

Preface

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The construction of a national curriculum is always a contentious matter in any society. Arguably, in Australia it is even more so. In a federal system, with distinct school educational authorities, the political nature of the endeavours to develop the national curriculum is subject to a large degree to negotiations and compromises between the different State and Territory jurisdictions and their federal counterparts. Often these inter-jurisdiction negotiations are marked by party political affiliations that can hinder agreements – as demonstrated by the fate of the National Statements produced in the early 1990s.

Attempts to standardise the curriculum in Australia are not new. In recent times, the focus of two governments (the Howard Government and the subsequent Rudd/Gillard governments) has been to gradually shift educational decision from the States and Territories into the Federal arena. This was evident in not only shifts in funding, but achieved through the rollout of national testing (NAPLAN), the creation of the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, which will implement national professional standards for teachers, and a national process for accreditation of pre-service teacher education programs, the development of a common national body for curriculum and assessment (ACARA), and the subsequent development of the Australian Curriculum for all schools across the country. Questions can be raised as to whether, in a very expansive nation such as Australia, educational decisions can better be carried closer to the ground. We note that in this most recent attempt to nationalise the school curriculum the debate about this issue has not been very prominent in the public arena. Rather, the debate

seems to have focused on what form should the curriculum take and what content should be included.

Likewise, developing a curriculum is an opportunity for different voices from the whole political spectrum (e.g. progressives and conservatives), as well as those representing different special interest (e.g. teachers, academics and members of the community) to present their claims and counter claims and demands. In the case of the mathematics curriculum, this social debate includes possible differing views by mathematicians and engineers, mathematics educators, as well as professional organisations representing different interests.

Hence the debate on the national curriculum is not only found in academic circles, but also in the public domain. It is carried out in academic publications and conferences, as much as it is carried out in houses of parliament, public media including blogs and wikis, even dinner tables. Here we argue that the danger is not of having a wide ranging debate leading to contrasting views. The danger is in short-circuiting the debate and cutting it down prematurely. In particular, we assert that the debate does not cease by the publication and adoption of a curriculum, rather it should continue in a cyclical manner with future modifications of the curriculum based on experiences in its implementation. This forms the main rationale behind this collection of chapters.

The idea for this book originated from a symposium at the 2010 Australian Association of Educational Research conference in Melbourne where each of the Editors made a presentation on the topic of their chapter here. Comments at that symposium were centred on the draft mathematics curriculum and the Shape Statement, as the curriculum was not released until March 2010. Prior to the conference, MERGA's developed a well-thought-out and constructed Response to the National Curriculum consultation draft in 2010.

This Book builds on such contributions by a) engaging with the full version of the curriculum published early on 2011; b) providing a wide range of content areas and foci of the curriculum; c) considering the implications of the draft for teaching and teacher development, and d) making such voices public through the publication of this collection on the web.

The various chapters by different authors represented here do not constitute a uniform theoretical approach nor can be taken as an official MERGA stance on the curriculum. Rather, the Book represents a diversity of viewpoints and stances on the Australian Curriculum: Mathematics. Our intention was to produce a set of chapters that are research based and that would consider the implications for practice, whether this involves teaching of mathematics in school or mathematics teacher

education and development. We attempted to solicit contributions from academic mathematics educators with special expertise in the relevant topics, people involved from the practice of curriculum development, and teachers from different States and Territories.

We submit this collection for further deliberation by all interested parties towards the future implementation and development of the Australian Curriculum: Mathematics towards more productive school experiences for today's students as tomorrow's citizens.

Each chapter was refereed by at least two MERGA members with special expertise in the topic of the chapter. We give special thanks to the work of our colleagues and critical friends whose contribution to the refereeing process undoubtedly has raised the quality of the arguments presented here. These include

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Bill Atweh
Helen Forgasz
Peter Galbraith
Vincent Geiger
Janeen Lamb
Katie Makar
Kay Owens
Robert Perry
Penelope Serow
Mal Shield
Max Stephens
Colleen Vale
Elizabeth Warren

The Editors
February 2012