Riders in the Chariot
CURRICULUM REFORM AND THE NATIONAL INTEREST 1965-95
Kevin Piper
Riders in the Chariot: Curriculum Reform and the National Interest 1965–1995
The Australian Education Review

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Kevin Piper
Contents

List of Figures vii

1 Curriculum Reform and the National Interest: An Introduction to the Review 1
   The Purpose of the Review 2
   A Focus for the Review 3
   The Structure of the Review 4
   Grounded Theory: A Perspective on Practice 6

2 Divided We Stand: The Search for Effective Process 9
   National Curriculum Development in Australia: A Historical Overview 10
   Who Drives the Chariot? Sources of Authority for the Curriculum in Australian Schools 24
   A Question of Development: Some Unresolved Issues 29
   Conclusion 36

3 Romancing the Past: The Search for Relevant Content 38
   Common, Core and National: The Debate in Australia 39
   What Do We Mean by a Common Curriculum? Some Sources of Conflict 51
   A Question of Content: Some Unresolved Issues 58
   Conclusion 67

4 Disciplines and Bondage: The Search for a Practical Framework 69
   Curriculum Organisation: The Structural Dimension 71
   Curriculum Organisation: The Political Dimension 73
   What Might Be Meant by a Common Framework . . . and Do We Have One? 77
Do We Need a Common Framework? The Ethical Dimension
Structure and Function: Some Unresolved Issues
Conclusion

5 The Devil and the Deep Blue C: The Search for Non-toxic Assessment
National Assessment in Australia: A Historical Overview
Why Do We Assess? A Question of Purposes
What Do We Assess? A Question of Targets
How Do We Assess? A Question of Methods
Assessment-led Curriculum Reform: White Knight or Good Night?
Conclusion

6 Nostalgia for the Future: The Search for Resolution
Past Indicative: The Historical Context
Present Conditional: The Current Context
Barriers to Reform: The Political Context
Patterns of Difference: The Ideological Context
Future Imperative: Towards Resolution
Conclusion

References
List of Figures

3.1 Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia 43
3.2 Conflicting Conceptions of the Core: Purpose and Function 55
4.1 A Skeletal Curriculum Framework Based on the National Goals for Schooling 82
Forgive no error you recognise
It will repeat itself and increase
And afterwards our pupils
Will not forgive us for what we forgave

Yevgeny Yevtushenko
A national mobilisation of scarce resources is needed to meet the great challenge of serious reform and development in education . . . Australia is simply too small, isolated, and dispersed, in world terms, for us to keep up the pretence that each little system can be self-sustaining.

Malcolm Skilbeck

It is always difficult to attain a national perspective on schooling in Australia, as anyone who has tried to answer the questions of overseas educators will testify, and nowhere is this more evident than in the always contentious area of curriculum provision and reform. For every generalisation there are qualifications and exceptions; for every clarification there are confusions. It is hardly surprising, then, that, particularly over the past three decades, there have been persistent calls for a more coherent and cohesive national approach to the challenges confronting curriculum provision and reform in Australian schools. The sources of these calls have been remarkably diverse, as have the arguments put forward in support of them – political, economic, social, cultural, ethical and, of course, educational. Despite the persistence of these calls over an extended period of time, however, and despite some quite determined efforts to respond to them, the fragmentation of curriculum decision making, with its attendant variability in the quality of curriculum provision, has tended to prevail. It is the tension between these
two contrary tendencies – on the one hand towards greater cohesion
and coherence, on the other towards fragmentation and diversity, that
is the central theme of this review.

There is a view, encouraged particularly by the state and territory
education systems, that these issues were addressed in the recent
national collaborative curriculum process that resulted in the develop-
ment and publication of national curriculum statements and assessment
profiles in eight Key Learning Areas. According to this view, all that
remains is for the state and territory systems to implement the national
statements and profiles, albeit selectively and idiosyncratically, and the
matter will be resolved, allowing the states and territories to get on with
their constitutional responsibility for curriculum provision within a new-
found spirit of cooperation and common purpose. Whether this is a
sustainable view is a question to be explored more thoroughly in
subsequent chapters of this review. Certainly it remains a contested view.

The Purpose of the Review

It may be that the issues raised in this review – issues of coherence and
cohesion, of a common purpose and a common direction, of curricu-
lum reform and the national interest – can never be resolved unequivo-
cally, at least so long as we have a federal system. But they will recur,
and probably with greater insistency as we approach the grand uncer-
tainties of the twenty-first century. Their very persistence over time, and
their centrality to concerns over the quality and effectiveness of Aus-
tralian schooling, will be sufficient to ensure that recurrence. It is this
inevitability, together with a belief that we are likely to be better
equipped for the challenges of the future if we have a clearer under-
standing of the failures of the past, and in particular a clearer under-
standing of the reasons for those failures, that has prompted this review
of our efforts over the past three decades to develop a national approach
to the issues confronting curriculum reform in Australian schools. This
is not to suggest that understanding the dynamics of past failures will
necessarily shield us from such failures in the future – the prophylactic
power of history tends to be much exaggerated – but it can make us a
little less vulnerable to the glib assurances of those who would have us
believe that every compromise is a resolution, and every evasion a
triump of pragmatism.

This review is not principally directed to policy makers or educa-
tional administrators, who no doubt have their own agendas on these
matters. Nor is it principally directed to curriculum specialists, who are likely to find the ground it covers familiar territory; although I hope it will prove of some interest to all of these groups. Rather it is addressed to that diverse group of educators and the wider public with an interest in improving the quality and effectiveness of Australian schooling. As such, it is offered as a contribution to a more informed public debate on issues that increasingly are assuming national, and indeed international, importance. To this end it seeks not so much to resolve issues as to clarify them; not so much to answer questions as to raise them; not so much to point directions as to open up pathways.

A Focus for the Review

In May 1988 the then Commonwealth Minister for Employment, Education, and Training, John Dawkins, unveiled an important policy statement as part of the Government’s May Economic Statement. This policy statement, entitled Strengthening Australia’s Schools: A Consideration of the Focus and Content of Schooling (Dawkins, 1988), emphasised the key role envisaged for education in the government’s plans for economic restructuring, and outlined the qualitative changes that would be necessary if Australian schools were to fulfil that role adequately. It invited the cooperation of the states in developing a national effort ‘to improve the quality, relevance and effectiveness of school level education throughout Australia’, and to break down the fragmentation, duplication and anomalies that characterise Australian schooling. Such a national effort for schools would involve all concerned with education in the development of ‘a national perspective’, ‘a shared commitment ... to agreed national goals’, and a ‘clear statement of the fundamental purposes of our schools, their objectives and priorities’.

The proposed mechanisms whereby this national reform of schools and schooling was to be achieved were:

- a common curriculum framework
- a common approach to assessment
- improved teacher training
- increased retention rates to the end of secondary schooling
- meeting the special needs of disadvantaged groups
- greater coordination in the efficient use of resources.

These proposals threw out an important challenge to Australia’s traditionally segmented and isolationist education systems. It was not
essentially a new challenge. Indeed it had been a part of the educational
debate in Australia for at least half a century, and a central part of the
debate for the previous two decades or more. An analysis of the Dawkins
proposals undertaken at the time (Piper, 1989) identified four key ques-
tions emerging from the proposals so far as curriculum reform was con-
cerned:

- What might be meant by the development of a national perspective?
- What might be meant by a common curriculum?
- What might be meant by a common framework?
- What might be meant by a common approach to assessment?

In other words, there were major unresolved issues concerning devel-
opment, content, structure, function, and assessment in the policy pro-
posals as they stood. It is with these issues, and the efforts to resolve
them, both currently and in the recent past, that this review is essen-
tially concerned.

In choosing as a focus for this review the Dawkins (1988) statement
Strengthening Australia's Schools I do not mean to imply endorsement of
federal government policy or support for a mandated national curricu-
lum along the lines of the British model (United Kingdom, 1987). Rather
it is its watershed role both as a crystallisation of concerns that had been
gathering momentum in Australia over at least the previous two decades
and as a catalyst for the national collaborative curriculum process that
followed it that has determined its focal position in this review. In parti-
cular, the Dawkins statement gave public voice and policy backing to a
growing awareness, both nationally and globally, that curriculum
development and reform, while most sharply realised at the point of
implementation, has ramifications for the wider community and the
national interest, and could no longer be viewed solely in terms of local
and parochial interests.

The Structure of the Review

The structure of the review closely follows the analysis of the issues
raised in Strengthening Australia's Schools, as outlined in the previous
section. Following this brief introductory chapter, four more substanzial
chapters address in turn each of the four key questions relating to
curriculum identified in the previous section as emerging from the
Dawkins proposals. Chapter 2 explores the process of curriculum
development and addresses the question of what might be meant by the development of a national perspective in a traditionally fragmented school system. The issue is addressed first in its historical context through an exploration of the various attempts since the late 1960s to develop a national approach to curriculum development and reform. It is then addressed in its current context, and in particular the prospects for effective implementation of the outcomes of the recent national collaborative curriculum process. The latter part of the chapter is devoted to an overview of some of the more salient conflicts and complexities that impede the development of a national approach to curriculum development and reform, and examines the prospects of their eventual resolution.

Chapter 3 tackles the contentious issue of curriculum content and addresses the question of what might be meant by a common curriculum, and in particular the question of what might be considered core learning to which all students are entitled. Again the issues are addressed first in their historical context by examining various attempts in recent decades to define the content of a common core curriculum, leading on to a discussion of the extent to which the outcomes of the recent national collaborative curriculum process could be said to constitute a common core curriculum for Australian schools, if indeed they were ever intended to. Again, too, the chapter concludes with a discussion of some of the more intractable difficulties surrounding the identification and definition of curriculum content, and in particular the identification and definition of what should constitute core learning for all students.

Chapter 4 looks at issues of structure and function, and addresses the question of what might be meant by a common framework. It explores the shifting fashions in the construction of syllabuses and curriculum guidelines in recent decades, and attempts to make sense of the confused and confusing struggle between learning areas and school subjects as the basic organisers of curriculum provision. The chapter goes on to explore conflicting conceptions of the structure and function of the school curriculum, particularly in relation to their implications for a national approach to curriculum development and reform and the development of a common framework for curriculum provision in Australia’s schools.

Chapter 5 is concerned with the vexed question of assessment and its relationship to curriculum, and addresses the question of what might be meant by a common approach to assessment. It begins with a brief historical overview of the various attempts to institute some form of
national assessment of student progress in the Australian context and their effects on the curriculum debate, and examines the attempt of the recent national collaborative curriculum process to address (or evade?) the issue through the development of national assessment profiles. It concludes with a consideration of the conflicts and complications surrounding the purposes, targets, and methods of assessment, and examines the credentials of the frequently advanced proposals for assessment-led curriculum reform.

A final chapter attempts to bring the various threads of the argument together to provide a more integrated and cohesive overview of the issues surrounding national curriculum development and reform and explores the prospects for further developments in an issue of ongoing significance for curriculum reform in Australian schools.

Grounded Theory: A Perspective on Practice

The approach adopted in this review has been to ground the discussion as far as possible in the actual practice of national curriculum development in the Australian context. The tradition it draws on is thus that of curriculum research and evaluation rather than of curriculum theory. This is not to suggest that the approach adopted is atheoretical, but rather that its theoretical base is located in what Glaser and Strauss (1967) refer to as 'grounded theory' — that is, the theory emerges from the practice, rather than being imposed on it as a pre-ordinate analytical framework. Not surprisingly, perhaps, the review draws heavily, although certainly not exclusively, on research and evaluation studies with which I have been personally involved, either directly or indirectly; and indeed it has been the opportunity to reflect on the patterns emerging from an extensive career in curriculum research and evaluation, most of it at the national level, that has provided the impetus to undertake this review. There are of course dangers in this approach; but there are also advantages, not least of which is a degree of authenticity in the telling.

It is, of course, always difficult to attain perspective on events with which we have been closely associated, even in a role that demands objectivity. Michael Patton (1982) has likened the evaluator to a fire hydrant in a dog pound: the measure of objectivity does not lie in keeping dry, but in ensuring that one side does not go cold. It is difficult, too, to attain perspective over time, since the events of the past usually require some reinterpretation in the light of the present,
particularly in an area characterised by such dramatic swings of fashion as curriculum policy and practice, where even the basic vocabulary of discourse has a disconcerting tendency to change significantly in meaning as words are expediently redefined to suit shifts in policy. A colleague has suggested that the term 'reform' has become so debased in recent years, particularly in the educational context (Bourke, 1993), that it is no longer possible to use it seriously in educational discourse without inviting misunderstanding and suspicion. So, too, words like 'quality' and 'collaboration' have become so devalued by their association with a dubious 'reform' process that they also are in danger of losing their currency in serious discourse. It would be a pity, however, simply to abandon them to the opportunists and the linguistic vandals, since they embody concepts central to the issues raised in this review and not easily recaptured in synonyms. Perhaps it is time to reclaim their semantic integrity.

Simply to reassert that semantic integrity, however, does not entirely resolve the problem, since the concepts these words embody are in themselves contentious, and contested. As Michael Fullan (1990) has astutely observed, one person's collaboration is another person's conspiracy. So, too, one person's reform is another person's vandalism; one person's quality is another's elitism. Even the term 'curriculum' itself is an elusive concept. In some contexts it is employed as a reductionist concept signifying little more than syllabuses or courses of study; in others it is employed as an expansionist concept embracing the entire range of the functions of schooling and the total experience of the child within the school, and is virtually indistinguishable from education itself. Perhaps more importantly, the word itself is underlain by images, metaphors and associations that are as much derivational as they are definitional, and more related to function than scope. Thus it is not uncommon for textbooks on curriculum studies to begin by informing the reader that the word 'curriculum' is derived from a Latin word meaning 'racecourse'. For those of my generation in Australia, who went to school when Latin was the jewel in the crown of the academic curriculum, the word is probably also associated with its other, and perhaps more common, meaning of 'chariot' or 'cart'. This piece of trivia is introduced not simply to explain the title of this review, nor to demonstrate the enduring relevance of the classical academic curriculum, but rather to suggest that we get a very different image of the nature and function of the curriculum if we think of it as a chariot or vehicle than we do if we think of it as a racecourse. It is this image of the curriculum as a vehicle,
with all its potential for exploration, choice and change of direction, rather than the static image of a course of study, that underpins the discussion in this review of our rather troubled journey over the past three decades towards a national perspective on curriculum reform in Australian schools.
Resistance to change does not come from the stupidity or venality of individuals within the system; it is a function of the system itself.

Donald Schon

Attempts to implement a national approach to curriculum development and reform in the Australian context have proved consistently difficult, and an understanding of the dynamics of these endemic barriers to effective action is central to an understanding of the developmental issues underlying a national approach to curriculum reform in Australian schools. A persistent impediment to such reform has been our inability as a nation to devise processes that optimise the opportunities for quality development on the one hand, and for effective implementation on the other. While this is a complex problem, and by no means an exclusively Australian one, any analysis of its manifestations in the Australian context must begin with the Australian federal system. Despite a substantial Commonwealth involvement and investment in education, particularly over the last three decades, education is a constitutional responsibility of the states, and states' rights are jealously guarded.

A persistent underlying theme in the history of national attempts at curriculum reform in Australia has been the efforts of the state and territory bureaucracies either to control the process, or to undermine it; a predictable response, but one not necessarily in the national interest, nor indeed in the interests of students in Australian classrooms. This is not to attribute any particular malevolence or perversity to the actors
in this long-running and repetitive saga. After all, the cast changes, sometimes with extraordinary rapidity, but the roles remain remarkably consistent over a long period of time (Spaull, 1987). Nor is this a problem confined to education, as is evidenced by the ongoing difficulties experienced in obtaining a coordinated national approach to the regulation of financial institutions, interstate communications and transport, environmental protection, and, more recently, native title legislation and human rights, to name only a few of the more conspicuous areas of disagreement.

It may be that there is nothing that we as a nation can do about this except learn to live with it. It may be that there is nothing we wish to do about it. Then again, it may be that the urgency and uncertainty of the immediate and long-term future facing us as we edge uneasily towards the new millennium have changed the scene sufficiently to require a change of script. In thus reviewing the performance of the states and territories from a national perspective, however, we need to be wary of interpreting their recalcitrance solely in terms of self-interest; although no doubt that plays as pervasive a role in this context as it does in other areas of political activity. For the most part the Australian states wear their parochialism with conviction, and indeed with a measure of pride. Their allegiance lies with old loyalties and old rivalries, and it is this legacy that constitutes the major obstacle to genuine cooperation between the Commonwealth and the states in a national effort for schools. In considering current and possible future attempts at national collaborative action, therefore, it is instructive to view them, not in isolation, but as part of an ongoing search for a workable model for cooperation between the Commonwealth and the states in curriculum development and reform.

**National Curriculum Development in Australia: A Historical Overview**

There is a sense in which the most recent pressures towards a national collaborative approach to curriculum reform were a product of their time, part of a national response to global imperatives and an uncertain future. It is no coincidence that *Strengthening Australia's Schools* (Dawkins, 1988), the policy statement which initiated the pressures, appeared two months after John Dawkins chaired an international conference on education and the economy in Paris (Organization for
Economic Co-operation and Development, 1989b), nor that it appeared as part of a government statement on economic restructuring. But there is also a sense in which these developments are part of an ongoing process, extending back at least a quarter of a century, towards the development of a national curriculum for Australia's schools, and without some appreciation of this process it is impossible to understand fully the interplay of events in the current context, or to make informed judgments about where these events might lead us.

While there had been examples of cooperation between the Commonwealth and the states on curriculum matters before the late 1960s, perhaps the most notable being the curriculum planning associated with the introduction of the metric system and decimal currency in the early 1960s, it was the inauguration of the Australian Science Education Project (ASEP) in October 1969 that marked the advent of national curriculum development in Australia. Two features of the project are worthy of note here, since they have remained central to the concept of national curriculum development in Australia: firstly, the principle of national curriculum development as a partnership between the Commonwealth and the states, including the principle of shared funding; and, secondly, a recognition of the importance of involving teachers in the process of curriculum development (Owen, 1978: 12-16).

The Australian Science Education Project adopted what Francis (1982: 289) has referred to as a 'centralised management model', in which a team of developers was assembled together in a single location under a director and a committee of management. Francis notes that:

. . . there was a perceived problem with ASEP that had surfaced and was in the minds of educational administrators, viz that a large, centralised project builds up its own momentum and inclines to develop a life of its own, and inevitably becomes less accountable to those who initially sponsored it. As Geoff Spring has stated "rightly or wrongly the ASEP model was associated [with] major centralised projects overseas and this model was being rejected by many educators in Australia and overseas who preferred a 'grass roots' model".

At the same time, studies of the implementation of the Australian Science Education Project (Owen, 1978; Fraser & Northfield, 1981) have suggested that the breaking up of the central project team on the completion of its developmental activities in 1974 left schools and teachers without support during the critical implementation stage.

