, Australians have wondered why their country has not fared better economically both internally and in competition with other nations. Public pressure has pushed politicians to attempt to maintain high living standards and improve social conditions with fewer resources. Education also has been redefined in essentialist and instrumental terms to serve labor market needs. This view has clashed with the liberal-humanist tradition of curriculum most educators embrace. The national government's emphasis on economics in education policy can be seen in its national education goals: increased participation in education, skills training, private sector and trade union involvement in skills education, improved school retention, and improved overall quality. National curriculum frameworks also have played an increased role in furthering social and economic policy objectives. Frameworks provide an overall approach and focus for curriculum, but allow schools the freedom to make local changes. Also, inclusive curriculum has attempted to make education more inclusive of students' different gender, race, and culture. (Contains 29 references.) (JPT)

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THE POLICY CONTEXT OF RECENT CURRICULUM REFORMS IN  
AUSTRALIA

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## THE POLICY CONTEXT OF RECENT CURRICULUM REFORMS IN AUSTRALIA

The economy of Australia, reflecting current difficulties evident in the operation of the global economy, is slowly and painfully moving out of recession - a trend for which the current Keating federal Labor government assumes full credit. Populist claims have been made in the media by the current Prime Minister that, in his previous role as Treasurer, recent economic improvements can be 'sheeted home' to the success of his economic restructuring policies of the 1980's. Basic to the latter has been a centralist and pervasive microeconomic reform agenda covering many areas of the economy including transport and 'the Waterfront', for example, and encompassing areas of schooling and workplace reform for teachers in the area of education.

In the 1980's "The Lucky Country" became "The Unlucky Country". or so our politicians had us believe as they then sought to locate the origins of the country's economic malaise on global forces substantially outside the control of politicians and policy makers and their stewardship of the national economy. In endeavouring to address seemingly intractable economic difficulties a new form of federalism emerged, which was based on the principles of corporate management and known as 'corporate federalism' (Lingard, O'Brien and Knight, 1993). Lingard (1991) locates the rise of corporate federalism in the early beginnings of the previous Hawke Labor government, which first came to office in 1982 and especially during its post 1987 term, in which the states became more vulnerable to national policy developments by the federal government's ability increasingly to restrict state access to central sources of funding under the rubric of a national agenda for micro economic reform. This policy continues to be asserted by Prime Minister Keating in the current term of Labor. In this regard, Lingard, O'Brien and Knight observe:

It appears that, under corporate federalism, the Commonwealth Government wants to pull to the centre all those aspects of policy central to micro economic reform and to devolve as far as possible other functions to the states. One result of this

tendency has been the creation of national policies geared to the creation of a national economic infrastructure.

(Lingard, O'Brien and Knight, 1983: 233)

Further, according to these scholars, what might be called a neocorporatist, efficient state strategy has engendered a corporate managerialist reformation of the public service as well as a reformation of commonwealth-state relations in terms of corporate federalism. This internal restructuring of the agencies of the state are a tangible political manifestation of the need to solve Australia's current round of economic problems.

Notwithstanding a new found economic optimism, the natural resource endowments of Australia fuel the popular belief held by its citizenry that we should be doing a lot better with respect to the reduction of a large balance of payments deficit; reducing structural inefficiencies; becoming more competitive with our Asian neighbours; reversing trends in falling productivity and, until recently, arresting rising unemployment. The dilemma of fulfilling public expectations for the maintenance of high standards of living and adequate social service provision, while concurrently reducing costs, places politicians and their economic advisers in a 'no win' position with the public at large. The largest budget allocations for provision of health, education and social welfare services have evidently taken the brunt of the push for cost efficiencies and the pruning back of public expenditure under an economic reform agenda seeking 'more for less'. In vigorous pursuit of this agenda by the federal government, an efficiency imperative based on economic rationalist arguments, narrowly and naively interpreted with respect to the nature of education, has dominated national debate and the public policy agenda. An offshoot of the redistribution of resources, in line with revamped federal policies, has been that associated responses in the contemporary social and economic climate have encouraged education to be redefined in essentialist and instrumental terms *inter alia* to better serve the needs of the labour market.

Following the exploration of some philosophical and conceptual issues surrounding the policy context of the work of schools in general, and associated curriculum issues in

particular, the discussion moves to a consideration of recent changes in the Australian States and Territories involving unprecedented collaboration between the commonwealth and state governments in education. While certain collaborative aspects of a national curriculum initiative are being maintained this, and cognate issues, are now interpreted and mediated differently by the states. The specific form it takes substantially depends on state level political persuasions, affecting in turn the ideological response to developing further the emerging national curriculum statements and profiles across eight learning areas.

