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## Re: **National English Curriculum: Framing paper**

### INTRODUCTION

The Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE) supports the goals to encourage openness to diversity, the imagination and strengthening connections between people. We recognise the key role that language plays in empowering a person's participation in their own lives. learning, relationships and that of their communities. Our concern would be that embarking on a national curriculum to which all schools and individuals must adhere, may countermand the very pluralistic, changing, dynamic, diverse experience and society which we value.

Recommendation 1: That learners be consulted as to the purpose and content of the national Curriculum if they have not already been consulted

### AIMS

The aims emphasise the knowledge and technical skills of language acquisition and while these are important AAPAE longs to see enjoyment, delight and love of language and literature and communication through talking, listening, reading and writing articulated and valued.

The publication of the Cambridge Primary Review (**Website:** [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk)) in recent days is a timely event while finalizing the AAPAE's response to the National Curriculum Framing Paper for English. The following summary expresses concisely the central issue facing AAPAE in relation to any National Curriculum.

"...one of most consistent themes to emerge from our evidence is that that there must be less national prescription and more scope for local variation and flexibility. We go further, and argue for an explicit and protected local component to the curriculum."

There is also strong evidence that improved standards are dependent on as broad a curriculum as possible with all areas of study given time and status.

We urge the Board and the writers of the National Curriculum to carefully consider the findings of this review so that Australia can learn from the experience of others

## **ELEMENTS**

It is positive to see that enjoyment and appreciation of language is articulated in this section and the place of creativity and imagination recognised.

Recommendation 2: That the three Elements are experienced as integrated into learners' real lives.

## **A FUTURES ORIENTATION**

The diversity of the Australian community and its strengths and needs are clearly articulated. Recognising "the dynamism of the Australian language, literary, and literacy experience," and the pressure this puts on "the coherence, practicality, inclusiveness, and adaptability of an English curriculum" means that any centralised curriculum will need to be as broad and wide ranging and flexible as possible and still play "a central and practical part in affirming and acting on a commitment to both equity and quality in Australian life."

## **TERMS USED IN THIS PAPER**

They are clear but inevitably have an air of jargon about them. It is hard to get the balance right of plain English and professional language!

Recommendation 3: that curiosity, creativity, intellectual adaptability and collaboration which are included in the definition of general capabilities are given equal status and importance.

## **CONSIDERATIONS**

### **Beginnings and 'basics'**

This section pays homage to the relentless campaign in the media and other places which has denigrated kids and teachers and parents and researchers who have come to value the wholistic nature of learning. It reads like an appeasement to the back to basics brigade.

Recommendation 4: That the paragraph beginning "Basic Learning is not an end in itself.." become the opening paragraph rather than tucked away at the end.

Recommendation 5: The 'basics' are tools which serve the master of the rich diversity with which humans acquire language, construct meaning and communicate with each other.

### **The teaching of grammar in English**

Grammar as part of the tool kit serving the quality of language and literature is worth emphasising.

Recommendation 6: That grammar also be seen as an evolving tool for different generations and technologies

### **The texts of English**

We support the expansion of the notion of texts to include multi media as having an important place in the National Curriculum.

Recommendation 7: Include those which reflect our multicultural society - (this is mentioned later)

### **Understanding, analysing, appreciating and constructing**

Recommendation 8: Emphasis on the creative, critical, analytical problem solving, resourceful capacities of learners of all ages is to be encouraged and understanding the place of language in acquiring and using these capabilities across all learning needs to be valued.

### **The place of literature and Australian literature**

Recommendation 9: Begin from the interests of the learner, give pride of place to our indigenous heritage, our Australian literary heritage in all its multicultural diversity and keep as open a mind and broad a perspective of the possibilities of all kinds of literature from all cultures.

### **Pedagogy and disciplinarity**

Why are 'rules and conventions', systemic knowledge', 'norms and conventions' 'explicit knowledge about language, literature, and texts' 'authoritative teaching' leading the sentences which actually are discussing and acknowledging the complexity of co-learners' imaginative worlds, enjoying making meaning, acquiring mastering and creating communication through language. Again the pressure on teachers and students to be seen to be doing the basics overshadows the wonderful partnership in which they engage when each person embarks on the lifelong journey of discovery and exploration of their language and literature.

Recommendation 10: Norms, conventions, systems etc are tools for the essence of teaching and learning and need to keep their place!

### **General capabilities across the curriculum**

Recommendation 11: That inventive thinking; adaptability and the management of complexity; self-direction in learning and life-planning; curiosity, and creativity; and abstract, adaptable, and sound reasoning) a focus on effective

communication (teaming, collaboration, and interpersonal skills; and personal, social, and civic responsibility) be placed at the core of life and learning as they have always been for participants in alternative and progressive and democratic education.

Recommendation 12: Reconsider whether a centralized, standardized assessed national curriculum is contradictory to these and would in fact prevent these means achieving the goal of effective learning for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

## **STRUCTURE OF THE CURRICULUM**

### **The Elements**

#### *Element 1: Language: Knowledge about English*

Element 1's title, Knowledge ABOUT English indicates a certain fundamental belief system in the way learning occurs. Learning 'about' rather learning through 'doing' sets out two different paths. 'About' implies someone with knowledge and expertise instructing the other. 'Doing' implies experience, discovery, and collaboration with a co learner and reflection on that experience. If a person learns 'about' the piano and all the technical related aspects of music yet never puts their fingers on the keys they cannot play and will most likely will feel inadequate and inhibited to do so. The 'doing' and the 'about' need to be seamlessly woven together. There is much emphasis on acquiring expertise in school language and linked with the testing regimes that have been put in place our concern is that this narrows the focus. In the last few days the most authoritative investigation into primary education for more than 40 years The Cambridge Primary Review has become more public. The general conclusion of this 2 year study into the last 20 years of National Curriculum in the UK, with 800 submissions, is that "a generation of schoolchildren have had their lives "impoverished" by rigid testing and an over-emphasis on the "three Rs", and warns today that Britain's schools are in "severely utilitarian and philistine times".