In 1974 the National Committee on Social Science Teaching (NCSST), set up in 1970 as a consequence of a national conference on the teaching
of the social sciences in secondary schools held in Melbourne in 1967 (Connell, 1993, 545ff.), submitted a proposal to the Interim Council of the Curriculum Development Centre (which had been appointed the year before to prepare the way for the setting up of a national curriculum development organisation) based on a survey which had identified a number of areas of special need in the provision of resources for the teaching of the social sciences in secondary schools in Australia. The proposal was subsequently accepted for funding, and the Social Education Materials Project (SEMP) thus became the first major enterprise of the fledgling Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), formally instituted by act of parliament the following year. The Social Education Materials Project model provided for eight largely autonomous teams of secondary teachers, seven of them sponsored by state education departments and one by the Headmasters' Conference of New South Wales, loosely coordinated by a national project director. Francis (1982: 289) has referred to this as a 'federal model', and comments:

There is some appropriateness in the term, as it describes the relationship between the Commonwealth and State Education Departments. It also reflects the long process of discussion and co-operation (supported by the network of State committees and State project officers), more often than not, encouraged by the entrepreneurial role of NCSST that is the genesis of SEMP. The people involved in the formulation and early decision taking had always worked within a federal model. There was a pronounced preference for this style of operation in the Interim CDC Council, and it can be reasonably implied that it was in tune with the view of NCSST and the State education authorities who were to become the participants ...

While the Social Education Materials Project model satisfied the accountability demands of the states, it in turn was criticised for its lack of an identifiable national focus, or indeed of any cohesive curriculum framework to guide project activity. The nominal adherence of each of the project teams to an inquiry-based approach ensured that the various team products were at least pedagogically compatible, despite a wide range of development styles, but it failed to provide a focus whereby the separate and largely independent sets of resources could be said to cohere into a curriculum. Consequently the materials seem to have been taken up in a piecemeal fashion to be slotted into existing courses, some of them pedagogically at variance with the inquiry-based approach on which the materials were predicated (Piper, 1979b).
The arrival of the national Curriculum Development Centre on the scene was of key importance, since it institutionalised the Commonwealth's entry into the curriculum area, and legitimated the concept of national curriculum development. The principle of cooperative development between the Commonwealth and the states was written into the Act which established the Centre as a statutory requirement (Australia, 1975: 13), and the Curriculum Development Centre was directed by Cabinet to 'seek a contribution in kind to projects from the states – including Catholic and independent schools – which matched its own' (Connors, 1980: 20). It was these requirements that provided the underpinning for the 'cooperative model' of curriculum development forged by the Curriculum Development Centre and exemplified in one of its major projects, the Language Development Project (LDP).

The Cooperative Model: A Case Study

The Language Development Project was a major national initiative in English language education undertaken by the Curriculum Development Centre in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Phase II of the project, its developmental phase, comprised eight component projects, one in each state and territory. The tasks undertaken by the component projects were the product of negotiation between the Curriculum Development Centre and education authorities in the particular state or territory. These tasks, while consistent with the goals of the national project, tended to reflect particular state and territory interests at the time, and did not constitute a comprehensive coverage of the tasks implied by those goals. In fairness, however, they were never intended to, since they were clearly seen as an initial set of tasks from which further work would be developed. In the event, the project was not to be allowed to run its full course, so that this initial set of tasks, most of which remained uncompleted, was effectively to constitute the scope of the project.

The organisational plan for Phase II of the project involved a two-tier structure comprising a central project team located at the Curriculum Development Centre and local project teams in the states and territories. This two-tier structure reflects a dualism in the nature of the project, an appreciation of which is essential to a proper understanding of the complexities of the cooperative model as it was exemplified in the Language Development Project. There is a sense in which each of the state and territory projects was an autonomous unit, tackling its own project in its own way within its own preferred structures; but there is also a sense in which each was a part of a wider, national project, sharing
common goals and negotiating a common platform (McCulla, 1984). While the detailed processes of this emerging model were often complex, three central features can be identified which go a long way towards defining it: it was negotiable, it was open-ended, and it was teacher-based. Within this general model the state and territory teams developed their own preferred methods of working and their own distinctive styles (Christie, 1980: 12-20).

The picture emerging from this overview is one of both diversity and cohesiveness, of a set of individual and idiosyncratic elements coming together to form a national picture. In the final analysis, however, the cooperative model as exemplified in the Language Development Project remained in practice a loose association of state and territory projects pursuing local priorities in an area of common interest. The national focus of such a project was essentially something grafted on to the state and territory projects through negotiation and accommodation, rather than the prior negotiation of a genuinely national perspective in the pursuit of common goals. What stands out in the Language Development Project experience, however – and more generally in the Curriculum Development Centre experience – is the potential for effective collaboration at the worker level, once obstructions at more senior levels of the bureaucracies had been overcome or bypassed. There is evidence that through the National Management Committee (the state and territory task-force leaders and the national director of the project), the diverse elements that made up the Language Development Project were beginning to develop a shared national platform at the time the project came to a premature close with the demise of the Curriculum Development Centre (McCulla, 1984), and there are some grounds for believing that, had the project been allowed to move into its planned third phase, more genuinely collaborative structures may have emerged.

Demise and Revival: The Outposting Model

In April 1981 the Curriculum Development Centre was a victim of the Fraser Government’s Ministerial Review of Commonwealth Functions (popularly known as the ‘Razor Gang’), a committee set up by the government to devise ways of reducing government spending (Piper, 1984: 44–46). The Centre was abolished, and its functions absorbed into a unit within the Commonwealth Department of Education (Australia, 1981). The implications of this decision for the Curriculum Development Centre, while they appeared to be clear cut and terminal, were in fact extraordinarily confused. The Act establishing the Centre as an
independent statutory authority, it seemed, was not to be repealed. Its Council would ‘continue to discharge its legal obligations under the CDC Act’, one of which was to determine policy and programs. Legally, then, the Curriculum Development Centre continued to exist as an independent statutory authority, subject to the direction of an independent council. In practice, however, it was ‘to be replaced by a unit of the Commonwealth Department of Education’, subject to the direction of the Minister and the senior bureaucrats within the Department. What is surprising, to the layperson at least, is not that the takeover of the Centre by the Commonwealth Department of Education occurred, but that it was able to occur apparently without challenge to its legality.

In March 1983 the Fraser Government was defeated in a general election and the Hawke Labor Government came to office. In line with its pre-election education policy (Australian Labor Party, u.d.: 3) the new government moved to reconstitute the Curriculum Development Centre; not, however, as an independent authority as it had been under the original Act (Australia, 1975), but as one of four divisions within the Commonwealth Schools Commission (Australia, 1984a). Some observers interpreted these events as signalling more direct Commonwealth government control over the activities of the Centre, and a reduced role for the states (Beare, 1984).

Subsequent events, however, proved this interpretation to be wide of the mark. New programs initiated by the revived Curriculum Development Centre were located in the states, often in state education departments, with each participating state and territory entering into separate contractual arrangements with the Curriculum Development Centre (Australian Education Council, u.d.; Curriculum Development Centre, u.d.). On the surface this would suggest a return to a federal model similar to that employed in the Social Education Materials Project, with the Curriculum Development Centre reduced to a coordinating role, an interpretation supported by policy statements from the new director of the resurrected Centre:

Whereas the former model centred national projects in Canberra, the new approach will be to ‘outpost’ projects in a place where project officers can be close to the action and can be supported by local officers... The CDC role is to provide national administrative back up and to ensure appropriate management.

(Boomer, 1985: 3)

This ‘outposting model’, as it came to be known—the metaphor itself is revealing, given Garth Boomer’s well-earned reputation as a precise
wordsmith — was to become the preferred model for the revived Curriculum Development Centre’s major projects. The reasons for this apparent retreat from the cooperative model are unclear, but would seem to be largely a product of the weakened position of the Curriculum Development Centre and the increased bargaining power of the states and territories in dictating the terms of its resurrection (Australian Education Council, u.d.). Other factors which seem likely to have contributed are the transfer to the Schools Commission, which had traditionally operated under a federal model, and the strong representation of state interests on the Curriculum Development Council, the governing body of the reconstituted Centre (Australia, 1984b; Curriculum Development Centre, 1985).

This implied criticism of the outposting model should not, however, be taken as an implied criticism of the performance of the reconstituted Curriculum Development Centre. Such were the circumstances of its revival that there is little doubt that the Centre had little or no choice in its mode of operation. Given the limitations of the model within which it was constrained to operate, the Curriculum Development Centre Mark II performed an important leadership role in Australian curriculum reform in the 1980s, and its projects resulted in an impressive body of curriculum resources for Australian schools. Nevertheless, it is true to say that it was widely perceived as being hamstrung by its relationship with the state bureaucracies, and even some of its most successful projects, such as the Mathematics Teaching and Curriculum Project (MTCP), were perceived as state-controlled projects using federal money to pursue state initiatives. It is no secret, too, that Curriculum Development Centre officers themselves were often frustrated at their inability to get cooperation from the states once funds had been committed. Perhaps it was this perception that eventually led the Commonwealth government to opt out of direct involvement in curriculum development; although it seems more likely, ironically, that the Curriculum Development Centre, like the Commonwealth Schools Commission of which it was a part, became easy targets for the Expenditure and Review Committee — the Hawke Government’s own Razor Gang — and the economic rationalist proclivities of the amalgamated Department of Employment, Education, and Training.

A National Effort for Schools: An Agenda for Reform

In the previous chapter I highlighted the watershed role of the federal government’s 1988 policy statement Strengthening Australia’s Schools
(Dawkins, 1988) on the one hand as a crystallisation of past concerns, on the other as a catalyst for future action. The principal components of the national effort for schools called for in *Strengthening Australia's Schools* were a shared commitment to agreed national goals, the development by all concerned with education of 'a national perspective', and 'a clear statement of the fundamental purposes of our schools, their objectives and priorities', the latter presumably an elaboration of the national goals referred to earlier, although this was not clear. What was clear was that the focus for development was to be government schools, and the process cooperation with and between the states and territories, although no clear structures or procedures for such cooperation were identified.

While the overall focus of *Strengthening Australia's Schools* was on cooperation, consultation and negotiation as dictated by the federal structure of Australian schooling, the final paragraphs contained a sting in the tail with the tying of its proposals to funding arrangements and resource agreements. Whether this was intended to be a carrot or a stick is a matter of interpretation, but perhaps there was a little of both, linking the proposals for a national effort for schools to the economic rationalist concerns which characterised the Dawkins approach to the reform of higher education.

The Australian Education Council (AEC) – the meeting of Commonwealth and state Ministers of Education – emerged as the forum for negotiation, and the proposals were considered at a series of four meetings of the Council. The final meeting in Hobart in April 1989 reached agreement on a set of national goals for schooling, the creation of a national curriculum agency, the initiation of a process of national collaborative curriculum development, and the introduction of an annual national report on schooling. This agreement was embodied in the historic *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (Australian Education Council, 1989) issued as a result of the meeting. The process had been facilitated by an elaborate series of working parties set up by the Council to provide background research and advice. While the deliberations of these working parties were largely conducted in secret, it would appear that the state and territory bureaucracies were dominant in setting the agenda; although it should be noted that not all of the working party recommendations were accepted by the Council.

The agreement on a set of national goals was hailed by its sponsors as a milestone in Commonwealth-state relations, and indeed, given the previous history of the Australian Education Council (Spaull, 1987) it was, in the words of the Victorian Minister at the time, Joan Kirner, 'pretty amazing'. A less charitable interpretation, however, might
attribute the extent of agreement more to the vague generality of the
goals themselves than to any substantive commitment to a national
perspective.

The meeting also decided to proceed with the collaborative develop-
ment of a national statement on mathematics curriculum which would
‘identify the knowledge and skills to which all students are entitled’
(Australian Education Council, 1989) and to proceed with a ‘mapping’
of the curriculum in the key curriculum areas of science, technology,
and literacy/English as a basis for the development of similar national
statements in those areas. The use of the proposed national statements
would not be compulsory, but there was an expectation that ‘where
agreement is reached after full consideration’ systems and schools would
use them. This decision represented a somewhat uneasy compromise
between the Ministers, a majority of whom were keen to take up the
Dawkins proposal for the development of a national curriculum frame-
work, and the Directors-General of Education, who were anxious to pre-
serve their traditional systemic control over curriculum policy and
provision. In the latter half of 1988 the Directors-General of Education,
through their Directors of Curriculum, commissioned a ‘mapping’ of
existing curricula across the state and territory systems in an effort to
demonstrate that there was already sufficient commonality in curricu-
ulum provision across the various systems to obviate the necessity for
further national development (McGaw, 1994a). This initial curriculum
mapping exercise covered the general curriculum and the curriculum
in numeracy/mathematics (Australian Education Council, 1988). When
this strategy failed, the tactics shifted towards having the mapping ex-
ercises recognised as a basis for the development of national statements
and ensuring that there would be no compulsion or obligation on the
state and territory systems to adopt them. It was this compromise that
was reflected in the Hobart Declaration on Schooling. In many ways it was
an unfortunate compromise, since it introduced into the process a de-
gree of ambiguity that left it vulnerable to confusion and manipulation.

The other major outcome of the Hobart meeting so far as curriculum
development was concerned was the decision to set up a national cur-
riculum company, to be known as the Curriculum Corporation of Aus-
tralia (CCA), with the Ministers constituting the board of management
of the company. Initially the new company was to be funded by a core
grant jointly funded by the Commonwealth and the states, but it was
eventually expected to become self-supporting. It was more than a year
after the original decision to set up the Curriculum Corporation of Aus-
tralia before the new body commenced operations. A proposal on the
part of some state Ministers of Education to link the new agency with the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER) fell through when the Directors-General of Education objected that the independence enjoyed by the Australian Council for Educational Research’s Council, while appropriate for a research agency, was inappropriate for curriculum development. A compromise proposal to link the two bodies under a common director (Dr Barry McGaw, the Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research) but keep separate boards of management was rejected by the Australian Council for Educational Research’s Council as ‘unworkable’. In the event the new body was set up independently, and located in Melbourne. Initially New South Wales declined to join, posing some threat to the new agency’s credibility as a national organisation and further eroding any claim it might have had to exercising a formative role in the development of the national curriculum statements. The new body also ran into some trouble over its name, having been refused permission to register the name Curriculum Corporation of Australia in Victoria, and is now known as Curriculum Corporation.

Apart from the overtones of commercialism, the big difference between the new structure and previous structures for national curriculum development was the removal of the development agency from direct association with the Commonwealth government. While this removed one of the major obstacles to state and territory participation in national curriculum development, it created an inherent instability in the new structure which compromised its capacity to develop a national perspective, or indeed any direct commitment to act in the national interest.

A ‘mission statement’ issued by the newly established board (Curriculum Corporation, 1990) defined the role of the Corporation as:

- facilitating collaboration among government and non-government schools and school systems and education authorities in curriculum development;
- reducing unnecessary differences in curriculum between the states and territories;
- encouraging more effective use of resources by eliminating unnecessary duplication of effort in curriculum development and the provision of information services; and
- providing advice to the AEC on national curriculum issues referred to it by the AEC.
This is certainly a more limited, and limiting, role than might have been anticipated for the new organisation from *Strengthening Australia's Schools*, or indeed from that envisioned by the Ministers in their initial approaches to the Australian Council for Educational Research for the establishment of a national research and development agency, and no doubt reflects the influence of the state and territory bureaucracies through the Australian Education Council working party set up to oversee the establishment of the new body. The strong implication here of a reactive rather than a proactive role is reinforced by the mission statement's delineation of the program of the Corporation to:

- provide management services where requested to national collaborative curriculum activities agreed to by the AEC;
- facilitate and undertake commissioned project work in relation to curriculum development and information sharing and cataloguing; and
- arrange for the printing, publication, distribution and sale of education materials requested by the AEC or such other materials as may be approved.

The potential of the new organisation to exercise a formative influence on national curriculum reform in Australia is further restricted by its mode of operation, identified in a briefing paper by the executive director of the corporation as 'one of outposting projects and outsourcing services' (Francis, 1990: 2). On the surface this would appear to be a straightforward recycling of the 'outposting model' adopted by the Curriculum Development Centre during the previous decade. One can only speculate as to why it was seen fit to revive it, but it seems likely that, as with the Curriculum Development Centre before it, the 'outposting model' was imposed on the Corporation as a condition of state and territory cooperation, to ensure that the new body would be unable to develop 'its own independent curriculum stance' (Francis, 1991).

With the withdrawal of the Commonwealth from any direct involvement in curriculum development, perhaps inevitable after the decision in 1987 to abolish the Commonwealth Schools Commission, of which the national Curriculum Development Centre was a part, the demolition of the educational reforms of the Whitlam Government in the early 1970s was completed, ironically at the hands of a Labor government. It is interesting to speculate on the reasons for this apparent retreat from the Whitlam vision, but perhaps the economic rationalist approach favoured by the Hawke Labor Government encouraged the view that, as I have suggested earlier, control of the purse strings might prove more
effective in pulling the states into line than educational leadership had proved to be.

By the beginning of the 1990s, then, we had begun to see movement of a sort towards a national effort for schools, although what it all added up to was difficult to gauge. The question must be asked to what extent, and in what sense, a shared states' perspective could be said to constitute a national perspective, and to what extent the states and territories were genuinely committed to the development of a national perspective even in this limited sense. The colonial legacy dies hard in Australian education, and it is not about to roll over and expire gracefully. Not, at least, while there are empires to protect.

Marriage of Convenience: The Collaborative Model

The linking of the development of national curriculum statements to the curriculum mapping exercise and the delay in the setting up of Curriculum Corporation enabled the state and territory Directors of Curriculum effectively to take control of the national collaborative curriculum process initiated by the Hobart Declaration on Schooling. Rather than wait for the establishment of the national curriculum body, work proceeded under the auspices of the Directors of Curriculum on the development of a national statement on mathematics curriculum (Australian Education Council, 1991b) and on mapping the curriculum in science, technology, literacy/English and, later, studies of society and environment, as a basis for the development of national curriculum statements in these areas. In mid-1991 the Directors of Curriculum were merged with the Australasian Cooperative Assessment Program (ACAP), which had submitted a successful proposal to the Australian Education Council for the development of assessment profiles based on the national curriculum statements, into a single body, the Curriculum and Assessment Committee (CURASS) under the auspices of the Australian Education Council, and it was this body that oversaw the development of the remaining national curriculum statements and their associated assessment profiles.

The advent of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee, and in particular its restructuring in June 1992 to provide for an executive and a full-time secretariat, brought a new sense of urgency and considerably increased resources to the task of completing national curriculum statements and assessment profiles in eight agreed learning areas: English, mathematics, science, languages other than English, the arts, technology, studies of society and environment, and health. The
unrealistic timelines imposed by the Australian Education Council were pursued relentlessly, even at the expense of quality and due process, with a final deadline for completion, including trialling and ‘validation’ of profiles, in all eight learning areas of June 1993; a desperate timetable that was to undermine severely the credibility of the process and the quality of the products, especially in those curriculum areas in which development had been late in starting and was insufficiently advanced at the time the rush to publication started.

In the event the deadlines were met, the task was completed, albeit inadequately, and the statements and profiles were submitted for endorsement to the Australian Education Council at its June 1993 meeting in Perth. What was expected to be a relatively straightforward rubber-stamping, however, was turned on its head by the failure of the Australian Education Council to endorse the national statements and profiles. Instead, a decision on their endorsement was deferred for further consideration at the final meeting of the Council in Hobart in December 1993. While this was widely interpreted as something of a political stunt on the part of the conservative states, who were in a majority on the Council for the first time in more than a decade, to embarrass the federal government, it nevertheless threw a huge doubt over the future of national collaborative curriculum development. This doubt was further reinforced by the decision of the Council to dismantle its administrative substructure of committees and subcommittees, including the Curriculum and Assessment Committee, in preparation for its own dissolution at the end of the year. This left the process not only without any authority to continue, but without any established mechanism for continuation, apart perhaps from Curriculum Corporation, which would certainly have been capable of assuming a leadership role, but whose record of marginalisation in the process to date did not augur well for its prospects of doing so.

