

Editorial

Curriculum developments: Looking back, looking forward

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<https://doi.org/10.18296/cm.0017>

2017 is something of a curriculum milestone year in Aotearoa New Zealand. It is 10 years since the introduction of the revised *New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) (*NZC*), the official curriculum for Years 1–13 in English-medium schools, and approaching a decade since the introduction of *Te Marautanga o Aotearoa* (Ministry of Education, 2008) (*TMOA*), the official curriculum for Māori-medium schools. It is also 21 years since the introduction of *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 1996), the early childhood curriculum, and a revised early childhood curriculum was published this year (Ministry of Education, 2017). These time markers provide an opportunity to look back on these official curricula which provide frameworks for teaching and learning in Māori- and English-language mediums and in different sectors, learning areas, or subjects. To what extent have the promises and aims of curriculum policies been achieved? How should we look forward to possibilities and challenges for curriculum development in the future?

Curriculum change and redevelopment are features of educational landscapes where there are imperatives to constantly improve the quality of education. Curriculum reforms are the norm rather than the exception because politicians, educationalists and communities tend to think that things can always be done better. Also, curriculum reform can be expected because education is a political issue and curriculum is embedded within a wider educational reform landscape (Goodson, 2014; Hargreaves & Shirley, 2008). Curriculum changes, though, will always be contested because curriculum is never neutral (Pinar, 2012) and particular national curriculum developments will represent positions taken in a particular place and time in relation to the contestation of ideas about the place of knowledge and what knowledge is worth knowing (Pinar, 2012; Priestley

& Sinnema, 2014). At the same time, there may be tensions within national curricula that limit the capacity to achieve curriculum reform agendas (Sinnema & Aitken, 2013) and teachers may resist content or pedagogical elements within a particular curriculum or the roles assumed for them within the curriculum change (Mutch, 2012; Sinnema & Aitken, 2013). In different national contexts, teachers may be positioned to greater or lesser extents as curriculum implementers, interpreters, or developers, with more or less autonomy for curriculum decision-making. In addition, curriculum reform is likely to be unsustainable where there is little concern for teachers' professional beliefs and sense of personal mission, and teachers may be indifferent or more actively hostile toward curriculum developments where these appear to them to be poorly conceived and against their personal and professional beliefs about the goals of education and their purpose as teachers (Goodson, 2014).

Developments and revisions of national curricula can be seen both to respond to broad political policy agendas for educational improvement, and to constitute reform policies which will elicit responses at other levels in the system.. It is important, then, to understand particular national curriculum developments in their wider political and policy contexts. However, it is difficult to get a grasp on curriculum developments and forces for change within complex, multilayered, and shifting political and curriculum environments. To try and understand variations in national curriculum policies and local responses, Goodson and Lindblad (2011) draw on the idea of curriculum "refraction". Refraction refers to the process whereby curriculum is implemented and understood in potentially very different ways in different contexts. They contend that there are a variety of points of refraction, or milieu membranes, through which restructuring policies must pass, from national and regional systems right down to local governing bodies, particular schools, and individual classrooms and teachers.

This refraction means that a wide range of potentially contradictory policy responses are possible, even if certain global and national trends are evident in high-level educational and curriculum policies. Many different organisations or interest groups may have an interest in and influence on curriculum policy, and these groups may hold different ideas

about the purpose of teaching and learning broadly and within particular curriculum subjects. Also, at the personal level, individual teachers may refract curriculum policy in very different ways as they make sense of official curriculum policies and develop the curriculum in practice in schools and classrooms. In a recent conference presentation, Goodson (2017) explained that in curriculum research it may not always be easy to investigate the definition of the curriculum, where this is increasingly undertaken behind closed doors and implemented in a top-down manner, but it is possible to investigate the points of refraction where policy meets the nation state, schools, or early childhood education settings—or teaching professionals.

In looking back at national curriculum developments in Aotearoa New Zealand, considering the tensions experienced by educationalists in making sense of specific national curricula, and looking forward to possible future curriculum developments, the articles in this collection deal with points of curriculum refraction. Some consider ways in which policies or aspirations for educational change and improvement are interpreted and enacted (refracted) through historical curriculum development processes, and how curriculum needs to be understood in the context of wider systems and policy environments. Others focus on points of refraction at the teacher level, where teachers try to make sense of curriculum and the contradictions or tensions they encounter within curriculum policy and what it means for them and their practice.

This collection

In responding to the call for papers on the theme “Curriculum developments: Looking back, looking forward”, the authors whose work is included in this collection provide a range of perspectives on curriculum policy, aspirations, and implementation in Aotearoa New Zealand. Writing from positions as educators and researchers who have been intimately connected with curriculum developments over the years, their commentaries and empirical research suggest that while some promises or aspirations may have been fulfilled, others have not. In looking back, they highlight tensions within curriculum policy and the contestability of ideas about what and whose knowledge should be valued within

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official curricula. In looking forward, they point to ongoing challenges for educators and researchers in making sense of the curriculum and the policy environment, particularly in relation to the broader ecology and influences on curriculum policy, and for teachers as curriculum decision-makers who work within particular social, school, and community contexts.