### **Instrumentalist vs Liberal Perspectives on the Curriculum**

The wholesale adoption of instrumentalist views by some opinion leaders, notably politicians, economic rationalists, corporate managers and trainers, has generally precipitated negative responses from educators. Skilbeck (1987), for example, has suggested that the liberal-humanistic tradition is being set aside in favour of technicist solutions to problems focussed on matching the curriculum essentially to the needs of society as it now exists. The ascendancy of 'life adjustment' models of the curriculum, emphasising practically oriented and personally relevant curricula for everyday living, are far removed from the reconstructionist ideals underpinning a core curriculum of common learnings for all the nation's children and youth. This, it was argued, would provide students with access to a common culture, viewed dynamically, and a common set of values within the traditions of mainstream society.

Social reconstructionist ideology was clearly articulated in a benchmark document under the auspices of the (then) national Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), in 1980, entitled '*Core Curriculum for Australian Schools*'. Significant within the prevailing political orthodoxy was the demise of the CDC and its resurrection as the Curriculum Corporation of Australia. The CDC document provoked widespread public discussion, as was its intention, but little apparent 'take up' of its ideas and ideology by the States and Territories followed its publication and dissemination. It did, however, *indirectly* have an influence on subsequent curriculum activity via the actions of policy makers who

incorporated aspects of the document into the reports and policy statements of a plethora of contemporary reviews and Committees of Inquiry. The latter have been relatively commonplace over the last decade in all State and Territory education systems in turn, and were primarily concerned with structural reforms and curriculum revision. This has been a feature of the high profile education and training has received in Australia, as elsewhere, over the last decade.

Taking culture as the starting point for curriculum building stands in stark contrast to that which takes its inspiration and direction from the views of experts in the fields of science and technology, economics and management. The latter are of course more amenable to a public policy agenda which views education as one means of revitalising the economy and creating wealth for Australia. At an ideological level, the real issues centre around goal clarification involving values conflict and the nature and purpose(s) of education in a post industrial state moving into an increasingly complex and uncertain future. A consideration of alternative futures in education requires informed public debate by a wide community of interest within a democratic framework that is truly participatory.

At a practical level there are also problems to be encountered in operationalising the efficiency criterion. According to Beare (1986), wherever the efficiency approach has been tried in education, ". . . it has run up against an intractable problem, namely that some of the most highly valued outcomes of schooling are not measurable in this way". It follows that there is always the danger lurking that only those outcomes which are measurable will come to be valued, thus, "The problem has always been that economically driven objectives will overwhelm the delicate sensitively educational ones" (Beare, 1986: 6-7).

### **National Concerns and Policy Initiatives**

As mentioned earlier, the main feature of the Australian government's superordinate socio-economic reform policy has been to treat education overwhelmingly as a mechanism for economic development at the expense of something to be intrinsically valued for its own

sake In seeking to achieve national goals, the government has emphasised a number of priority areas including:

- increasing participation in education,
- an emphasis on skills training, and,
- involving the private sector and trade union representatives in skills education,
- increasing school retention rates,
- improving the overall quality of education.

The achievement of these goals places a heavy emphasis on secondary education, particularly in the later years of schooling, to counter national and personal disadvantage and give credence to educational outcomes now linked to national productivity in an explicit and direct manner.

Under the Australian federal system of government, education, constitutionally, is a residual power of the states and, as such, must be administered by the states. Notwithstanding this mutually understood arrangement hitherto, recently increased incursions into education at all levels by the federal government, as well as it forging closer links between education, the business sector, employment and training have become both a conspicuous and high profile activity. Federal government intentions were signalled by the formation of a 'megaministry', The Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET) in 1987 headed at that time by the federal Minister of Education, the Hon. J.S.Dawkins. On assuming office he quickly made his overall intention clear, which, starkly put, was to use the education system to create wealth for Australia. This he planned to achieve by intervening in education matters directly in a situation where central government would no longer simply be the States' banker but would seek to give educational leadership, justified in terms of a central government role necessary to promote the national interest and requiring the effective allocation and use of national resources to meet national goals.