Those who had interpreted the Perth decision simply as a deferral and a flexing of the muscles on the part of the conservative states were in for a further shock, however, when the Australian Education Council, at its final meeting in Hobart in December 1993, again failed to endorse the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles, instead referring them back to the individual states and territories to do with as they saw fit. Ironically the city that had given birth to a national collaborative approach to curriculum reform with the Hobart Declaration on Schooling was also the site, some five and a half years and many millions of dollars later, of its inglorious demise. The Hobart meeting also saw the demise of the Australian Education Council after
almost sixty years of existence. It was replaced by a new body, the acronymically challenged Ministerial Council for Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA). The expanded portfolio and wider concerns of this new body has meant a reduced role, and possibly also a reduced priority, for school education in its deliberations. This in turn has meant that national collaboration in curriculum reform is unlikely to be high on its agenda, at least in the immediate future.

The official line has been to play down the seriousness of these events. In practical terms, it is argued, nothing has really changed. There was never any real likelihood that the states and territories would have given up control of their own curricula, whether or not the Australian Education Council had endorsed the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles. The states and territories would now take the statements and profiles and incorporate them into their curriculum decision making as they saw fit, which is all that could realistically have been expected in any case, despite the rhetoric of the Hobart Declaration on Schooling and the agreement to pursue its implementation collaboratively. Thus to write the process off as an expensive failure is to misunderstand it. Essentially it had achieved the only outcome it was ever likely to achieve.

While eminently pragmatic, this argument is rather too reminiscent of the old story of the difference between the optimist and the pessimist: the optimist believes that this is the best of all possible worlds; the pessimist fears he is right. As usual, the truth in this case appears to lie somewhere between optimism and pessimism. It seems unduly optimistic (and highly ahistorical) to suggest that the states and territories will, of their own volition and in the absence of specific structures and incentives, move towards curriculum reform in a genuine spirit of collaboration in the national interest. By the same token it would be unduly pessimistic to suggest that the pressures for reform, or indeed the need for reform, will simply go away, and that the current impasse will, or indeed can, be accepted as a satisfactory resolution of what is, after all, a national problem, and arguably a national imperative.

Perhaps the most abiding impression left by these events is one of wasted opportunity. Certainly the results fall far short of the promise and expectations generated by the Hobart Declaration on Schooling. By the same token it would be short-sighted to dismiss these events as simply wasted effort. Certainly the outcomes are disappointing, but they are not negligible; nor are they necessarily final.

So what do we have to show for some five years and several million dollars of collaborative effort? We have the Common and Agreed
National Goals for Schooling in Australia, which have been endorsed by all state and territory systems, although there is little evidence that they have had any marked effect on policy or practice either at national or system level. We have too the eight agreed learning areas endorsed by the Australian Education Council at its April 1991 meeting, which presumably continue to provide a common organisational structure for curriculum across the various state and territory systems, although, as we will argue later, these learning areas have serious structural and definitional problems that limit their capacity to provide an effective basis for a common curriculum framework, particularly after their absorption into existing state and territory frameworks.

Perhaps most importantly, we have the national curriculum statements and profiles themselves, published by Curriculum Corporation early in 1994, although significantly and ironically without the word ‘national’ in their titles. While the statements and profiles in their present form are variable in quality, lacking in authority, and unlikely to contribute in any significant way to a more coherent national approach to curriculum provision, they are now in the public domain and can thus provide a focus for a more purposeful and informed public debate on future directions for curriculum reform in Australia’s schools.

Who Drives the Chariot? Sources of Authority for the Curriculum in Australian Schools

It is always dangerous, however, to confuse policy and practice, curriculum development and curriculum implementation. It would therefore be inappropriate to conclude this overview of the developmental issues underlying a national approach to curriculum reform in Australian schools without some consideration of curriculum practice in the schools themselves. Somewhat paradoxically, at the same time that pressures were mounting during the early 1970s for a national approach to curriculum development and reform, the states and territories were beginning to move away from their highly centralised curriculum structures towards greater devolution of curriculum decision making to schools and their communities. An influential national report of the period (Karmel, 1973: 10) put the argument in this way:

The Committee favours less rather than more centralised control over the operation of schools. Responsibility should be devolved as far as possible upon the people involved in the actual task of schooling, in consultation
with the parents of the pupils whom they teach and, at senior levels, with the students themselves. Its belief in this grass-roots approach to the control of the schools reflects a conviction that responsibility will be most effectively discharged where the people entrusted with making the decisions are also the people responsible for carrying them out, with an obligation to justify them, and in a position to profit from their experience.

With the shift from centralised to school-based curriculum in the early 1970s, Australian teachers suddenly found themselves with a new-found responsibility for curriculum development to match their acknowledged role in curriculum implementation. Not surprisingly this created some confusion, and not a little apprehension. A study group set up by the national Curriculum Development Centre in 1977 to establish priorities for support for school-based curriculum development in Australia attempted as one of its initial tasks to identify the characteristics of school-based curriculum development (SBCD) in the Australian context:

SBCD is in a sense a modification of a traditional system of curriculum determination emanating either from a school principal or a central state board of education, and implies the development of a more participatory form of decision making relating to curriculum development and implementation. It is important to note that SBCD may not necessarily be a whole school exercise; it may relate only to a part of the school. Also, in qualitative terms, it may be either selective or adaptive rather than creative. The modification of the traditional system should not imply a severance of existing relationships, rather it suggests a shift in responsibility and the establishment of a different pattern of relationships . . .

These modifications demand an increased sensitivity in the relationships between all bodies involved and a change in traditional roles. In particular, a new type of professional expertise is demanded for the teacher who will have more opportunities for initiating change than in the past.

(Quoted in Walton, 1981: 12–13)

What is noteworthy about this statement, apart from its reaffirmation of a changed professional role for the teacher, is its tentativeness, even nervousness, about accepting the full implications of school-based curriculum development, even to the point of blurring the meanings of the words themselves. It is almost as if the members of the study group were prepared to test the water of school-based curriculum development, but certainly weren't prepared to jump in. This may in part be the result of compromises to accommodate the range of state and territory positions on curriculum devolution – national statements on education in Australia tend to have this elusive quality – but it also reflects
an ambiguity and uncertainty about the practice of school-based curriculum development in Australia that is still evident after more than two decades of implementation.

This ambiguity and uncertainty is reflected in the research on school-based curriculum development in Australia. Evans (1984: 257), in summarising the research to that date, concluded that:

... the evidence so far is that, in most schools, the rhetoric of community involvement and school-based development is ahead of the practice.

and similar conclusions have been reached by other researchers in the field (Brady, 1981; Cohen & Harrison, 1982; McRae, 1988; Sturman, 1989; Marsh & Prideaux, 1993).

The message emerging from this body of research is that, with some notable exceptions, what we have in Australia is school-based curriculum decision making rather than school-based curriculum development, and this process is more likely to occur at the level of the individual teacher or group of teachers – for example, teachers of a particular subject or at a particular grade level – than it is as a whole-school exercise. Whether this process serves to encourage or to inhibit curriculum reform is less clear, but the most comprehensive research study in the area (Sturman, 1989: 245) concludes that:

... it is not sufficient to introduce policies of decentralisation if curriculum change is advocated. These policies need to be linked to satisfactory support structures otherwise schools will be left in a vacuum and school and teacher responses to devolution will vary greatly. Faced with such a vacuum it is perhaps not unreasonable that many schools and teachers may have clung to more traditional and recognised practices.

One of the commonest complaints about school-based curriculum development from teachers in Australian schools concerns the time it entails and the lack of support structures at the school level. Good curriculum development takes time, and many teachers find it difficult to find that time among the myriad other duties and demands imposed by classroom teaching. An even more intractable barrier to curriculum development and reform at the school level is what is sometimes referred to as the culture of teaching. Hargreaves (1989a: 26–27) sees the major features of this culture as ‘present-oriented, conservative, and individualistic’, and as being overwhelmingly classroom-centred:

This classroom-centredness is indeed one of the overriding characteristics of the teaching profession; a characteristic which arises from and is in turn fed by the daily, recurring experience of classroom isolation.
This isolation is strikingly illustrated in research on communication patterns in Victorian secondary schools (Ainley, Reed & Miller, 1986). The researchers found that the incidence of teachers planning jointly or working together was, on average, once per term, and that communication between the classroom teacher and subject or year-level coordinators on curriculum matters was, on average, somewhere between once per month and once per term. Significantly, the researchers also found that communication was more frequent in small schools than in large schools, and more frequent in rural schools than in urban schools; and that frequency of communication was associated with more effective coordination and with teacher satisfaction.

Perhaps the single most important factor in facilitating or inhibiting school-based curriculum decision making is the organisation and climate of the school itself, and in particular the extent to which the school, through its organisation and policies, is able to break down the isolation and insulation of the classroom teacher to facilitate whole-school planning and decision making (Bartlett & Ogilvie, 1978; Skilbeck, 1984; Sturman, 1989). So, too, the extent to which innovation is actively encouraged or discouraged by the school administration has a profound effect on the effort teachers are willing to make. Even teachers who return enthused from an in-service course, conference attendance, or period of study leave can quickly find their enthusiasm snuffed out by the indifference of colleagues or superiors. Another aspect of this issue is the relative flexibility or inflexibility of the organisational structures themselves, for example the relative flexibility that primary school teachers have in adjusting their timetable to accommodate innovative programs, compared to the rigidity of the subject-based timetable in secondary schools. School assessment policies can similarly inhibit curriculum reform if they are insensitive to curricular requirements.

Much is made in the research on effective schools of the importance of the leadership role of the principal. Curiously, this leadership role is not evident in the research on curriculum decision making in Australian schools, suggesting that Australian principals prefer to exercise their leadership role in areas other than curriculum. Thus in Sturman’s (1989) research on the devolution of curriculum decision making, the principal was rated as a relatively minor influence on the curriculum in all three states studied. Ainley, Reed and Miller (1986) in their study of Victorian secondary schools found the frequency of communication between the classroom teacher and the principal on curriculum matters to be, on average, once per year! Brady (1981), in his study of New South Wales primary schools, found a similar pattern, with involvement of
the principal in curriculum decision making more likely to occur in small schools, and in some subject areas, such as mathematics, rather than others. It should be noted, however, that the role of the principal is important in establishing an organisational climate conducive to school-based curriculum development (Cohen & Harrison, 1982; Brady, 1983; Marsh et al., 1990).

What then are the sources of authority for the curriculum in Australian schools? The Australian Education Council’s curriculum mapping working party reported on the basis of information supplied by the various state and territory departments that the most important influences on the curriculum in Australian schools were system-level documents and syllabuses, followed by school inspectors or curriculum advisers, and textbooks and materials (Australian Education Council, 1988). Sturman (1989), on the other hand, in an empirical study of school-based decision making in three states, found that the most important influences were the subject coordinator or head of department, the individual teacher, and teachers acting collegially. System-level documents and syllabuses were rated as of relatively minor importance by the teachers in Sturman’s study, even in the most centralised of the three states studied.

To complicate the matter further, McRae (1988), on the basis of his evaluation of a large national innovations program, found that curriculum ideas were generally neither ‘top down’ nor ‘bottom up’, but rather ‘came from sources that seemed to be off to the side somewhere’:

There is no obviously discernible pattern there. It would be safe to say that schools will pick up what appears to be of use to them whatever the source.

(McRae, 1988: 34–35)

What are we to make of these apparently contradictory findings? Unfortunately there has been no systematic research on the way in which schools and teachers use system guidelines in the development of their school-based programs, if indeed they use them at all. There are, however, some indicators, in addition to Sturman’s findings, which suggest the need for such research; thus, for example, a national inquiry into education for active citizenship (Australia, 1989: 21–22) found that the problems it identified did not lie with curriculum policy, but rather with the fact that:

... formal statements of policy are not always a reliable guide to what is actually taking place in schools, and in the case of education for active citizenship the Committee found the gap between theory and practice to be quite large.
Any discussion of the sources of authority for the curriculum in Australian schools, however, would be incomplete without some reference to what may well be the most important source of the curriculum-in-practice, the commercial textbook. While there are teachers who make little use of commercial textbooks, and others who use them critically, as one resource among others, it is also true that there are many—perhaps most—for whom the textbook becomes the de facto curriculum and the principal determinant of the content, sequencing and pacing of learning (De Castell, Luke & Luke, 1989). Again there is a need for research to establish not only the extent of the influence of commercial textbooks, but also the complex interaction between textbooks and other commercial materials, system-level documents and syllabuses, and other sources of authority within and outside the school in determining the nature and reality of curriculum provision in Australian classrooms.

The past few years have seen moves in several state and territory systems towards the recentralisation of curriculum control through the establishment of statutory boards charged with the development of mandated curriculum, reinforced by accountability mechanisms and system-wide testing programs. Paradoxically this shift has occurred at the same time as moves to devolve managerial decision making and school governance to schools and their communities. Some observers see such anomalies as evidence of a fundamental tension within the conservative agenda between, on the one hand, a commitment to individualism and freedom of choice and, on the other, a commitment to maintenance of the existing social order (Whitty, 1990). It is too early to speculate just what these changes might mean for the future of school-based curriculum development in Australian schools, but it is difficult to believe that two decades of relative independence in curriculum decision making at the school level will be easily overturned in practice by policy shifts at the centre.

A Question of Development: Some Unresolved Issues

The developmental issues underlying a national approach to curriculum development and reform reviewed in this chapter are complex and contested, and unlikely to be readily resolvable, certainly in the short term, and perhaps also in the long term, since there will always be a
need to respond to changing circumstances and changing perceptions of need. Three such issues are singled out for comment in this final section of our review as particularly salient in the current context. Two of them deal with the problem of fragmentation: both the fragmentation of effort in the developmental process itself, and the fragmentation of the curriculum arising from sporadic and uncoordinated development. The third deals with the problem of implementation, and the role of the teacher in curriculum development and reform.

Cohesive Development: The Fragmentation of Decision Making

The central theme of Strengthening Australia's Schools was crystallised in its final sentence: 'Australia can no longer afford fragmentation of effort and approaches must be developed and implemented in ways which result in real improvements in schooling across the nation' (Dawkins, 1988: 7). While there is no doubt a good deal of the economic rationalist concern with efficiency lurking behind this statement, it would be unduly cynical to suggest that there is not also a concern with the quality and effectiveness of schooling. The fragmentation of curriculum decision making, and hence of curriculum provision, is not simply a matter of healthy diversity; it is also a matter of variability in the quality and effectiveness of provision.

The fragmentation of decision making manifests itself at many levels in the curriculum development process, and its manifestations are somewhat different at the different levels. At the school level it is reflected in the tendency for groups of teachers, for example teachers of a particular subject or grade level, or even individual teachers, to develop their curricula independently, with very little coordination or consultation. At the state level we see fragmentation in the three-tier system of state, Catholic and independent schools, not to mention the pressures towards fragmentation resulting from regionalisation and the devolution of curriculum decision making to schools (Sturman, 1989). It is with the operation of the process at the national level, however, that we are principally concerned in this review.

At the risk of some oversimplification, it is possible to view the history of national curriculum development in Australia as a gradual drift away from a cohesive national perspective towards greater and greater fragmentation as the state and territory bureaucracies demanded and gained more control over the process. Whatever other faults it may have had, the centralised management model adopted by the Australian
Science Education Project did allow it to develop a coherent and internally consistent curriculum package. It will be recalled, however, that the state bureaucracies became concerned that the project had tended to develop a life of its own and become less accountable to its sponsors. As a consequence, the ‘federal model’ adopted by the Social Education Materials Project and the ‘cooperative model’ developed by the Curriculum Development Centre included more direct state and territory control of the component projects, but at the cost of coherence and internal consistency in the project at the national level. The ‘outposting model’ employed by the resurrected Curriculum Development Centre in the 1980s involved even greater state control as part of the price exacted by the states for cooperation with the new body, in many cases at the cost of any recognisable national perspective at all.

It is doubtful that Curriculum Corporation can succeed in reversing this trend, given its lack of independence, its mode of operation, and its continuing commitment to the ‘outposting model’. Part of the problem has been the loose way in which words like ‘cooperation’, ‘collaboration’ and ‘coordination’ have been used to describe Commonwealth-state relations in bodies such as the Australian Education Council and Curriculum Corporation. It is stretching the meaning of ‘cooperation’ to extend it to include participation when it suits, and only when it suits; but even if we accept the pursuit of more-or-less synchronised self-interest as a form of minimal cooperation, it can hardly be construed as collaboration in the national interest, or as likely to lead to the development of a cohesive national perspective. Whether continued fragmentation is a sustainable option, an irresponsible indulgence, or an inevitable consequence of the political reality of Australian federalism is ultimately, of course, a political question, to be resolved by political debate and the political will. The nature and content of a common core curriculum, on the other hand – as distinct from its possibility, desirability, or acceptability – is ultimately an educational question, to be resolved by an open and professional program of research and development as independent as possible from the posturing and compromises of the political process. It is important to remember, too, amidst the clamour of states’ rights, that, with minor exceptions, curriculum differences between the states are the product of historical accident, not historical necessity, emanating in the main from the interplay of fads, fashions and factions within the state bureaucracies rather than from any real differences in the needs of Australian students from state to state.
Coherent Development: The Fragmentation of Learning

An important contribution to the quality and effectiveness of schooling is coherence and balance in the curriculum. Fragmentation of learning occurs when there is a lack of coordination in the learning experiences of students either vertically, from grade to grade, or horizontally, across curriculum elements within grades (McGaw, Banks & Piper, 1991; McGaw, Piper, Banks & Evans, 1992). It is therefore crucial to effective curriculum development that due attention is paid to the careful coordination of curriculum development activities to ensure that coherence and balance in the total curriculum are not compromised. Fragmented development occurs when a particular level of schooling – for example the junior secondary curriculum – is targeted for reform without due attention to the implications of the development for other levels of schooling, or when a particular area of learning, for example the science curriculum, is targeted without due attention to the effects of such targeting on the integration of learning experiences across other curriculum areas.

National curriculum development in Australia has principally been targeted development, aimed at particular areas of learning such as science, social education, English language and mathematics, identified as priority areas for development at the national level, the only exception to that general rule being the original Curriculum Development Centre’s Core Curriculum Project undertaken in the late 1970s. That project resulted in an influential discussion paper, Core Curriculum for Australian Schools (Curriculum Development Centre, 1980), seen as the opening salvo in a major program of ‘analyses, planning, development and evaluation in the area of core curriculum which should, we believe, form a significant part of Australian education in the ‘eighties’ (Curriculum Development Centre, 1980: 23). In the event, that grand plan was forestalled by the closing of the Curriculum Development Centre by the Fraser Government’s ‘Razor Gang’ in April 1981. The resurrected Curriculum Development Centre did not take up further development of the proposal, and national core curriculum lapsed as a major issue in Australian education until its revival in the Dawkins proposals in Strengthening Australia’s Schools (Dawkins, 1988). It is from the implicit contradictions in those proposals, and in the Australian Education Council’s responses to them, that the concerns raised here about curriculum coherence and the fragmentation of learning principally arise.
The contradictions in *Strengthening Australia's Schools* stem from a fundamental conflict between the generalist, inclusive goals implied in the desire 'to provide a cohesive curriculum appropriate to contemporary social and economic needs' through 'the development of a common framework that sets out the major areas of knowledge and the most appropriate mix of skills and experience for students in all the years of schooling' (Dawkins, 1988: 7); and the exclusive, instrumentalist goals implied in the key role envisaged for education and training in the government's plans for economic restructuring, as in the proposal for priority 'to be given to developing a framework for mathematics and science courses which are relevant to a technologically oriented society' (Dawkins, 1988: 8). A possible interpretation of this apparent confusion might suggest that it simply represents a conflict between the rhetoric and the real agenda lying behind the proposals for a national curriculum, but such an interpretation is probably unnecessarily cynical. A more likely explanation is that it reflects the conflict between policies of equity and social justice on the one hand, and policies of economic rationalism on the other, that characterised the Hawke Government's term generally.