The first two articles provide retrospective examinations of the development of *TMOA*, the official Māori-medium school curriculum, and *Te Whāriki*, the early childhood curriculum. Georgina Stewart, Tony Trinick and Hēmi Dale offer a commentary on the development of *TMOA* from their perspective as three Māori educators who have been involved in the development of this curriculum for over twenty years. In so doing, they highlight ongoing tensions and challenges in the development of a curriculum for Māori-medium schools. These tensions relate to the relationship between *TMOA* and *NZC* and between competing aspirations for a curriculum that provides access for Māori children and young people to global knowledge and the opportunities this provides while also addressing aspirations for indigenous education in relation to the centrality of Māori knowledge and language revitalisation. From their perspective as early childhood educators, Manutai Leaupepe, Jacoba Matapo, and Elizabeth Ravlich provide an overview of Pasifika involvement and scholarship in early childhood education and in relation to *Te Whāriki* curriculum developments across two decades. They maintain that the early childhood curriculum needs to be constructed with a rich image of the Pasifika child and that this image needs to be made explicit within the curriculum to support teachers who work closely with Pasifika children, families and communities. In considering the 2017 revision of *Te Whāriki*, they argue that an opportunity has been missed to address the aspirations of Pasifika people within the curriculum.

The following two articles contribute a systems view of curriculum, which invites consideration of broader contexts within which curriculum policy is developed. Focusing on health education and using a jigsaw metaphor, Jenny Robertson and Rachael Dixon overview the multiple policies that influence health education in *NZC* and illustrate how health education sits at the intersection of health and education policy. Visions of health

education and promotion of wellbeing differ between stakeholders in the different sectors. The authors contend that a wide range of stakeholders would benefit from better understanding of health education and wellbeing on educational terms. Cathy Bunting and Bronwen Cowie, along with a larger group of science education researchers, articulate a systems view of science education in Aotearoa New Zealand. For them, seeing science education as an ecosystem invites consideration of how the science curriculum is part of a broader system, elements of which may support or contradict the curriculum. This systems view helps to explain some of the persistent challenges in supporting science learning and implementing the vision for science education that is articulated in *NZC*; also, it draws attention to the possibilities for science learning that may exist outside classrooms and which may be leveraged inside the classroom.

Focusing on the link between assessment policy and the enacted curriculum, Michael Johnston, Rosemary Hipkins, and Mark Sheehan consider the connection between high-stakes assessment and development of epistemic knowledge in two secondary subjects, science and history. Through statistical and qualitative analysis, they explore the extent to which processes for constructing understanding and knowledge of natural and social worlds are made explicit and examined through the science and history assessment standards for the National Certificates of Educational Achievement (NCEA). In common with other articles in the collection, they draw attention to the interconnections and influences on curriculum from within broader systems, in this case the formal assessment and qualifications structures for secondary education.

Rounding out the collection, two teacher educators examine challenges for teachers in making sense of the curriculum policy environment and enacting elements of curriculum, one in relation to history education; the other, mathematics education. The challenge of teaching about controversial historical issues is highlighted by Mark Sheehan, in the context of a permissive national curriculum which leaves decisions up to teachers about how they engage learners with difficult questions about the past. An examination of public submissions to a petition initiated by school students calling for the wars of the 19th century between Māori

and the Crown to be explicitly required in the school curriculum reveals a generally unsympathetic public response. This raises questions about how easy it is for history teachers to introduce and engage students with difficult or uncomfortable issues in New Zealand's colonial past when school communities and students' and teachers' own families may not be particularly open to or sympathetic towards these issues. Jane McChesney describes a complex landscape of curriculum documentation for the Mathematics and Statistics learning area that needs to be negotiated by teachers and which may present them with contradictory or confusing guidance. Focusing on how mathematical processes are addressed within official and proxy curriculum guidelines, she highlights tensions for teachers in making sense of the curriculum and how they might teach for mathematical processes. Suggestions are made for potential curriculum renewal or revision.

Individually, these articles draw attention to specific and ongoing tensions within the curriculum policy environment in Aotearoa New Zealand, which present challenges for the educators charged with making sense of the curriculum and shaping the curriculum in practice in schools and early childhood centres. A range of issues are highlighted that warrant consideration in any revision or renewal processes for the national curriculum and assessment structures for Māori medium, early childhood and school-level education. Collectively, though, they highlight the complexity of curriculum environments and reflect international trends and interest in research that broadens understanding of curriculum within wider policy contexts and deepens understanding of curriculum issues by focusing on points of curriculum refraction.

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