*Skills for Australia* (1987), which was the first of several policy documents to emerge in quick succession under his signature, made explicit his policy agenda for DEET with respect to national education and training policies. In this document the Federal Minister for Education asserted that:

A high quality basic education is an essential prerequisite for a vocationally skilled and adaptable labour force. More needs to be known about the levels of competence achieved by our students at school, especially in the core disciplines of language, mathematics and science... . We also need to examine new ways to impart less measurable skills on which future prosperity depends - life-time learning, enterprise and initiative, pursuit of excellence, communication skills, teamwork and responsibility. In other words, we need to lay the foundations of a productive culture.

(Dawkins, 1987: 8-9)

In a subsequent publication he focussed more clearly on his objectives for schools in which education was couched in terms of economic rationalist values, framed by notions of a skilled work force to make Australia 'the clever country', and countenanced by a view of education as human capital in which government should invest now in order to realise a return later.

Schools are the starting point of an integrated education and training structure in the economy. They provide the foundation on which a well-informed, compassionate and cohesive society is built. They also form the basis of a more highly skilled, adaptive and productive workforce. As skill upgrading and retraining of adults becomes more necessary, so will the quality and nature of schooling received by individuals need to change. It will need to be more adaptable and prepare for lifelong education.

(Dawkins, 1988: 2)

The success of his policy to date can be measured in terms of a more direct role for, and involvement by, central government in what had previously been essentially a States and Territories responsibility under the Australian Constitution. It was realised in no small part because of the extant political climate of the late 'eighties in which the federal Labor government shared its social democratic aspirations with a majority of Labor governments at the state level. Recent electoral changes have witnessed a backlash to what is seen as

encroaching centralism by several conservative states in a number of policy areas, and especially in moves towards a national curriculum for schools

The current policy context for schools and the school curriculum has to be understood developmentally. As new policies and new directions were being charted for schools through the 'eighties the curriculum was earmarked for special attention. Early in the decade there was a marked 'back to basics movement' in evidence. It was widely believed by vested interests in academia and business that increasing the rigour of curricula would arrest a seeming decline in academic standards, although the Quality of Education Review Committee (1985) was at pains to point out that there was no evidence to show that cognitive outcomes had either improved or declined in the preceding fifteen years prior to the Committee's formation. Nevertheless education, and its critics, enjoyed a high public profile throughout the 'eighties and beyond, manifesting a number of concerns and public disquiet regarding in particular its poor articulation with the world of work in a period of record high youth unemployment, and lacking in value on returns for the tax dollar spent

### **Curriculum Concerns**

Since the advent of the first Hawke Labor Ministry in 1982, the curriculum has been used increasingly to play a central role in furthering key social as well as economic policy objectives. In keeping with Labor's social policy, making the curriculum more sensitive to individual needs and more inclusive in its nature and scope was likely to provide a greater degree of equity for the socially disadvantaged and educationally deprived, while a more socially relevant curriculum would enhance national economic performance. New ways of thinking about the curriculum, paralleling similar social and economic trends in Britain, have been substantially brought about by increased student retention rates, fostered by lack of employment opportunities especially for youth. Between 1980 and 1987 the school retention rate went up from 31.9% to 50.39%, a rise of 18.4% (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987; p.57). In *Skills for Australia* (1987) a target retention rate of 65% by the 1990's, in the post compulsory years of schooling, was reaffirmed.

In order to meet the needs of a broader range of students now completing the full six years of secondary education, a number of options have been provided. One effect of this was that choice in education nowadays has taken on a new meaning. It has become 'particularised' insofar as it is regarded as being specific to particular students choosing particular schools with a particular curriculum. In Western Australia, for example, a unit curriculum has been in place since 1986 marking one response to the accommodation of student choice (Carter, 1993). At the senior secondary level, the solution in Tasmania was to provide for a range of courses and pathways leading to post-secondary vocational courses, tertiary studies or entry to the labour market (Education Department of Tasmania, 1987, p.13). Other state systems, where attempts have been made to match curricula to a wider range of ability, due to a more diverse population staying on at school in the later years, have addressed the problem through provision of broad groups of subjects. This allows for increased student choice of subject selection within the framework of a core of studies (McGaw, 1984; Andrich, 1990). The problem for curriculum directors has been to resolve the tensions between balance and coherence on the one hand and choice and diversity on the other. This is not readily achieved and seemingly has been accommodated via system adjustments rather than accomplished by trade offs, thus, in effect, mask the underlying conflict of choice versus prescriptivity.