The confusion evident in *Strengthening Australia's Schools* is echoed in the Australian Education Council's response to the Dawkins proposals. On the one hand we have, despite some internal inconsistencies, the inclusiveness and balance of the national goals for schooling, presumably seeking to define a balanced agenda for curriculum reform. On the other hand we have the apparently incompatible activity of the Directors of Curriculum, and later the Curriculum and Assessment Committee, pursuing the development of national statements in targeted curriculum areas without any apparent coordination or antecedent framework, and without any apparent location in the national goals for schooling.

Even more questionable is the manner in which the areas targeted for development were identified, on the basis of areas of commonality in existing state curricula. The fact that things are common to a number of state curricula is, of course, no guarantee of their relevance to the needs of Australian education in the 1990s, but more importantly it neglects the important issues of cohesion, inclusivity and balance among the targeted areas themselves. This endemic incoherence and confusion is likely to cause major headaches for Curriculum Corporation as it tries to develop its program, particularly if, as seems likely, that program is heavily constrained by the national curriculum
statements and assessment profiles already published. Any attempt to achieve balance and coherence would become a post hoc rationalisation of an essentially arbitrary process.

**Policy and Practice: The Role of the Teacher**

A curriculum essentially represents plans for action, and is only fully realised when those plans are put into action; that is, when they are implemented by teachers in classrooms. Indeed, the history of curriculum development contains many examples of large-scale development projects whose mission of curriculum reform was frustrated by their attempts to bypass the role of the teacher through the production of 'teacher-proof' materials, only to find that their materials were not taken up and implemented in the schools. It has been reported that at the height of this development in the United States in the post-Sputnik years no fewer than ten Nobel laureates were actively involved in school science curriculum development projects (Gatewood & Obourn, 1963), and yet by the late 1970s a National Science Foundation study found that, despite the multi-million dollar expenditure on these projects, ninety per cent of classroom teachers had returned to the traditional textbook approach (cited in De Castell, Luke & Luke, 1989).

As was noted earlier in our historical overview, a recognition of the importance of involving teachers in the curriculum development process was a feature of national curriculum development in Australia from its inception (Owen, 1978), and was a central plank of the cooperative model developed by the original Curriculum Development Centre in the late 1970s and early 1980s. It was a recognition that was to create something of a dilemma for the cooperative model, a dilemma which is well illustrated in the Curriculum Development Centre’s Language Development Project. The first phase of the project (Maling-Keepes & Keepes, 1979) was a research phase, leading to the formulation of a ‘set of beliefs about the nature of language and the ways in which it is learnt’ (Eagleson, Horvath & Rothery, 1979) which formed the basis for the Language Development Project’s evolving model of language education (Piper, 1988). There was always an element of contradiction between a teacher-based model of curriculum development which invested ownership of the project in its participants, and the development of a theoretical model of language and language learning intended to inform the project, and this was a contradiction the project never really succeeded in resolving. Clearly, it was in the long-term interests of the project to ensure that, while the developmental task lay squarely with
teachers in classrooms, that task was undertaken within the view of language and language learning which informed the project. Equally clearly, the model of language and language learning had to remain responsive to the needs of the project teachers, open to modification in the light of project experience. The diversity of the project and the geographical dispersion of its component projects created difficulties in sustaining the sort of dialogue that such a process requires. The possibility – perhaps even the inevitability – thus always existed of some inconsistency between the materials produced by the teacher networks and the project’s view of language and language learning. Ideally the relationship is one in which theory informs practice and practice informs theory, and that ideal relationship lies at the very heart of the Language Development Project’s cooperative model of curriculum development as it was originally conceived; but whether such an ideal condition is a practical proposition in the real world of cooperative networks is a question for which the Language Development Project’s experience provides no clear or unequivocal answers (Piper, 1983b; 1984).

The 1980s were characterised by an increasing politicisation of education, reflected in a tendency for Ministers at both state and Commonwealth level to intervene more overtly and more directly in educational provision, including curriculum provision, than was the case in the past (Crump, 1993). This in turn resulted in a shift towards policy-based development, as is evident for example in the program of the reconstructed Curriculum Development Centre during the 1980s (Kennedy, 1988), and in the recent national collaborative curriculum process, based as it was on a ‘mapping’ of policy documents across the state and territory systems. Somewhat contradictorily, the 1980s also witnessed a shift away from research-based development towards an approach more closely aligned to practice, a shift perhaps best exemplified in the Mathematics Curriculum and Teaching Program [MCTP] (Lovitt, Clarke & Stevens, 1990) and the ill-fated National Guide to Literacy (Withers, 1989), both major national initiatives of the resurrected Curriculum Development Centre. These projects were predicated on the belief that the basis for effective reform of the school curriculum already exists in the practice of the best teachers, what Shulman (1987) refers to as ‘the wisdom of practice’. Effective curriculum development thus revolves essentially around the identification and documentation of ‘exemplary’ practice. Supporters of such an approach see it as holding genuine promise of curriculum reform by locating the basis for reform in classroom practice, thus bypassing the barriers to implementation experienced by large-scale curriculum development projects in the past (Boyd, 1979;
Fullan, 1982; 1990; Brewer & Lovitt, 1992). Critics of the approach see it as unduly teacher-centred, thus excluding other legitimate stakeholders in curriculum reform, particularly students; as unduly present-oriented, legitimating current practice at the expense of much-needed reform; and as contributing to the maintenance of a culture of schooling which persistently trivialises the processes of curriculum development by confusing curriculum with pedagogy, and pedagogy with decontextualised classroom activities.

The resistance of the practising teacher to theory and the findings of research, commonly manifested in a deep suspicion of outside ‘experts’, is one of the less constructive features of educational practice in Australia. The key question, of course, is whether teachers outside the developmental program, who have not been exposed to the professional stimulation of participation in the program, will be any more receptive to the solutions of ‘exemplary’ teachers than they have proved to be to those of outside ‘experts’. There is some evidence to suggest that teachers who participate in curriculum development projects have a different curriculum orientation to that of their non-participant colleagues (Piper, 1983a;1988). They are also likely to be more innovative than their colleagues, and to have higher intrinsic and extrinsic motivation (Leithwood et al., 1976; Fullan, 1990).

Conclusion

I have in this chapter highlighted two major and somewhat contradictory long-term trends in the curriculum reform process in Australian schools, on the one hand towards quality curriculum development and the national interest, on the other towards effective implementation and teacher professionalism, and there seems little reason to doubt that they will continue to be prominent in the curriculum reform process in Australia, at least in the foreseeable future. The real challenge for curriculum reform over the next decade will be to reconcile demands for professional autonomy, which is necessary to maintain commitment and quality provision, with the equally pressing demands for safeguards and guarantees to protect the rights of consumers and the public interest. Whether there is a role for a national curriculum framework in addressing this challenge is bound to be hotly contested, but it seems likely to remain at the centre of the debate on future directions for Australian education for some time to come, and to continue to provide illuminating insights into the complex interaction between the political and the pedagogical in the determination of curriculum provision.
The debate on curriculum decision making in Australia has been muddied by a misleading and unproductive dichotomy between ‘top down’ and ‘bottom up’ models. The Australian experience has been that neither model is satisfactory, either as a description of the past or as a prescription for the future, and for very similar reasons. Both are linear models; both are unidirectional models; both are limited models; and both are exclusive models, serving the interests of some groups but excluding others. The pragmatic instrumentalism underlying many ‘top down’ models fails to recognise that the curriculum is a significant personal experience in the lives of those engaged in it, and must have demonstrated relevance to those involved in its implementation if it is to achieve its purpose. The romantic individualism underlying many ‘bottom up’ models fails to recognise that many of the problems we face are common problems, which are best tackled cooperatively, and reflects our loss of a sense of community in a period characterised by self-interest and the privatisation of experience.

What is needed is a view of curriculum decision making that is more interactive, more collaborative, more inclusive of the diverse interests that are represented in the curriculum of our schools, and particularly more inclusive of the needs and interests of the students, who are the ultimate clients of all curriculum development and reform, but who are often marginalised in the conflict between more powerful interests.
Romancing the Past: The Search for Relevant Content

One of the great, as yet not fully engaged, Australian education debates will be over what constitutes essential knowledge to which all children are entitled.

Garth Boomer

When Herbert Spencer urged us, in considering the school curriculum, to consider first the question: ‘What knowledge is of most worth?’, he was urging us both to return to first principles, and to reinterpret those principles in the light of current needs. Spencer’s concern was the irrelevance of the then dominant classical curriculum to the demands of scientific and technological change in nineteenth-century England, a concern not too far removed from a central theme of John Dawkins and the Commonwealth government in Strengthening Australia’s Schools (Dawkins, 1988). In applying Spencer’s question to the task of devising a curriculum appropriate to the needs of the twenty-first century – and it is well to remember that most of the students now in our schools will complete their schooling in the twenty-first century – it would be unwise to be misled by its deceptive simplicity. It is not a purely technical question, amenable to technicist solutions. It is rather a normative question, raising questions of value. Are we to consider it in terms of most worth to the individual, of most worth to the society, or of most worth to the economy? Or is worth, as is sometimes suggested, something inherent in the learning itself, an intrinsic and self-evident good? If, as seems likely, we would wish to consider worth in terms of all of these aspects, can we reach any agreement on the weighting that should be accorded to each? And even assuming such agreement, is it to be ‘worth’ as
defined by adults, continuing learners certainly, but so far as the school curriculum is concerned, ex-learners, or is it to be 'worth' as defined by students, who will be the ultimate judges of worth, if not its legislators?

Nor should we forget the historical dimension. When Spencer asked his question it was in the context of a school curriculum heavily dominated by the classics and classical languages, certainly a far cry from the curriculum context in late twentieth-century Australia, dominated as it is not only by a global economy but also by a knowledge explosion unprecedented in earlier centuries. Ironically, mathematics and science, whose cause Spencer was championing, now enjoy the privileged status once accorded the classics, and it is their role that is now under scrutiny. Whatever solutions we arrive at, whatever criteria of worth we set, it is well to remember they will ultimately be tentative and they will ultimately be impermanent, subject to continual reassessment in the light of changing needs and a changing culture. The question raised in Strengthening Australia's Schools is whether they should also be fragmented and diverse, rather than cohesive and consensual.

Common, Core and National: The Debate in Australia

While the issue of common or core curriculum has a long history in Australian education (Connell, 1980; 1993), its emergence at the forefront of the education debate in Australia coincides with the move towards national curriculum development in the early 1970s. The most influential educational report of the period, Schools in Australia, the report of the Interim Committee for the Australian Schools Commission (the Karmel Report), parallels its concern with equality of opportunity with a consistent emphasis on 'the attainment of minimum standards of competence for life in the modern democratic industrial society' (Karmel, 1973: 139). The core curriculum issue was a central concern of the Australian Education Council during the mid- to late 1970s (Spaull, 1987), and was the focus of a number of influential reports and policy documents at state and territory level during that period (Tasmania, 1978; 1980; Northern Territory, 1979; Victoria, 1980; South Australia, 1981). A number of common themes ran through all or most of these documents – a functional approach to the definition of the core curriculum focusing on effective participation in the life and work of the society; a commitment to school-based curriculum development; and
the involvement of parents and the wider community in curriculum decision making – and these themes were reflected in the debate at the national level (Piper, 1981).

At the national level these concerns found expression in the work of the national working party on core curriculum set up by the Curriculum Development Centre under the chairmanship of Sir Mark Oliphant, culminating in the release by the Centre of its influential discussion paper Core Curriculum in Australian Schools: What It Is and Why It Is Needed (Curriculum Development Centre, 1980). The discussion paper defines core curriculum as:

... that set of basic and essential learnings and experiences which can reasonably be expected of all students who pass through our schools. ‘Basic’ learnings are defined as those which provide a base or foundation necessary for other study and learning, and for continuing personal development. ‘Essential’ learnings and experiences are defined as those which are required by all for effective cultural, economic, political, group, family and interpersonal life in society.

(Curriculum Development Centre, 1980: 4)

and argues its necessity in terms of social change, growing community concern with education, changing concepts of secondary education as education for all, innovation in education, the finite nature of educational resources, the outdated subject organisation of the school curriculum, and the needs of the future. It bases its development of a framework for core curriculum on a brave attempt to define a set of universal aims for education and a set of aims for Australian schools, firmly rejecting a ‘back to basics’ approach and the introduction of national or system-wide testing of core elements.

The core framework is defined in terms of seven core ‘processes’ (learning and thinking techniques; ways of organising knowledge; dispositions and values; skills or abilities; forms of expression; practical performances; and interpersonal and group relationships) and nine ‘areas of knowledge and experience’ (Arts and Crafts; Environmental Studies; Mathematical Skills and Reasoning; Social, Cultural, and Civic Studies; Health Education; Science and Technology; Communication; Moral Reasoning and Values; and Work, Leisure, and Lifestyle) [Curriculum Development Centre, 1980: 16–20]. It is interesting to note that in public discussion of the framework the areas of knowledge and experience attracted a good deal more attention than the learning processes, perhaps reflecting an ingrained habit of thinking of curriculum in terms of a body of subject matter.
The discussion paper sees it as the responsibility of individual schools to determine the specific content of core programs within the broad framework provided and in the context of local needs, but stresses that ‘students, parents, and community should participate in appropriate ways in the planning process’ (Curriculum Development Centre, 1980: 21). The paper was envisaged as an exploratory statement, as a stimulus to national debate, and as the first in an ongoing series of publications directed to further exploration of the concept of core curriculum and its implications for Australian schools. Unfortunately the Fraser Government’s decision to wind down the operations of the Curriculum Development Centre frustrated this intention and, as we have noted in the previous chapter, the project was not taken up by the reconstituted Curriculum Development Centre or its Council.

Many of the issues raised in the Curriculum Development Centre’s discussion paper were, however, taken up in one of the last important reports of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, In the National Interest: Secondary Education and Youth Policy in Australia (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987). Chapters 10 and 11 of the report are particularly pertinent as evidence of the kind of thinking at Commonwealth level that led to the development of the proposals in Strengthening Australia’s Schools (Dawkins, 1988).

The Commission sees the development of frameworks for essential studies through the years 7 to 12 as a task of national importance in which collaborative action between education systems and authorities is essential . . .

The Commission suggests that there should be four components which provide the content of the essential studies. These are:

- concepts
- intellectual and performance skills
- Australian Studies
- integrated studies.

(Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987: 99)

The report goes on to argue that in developing ‘the essential curriculum’, ‘the focus should be on the identification of key concepts drawn from the main areas of knowledge rather than key subjects to be studied’. It ‘tentatively’ identifies five areas of skill that may be considered illustrative of what it means by intellectual and performance skills: skills of rational inquiry; communication and expressive skills; social skills; physical skills; and technological skills. The inclusion of Australian
Studies in the essential curriculum is justified on the basis that it ensures support for Australian democracy 'by ensuring that there is a common basis for discourse, discussion and for resolution of differences about what needs to be valued, preserved, or changed in the interests of the society as a whole'. Integrated studies are justified on the grounds that they 'provide a connecting strategy across the curriculum making links between otherwise disconnected concepts and ideas'. Finally, the report identifies four criteria for the selection of content in 'the essential curriculum': utility or value; relevance; inclusiveness; and accessibility (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987: 99–102).

*Strengthening Australia’s Schools* (Dawkins, 1988) was understandably cautious in specifying the content of a common core curriculum for Australian schools, although it did make particular reference to literacy, numeracy and skills of analytical reasoning, to an orientation towards Asia and the Pacific, and to the priority to be accorded to mathematics and science as the cornerstones of a technological society. It is nevertheless possible, and indeed appropriate, to see its proposals as part of an ongoing process of public debate and discussion on the development of a curriculum that is common, core and national extending back over a period of at least two decades, and leading on to its latest expression in the formulation of the national goals for schooling that form the centrepiece of the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (Australian Education Council, 1989).

**One Foot on the Ground: The National Goals**

The first two of the national goals for schooling set out in the *Hobart Declaration on Schooling* (Figure 3.1) are quite specifically directed at all young people, and it seems reasonable to infer a similar intention for the remaining eight goals. The national goals therefore provide a convenient and appropriate starting point for a consideration of the possible content of a common national core curriculum for all Australian students. More importantly, they have the added advantage of having been agreed to by all Australian states and territories and by the Commonwealth, which presumably implies a commitment to common implementation. Admittedly they have not been exposed to the wide community consultation that might be required for a genuine national consensus, but this is not precluded as part of the process of regular review and revision that was always intended for the national goals (Australian Education Council, 1989) and may yet occur, although there are no signs of it at the time of writing.
Goals for Schooling in Australia

1. To provide an excellent education for all young people, being one which develops their talents and capacities to full potential, and is relevant to the social, cultural and economic needs of the nation.

2. To enable all students to achieve high standards of learning and to develop self-confidence, optimism, high self-esteem, respect for others, and achievement of personal excellence.

3. To promote equality of education opportunities, and to provide for groups with special learning requirements.

4. To respond to the current and emerging economic and social needs of the nation, and to provide those skills which will allow students maximum flexibility and adaptability in their future employment and other aspects of life.

5. To provide a foundation for further education and training, in terms of knowledge and skills, respect for learning and positive attitudes for life-long education.

6. To develop in students:
   a. the skills of English literacy, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing;
   b. skills of numeracy, and other mathematical skills;
   c. skills of analysis and problem solving;
   d. skills of information processing and computing;
   e. an understanding of the role of science and technology in society, together with scientific and technological skills;
   f. a knowledge and appreciation of Australia’s historical and geographic context;
   g. a knowledge of languages other than English;
   h. an appreciation and understanding of, and confidence to participate in, the creative arts;
   i. an understanding of, and concern for, balanced development and the global environment; and
   j. a capacity to exercise judgment in matters of morality, ethics and social justice.

7. To develop knowledge, skills, attitudes and values which will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context.

8. To provide students with an understanding and respect for our cultural heritage including the particular cultural background of Aboriginal and ethnic groups.

9. To provide for the physical development and personal health and fitness of students, and for the creative use of leisure time.

10. To provide appropriate career education and knowledge of the world of work, including an understanding of the nature and place of work in our society.

Figure 3.1 Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia (Australian Education Council, 1991a)
The national goals fall into two sharply distinct parts. The first five goals are largely rhetorical, more inspirational than aspirational, and have minimal implications for the content of a common national curriculum. We will return to these goals later. For the moment we will focus our attention on goals 6–10, which are quite different in character, considerably more specific, and with clear implications for curriculum content. The content of these goals can be considered as falling into four categories – a set of content items referring to core processes or resources for learning, across the curriculum; a set referring to knowledge and understanding of the physical or natural world; a set concerned with knowledge and understanding of the social and cultural world; and a set relating to the personal growth and development of the individual. Such classifications are, of course, always somewhat arbitrary, and do not preclude the possibility of alternative categorisations, but they do provide a convenient and defensible starting point for the analysis of the content implications of the national goals.