Recommendation13: Please consider carefully the Cambridge findings before we embark on the implementation of a similar regime

#### *Element 2: Literature: Informed appreciation of literature*

The overall exposition of the value and place of diverse forms of literature being an integral part of the experience of all learners is positive. We are concerned about the implications of a statement such as "in the pushing of the informed appreciation of literature down into the primary years may mean. Does it mean a more segmented, separated subject based programme? You go on to say that it "will mean that some teachers will seek to develop their knowledge of literary terms, concepts, and pedagogies." This sounds as though a much more

prescribed, potentially rigid required body of officially sanctioned and approved literature is going to demand in the primary stages. to the detriment of the culture of primary education

Recommendation 14: That freedom of choice and self selection for both teacher and learners be valued.

### *Element 3: Literacy: Evolving repertoires of English usage*

The introduction to the Elements mentioned the ultimate goal of integration of all three. If they have to be defined separately

Recommendation 15: Element 3 needs to be Element 1. 'Learning to' is served then by the 'learning about.'

Recommendation 16: that language and literature is enjoyed and valued at every stage of a person's life and not just for some future need.

Recommendation 17: The purpose and function of grammar, structure, and systems is the basis for their integration into a full literate life.

### **Stages of schooling**

The guiding principles make some key points, "not all learning is predictable, nor should it be;

Build-in flexibility to the timeframes for learning in the three Elements,

be aware of the powerful equity implications of a lockstep, rushed or crowded curriculum,

of the ongoing need to increase the levels of engagement and intellectual quality that characterise learning in Australian schools.

Consider, as much as possible, the full range of conditions in which Australian schoolteachers work.

Some aspects of learning within each Element will clearly receive more focus, time and attention at different points along the K–12 continuum"

Recommendation 18: Strengthen these key points and recognise the seeming 'messiness' of real learning, allow flexibility and opportunity for negotiated learning and learning times and see these as valid and enriching processes which in fact lead to addressing the very real problem of learner disenchantment and disengagement with the schooling process.

### Stage 3

"Students are given opportunities to engage with a variety of texts, including texts of their own choosing. They learn how to articulate the personal value and appropriateness of texts of their own choosing." Why do we have to wait for this stage ( ages 12 -15)?

Recommendation 19: Value choice and self selection and access to varieties of texts at all stages, as this is a fundamental active engagement process.

## **PEDAGOGY AND ASSESSMENT**

### **Pedagogy**

This section on Pedagogy reinforces some of the key concerns of AAPAE and we appreciate the recognition of the importance of broad diverse approaches, value of the interconnectedness across' multiple curriculum areas', giving learners opportunities to study in depth.

Recommendation 20: that the place of individual interest and choice as essential motivators of learning be fully recognised. Working with the real life languages of the students' whole world acknowledges their reality and empowers them to develop awareness and skills in using of the public, more official spaces.

### **Assessment**

The paper summarises succinctly the reality that through their assessment processes "teachers and education systems reveal in concrete terms the skills, knowledge and values they prize most."

Recommendation 21: That the range of opinions held by members of AAPAE about testing and assessment be acknowledged and that those who value and prize learner negotiation and choice, individual differences, self direction, collaboration and co-operation with reduced or minimal competition and comparative experiences be able to express these in diverse ways of assessment.

Recommendation 22: Consider the findings of the Cambridge review on the negative effects of testing on learners and on restricting curricula and learning.

Recommendation 23: Where appropriate learners and school communities can choose to exempt themselves from National Testing requirements and provide alternative assessments processes.

## **ADVANCING THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF ENGLISH**

The writers of this framing paper have worked hard to walk a balanced line between the ever present public battle over 'literacy crises' and perceived falling standards that teachers parents and learners experience. My overall impression is that the weight of opinion and direction has succumbed to the 'back to basics' bandwagon. Having worked in classroom for thirty years I challenge this belief of the loss of literature in primary English and challenge you to examine that if it is really the broad case then it has been driven by the more than a decade now of narrow standardized assessment and ever increasing pressure of the testing regime. The four elements you present as potential advances, continuity and cumulative learning, construction of language, systemic program, loss of literature and language and literacy sound very much like back to the future to me. Where is the transformation of learning that can inspire the generations of the 21st Century? Are we going to continue to see education as the conveyance of data, information, doing things right efficient/ or can we see a place to allow understanding, and wisdom to grow - wisdom which is concerned with the long term and the short term consequences of what we do, how effectively we live?

Alexander, R.J. and Flutter, J. (2009) Towards a New Primary

Curriculum: a report from the Cambridge Primary Review. Part 1: Past and Present.

Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

Alexander, R.J. (2009) Towards a New Primary Curriculum: a report from

the Cambridge Primary Review. Part 2: The Future. Cambridge: University of Cambridge

Faculty of Education.

[http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/Curriculum\\_report/CPR\\_Curric\\_rep\\_Pt2\\_Future.pdf](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Downloads/Curriculum_report/CPR_Curric_rep_Pt2_Future.pdf)

**Website:** [www.primaryreview.org.uk](http://www.primaryreview.org.uk)