### **Curriculum Frameworks**

Throughout the decade of the 'eighties and culminating in the work undertaken under the auspices of the Australian Education Council (AEC) since 1986, a collaborative effort between the Federal Government and the States to frame national curriculum statements as frameworks has become pervasive across the various States and Territories.

As a curriculum device, a framework can be conceived of as a structure employing principles of curriculum design, resulting in a particular pattern of curricular organisation. The structure broadly circumscribes curriculum elements such as purposes content

outlines, learning activities and assessment, states relationships between them and gives criteria for their selection. Frameworks are usually accompanied by guidelines for the selection and sequence of elements, together with strategies for implementation. Provision is made for the incorporation of externally developed syllabus statements and curriculum packages within the structure, accompanied by details of course and instructional planning completed by teachers, within a school, to meet the needs of students in a specific local context. This structure allows for flexibility and choice while maintaining the integrity of the overarching design. To be effective this criterion does presuppose a good clear design at the system level allowing for and facilitating a range of legitimate interpretations in schools and classrooms. It also goes some way to ameliorating the tensions between prescriptivity for accountability, and choice for meeting individual needs and aspirations.

Among their other advantages, curriculum frameworks have been instrumental in allowing for more flexibility on the part of schools and teachers in their use of a range of different syllabuses and content areas, especially at the secondary level of schooling, to achieve certain types of student outcomes. These have emerged at the system level and their introduction, supported by centrally developed policy statements such as that incorporated on the 1985 Victorian Ministerial Review, has allowed for choice and localised decision-making but within clearly defined and commonly understood boundaries.

The move towards system level curriculum frameworks should, however, be seen within the overall trend towards core curricula at both state and national levels which has occurred over the course of the last decade. This movement in part can be referenced back to the more subtle influences of the previously mentioned discussion document *Core Curriculum for Australian Schools*. While the notion of 'core' and 'electives' has been variously interpreted, the concept has been associated with moves to school-based decision making and the devolution to schools of numbers of functions previously the concern of central office staff in a number of state and territory education systems. The move away from centrally determined largely prescriptive syllabuses to frameworks, with responsibility

for the development of courses devolved to regions and schools, is now well established in states such as Queensland, Victoria and Western Australia. Intra-state harmonisation of system level frameworks converging with the AEC's thinking following *'The Hobart Declaration on Schooling: Common and Agreed Goals for Schooling in Australia'*, and AEC intentions (then) to move towards a national curriculum, facilitated a massive collaborative agenda between state and commonwealth governments crystallised by a nationally engineered curriculum mapping exercise (AEC, 1988).

### **Inclusive Curriculum**

In addition to those common core and national curriculum concerns that acquired a prominent position in policy making at both the federal and state levels of politics, there has been increased efforts to raise public consciousness regarding inclusive curriculum and in attempts to make curricula more inclusive of gender, ethnicity and disadvantaged groups generally. According to Kalantzis and Cope (1987), a crucial tool of social enablement is one of success in formal schooling. Multiculturalism and non-sexism should not be soft options for building the self-esteem of the disadvantaged, but matters of intellectual validity and educational rigour for all students. As such they should be common inclusive processes supporting related objectives which are of prime importance.

The interaction of especially gender and ethnicity together with S.E.S., however, raises a number of complex issues and questions. To date the results have been rather mixed where practical attempts have been made to rework curriculum to make it more inclusive. Although the underlying principles of inclusivity have achieved wide acceptance in Australia much still remains to be done regarding their implementation to achieve system wide impacts and national policy objectives (see Carter and Bednall, 1986, for example).

Under corporate federalism the microeconomic reform agenda has once again reasserted its dominance thus diluting the impact of inclusivity by equating equity and efficiency in the readjustment of social policy as a response to economic imperatives. Even a cursory

reading of a significant policy document such as *The national policy for the education of girls in Australian schools* (1987) focuses on what are at source essentially social justice concerns but with their moral overtones reduced by couching them in terms of labour productivity and efficiency.

### **Assessment Issues**

Another major shift in policy, nationally, has been in the areas of testing, public examinations and credentialling. In general, external summative assessment leading to certification in most, but not all, states, was applicable only to those students completing the full twelve years of schooling. This has included the final post compulsory years of secondary education at the conclusion of which students graduate at about the age of 17 years. An internally assessed credential has been awarded to students completing their compulsory education normally after ten years of schooling. There are no formal assessment criteria in the public education sector for entry to primary (elementary) school, and for transition from primary to secondary school.