The items in our first category, which might be considered as core processes, or resources for learning, are grouped together because they constitute the fundamental building blocks on which all learning depends, across the curriculum and beyond the curriculum; what the Curriculum Development Centre’s discussion paper referred to as ‘basic learnings’. These are identified in the first four items (a, b, c and d) of goal 6 as:

To develop in students:
- the skills of English literacy, including skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing;
- skills of numeracy, and other mathematical skills;
- skills of analysis and problem solving; and
- skills of information processing and computing.

The first two of these are the traditional ‘basics’, well entrenched in curriculum practice, although not necessarily always well realised across the curriculum, at least in the secondary school. The second two are less traditional, but arguably just as basic to an adequate education for an increasingly complex modern technological society. They are of course not new, but their integration into current practice, across the curriculum, may well be in need of greater emphasis.

A second group of goals refers to learning about the physical and natural environment, and might appropriately be referred to as Environmental Studies were it not for the fact that this might give a
misleading impression of their scope. Perhaps some broad area classification such as Science, Technology, and the Environment is less likely to be misinterpreted. Learnings in this area are to be found in items 6e and 6i:

To develop in students:

- an understanding of the role of science and technology in society, together with scientific and technological skills; and
- an understanding of, and concern for, balanced development and the global environment.

A third category of goals deals with learning about the social world, and might appropriately be termed Social and Cultural Studies or, more commonly in the Australian context, Social Education. The goals clearly relating to this area of learning are item 6f, and goals 7 and 8:

To develop in students a knowledge and appreciation of Australia’s historical and geographic context;

To develop knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values which will enable students to participate as active and informed citizens in our democratic Australian society within an international context; and

To provide students with an understanding and respect for our cultural heritage including the particular cultural background of Aboriginal and ethnic groups.

Goal 10 is probably also best located in this category, although it may have some claim to a separate classification as Pre-vocational Education, particularly given the current policy emphasis on vocational education in the context of economic restructuring:

To provide appropriate career education and knowledge of the world of work, including an understanding of the nature and place of work in our society.

A final set of goals relates to the individual development of the student, and might best be categorised under some such title as Personal Growth and Development, or Developmental Education. The goals in this category are items 6g, 6h, and 6j, and goal 9.

To develop in students:

- a knowledge of languages other than English;
- an appreciation and understanding of, and confidence to participate in, the creative arts;
a capacity to exercise judgment in matters of morality, ethics and social justice; and

To provide for the physical development and personal health and fitness of students, and for the creative use of leisure time.

Such a content outline of course begs more questions than it answers. Many of the bitterest controversies surrounding curriculum provision are masked in the generality of the goals, as are questions of balance and relative weighting, and there is still room for wide – perhaps unacceptably wide – variation in the breakdown of the goals into more specific knowledge, skills and attitudes; and even where such agreement could be reached, there are likely to be widely divergent interpretations in practice. Despite this level of generality, however, the formulation does have certain features which set it apart from current policy and practice: for example, the strong emphasis on social relevance in the formulation of the Science, Technology and Environment strand; the resource implications for the recruitment and training of teachers in the emphasis on languages other than English and the inclusion of morality, ethics and social justice in the Personal Growth and Development strand; or the failure to ‘acknowledge Australia’s increasing orientation towards Asia and the Pacific’, as called for in Strengthening Australia’s Schools (Dawkins, 1988: 8) in the Social Education strand. Nevertheless it does provide a starting point for public discussion about the appropriate content of a common core curriculum for Australian schools, a starting point, moreover, which already has substantial agreement at the political level.

Towards a Common Curriculum? The Territorial Imperative

There is some dispute over the extent to which the national collaborative curriculum development process initiated by the Australian Education Council as part of the Hobart Declaration on Schooling was intended to develop a common curriculum framework of the kind called for in Strengthening Australia’s Schools and presaged in the national goals for schooling. Eltis (1993: 49), who, as a member of the Directors of Curriculum, was closely associated with the initial stages of the process, is emphatic in his assertion that ‘no attempt is being made to define a common core curriculum for all students’. Another senior figure closely associated with the initial stages of the national collaborative curriculum development process, in a confidential commentary on an earlier draft of this review, is even more emphatic, both verbally and typographically:
There was no commitment to develop a common curriculum at any time during the national collaborative curriculum exercise.

The perceptions of those so closely connected with the process must be given some credence, since they are clearly authentic perceptions, if not necessarily objective ones. There is, however, at least an element of humbug, and perhaps also of revisionism, about these assertions. The Hobart Declaration on Schooling seems quite clear in its intention that ‘the statement of common principles will identify the knowledge and skills to which all students are entitled’ (Australian Education Council, 1989: 2). Perhaps more importantly, the official rhetoric of the process continued to emphasise this fundamental commitment to the development, however notionally and however tentatively, of a common core curriculum for all Australian students. Thus Hannan (1992: 29), the first chair of the national Curriculum and Assessment Committee charged with the development of the national curriculum statements, defines their purpose as twofold:

... to give a common basis in knowledge and skills for systems and schools across Australia to work from and develop; and to propose new aspects of content where there appear to be gaps in existing state frameworks.

and his successor in that post, Boston (1993: 13), reaﬃrms that central purpose:

Within the national collaborative project, systems’ representatives have always held that national statements and profiles should be frameworks that set out the essential content and outcomes of the curriculum but avoid detailed statements of content, teaching method and assessment.

Much of the confusion surrounding the national curriculum statements stems from the politically dictated decision that there would be no compulsion on schools and systems to adopt them, thus creating from the outset a degree of ambiguity about their status. However, this does not negate their purpose, nor the expectation that ‘where agreement is reached after full consideration then it is likely that government and non-government systems and schools will use them’ (Australian Education Council, 1989: 2). The failure of the Australian Education Council to endorse the national curriculum statements in 1993 undermined their status even further, as did the decision to publish them without the word ‘national’ in their titles. They do, however, exist in the public forum and, while their impact on curriculum decision making at system and school level appears to have been limited, they do provide a focus for future debate on the possible content of a common core curriculum for Australian schools.
The decision to base the national curriculum statements on areas of commonality among state and territory system curricula as identified through the curriculum mapping project conducted by the Directors of Curriculum was in many ways an unfortunate one, since it locked the development of the statements into a political process of negotiation and compromise rather than a professional one of research and development. The curriculum mapping project itself, however, was a useful input into the debate, since it provided for the first time a comprehensive national overview of curriculum provision, at least at the policy level, in Australia’s schools.

Volume 1 of *Mapping the Australian Curriculum* (Australian Education Council, 1988), dealing with the General Curriculum, identified six ‘subjects’ which were common to all Australian systems at the primary level, but added that ‘despite this uniformity there is substantial variation in content, style and emphasis within the subject areas at school and teacher level’ (Australian Education Council, 1988: 14). At the junior secondary level (Years 7/8–10) there was less agreement across systems on a common core of subjects than at the primary level, but the report noted that where systems nominated a ‘core’, there were common elements (Australian Education Council, 1988: 25).

At the senior secondary level (Years 11/12) the curriculum was heavily influenced by the certification system and a wider range of subject choices. Little commonality existed, but in a list of the twenty most popular subjects in each system, English (which was compulsory in some systems), a mathematics and a science rated consistently highly in all systems, suggesting a degree of commonality at the general level, although this may largely have dissipated at a more specific level of course content (Australian Education Council, 1988: 51–52; see also Ainley, Jones, & Navaratnam, 1990).

It will be noted that the unit of analysis in these discussions of common or core studies across systems is mainly the school ‘subject’, although as we have noted earlier curriculum documents in most systems are organised on the basis of broad learning areas (Australian Education Council, 1988: 24), as are the national curriculum statements. In relation to the primary curriculum the authors of the report indicate both their own confusion and confusion in the curriculum practice of some state and territory systems with the admission that:

Some systems use the terms ‘areas of learning’ and ‘subjects’ interchangeably. Most derive subjects from learning areas.

(Australian Education Council, 1988: 14)
Such a comment, and such a practice if it is indeed widespread, betrays a serious misunderstanding of the basic principles of curriculum construction. School 'subjects' and 'areas of learning' represent alternative and logically distinct systems of curriculum organisation, and are not directly translatable in each other's terms. However, the comment does help to explain some of the confusion surrounding the development of the national curriculum statements and highlights the danger of basing their formulation on supposed areas of commonality among the state and territory systems. We will return to this issue in more detail in the next chapter.

Employment-related Key Competencies: The Economic Imperative

Parallel to the national collaborative curriculum development process, but from a somewhat different direction, was a concerted push by the Commonwealth government, strongly supported by employer organisations and the trade union movement, for a more coordinated national approach to vocational education and training, and a closer relationship between the school curriculum and the world of work. This push was focused particularly, although not exclusively, on the senior secondary school curriculum, and in the context of certification and assessment, and has been widely interpreted as an attempt to link educational outcomes to economic policy (Collins, 1992).

The report of the committee set up by the Australian Education Council to review participation in post-compulsory education and training (Finn, 1991), as well as making recommendations in the post-secondary area, recommended that all students should complete schooling to Year 12 and proposed the development of employment-related Key Competencies to be promoted through the school curriculum, particularly in the senior secondary years. The Finn Report identified six key areas of competence:

- language and communication
- mathematics
- scientific and technological understanding
- cultural understanding
- problem solving
- personal and interpersonal.
It will be noted that while some of these identified areas are clearly process-oriented, and hence amenable to definition in terms of ‘competence’, others, such as scientific and technological understanding and cultural understanding, appear to be more content-oriented, although expressed in process terms (understanding). The Employment and Skills Formation Council of the National Board of Employment, Education and Training in a major report (Carmichael, 1992) endorsed the Finn Report’s recommendations, and proposed a new system of competency-based training leading to a new credentialling system, the Australian Vocational Certificate, in which school-based courses would have a role.

The Mayer Committee, charged with recommending on the implementation of the employment-related key competencies, redefined the Finn competencies and, in doing so, shifted their focus from a partly content-oriented formulation to an exclusively process-oriented formulation. They identified seven key competencies (Mayer, 1992):

- collecting, analysing and organising information
- communicating ideas and information
- planning and organising activities
- working with others and in teams
- using mathematical ideas and techniques
- solving problems
- using technology.

The switch to a process-oriented formulation meant the disappearance of the cultural understanding area nominated by Finn, but the Mayer Committee, in acknowledging its omission, recommended that ‘steps be taken to make the required knowledge explicit and provide the necessary access to the knowledge for all young people’ (Mayer, 1992: 8). The mechanism by which this was to occur was not made clear, but may well have been encompassed in another of the Committee’s recommendations that ‘steps be taken to ensure that the national statements and profiles being developed for the eight key learning areas . . . encompass the foundation knowledge integral to the achievement of the Key Competencies’ (Mayer, 1992: 6). There is no indication in the published national curriculum statements and assessment profiles, however, that this did in fact occur; although it should be noted that the national statements and profiles as published were not extended beyond the compulsory years of schooling, it having been found too difficult to accommodate in a national statement the various certification and credentialling requirements that tend to dominate the curriculum in the senior secondary years.
The Australian Education Council at its final meeting in Hobart in December 1993 endorsed the Mayer Committee’s key competencies, with the reinstatement of cultural understanding, but without any recommendations concerning implementation, assessment, or certification. In general, the key competencies have had a lukewarm reception in the educational community. The major criticisms have been the excessive focus on employability, the instrumental view of education as an arm of economic policy, and a questioning of the validity of the concept of generic competencies, divorced from specific content (McGaw, 1994a). Thus the report of the Review of the Queensland School Curriculum (Wiltshire, 1994: 101):

The key competencies which have evolved at the national level began their life as employment-related competencies or skills and not educational competencies. This remains fundamentally the issue and, whilst educators might well agree with the notion that certain competencies are vital for the workplace and their identification can assist in the transition to employment, their relationship to schooling in general and curriculum in particular is not simply a matter of instantaneous definition, location, isolation, and measurement in a schooling system.

**What Do We Mean by a Common Curriculum? Some Sources of Conflict**

Much of the confusion surrounding the debate on a common or core curriculum stems from the range of meanings attached to the terms themselves, terms which, while technically distinct, are commonly used interchangeably, and seldom unambiguously. Indeed much of the controversy surrounding core curriculum, in Australia as overseas, is directly traceable to these often unrecognised ambiguities and the unstated assumptions underlying them. One solution, frequently advocated, is to avoid the use of the terms ‘common curriculum’ or ‘core curriculum’ altogether, replacing them with some such term as ‘fundamental learning’, ‘basic learning’, ‘essential learning’, or, more recently, ‘the entitlement curriculum’; but since the confusion is at least as much conceptual as it is semantic, a change of terminology is unlikely to resolve the problem.

Perhaps the only elements on which there is reasonable agreement are that the common or core curriculum is that part of the curriculum which is designated as required learning for all students, and that it
constitutes a substantial component of the total curriculum; although even this apparent agreement may break down if the focus is on learning outcomes as distinct from curriculum inputs. Before we can sensibly address the contentious issue of curriculum content – the knowledge, skills, and values that should comprise the core – there are more basic conceptual elements that give rise to conflict and confusion in the public debate. Some preliminary exploration of these conceptual elements is necessary, not as a basis for resolution, but rather as reference points for our discussion of the issues surrounding the definition and selection of the content of a common core curriculum for Australian schools.

An initial area of conflict is at the level of decision making. Who determines the core or, to put it in terms that were popular in the debate of a decade ago, who owns the core curriculum? Is it the preserve of the educators, or do students, parents and the wider community, including employers and politicians, have a stake in its formulation? And, if so, how are the responsibilities to be shared? At what level is the core curriculum to be determined? At the national level? At state or system level? At regional level? At school or local community level? At teacher level? Or should it be a shared responsibility, with contributions at all or several of these levels? This conflict in turn is tied up with differing views on the degree and extent of uniformity which is desirable, and leads on to a second area of conflict, the degree of specification desirable in a common or core curriculum. How tightly should the core be defined? Should it be general or specific, flexible or definitive, advisory or prescriptive, facilitative or directive? Should it encourage diversity or uniformity? Are we, in other words, talking about a core curriculum or the core curriculum?

Underlying most statements on common or core curriculum is an implicit organisational model which defines the relationship of the core to the total curriculum. Unfortunately these models are seldom made explicit in the debate, and conflict at the level of definition is sometimes attributable to conflicting assumptions about the way in which the common core to be defined will be related to the rest of the curriculum. The most commonly assumed model in the debate appears to be the one most commonly encountered in practice – even though it is in many ways the least satisfactory way of resolving the issue – namely, the idea of a core plus electives. According to this model, the curriculum is split into two largely unrelated parts: a core, which is compulsory for all students, and a series of electives, which offer the students a measure of choice. Another model which is current but less frequently encountered
is the core plus enrichment model, in which students may elect to take subjects or courses at a basic (or core) level, at an enriched level, or at an advanced level, as exemplified in the Wyndham Scheme in New South Wales. A third model sometimes encountered is the integrated core, in which the core does not constitute a separate or distinct element of curriculum organisation but permeates the total curriculum, as exemplified in the South Australian core curriculum. In this model the core may be incorporated in a variety of ways, the only requirement being that, however the curriculum is structured, the core learnings must be covered. A fourth possible model, which has not had much currency in the debate to date but offers considerable promise for resolving some of the more persistent difficulties in integrating core studies into the total program, might be termed the generative core. In this model the core provides a base or starting point for a variety of studies and inquiries, and the total curriculum becomes a series of movements in and out of the core. No doubt, with a little imagination, other models could be devised for integrating common learnings into a variety of programs, once such common learnings are identified and agreed upon. It is only a lack of imagination that equates the concept of a common or core curriculum with uniformity.

A further area of conflict lies in the unit of analysis and definition to be employed in formulating a common or core curriculum. In what terms should the core be defined? While definition in terms of ‘core subjects’ does not have much currency among curriculum developers, it is the unit of analysis most commonly encountered in practice in the schools, even where curriculum guidelines are differently conceptualised, and is the one employed in the initial formulation of the British core curriculum (United Kingdom, 1987; Flude & Hammer, 1990). Closely allied to this is definition in terms of ‘core areas’, such as Language and Communication, Science and Technology, or Social Education, an approach generally employed in policy documents at system level in Australia, but, as we have seen, often circumvented in practice at the school level. Definition in terms of ‘core content’ – using that term in its widest sense to include skills, values, and attitudes as well as subject matter – seems to be an assumption underlying much of the argument surrounding a centrally determined core curriculum. This is the approach adopted in the Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia (Australian Education Council, 1989), although noticeably absent from the initial formulation of the British core curriculum (United Kingdom, 1987). Definition in terms of ‘core’ themes, problems, or issues does not appear to have much currency in
the Australian context, but is often encountered in overseas discussions
of core curriculum, especially American. Another approach sometimes
encountered is definition in terms of 'core processes', such as problem
solving, thinking, or communicating, which underpin learning and in-
tellectual activity and have an 'across the curriculum' focus, as in the
South Australian core curriculum. Somewhat similar to these, but more
pragmatic, is definition in terms of basic competencies (cf. Finn, 1991;
Carmichael, 1992; Mayer, 1992). At its narrowest this approach finds
expression in the 'back to basics' position, but it can involve a much
broader view of competence. Somewhat allied to this is definition in
terms of performance criteria, or even of precise tasks to be mastered.
The latter is favoured by those whose interest in the core curriculum is
allied to an interest in some form of monitoring or assessment, and is
also evident in the development of the attainment levels associated with
the British core curriculum and the 'outcome statements' that provide
the basis of the Australian national assessment profiles.

Many of these structural differences have their root causes in the last
and most important area of conflict, the purpose and function of a com-
mon core curriculum. Why are we defining a common core, and what
do we expect it to do?

Figure 3.2 presents a classification of a number of positions commonly
encountered in the debate on core curriculum over the past two decades
in Australia. There is no suggestion that the classification is exhaustive
or definitive, but it does provide a useful starting point for our discus-
sion of conflicting conceptions of the purpose and function of a com-
mon core curriculum and their implications for the development of a
common curriculum framework for Australian schools. The table
categorises nine positions identifiable in the debate to date, classified
according to their differing assumptions concerning purpose and func-
tion. These nine positions are grouped into three broad orientations
which might be considered as constituting essentially different ideo-
logical perspectives on the purpose and function of a common core cur-
riculum.

The first of these broad ideological orientations has been designated
administrative, since it stems mainly from concerns at system level; in
particular, a concern with assessment as a means of curriculum control.
The requirements of assessment thus tend to become the basis for defi-
nition, though they are unlikely to constitute the sole consideration. Two
positions are identified within this administrative orientation: a cre-
dentialist position and a centralist position.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orientation</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Function</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A ADMINISTRATIVE</td>
<td>1 CREDENTIALIST</td>
<td>certification</td>
<td>comparability/selection</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 CENTRALIST</td>
<td>regulating/monitoring</td>
<td>accountability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B ACADEMIC</td>
<td>3 ELITIST</td>
<td>tertiary preparation</td>
<td>maintenance of academic standards</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4 UTILITARIAN</td>
<td>literacy and numeracy</td>
<td>maintenance of basic standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C SOCIO-CULTURAL</td>
<td>5 POLITICAL</td>
<td>citizenship</td>
<td>maintenance of the social order</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6 CULTURAL</td>
<td>cultural transmission</td>
<td>maintenance of the common culture</td>
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<td></td>
<td>7 ECONOMIC</td>
<td>vocational preparation</td>
<td>maintenance of the workforce</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>8 FUNCTIONAL</td>
<td>preparation for adult life</td>
<td>developing a more competent society</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>9 ETHICAL</td>
<td>social justice/equity</td>
<td>developing a more equitable society</td>
</tr>
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**Figure 3.2** Conflicting Conceptions of the Core: Purpose and Function

The *credentialist* position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is certification, and its function is to ensure comparability as an aid to selection. Its proponents are likely to emphasise the perceived demands of employers and tertiary institutions; its detractors the restrictive effect it has on the school curriculum. Its basis for definition of the core is that part of the course of study which will be externally examined or monitored. This use of the term 'core' has little in common with other positions, and has not been prominent in the debate until recently. It has, however, re-emerged as a significant element in the debate over
proposals to extend the concept of a common core curriculum to the post-compulsory years of secondary schooling (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987: 94-97), and more recent pressures from industry and the trade union movement for competency-based assessment (Finn, 1991; Carmichael, 1992; Mayer, 1992).

The centralist position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is the regulation and/or monitoring of the system, and its function is system accountability. Its proponents are likely to emphasise the perceived requirements of the system to be accountable for the expenditure of taxpayers' money; its detractors the restrictive effect it is likely to have on the school curriculum and the dangers of uniformity. Its basis for definition is likely to be performance criteria and/or performance tasks amenable to large-scale testing, although commonly these will also be influenced by other considerations. The focus of attention on the national assessment profiles - in comparison, for example, with the relative lack of attention paid to the national curriculum statements and the national goals - is a current manifestation of this position, as is the recent proliferation of large-scale testing programs in the state and territory systems, for example the Basic Skills Testing Program in New South Wales and the Learning Assessment Project in Victoria.

The second broad ideological orientation has been designated academic, since it stems mainly from a concern with maintaining standards, often perceived to be either declining or under threat. Two positions are identified within this academic orientation: an elitist position and a utilitarian position.

The term 'elitist' is not used here in a pejorative sense, but rather to suggest that the concern in defining the core is with standards of entry to tertiary education and with the needs of that group of students who will be seeking entry to tertiary institutions. The elitist position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is tertiary preparation, and its function is the maintenance of academic standards. Its proponents are likely to emphasise the pursuit of excellence; its detractors the needs of the majority of students. Its basis for definition of the core is likely to be the provision of a good grounding in the academic disciplines. A current manifestation of this position has been the struggle to retain the integrity of the traditional academic subjects within the Key Learning Areas, even at the cost of the integrity of the Key Learning Areas themselves.

The utilitarian position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is the attainment of literacy and numeracy, and its function is the maintenance of basic standards. Its proponents are likely to emphasise 'back to basics' and the conviction that standards of reading, writing and
computation have declined; its detractors the limited view of education it implies. Its basis for definition of the core is 'the three Rs': the provision of a sound basic training in reading, writing, and number. This position is always with us, particularly in the media, but may not have as strong a currency in local school communities as is sometimes supposed (McGaw, Piper, Banks & Evans, 1992).

The third broad ideological orientation has been designated socio-cultural, since it stems mainly from concerns relating to the perceived needs of the society, and/or of the individual within the society. Five positions are identified within this socio-cultural orientation: a political position, a cultural position, an economic position, a functional position and an ethical position.

The political position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is training for citizenship, and its function is the maintenance of the social order. Its proponents are likely to emphasise the preservation of 'the Australian way of life' and the democratic tradition; its detractors that it is open to the charge of indoctrination and lacks the rigour of traditional academic studies. Its basis for definition of the core is the structure and ideology of the prevailing political institutions. Recent calls at the national level for an increased focus on citizenship education are a current manifestation of this position (Australia, 1989; 1991; Macintyre, 1994).

The cultural position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is cultural transmission, and its function is the maintenance of the common culture. Its proponents are likely to emphasise the responsibility of each generation to transmit and advance the cultural tradition, and the importance of the common culture to social cohesion; its detractors the difficulty of defining a common culture in a pluralist society. Its basis for definition of the core is the common culture, usually defined in terms of the intellectual tradition. The core curriculum project mounted by the national Curriculum Development Centre in the late 1970s was strongly identified with this position (Curriculum Development Centre, 1980).

The economic position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is vocational preparation, and its function is the maintenance of the workforce. Its proponents are likely to emphasise economic growth and the needs of the workforce; its detractors, its limited view of education as narrow vocationalism. Its basis for definition of the core is the perceived needs of the workforce, usually defined in terms of the interests of employers. This position has taken on a new significance in the current debate with the importance attached in Commonwealth
government policy to the instrumentalist role of education in economic restructuring (Dawkins, 1988; Finn, 1991; Carmichael, 1992; Mayer, 1992).

The functional position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is preparation for adult life, and its function is the development of a more competent and self-reliant society. Its proponents are likely to emphasise the maximisation of life chances and life choices for each student; its detractors the danger of trivialisation of the curriculum. Its basis for definition of the core is the particular competencies required for coping effectively with adult life-roles. This position was prominent in the educational reform movement of the 1970s (Karmel, 1973; Piper, 1977) and more recently in the concept of the ‘essential curriculum’ (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987; Ryan & Davy, 1989).

The ethical position is a relative newcomer to the debate on a common core curriculum, and is the product of an increasing concern over the past decade with the role of schooling in the reproduction of social inequities. The ethical position is that the purpose of the core curriculum is social justice and equity, and its function is the development of a more just and equitable society. Its proponents are likely to emphasise the inequitable outcomes of schooling for many students; its detractors the virtues of competition and the concept of merit. Recent calls for the establishment of an ‘entitlement curriculum’ (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1989a) are a current manifestation of this position.

It is the nature of educational debate that arguments are rarely encountered in their pure form, and it is not unusual in statements on the core curriculum to find elements of a number of the positions identified here lying, sometimes uneasily, together. This is particularly true of statements of public or institutional policy, which typically reflect the compromises of committees and the lobbying of special interest groups. There is then no suggestion that the positions identified are exclusive. Nor is it claimed that they are exhaustive of the possible or actual positions adopted in the current debate. Rather, they should be seen as signposts in the debate, as aids to the exploration of a difficult and tangled terrain; not as providing a definitive map of the territory.

A Question of Content: Some Unresolved Issues

The fundamental dimensions of difference relating to the content of a common or core curriculum are not, however, issues of content selection and formulation, as formidable as those issues may be. Rather they
arise from conflicting conceptions of the nature of knowledge, how it is transmitted, and how it is acquired; that is, they are issues of epistemology, pedagogy, and the theories of human learning, and, in particular, conflicting assumptions about these that profoundly influence curriculum practice. An illuminating background to these dimensions of difference is provided by the work of Young (1981) and Sturman (1989) on teacher epistemologies and their relationship to teaching practice. My own work on curriculum style (Piper, 1979a; 1983a; 1995) is also relevant.

Perhaps the most penetrating insight into the effects of these differences on practice, however, is provided by Berlak and Berlak (1981) in their seminal study of British primary schools. They identified sixteen dimensions of difference by which it was possible to classify the practice of the teachers in their study. They categorised these dimensions as ‘dilemmas’ and classified them into three sets – control dilemmas, curriculum dilemmas and societal dilemmas. Four of these dilemmas are selected here for further discussion as being of particular relevance to our concerns in this chapter.

Public Knowledge v Personal Knowledge

If we pause to consider our own knowledge, we will find it consists of two somewhat different kinds: a public knowledge which we share with others, acquired in public institutions or through public media, and a personal knowledge, acquired through experience as a result of our efforts to make sense of our world and the events of our lives. Sometimes these two forms of knowledge are in harmony, sometimes in conflict; sometimes they co-exist in an uneasy alliance. If we ask ourselves which of the two kinds of knowledge we value most, in our work, in our lives, in our personhood, or if we ask ourselves which is more basic or essential to the effective conduct of our lives, we enter into the essence of the public knowledge v personal knowledge dilemma.

Berlak and Berlak (1981: 144) neatly summarise the dilemma in its pedagogical context:

This dilemma represents, in its most general form, a cleavage in the western tradition over what is worthwhile and adequate knowledge. On the one hand, teachers are drawn towards the position that worthwhile knowledge consists of the accumulated traditions of the ages, traditions which have a value external to and independent of the knower. On the other hand, teachers are drawn towards the position that the value of knowledge is established through its relationship to the knower.
The dilemma is further complicated by the recognition on the part of many teachers that public, external knowledge only becomes meaningful, and hence useable, when it is internalised, integrated, or at least reconciled with personal knowledge. This is the distinction we often make between knowing something and understanding it, what I have referred to elsewhere as realisation, 'the ability to integrate new knowledge with previously acquired knowledge, and use knowledge creatively to generate original thought' (Piper, 1976: 58).

The public knowledge position on this dimension of difference is represented at its crudest by the 'back to basics' push, and at a more sophisticated level by the classical humanists and such writers as R.S. Peters (1966), whose view of education is as a process of initiation into the academic disciplines. The personal knowledge position is represented by the so-called 'progressive' writers of the 1950s and 1960s such as A.S. Neill (1962), Carl Rogers (1969) and John Holt (1969; 1970). One position is a view of learning as an 'outside in' process; the other as an 'inside out' process. The distinction is akin to the etic–emic distinction sometimes made by anthropologists:

Etic definitions are imposed by people outside a setting or situation. Emic definitions are those held by the participants themselves and reflect their native conceptual and categorical system.

(Bloome, 1989: 9)

John Dewey, sometimes called the father of progressivism, understood what some of his followers (and many of his critics!) have failed to understand: that personal knowledge can act as a bridge to public knowledge:

To the one who is learned, subject matter is extensive, accurately defined, and logically interrelated. To the one who is learning it is partial, and connected through his personal occupations. The problem of teaching is to keep the experience of the student moving in the direction of what the expert already knows.

(Dewey, 1966: 183–184)

Berlak and Berlak refer to such resolutions – resolutions which relate the two horns of the dilemma in a creative and constructive way rather than treating them as oppositional – as 'transformational' resolutions.

Knowledge as Content v Knowledge as Process

If we consider our own knowledge from a somewhat different perspective, we can again identify knowledge of two somewhat different kinds:
a body of information, which could be described as 'knowing that . . . ', and a set of skills and techniques, which could be described as 'knowing how . . . ', what practical people sometimes refer to as a distinction between knowledge and know-how. Normally in our everyday lives these two kinds of knowledge complement each other; but if again we pause to ask ourselves which kind of knowledge we most value, or which is more basic or essential to the effective conduct of our lives, we enter into the essence of the knowledge as content v knowledge as process dilemma.

The curriculum and pedagogical effects of this dilemma are summarised by Resnick (1987: 48–49):

Thinking skills tend to be driven out of the curriculum by ever-growing demands for teaching larger and larger bodies of knowledge. The idea that knowledge must be acquired first and that its application to reasoning and problem solving can be delayed is a persistent one in educational thinking. ‘Hierarchies’ of educational objectives, although intended to promote attention to higher order skills, paradoxically feed this belief by suggesting that knowledge acquisition is a first stage in a sequence of educational goals. The relative ease of assessing people’s knowledge, as opposed to their thought processes, further feeds this tendency in educational practice.

Periodically, educators resist this pressure by proposing that various forms of process- or skill-oriented teaching replace knowledge-oriented instruction. In the past, this has often led to a severe deemphasis of basic subject matter knowledge. This, in turn, has had the effect of alienating many subject matter specialists, creating pendulum swings of educational opinion in which knowledge-oriented and process-oriented programs periodically displace each other, and delaying any serious resolution of the knowledge-process paradox.

The dilemma is further complicated by divisions within the knowledge as content position as to whether the content should be principally factual and informative or whether it should be principally conceptual and integrative, and within the knowledge as process position as to whether processes are general and applicable across the curriculum, or whether they are differential and specific to particular disciplines: dilemmas within dilemmas, as it were. A further complication arises from the fact that it is not always easy to distinguish the two positions simply on the basis of the relative emphasis placed on the teaching of skills, since it is possible to treat skills as content: the teaching of mathematical skills through algorithms, for example, or the teaching of inquiry skills as a set of routine procedures.
The knowledge as content position on this dimension of difference is represented at its crudest by the rote memorisation of textbook summaries or notes from the blackboard, and more reasonably by a view of curriculum in which the importance of skill development is recognised, but the major emphasis is on the content of learning.

An extreme knowledge as process position leads to the neglect or trivialisation of content, but is represented more reasonably by a view of curriculum in which content knowledge is a means to an end rather than an end in itself.

The distinction is essentially one between learning as a passive, receptive process, and learning as an active, productive process; or, to put it a little more colourfully, between learning as a noun and learning as a verb.

In some ways the dilemma is an artificial one. Processes are seldom engaged in for their own sake; more commonly they are a means towards some end, and frequently the end of communicating, inquiring, reasoning, or problem solving is the acquisition of content knowledge. Processes are not simply things to be learned; they are ways of learning, of acquiring knowledge, and herein lies the possibility for transformational resolution. Knowledge can present learners with an ordered and organised view of their world; or it can present them with a method for organising their own experience of the world. In practice, of course, it can do both; but to the extent that the world which learners inhabit is different from the world which they will inhabit in later life, that part of the learning which consists of an ordered and organised view of the world will tend to become obsolete, and the more permanent and lasting value will tend to lie with that part of the learning which consists of knowledge as a method of ordering and organising experience. It is sometimes forgotten, too, in the wistful romanticism of the conservative ascendancy, that the reaction against the traditional curriculum in the late 1950s and early 1960s was a reaction against its intellectual poverty, in which 'excellence' was realised in feats of memory and an undifferentiated capacity for recycling the thoughts of others, rather than in the capacity to use knowledge as a springboard for independent thought (Bruner, 1960).

Knowledge as Given v Knowledge as Problematic

Whether truth exists independently of the interpretation we put on it; whether we should accept the word of expert authority, or be sceptical; whether there is an objective truth, single and unequivocal, or a multi-
plicity of truths: these are questions we have all grappled with from
time to time, and it is the tension which lies at the heart of such ques-
tions that is reflected in the knowledge as given v knowledge as problematic
dilemma.

Postman (1988: 21-22) summarises the working out of this dilemma
in the history of educational thought:

The idea that schooling should make the young compliant and easily
accessible to the prejudices of their society is an old and venerable
tradition. This function of education was clearly advocated by our two
earliest and greatest curriculum specialists, Confucius and Plato. Their
writings created the tradition that requires educators to condition the
young to believe what they are told, in the way they are told it.

But the matter does not rest there. We are fortunate to have available an
alternative tradition that gives us the authority to educate our students
to disbelieve or at least to be skeptical of the prejudices of their elders.
We can locate the origins of this tradition in some fragments from Cicero,
who remarked that the purpose of education is to free the student from
the tyranny of the present. We find elaborations of this point of view in
Descartes, Bacon, Vico, Goethe, and Jefferson. And we find its modern
resonances in John Dewey, Freud, and Bertrand Russell.

This dilemma has some features in common with the two preceding
dilemmas, and there is some danger of confusing them. A public know-
ledge position, however, does not necessarily imply a knowledge as given
position – it may, for example, view knowledge as socially and/or cul-
turally constructed, as distinct from personally constructed. So, too, a
knowledge as process position does not necessarily imply ‘a critical stance
towards the processes themselves, nor towards the knowledge gained
through them’ (Berlak & Berlak, 1981: 147).

A knowledge as given position on this dimension of difference is that
knowledge comes from without and is sanctioned by authority –
whether the authority of the church, the state, the discipline, or ‘natural
laws’ – and is represented at its crudest by centrally prescribed syllab-
buses reinforced by school inspection and public examinations. The
knowledge as problematic position, by contrast, is that knowledge is
pluralistic, constructed, provisional and tentative, and there is an em-
phasis on the need to submit all knowledge, whatever its source, to
critical examination. The distinction is essentially one between a view
of learning as an unquestioning, acquiescent, dependent process and
one of it as a sceptical, critical, independent process, and is neatly
encapsulated in Bruner’s (1974: 132) distinction between ‘knowers’ and
‘seekers’:
Knowers are valuers of firm declarative statements about the state of things. Seekers regard such statements as invitations to speculation and doubt.

Paradoxically, while the knowledge as problematic position has been a central tenet of the academic tradition itself, the knowledge as given position has been equally central to the 'academic' tradition of schooling.

In seeking a transformational resolution of the knowledge as given v knowledge as problematic dilemma it might be productive to address ourselves to the question of how in fact knowledge grows – through a process of transmission and accumulation, or through a process of reinterpretation and critical review. Popper (1963: 129–130) has addressed this question in relation to scientific knowledge (cf. also Kuhn, 1970):

It is necessary for us to see that of the two main ways in which we may explain the growth of science, one is rather unimportant and the other is important. The first explains science by the accumulation of knowledge: it is like a growing library (or a museum). As more and more books accumulate, so more and more knowledge accumulates. The other explains it by criticism: it grows by a more revolutionary method than accumulation – by a method which destroys, changes, and alters the whole thing, including its most important instrument, the language in which our myths and theories are formulated . . . If science could grow by mere accumulation, it would not matter so much if the scientific tradition were lost, because any day you could start accumulating afresh. Something would be lost, but the loss would not be serious. If, however, science advances by the tradition of changing its traditional myths, then you need something with which to start. If you have nothing to alter and to change, you can never get anywhere. Thus you need two beginnings for science: new myths, and a new tradition for changing them critically.

If we accept Popper's argument, then an effective curriculum for the advancement of knowledge requires both a thorough understanding of the current myths (knowledge as given) and a well-developed intellectual capacity for changing them critically (knowledge as problematic).

Knowledge as Molar v Knowledge as Molecular

In our efforts to make sense of our world, it sometimes happens that we 'can't see the wood for the trees'. But there are also occasions when we can't see the trees for the wood. If we ask ourselves which of these incomplete forms of knowing is the most valuable – seeing the trees as
a first stage in getting to know the wood, or seeing the wood as a first stage in getting to know the trees – whether, in other words, it is better to move from the whole towards an understanding of the parts or from the parts towards an understanding of the whole, we enter into the essence of the knowledge as molar v knowledge as molecular dilemma.

The knowledge as molar position on this dimension of difference is that knowledge is global, contextualised and relational, with an emphasis on overall meaning. The knowledge as molecular position is that knowledge is analytical, incremental and sequential, with an emphasis on the mastery of components. The distinction is neatly illustrated in the controversy surrounding English language teaching between the traditional grammar-based approach and the currently more favoured 'whole language' approach. The 'new orthodoxy', as it is sometimes referred to, adopts a strongly knowledge as molar approach on this dimension of difference:

Language is learnt naturally and systematically in use where the learner is an active participant. Language is not constructed incrementally by assembling parts. It is a resource which grows for the learner as that person interacts with other people to make meaning.

(Eagleson, Horvath & Rothery, 1979: 329)

This contrasts with the strongly knowledge as molecular position adopted by the traditional approach to English language education based on the view:

... that student performance in written composition will be improved by their working through a large number of drill exercises, even if these are based upon very small pieces of language that have no wider context of meaning. Some also assume that explicit instruction in the terminology of traditional grammar and systematic practice in the analysis of language according to the rules of traditional grammar will result in marked improvements in student written language performance.

(Carr, 1979: 3)

Perhaps more than any of the other identified dilemmas, positions on this dimension of difference are intimately tied up with theories of learning, in this case between a position which views learning as a 'top down' process, moving from the whole to the parts, and one which views it as a 'bottom up' process, moving from the parts to the whole. Claxton and Murrell (1987: 75–76), in reviewing the research on preferred learning styles, make this connection explicit:
These two epistemologies [i.e. separate knowing v connected knowing] are clearly reminiscent of the two fundamental orientations that Kirby, Hale-Benson, and others have identified. Splitters, field-independents, serialists, and abstract, analytical learners are more in the objectivist mode of knowing, and lumpers, field sensitives, holists, and concrete learners are more in the relational mode. Thus, it appears a major stream of research on learning styles deals in one way or another with learners' preferences for one of the two ways of knowing.