Differences occur both inter- and intra- state, serving to highlight some of the inadequacies of curriculum provision for the post compulsory years. A consequence of higher retention rates and increased expectations for access to tertiary and/or further education has been to place enormous pressure on tertiary institutions to provide extra places for students when they are not adequately resourced to do so - a further consequence of other Dawkins driven policy initiatives at other levels of the education system. Consequently, the innate conflict between Australian societal concerns for egalitarianism and the avoidance, or denigration, of elitism - the 'tall poppy' syndrome - is likely to be exposed if, based on the British experience of national curriculum implementation, national testing is ever put in place in the middle school years (Bennett *et al*, 1992). While pressure is being exerted in certain quarters of the education community to avoid standardised tests at all costs, their possibility is not lost on those swayed by market forces and a league table mind set who wish to compare students and schools against nationally determined standards. Arguably,

this platform simply complements the logic of moves towards a national curriculum - or at least the achievement of common and agreed educational goals.

### **Initiatives for National Curriculum Reform**

While it is a relatively simple thing for a Minister for Education in a federal system of government to symbolically propose radical reforms within an area over which his purview has no constitutional responsibility. It is a very different matter for his intentions to have any sway in effecting changes of any magnitude. In achieving the latter Minister Dawkins engaged in a strategy which was itself essentially corporate in its operation. Under the aegis of an inter-governmental committee in education, known as the Australian Education Council (AEC), in which the federal Minister for Education has only been a full member since 1972, he has met regularly with ministers and their advisers from each of the Australian States and Territories as well as New Zealand. It is noteworthy that Spaul (1987), suggests that increasingly the AEC has become a forum in which the states respond to the federal education agenda. Under the Dawkins regime from 1987 to 1991 its hand was strengthened so that nowadays the AEC has become an important policy making entity under the direction of the Federal Minister acting in consultation with his ministerial colleagues in the States. From 1988, until he became Federal Treasurer in 1991, John Dawkins used this forum to secure ministerial agreement with respect to the curriculum agenda he had outlined in his main policy blueprint for educational reform delineated in Strengthening Australia's Schools.

The role of the AEC in setting the policy framework for collaboration with the states in moving towards a national curriculum is summarised by Macpherson in the following terms.

The AEC ... took charge of national curriculum development, initially by identifying five learning areas (later eight) across the curriculum of the primary and secondary schools. They also agreed to develop, using an inter-state process, national curriculum framework statements and profiles in each area to guide planning by teachers and schools. The major vehicle for this process was the AEC's Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CURASS)

(Macpherson, 1993, 32)

As an outcome of The Hobart Declaration, and in subsequent AEC deliberation and consultation with the states, John Dawkins was able to secure the agreement of his ministerial colleagues in the pursuit of a set of Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia. This has been mediated to the states and territories by the AEC as an agreement to develop in all students:

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

The list is rather conservative in the curriculum policy that it portrays, but what is significant in the statement of 'Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia' (ie. *The Hobart Declaration*), of which the listing above is but a part, is that mutual agreement was obtained between the Federal Minister for Education and eight State and Territory Ministers for Education in an area previously guarded jealously by the States. It needs to be remembered though that the declaration was more a symbolic statement rather than constituting a blueprint for action

As well as the development of national curriculum statements, subject profiles also provide an assessment framework in an Outcomes-based Education environment (OBE) for the eight agreed areas which represent national curriculum priorities. The profiles and the behavioural pointers they encapsulate regarding indicators of student achievement of prescribed educational outcomes provide the mechanism for a more common approach to assessment across state borders than has previously been the case.

Embedded in the national curriculum statements and profiles are a number of employment related key-competencies (Finn, 1991; Mayer, 1992) responses to which have resulted in a most overt attempt to vocationalise the school curriculum and polarise debate in Australia concerning vocational versus liberal forms of education.

At an eventful meeting of the AEC in Perth, Western Australia, in early July 1993, much of the developmental work leading to the formulation of the National Curriculum Statements and Profiles came to an abrupt halt with the decision to put the concept of a national curriculum on hold, but to "return then fruits of the collaborative activity, the student outcome statements, to the states and territories for further development" (McCredlin, R, 1993: 30).