Interestingly this dualism also surfaces in neurological research in the functioning of the left and right hemispheres of the brain (Springer & Deutsch, 1989; Atkins, 1993):

... it seems that we all use two distinctly different forms of processing information – a holistic, pattern making process called 'right brain' processing which focuses on the forest, and a logical, analytical processing called 'left brain' processing which focuses on the trees.

(Atkins, 1993: 11)

In concluding their review of the research on learning styles, Claxton and Murrell call for educational practices that will 'honor both analytic and relational knowing', arguing that such a resolution would contribute not only to more effective learning, but also to greater social cohesion and community understanding. Arnheim (1985: 94) arrives at a similar conclusion on the basis of the research on cognition. He argues that in order to grapple with the huge variety of structures in the broad field of human knowledge, the human mind employs two distinct cognitive procedures: intuitive perception – the ability to 'perceive the overall structure of configurations' – and intellectual analysis – the ability to 'abstract the character of entities and events from individual contexts'. He goes on to argue that:

Intuition and intellect do not operate separately but require each other's co-operation in almost every case. In education, to neglect the one in favour of the other or to keep them apart cannot but cripple the minds we are trying to assist in their growth.

How a common curriculum framework might accommodate the reconciliation of what have traditionally been antipathetic approaches is a challenge yet to be faced. In the past curriculum guidelines, frameworks, and support materials tend to have been locked into one camp or the other, to be implemented by the faithful, rejected by the apostates, and ignored or selectively adapted by the majority. Whether the all-too-human proclivity for factionalism on this particular dimension of
difference is endemic or remediable is an open question, but one well worth exploring in the pursuit of curriculum reform.

Patterns of Difference

The patterns of resolution of these dilemmas determine the epistemological dimension of curriculum provision, in that decisions on the resolution of one of the dilemmas tend to determine the pattern of resolution on the others. Thus we might expect that a public knowledge resolution of the public knowledge v personal knowledge dilemma might tend towards a pattern of resolution in the direction of knowledge as content and knowledge as given. Berlak and Berlak's data, however, suggest that the issue is much more complex than this, and that while patterns of resolution do occur (and recur) and thus provide a basis for the analysis of classroom practice, they do not seem to do so in any necessarily deterministic or predictable fashion. As my own research on curriculum practice (Piper, 1979a; 1983a; 1995) shows, it is a practical orientation towards what works in the classroom, rather than any carefully articulated and consistent theoretical position, that determines teachers' practical resolution of such dilemmas, and will determine their selection, interpretation and transmission of curriculum content.

Conclusion

Clearly, then, the task of defining both the style and the content of a common national core curriculum for Australian schools presents a formidable challenge to the curriculum reform process, a task not adequately addressed in the quasi-national curriculum statements in their current form. It is not a task that can be accomplished in a year or two – perhaps even in a decade or two – and it is to be hoped that the impatience of the political pragmatists and the economic rationalists will not condemn the process and the nation to a series of quick fixes and expedient compromises. Central to the success of the enterprise, however, is an ongoing and informed public debate that can help move the national will towards creative, if temporary, resolution of the more persistent dilemmas underlying the issues; temporary, because it is of the nature of the issues that they can never be permanently resolved but must be constantly reassessed in the light of changing needs and circumstances.
At present opinion is divided about the subjects of education. All do not take the same view about what should be learned by the young, either with a view to plain goodness or with a view to the best life possible; nor is opinion clear whether education should be directed mainly to the understanding, or mainly to moral character. If we look at actual practice, the result is sadly confusing; it throws no light on the problem whether the proper studies to be followed are those which are useful in life, or those which make for goodness, or those which advance the bounds of knowledge. Each sort of study receives some votes in its favour.

Despite an occasional quaintness of phrase, these words – from Aristotle, in the fourth century BC – have a curiously modern ring to them, and an enduring relevance. It is almost as if each new generation must reinvent the curriculum wheel before it can repair its chariot. It is the perception of a rather rickety chariot in urgent need of an overhaul that has prompted this review.
Disciplines and Bondage: The Search for a Practical Framework

Changing the curriculum entails all the physical and psychological difficulties of shifting a cemetery.

Logan Wilson

There is an important sense in which the structure and organisation of the curriculum is an integral element in curriculum reform, since it can in a very practical way inhibit or enhance the prospects for effective implementation. But there is also a sense in which it is inimical to reform, not only because structures, once established, are notoriously resistant to change, but also because arguments over structure and organisation can so easily divert attention from the real issues of reform. Indeed structural change can be, and often is, seen as a diversionary substitute for substantive reform. The typical response of Australian education to pressures for change has been to restructure. Such restructuring often creates considerable turmoil within the system, giving an impression of rapid and significant change, but typically has very little effect on what teachers teach and what students learn in classrooms. Hence the tendency for the same issues to recur, and the endemic urge to restructure in an effort to lay them to rest (Boyd, 1978, 1984; Cuban, 1989). Importantly, too, such restructuring tends to absorb enormous amounts of energy and resources which might more profitably have been employed in addressing more directly the issues which gave rise to the pressures for reform in the first place.
It is therefore important in reviewing in this chapter the structural issues underlying curriculum reform in Australian schools not to be seduced into seeing structural reform as an end in itself, or as an adequate substitute for tackling the more fundamental issues of purpose and direction that lie at the heart of the reform process. Unless we are prepared to address these issues, structural reform in itself is unlikely to have much impact on the quality of teaching and learning in our schools. That said, however, it is often difficult, and always unwise, to draw too clear a distinction between structure and function. It is rare that substantive reform can take place without a corresponding change in structures.

Notwithstanding the efforts of employers and the vocational training sector to have key competencies recognised as common structural organisers for the curriculum across education and training sectors (Finn, 1991; Carmichael, 1992; Mayer, 1992), principally in the interests of a more uniform approach to assessment and certification, the most important structural issue underlying curriculum reform in Australian schools continues to be, as it has been for the past decade or more, the struggle between traditional subjects and learning areas for control of the organisational structure of the school curriculum, particularly at the secondary level. Hannan (1992: 29) records the disruptive effect of this unresolved conflict on the development of the national collaborative curriculum statements, in particular the statements on the arts, health, technology, and studies of society and environment:

Each area... is therefore the focus of argument over whether it should be described from the point of view of its diverse content and approaches or whether it should be somehow pulled together into a single coherent subject [sic]. The first, dubbed the ‘disciplines’ approach because it contains strands called history, music, physical education and the like, is seen by some as hidebound and an invitation to the subject empires to stick to their old ways... The alternative approach, the so-called ‘conceptual’ approach, which divides the area into segments called ‘time’ or ‘place’ or some such, is seen by its doubters to be spinning the curriculum into the blue yonder... As I write this, the arguments are still raging, and ingenious compromise is being sought.

It was no doubt in Hannan’s interests, as a member of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee executive, to play down the seriousness of this rift; but in doing so he manages to gloss over, and in effect to misrepresent, the real issue at the heart of the dispute: whether the Key Learning Areas were to be conceptualised and defined as learning areas, or whether they could be somehow represented as traditional
subjects in disguise. There were those who saw the latter position as a threat to the integrity of the learning areas themselves, and hence as an improper basis for compromise, however ingenious. The failure of the national collaborative curriculum process to resolve this issue unequivocally seriously limits the potential effectiveness of the national curriculum statements, and hence their capacity in their present form to influence the direction of curriculum reform in Australian schools. It is not the job of a review such as this to attempt to redress this failure, but there is an obligation to attempt to clarify the bases of the dispute that produced it.

Curriculum Organisation:
The Structural Dimension

Over the past decade or more all Australian state systems have switched from traditional subjects to learning areas as the basic structural organisers for the school curriculum, at least during the compulsory years of schooling. At its April 1991 meeting the Australian Education Council endorsed the eight Key Learning Areas of the national collaborative curriculum development process – English; mathematics; science; languages other than English; the arts; technology; studies of society and environment; and health, including physical education and personal development – as common and agreed learning areas across all state and territory systems. Thus these eight learning areas now constitute, ostensibly at least, the official basic framework for curriculum development and delivery in all Australian state and territory systems. While this significant change has been evident at the policy level, however, it has not always been reflected in curriculum practice at the school level, particularly in secondary schools, and herein lies the root cause of the conflict and confusion that has beset the national collaborative curriculum process. Old habits die hard, and some states (or at least their representatives on the Curriculum and Assessment Committee) were reluctant to accept the full implications of the switch to learning areas. Hence the pressures on the development teams for ‘ingenious compromise’; and hence too the confusions and inconsistencies evident in most of the national curriculum statements and profiles in their current form.

The reasons for the shift from traditional subjects to learning areas are complex, and no doubt vary somewhat from system to system, but
they do constitute a significant element in a more general move over the past decade, both in Australia and overseas, targeted at improving the quality of curriculum provision in schools (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987; Dawkins, 1988; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1989a; Australian Education Council, 1989). Pressures for change came from a number of different directions. By the beginning of the 1980s the expanding curriculum, brought about by the rapid increase in new knowledge and increasing pressures on schools to take on new responsibilities outside their traditional role – environmental education, multicultural education, computer education, drug education, driver education, to name only a few of the more prominent – had become the overcrowded curriculum, otherwise known as ‘the smorgasbord curriculum’ or ‘the shopping mall curriculum’. The pressures placed on the school timetable by the creation of new ‘subjects’ – and such new demands typically required the creation of new subjects – and the consequent reduction in the time available for traditional subjects had resulted in a fragmented curriculum bursting at the seams. It had become imperative to find a more manageable and efficient way of organising school knowledge than that provided by the traditional subject structure.

At the same time, and from a quite different direction, research on learning was increasingly emphasising the importance of the connectedness of students’ learning experiences to effective learning, particularly in conceptual development and metacognition (learning how to learn). This produced a demand for greater coherence in the school curriculum, both in terms of the continuity of learning experiences from grade to grade (vertical integration), and in terms of the coordination of curriculum elements across subjects or programs within grades (horizontal integration). The development of P-10 or P-12 curriculum frameworks in a number of state systems, typically defined in terms of broad learning areas, was a direct response to these pressures. An increasing awareness, too, of the importance of cross-curriculum intellectual processes such as investigating, reasoning, communicating, problem solving and the like to effective learning, together with an increasing emphasis on active student learning and the acceptance by students of responsibility for their own learning, produced a demand for curriculum structures that would better facilitate the incorporation of these processes into the curriculum than that provided by the traditional subject structure.

More generally, the ubiquity and rapidity of social and technological change, together with a new-found sense of urgency in the need to
respond to change if we were to become ‘the clever country’ in an increasingly competitive global economy, created a demand for curriculum structures that would be more flexible and responsive to change than the relatively rigid structures of the traditional curriculum. Similarly, a new emphasis on the formulation of broad and inclusive goals for education – inclusive both in the sense of providing access to a wider range of students and of providing access to a wider range of knowledge, particularly new knowledge which cut across traditional subject boundaries – produced a demand for curriculum structures that would facilitate a more direct translation of goals into practice.

The important point to be made here is that learning areas, insofar as they meet these pressures for change, are not simply aggregations of existing subjects, but a fundamentally different approach to restructuring the curriculum in ways more appropriate to the perceived needs of the society and the individual student. The issue is not whether one set of classification categories is better than the other – by all means let that debate continue, because it is an important and substantial one – but that they are distinctive taxonomic systems, based on different principles of classification and different classification categories, and are thus not logically capable of definition in each other’s terms, at least not without distortion and considerable confusion. Both draw on academic disciplines, but in different ways, the one more or less directly, the other indirectly. Both draw on similar bodies of knowledge, skills, processes, methodologies, and the like, but they do so in different ways, the one emphasising interconnectedness, flexibility and the integration of knowledge, the other distinctiveness, fixed boundaries and the segmentation of knowledge. The failure to grasp, or perhaps to accept, these distinctions continues to produce a confused and confusing disjunction between policy and practice at school, system, and now at the national level, and constitutes a major impediment to effective curriculum reform in Australia’s schools.

Curriculum Organisation: The Political Dimension

The school curriculum has always been a contentious battleground for political ideology. That this should be so should be neither surprising nor reprehensible, embodying, as it does, the aspirations of the society for its youth, and hence for its future; and being required, as it is, to
balance competing needs and interests: the needs and interests of the individual against the needs and interests of the society; the needs and interests of the local community against the needs and interests of the nation; the needs and interests of the workforce against the needs and interests of the culture; and so we could go on. There is thus a certain naivety in complaints of ‘political interference’ or ‘social engineering’ when issues of curriculum reform are broached. Providing as it does the principal means of socialising the young into the life and culture of the society, schooling, and in particular the school curriculum, has always been, and will continue to be, an instrument of social engineering, a proposition as true of conservative pressures for social maintenance as it is of progressive pressures for reform. Recognising their political and ideological bases may not help resolve the conflicts impeding curriculum reform in Australian schools, but it does help to clarify them, surely a necessary first step towards any potential resolution. Equally importantly, it can serve to undercut the rhetoric of the professional lobbyists by focusing the debate on the underlying sources of conflict.

We have, of course, in our discussions to date frequently found ourselves enmeshed in the politics of curriculum reform, and in particular the impediments to that process posed by the politics of federalism. These, however, are macro issues. In this chapter we will be concerned more with the micropolitics of curriculum reform, the clash of vested interests and conflicting purposes that bedevil the reform process itself.

As was argued earlier, it is both difficult and dangerous to draw too fine a distinction between form and function, even for the purpose of introducing greater clarity into the analysis. The experience of many academic disciplines, particularly among the social sciences, attests to the closeness and complexity of this relationship, although this should not be taken to imply a narrow determinism. Form tends to be a reflection of function; function of purpose; and purpose of ideology; but there is no simple formula for establishing the linkages. The shift from traditional subjects to learning areas brought with it a new focus and a new brief. The new focus was the learning area, the new brief was inclusivity, the integration of learning, and relevance. One effect of this was to enhance the role of academic disciplines historically neglected in the traditional curriculum – the social and behavioural sciences, philosophy, linguistics, cybernetics, to name a few – at the expense of the established high-status subjects. The results of this shift in the power structure aroused predictable antagonism from subject associations,
university academics, and others who saw their hegemony threatened by curriculum change.

It would, of course, be unfair to see the issue solely in terms of territoriality and self-interest. Many teachers of the traditional subjects have a strong loyalty and commitment to their subject, and a strong conviction of its educational relevance and value, and see any threat to its status in the curriculum as an attack on educational standards. Indeed, they would probably not be good teachers if they did not. But it would equally be a mistake to underestimate the importance of self-interest, territoriality, the career aspirations of teachers, and the departmental structure and culture of secondary schools in contributing to the intractability of the issue.

A concern for standards is a predictable conservative response to the threat of change, which is not to suggest that it is a trivial or a contrived response. Indeed it is a view often held with deep conviction, whether or not it is supported by evidence. In the context of the debate on curriculum structure, however, the issue of standards is something of a red herring, since standards are a product of the conceptualisation and implementation of the curriculum, not of its organisational categories. Integrated, interdisciplinary programs can be intellectually challenging – as indeed they often are – and a traditional subject label does not automatically confer intellectual substance on a course of study. It is well to remember in the current spate of curriculum stereotyping that the original pressures for curriculum reform in the 1960s were as much a reaction against the intellectual poverty of the traditional curriculum as they were against its lack of relevance (Bruner, 1960; 1974). It is well to remember, too, that much of the intellectual substance in current curricula in the traditional subjects is, ironically, a direct result of those same pressures for curriculum reform that are now challenging the traditional subjects not simply to reform their habits but to redefine their role in a more relevant curriculum structure.

The working out of these tensions in the national collaborative curriculum development process was both painful and destructive (Hannan, 1992: 29), and is well illustrated in the turmoil and confusion surrounding the development of the Studies of Society and Environment statement. Problems of coherence were built into the task from the beginning by the lumping together of social education and environmental education in a single learning area. Conceptually they do not fit well together, and the effort to include the environment in strands essentially formulated as a social education framework is responsible for some of the more contrived infelicities in the document. Certainly
there are areas of overlap, as there are among all the learning areas, but
the focus of the two sets of studies is different, and sufficiently different
to prevent their ready integration into a single framework. Perhaps more
importantly, the academic disciplines that provide the knowledge base
for the two sets of studies are distinct. Social education draws principally
on the humanities and social sciences for its knowledge base; envi-
enmental education draws principally on the natural sciences, in
particular the biological and earth sciences, for its knowledge base. The
result has been to make an already large and diffuse learning area into
an even larger and more diffuse one, with a consequent lack of focus
and clarity of purpose in the definition of the area.

The problem appears to have arisen from the unique position of
geography as a link discipline between the social and the physical
sciences, and the desire to accommodate it unequivocally within a single
learning area. Again we come up against the failure to clarify the
categorical distinction between learning areas and traditional subjects,
and the lack of an overall conceptualisation of the curriculum as a whole
to guide the definition of learning areas. The diffuseness and lack of
focus of the area was further exacerbated by the later inclusion of the
area of business studies, apparently because, in the words of one
member of the Curriculum and Assessment Committee secretariat, ‘there
was nowhere else to put it’ (personal communication).

The confusion was further confounded by the turmoil surrounding
the formulation of the statement. Both the project brief and the devel-
oped statement were rejected by the Curriculum and Assessment
Committee and hastily rewritten ‘in-house’ by the Curriculum and
Assessment Committee secretariat and officers seconded from the state
and territory bureaucracies, much to the chagrin of the teams originally
commissioned to develop the documents, and to the distaste of at least
some of the officers seconded to the task. The basis for these rejections
remains a matter of some dispute (Gilbert et al., 1992), but appears to
have been at least in part due to the insistence of one state system in
particular on a more explicit accommodation of traditional history and
geography, and the protection of their territorial hegemony. A
compromise of sorts was effected, but it is neither ‘ingenious’ (Hannan, 1992:
29) nor convincing. The result has been a flawed and fragmented state-
ment, lacking internal consistency and any clear focus or sense of
direction, and inviting such a variety of interpretation as to threaten its
credibility as a common framework for the learning area.

We should not be too quick to assign blame for these evident weak-
nesses in the final framework to the officers seconded, sometimes
unwillingly, to perform the hasty rewrite. The highly politicised context in which they were constrained to operate and the ‘crash through’ approach adopted by the Curriculum and Assessment Committee secretariat in response to the politically dictated but absurdly inadequate timelines for completion militated against quality outcomes. It is difficult to attain a coherent national perspective if you are required to accommodate disparate state perspectives, and even more so when the brief includes the special pleading of powerful interest groups. Perhaps even more to the point, if you are driving with your eyes firmly fixed on the rear-vision mirror, it is a fair bet you are either driving in reverse or heading for trouble.

In conclusion, a word or two about the role of the traditional school subjects in a common curriculum framework based on learning areas. They do have a role in the development of the learning areas, since they constitute a substantial part of the discipline base on which the learning areas draw for their content. But their role is collaborative, not maverick, and focused on their potential contribution to a general education and initiation into the wider life of the society, not on specialised knowledge and initiation into an academic culture. Secondly, they have a role in the development of enrichment programs to complement the common or core program, either collaboratively through extension of the common or core program, or individually through the provision of specialised options. Finally, they have a pristine and untarnished role in the senior secondary school curriculum as it is presently constituted, although how long that exclusive role will remain as pressures increase for a broad general education at the senior secondary level remains to be seen. The shift from traditional subjects to learning areas was not an attack on their educational value, but a recognition of their limitations as structural organisers for the contemporary school curriculum. The challenge for the traditional subjects is not one of survival or exclusion, but of redefining their role and function in a more effective and more relevant curriculum structure.