Whether this was a major catastrophe in the light of subsequent collaborative activity or a blessing in disguise seems to be a matter of perspective. Prior to the meeting there was some apparent concern about the scale and pace of the intended reforms, and pressures being exerted by the Federal Minister without due regard to the sensitivities of 'States Rights'. The latter were voiced especially by some of the now conservative states who appeared to be suspicious of and opposed to the centralist tendencies emerging from the exercise of federal power in Canberra. It may be premature to think that the intensive intra-state consultative and collaborative activity in evidence prior to the July meeting of the AEC had become habituated, but many of the states have continued with the further development of the National Profiles in a way that transcends state borders. This is

occurring in a form in which the national agenda for curriculum and associated structural reform of education systems is held in view while being interpreted and mediated to schools by individual states through a process of trialling, review and further refinement conducted at state level. This is now occurring on a time scale that is more acceptable to teachers and schools than that originally envisaged by the AEC and its constituent committees. If this can be maintained it is still likely to yield many of the results intended by the signatories to *The Hobart Declaration* but customised to the needs of individual states and territories.

### **Conclusion**

What we have witnessed in a number of Australian state education systems as well as at the national level is what Broadfoot (1985) refers to as is the ascendancy of a technicist administrative ideology which finds its expression in corporate management techniques. The move to corporate models of management in many spheres of public life has featured widely in contemporary Australia.

In the entrenched form of educational policy development that has been in place since the early 'eighties, the convergence of corporate federalism with economic rationalism and a view of students as human capital within an agenda of microeconomic reform has tended to confine discussions about educational and curriculum reform at the ideological level to a restricted range of interest groups and power brokers. These are readily identifiable through statements made by high profile public figures mainly in the fields of commerce, industry and the trade union movement. At the federal level of politics it is noteworthy that originality in thought and action by a broadly based community of interest has been singularly lacking. According to Birch and Smart,

Recent turbulence in the education policy-making area seems likely to accelerate as its professional ranks become increasingly influenced and infiltrated by 'outsiders' such as politicians employers and concerned community groups. In short, the politicisation of education policy seems likely to grow rather than diminish so long as widespread anxiety about the quality and direction of education persists in the community.

The interlocution of the lay public has been accompanied by a marked lack of sophistication in educational thinking. With this has come requirements for the widespread use of explicit benchmarks such as performance indicators, and measurable outcome statements. Skilling and multi-skilling are now by-words in the language of productivity, training and education. These trends are also likely to continue as long as a federal Labor government remains in office.

Many of the policies the Federal Minister for Education has implemented were paralleled months earlier in England. With the signing into law of the 1988 Education Reform Act, steered through the British Parliament by Kenneth Baker, plans for a national curriculum and a national assessment policy were announced. These were justified in terms of the national interest which required people who were more productive, had a better command of the basics and were multi-skilled and innovative.

At the opposite end of a continuum starting with policy is that of practice. Both countries have been faced with similar labour market problems and stagnating industrial complexes and it is all too easy to blame the schools when things go wrong. Carre and Carter (1990) document some of the difficulties encountered by teachers charged with implementing the British National Curriculum on an impossibly short time scale, and, in the Australian context, prior to the July 1993 meeting of the AEC, a similar pattern of implementation was beginning to emerge. The backlash this provoked, particularly by the conservative states, resulted in polarising opposing viewpoints in the Committee resulting in a backing away from the agenda for a national curriculum in the form which it had developmentally assumed.

Kennedy is at pains to point out that unless policy makers can convince teachers that the reforms they propose are in the best interests of students there will be little positive action and even positive resistance on the part of teachers and school administrators (1988:372). A similar finding is also reported by Carter and Hacker (1987) There has been a radical

and massive shift in thinking about the curriculum with huge policy implications also evident in many other parts of the world. For curriculum policies to translate into practice it takes teachers to make them work. If the Western Australian experience to date is taken as being representative of moves towards the implementation of national profiles they have to be shown that they will work for the benefit of kids if teachers are to be convinced of their value.

The present continuing activity of the States and Territories, leading to the further refinement of National Profile statements according to their perceived needs, appears to be geared towards this end. It is to be hoped that the collaborative experience and shared experiences that have occurred since 1986 will not founder on a narrow and parochial interpretation of States Rights as the states and territories pursue their own agendas, but as Kevin Piper dryly notes (1989:10), "The colonial legacy dies hard in Australian education, and it does not roll over and expire gracefully. Not, at least, while there are empires to protect".

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