What Might Be Meant by a Common Framework . . . and Do We Have One?

The inevitable question that arises from our discussion to date is to what extent, and in what sense, the national collaborative curriculum process has produced a common and agreed framework for current and
future curriculum provision in Australian schools. As with so many questions in Australian education, the answer to this question is neither clear cut nor unequivocal; and again like so many questions in Australian education, its answer depends in part on our answer to an antecedent question: what do we mean by a common framework? Given the stubborn independence of the state and territory systems, and given the continuing culture of school-based curriculum decision making in Australian schools — a culture which, as we have suggested, seems likely to survive the efforts of a number of state and territory systems to strengthen centralised control of the curriculum — the task of developing a framework with the appropriate balance of structure and flexibility to accommodate such diversity of decision making presents a formidable challenge.

Hannan (1992: 28), in introducing the article cited earlier in this chapter, leaves us in no doubt about the state and territory perspective on this issue:

To achieve the level of collaboration necessary, the national curriculum must be very much a framework, sufficient to define agreed common ground and flexible enough to contain diverse, if not divergent, content, methods of learning and means of assessment.

While conceding the pragmatism of Hannan's assessment — from a state and territory position this is political reality — the question must arise of just how much diversity and how much divergence can be accommodated before notions of commonality and a shared structure become untenable. The more important question for the purposes of our discussion here, however, is to what extent the outcomes of the national collaborative curriculum development process can be said to constitute a common curriculum framework, even in Hannan's limited sense. While there is no single or simple recipe for an effective common curriculum framework, it seems reasonable to require that, as a basic minimum, it should contain:

- a set of common goals or purposes
- an agreed conceptual structure for the curriculum as a whole
- a common set of organisational categories within the overarching structure
- at least a broad general agreement on the scope and sequence of learning within the constituent categories
- at least a broad general agreement on those elements of the framework to be considered as required learning for all students
- at least a broad general agreement on expected learning outcomes.
It will be clear from our discussions to date that the outcomes of the national collaborative curriculum process meet some of these requirements, but not all. The most glaring omission is the absence of an overarching conceptual structure for the curriculum as a whole. The result of this is that there is no sense of how the various national curriculum statements ‘come together’ to form a coherent set of learning experiences for Australian students, a problem exacerbated by the way in which the individual statements were developed, by separate teams working independently of each other, without any apparent coordination and without any initial sense of how their individual statement might fit into a wider structure.

It is possible, of course, that the state and territory Directors of Curriculum had an implicit overall structure in mind when they identified the eight Key Learning Areas, but it seems likely that they were more concerned with identifying areas of commonality — hence the curriculum mapping exercise that preceded the identification of the Key Learning Areas and the development of the national curriculum statements and profiles — and driven more by political and economic imperatives than by educational ones. The political imperative was the preservation of state and territory autonomy in curriculum decision making; the economic imperative was the opportunity for cost saving through shared development costs in a time of scarce resources and budgetary constraints. The latter was a particularly important consideration for the smaller states and territories (Speedy, 1992).

It is possible, too, that the Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia (Australian Education Council, 1989) were considered as providing the overall conceptual structure for the national collaborative curriculum framework, an impression reinforced by the publication of the national goals at the beginning of each of the national statements; although this would seem to have been a post-development decision, since there is no attempt to link the statements with the goals, and no clear sense in which the statements themselves derive from the goals.

In many ways the national goals represent the most successful outcome of the national collaborative curriculum process, since they provide for the first time in our history a reasonably clear, concise and coherent formulation of the aims of Australian schooling, and in particular a sense of direction for curriculum reform in Australian schools. It is easy of course to criticise the goals for their vagueness and generality, particularly the first five goals; to quibble about particular inclusions or exclusions; or to deplore the occasional intrusion of a rather
heavy-handed political correctness. But given the difficulty of securing any sort of agreement at all among Australia's stubbornly independent states and territories on a national direction for education, they are a good deal more cohesive, coherent and forward-looking than we might have expected; and, contrary to the protestations of the states and territories, point the direction for substantial reform of the curriculum in Australian schools. Moreover they have the inestimable advantage of having been accepted and agreed to by all Australian states and territories. Presumably that implies some commitment to implementation, although there is little evidence to date that they have had much impact on curriculum decision making, particularly at the school level.

The only other outcome of the national collaborative curriculum development process to enjoy a similar level of endorsement are the eight Key Learning Areas – English; mathematics; science; languages other than English; the arts; technology; studies of society and environment; and health. All states and territories are now apparently committed to the organisation of their curricula on the basis of these eight learning areas, thus providing a degree of compatibility, at least at the structural level, not previously seen in Australian education. The Key Learning Areas as formulated, however, do have some serious weaknesses, arising principally from their origins in political negotiation and compromise rather than in any serious attempt to conceptualise a curriculum appropriate to national needs, that must raise serious doubts about their capacity to operate as an effective common framework for curriculum delivery. We have previously noted the confusion in the national collaborative curriculum development process from its inception as to whether the organising categories were to be 'areas of knowledge and experience' or 'subject areas', and the failure to address this issue unequivocally. While the agreed set of organisational categories are clearly designated as 'Key Learning Areas', they are in fact a curious mishmash of traditional school subjects (mathematics, English), agglomerations of subjects (science, languages other than English), broad curriculum areas (studies of society and environment, technology, the arts), and areas disguised as subjects (health, which is defined as including personal development and physical education). Then there are the oddities of fusion and fission: the combining of social and cultural studies with environmental studies, for example, in apparent disregard of the very different disciplinary bases on which the two sets of studies would have to draw and the structural imbalance created by such a huge and cumbersome learning area, or the separation of science from
technology and, for that matter, the environment, where most of its studies are focused.

It is difficult to escape the conclusion that a more logical and cohesive set of framework categories could have been derived directly from the national goals — with modifications or elaborations as required — than that which has arisen from trade-offs and compromises around identified areas of commonality among the states and territories. Figure 4.1 presents an outline of one such framework based on our analysis of the content implications of the national goals in the previous chapter of this review. In presenting it here there is no suggestion that it resolves all the difficulties of a common curriculum framework. Far from it. It is exemplary solely in the sense that it is illustrative of the argument. But it does have the advantages of internal consistency and demonstrated relevance to agreed common goals.

Such speculation, however, is in the realm of the might-have-been. A more immediate question is what might be done in our current situation. While it would no doubt be simplistic to focus too narrowly on a direct linear relationship between national goals and a common curriculum framework in a process as complex as the negotiation of national curriculum, there is a need — indeed an obligation — for a clear analysis of what the relationships are, and of the implications of disjunctions and discontinuities for both current practice and the possible modification of the goals themselves. This is important not only for the integrity and utility of the framework itself, but because public expectations and, more importantly, public evaluations of the process are likely to make fairly simple and direct connections between goals and outcomes.

Given such basic structural problems, it is little wonder that the teams charged with fleshing out the scope and sequence of learning within the Key Learning Areas tended to flounder in their task, although it is fair to say that there is considerable variability in quality among the various national curriculum statements. Generally those statements benefiting from an early start and an adequate time frame, such as mathematics and English, are more coherent, more focused, and more forward-looking than those, such as studies of society and environment, which had to contend with inadequate time for conceptualisation, unresolved issues, impossible deadlines, and the ‘can do, crash through’ culture that developed within the Curriculum and Assessment Committee, particularly after its restructuring in June 1992. Nevertheless, even the earlier statements reflect the ambiguities and confusions evident in the process as a whole, and some uncertainty as to whether
Figure 4.1 A Skeletal Curriculum Framework Based on the National Goals for Schooling
they are defining a set of common learnings for all students or providing a conceptual overview of the learning area.

So where does this leave us in relation to the questions with which we started this section: What might be meant by a common framework, and do we have one? We have provided some answers to the first of these questions, at least sufficient to open up the issues to public debate; but the answer to the second question remains equivocal. It seems likely that the outcomes of the national collaborative curriculum process will have some effect in bringing Australia's disparate curricula closer together; but whether they can achieve the status of an effective common curriculum framework must remain doubtful, partly because of their ambiguous status as genuinely 'national' documents, partly because of their internal inadequacies. They are, however, in the public domain and provide a focus for debate on the issues surrounding a common curriculum framework that has not been available to us in the past. It is to be hoped that Curriculum Corporation is able to keep that debate alive through a process of review and revision, and a monitoring of their influence on curriculum reform in the states and territories.

Do We Need a Common Framework?
The Ethical Dimension

The search for a common curriculum framework, however, is not simply a question of structure. It is also a question of purpose and function, of why and whether we might need a common framework. These, of course, are essentially ideological questions, but increasingly they are also being seen as ethical questions. There is an important difference between the current debate on common curriculum and that of a decade ago so far as the function and purpose of a common curriculum is concerned. The earlier debate was quite clearly focused on accountability, and couched in terms of such issues as diversity v uniformity and autonomy v control. These issues have not of course disappeared from the current debate – indeed they have resurfaced in an even cruder form as cornerstones of the new corporate managerialism – but they have been joined by a new set of issues focused on social justice and couched in terms of such issues as diversity v equity and autonomy v consumer rights (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987). An influential Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report, *Schools and Quality* (Organization for Economic Co-operation and
Development, 1989a), in noting this shift of focus, notes also the emergence of a new term, 'the entitlement curriculum', to replace older terms like 'core curriculum' and 'common curriculum'. The concept of an entitlement curriculum involves more than just a change of terminology. Rather it implies a basic ideological shift in the purpose and function of a common or core curriculum, with subsequent implications for the way in which the core curriculum – or rather the entitlement curriculum – is to be defined. In essence, the argument here is that if there is a body of learning deemed to be essential to effective participation in the life and work of the society – and there are good arguments to suggest that there is (Piper, 1977; Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987; Ryan & Davy, 1989; Boomer, 1992) – then there is a moral obligation to make that body of knowledge available to all students, despite the difficulties of definition and delivery. It is further argued that this is not simply in the interests of the student, but in the interests of the society as a whole, since it leads to the creation of a better informed and more productive citizenry.

It will be recalled from our discussion in the previous chapter that the initial purpose of the national curriculum statements as stated in the Hobart Declaration on Schooling was to 'identify the knowledge and skills to which all students are entitled' (Australian Education Council, 1989: 2; my emphasis). It is interesting in this respect to note that the early drafts of the national mathematics statement – the first of the national curriculum statements to be developed – included the designation 'entitlement curriculum', and that this disappeared from later and final drafts. It is not clear how, why, or at whose instigation this change occurred, but rumour has it that it was the result of a directive from the state and territory Directors of Curriculum, who were concerned that the inclusion of the word 'entitlement' might expose the state and territory systems to the dangers of litigation. It is easy to understand some nervousness over the legal implications of the shift to an entitlement curriculum, particularly given the escalation of litigation against educational authorities in the United States, but it is interesting to speculate to what extent this was the real cause of concern, and to what extent it was the result of nervousness at such a radical ideological shift in purpose and direction, not to mention the added pressures for implementation likely to accrue from such a designation.

Perhaps more importantly, from the point of view of our concerns in this chapter, the inclusion of the designation 'entitlement curriculum' in the early drafts of the national mathematics curriculum statement is a clear indication of its intention, at least in its initial conceptualisation,
to define a common or core curriculum in mathematics education for all Australian students. On the whole this still appears to be the intention of the final statement, although the removal of any clear indication to this effect has allowed an element of ambiguity to creep in. This ambiguity of purpose is even more evident in the later statements, particularly those for languages other than English and studies of society and environment, where the learning area is more diffuse: there seems to be some confusion of purpose between defining a set of common learnings and identifying areas of agreement among the states and territories, perhaps indicative of the confused political context in which the statements were developed. It is interesting to speculate what might have happened had the original intention of the national mathematics curriculum statement to develop an entitlement curriculum been honoured and carried through to the development of the other statements. Perhaps there is a lesson here to be learned for a more enlightened approach to future initiatives in national curriculum development. Perhaps too there is a challenge here for Curriculum Corporation, if it can overcome the nervousness of its board of management.

Structure and Function: Some Unresolved Issues

While issues of curriculum structure tend to be taken for granted, they are among the most intrinsically contentious of all curriculum issues, as the hostility and resistance typically encountered by attempts to change established structures will testify. On the one hand, such changes are often a threat, or perceived to be a threat, to established power structures and vested interests, and as such tend to become intensely political. On the other, curriculum structures reflect, or are perceived to reflect, deeply held personal beliefs on the nature and purpose of schooling, and as such tend to become a background for ideological conflict. Thus, in attempting to identify some of the key issues underlying the search for a practical framework for curriculum reform in Australian schools, it becomes important as far as possible to cut through the personal and political to expose the substantive issues to critical scrutiny, not simply as an aid to clarification of the issues themselves, but as a first step towards their eventual resolution. Structural change of itself, of course, does not lead to reform, but it can be a powerful factor in enhancing the effectiveness of substantive curriculum reform and in facilitating its implementation. By the same token a failure to resolve the issues of structural change or to honour its translation from policy
to practice can inhibit substantive reform, or effectively delay its implementation.

There are many areas of conflict relating to structural change – far more than can be addressed effectively in a review such as this – but in concluding the overview in this chapter of attempts in recent decades to devise a common framework for curriculum provision and reform in Australian schools I will briefly examine three such areas: the structural issues surrounding the important principle of curriculum coherence and the integration of learning; the functional issues surrounding instrumentalism and the search for relevance; and the ideological issues arising from the key principles of equity, diversity and the concept of entitlement.

Curriculum Coherence and the Integration of Learning

In Chapter 2 we noted the importance of curriculum coherence to effective learning, and explored the issue from a developmental perspective. In this section we revisit that issue from a structural perspective. The limitations of traditional school subjects as organisational categories for the contemporary school curriculum have long been recognised (see, for example, Curriculum Development Centre, 1980: 13), and have been extensively canvassed in earlier sections of this chapter. The major criticisms levelled at the traditional subjects as organisational categories for contemporary curriculum provision are that they contribute to the fragmentation of learning; that they inhibit the flexibility of the curriculum in responding to changing needs; and that they institutionalise an outmoded and limited conception of the range of human knowledge. Fragmentation leads to the compartmentalisation of knowledge, the failure to provide conceptual links between the major areas of human knowledge, and the inability to provide for the cohesive and systematic development of such generalised learning processes as language, number, critical inquiry, problem solving and analytical reasoning. A lack of flexibility leads to the overcrowded curriculum, with the burgeoning of an ever-increasing and confusing array of electives to meet the continuing demand on schools for the provision of such things as citizenship education, computer education, technological studies and environmental education, to name only a few. The limited and outmoded subject categories make it difficult for the school curriculum to incorporate insights even from established disciplines such as sociology, psychology, or philosophy, let alone the newer sciences and interdisciplinary studies at the forefront of modern knowledge.
One response to these perceived difficulties was a call for more integrated studies (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1987: 101), despite their somewhat chequered history. Another was the move in all Australian systems towards definition in terms of broad curriculum areas and, more recently, the agreement to adopt a common set of eight Key Learning Areas. This shift from traditional subjects to learning areas appears to have had little impact on curriculum organisation in secondary schools, although it appears to have had more success at the primary level, where the curriculum is less dominated by subject specialisms and an inflexible timetable. The dilemma posed by this situation for the development of a common curriculum framework is whether to seek to maximise cohesion, comprehensiveness and contemporaneity at the risk of non-implementation, or whether to seek to maximise the chances of implementation at the cost of contemporary relevance.

The switch from traditional subjects to learning areas as the structural basis for defining the school curriculum is not of itself, however, a guarantee of greater coherence in the curriculum. The potential still remains for the segmentation of the curriculum, and hence the fragmentation of learning, both across curriculum areas and within them. Coherence across curriculum areas is dependent upon a clear articulation within the curriculum framework of relationships between and among the learning areas, and their conceptualisation as interrelated parts of a total learning experience. Coherence within the curriculum areas is dependent upon a clear articulation of relationships between and among the various elements contributing to the definition of the learning area, including decisions on which of those elements are to be considered as essential learning for all students. As we have argued elsewhere, neither of these criteria is met in the national collaborative curriculum statements in their current form. Nor are they evident in efforts to date to incorporate the Key Learning Areas into state and territory curriculum provision at the system level. Thus we find that the largest state, New South Wales, appears to have largely abandoned the Key Learning Areas other than for purposes of national reporting, opting instead for syllabus-related outcomes statements and a reassertion of the primacy of New South Wales syllabus documents as the basic structural organisers for curriculum provision in that state (Eltis, 1995: i–ii). The second largest state, Victoria, while incorporating the Key Learning Areas as nominal structural organisers for its Curriculum and Standards Framework, effectively leaves decisions on their implementation to the discretion of schools, including the option of retaining...
traditional subject structures (Victoria, 1995: 7). We appear to be a long way away from a common curriculum framework, particularly one that honours the principles of curriculum coherence and the integration of learning.

Instrumentalism and the Quest for Relevance

One of the more persistent and longstanding divisions in the educational debate is that between a view of education that is child-centred, experiential and immediately gratifying, and one which is subject-centred and instrumental, with gratification deferred as a reward for effort. The struggle between these opposing views has ramifications across the whole of schooling, but is nowhere more focused than in the debate over the nature and purpose of the school curriculum. The one is future-oriented, with an emphasis on the value of education as preparation for adult life; the other present-oriented, with an emphasis on education as cultural experience. To employ a distinction from existentialist philosophy, the one is focused on becoming, the other on being.

An instrumental position on this issue is likely to emphasise a relatively narrow, focused and exclusive curriculum concerned principally with cognitive and intellectual development, although not necessarily or exclusively academic in its orientation. An experiential position, on the other hand, is likely to emphasise a broad, diverse and inclusive curriculum, concerned with the development of the whole child – spiritual, aesthetic, emotional, social and physical, as well as intellectual. There is no implication here of a lack of concern with cognitive development and academic achievement, but these are viewed within a wider focus on the total development of the child.

There is no suggestion that these positions are mutually exclusive, or incapable of resolution in a balanced curriculum. While it is common to present these conflicting views as sharply differentiated alternatives, often labelled as ‘traditional’ or ‘progressive’, it is more common in practice for schools and even individual teachers to find themselves pulled in both directions at once and endeavouring to produce a curriculum that meets both sets of criteria (Berlak & Berlak, 1981). Indeed it often becomes necessary to effect some such accommodation if the curriculum is to be made accessible to all students, since there are many students who are not responsive to the kind of extrinsic motivation implied in the instrumentalist position.

The debate between instrumental and experiential goals is closely related to the quest for relevance in the curriculum. When schools and
their communities were asked to nominate the most important qualities of the curriculum in an effective school (Piper, 1992), by far the most frequently nominated quality was relevance. Relevance, of course, is something of a buzzword in the curriculum debate and begs the question of relevance to whom and for what, and it would be misleading to suggest that all those nominating relevance as an essential characteristic of an effective curriculum were talking about the same thing. Indeed it was possible to distinguish in the responses several forms of relevance, not necessarily compatible with one another, and certainly not synonymous. Thus there were those whose concern was with personal relevance, that is relevance to the needs, interests and abilities of the individual student. There were those whose concern was with local relevance, or relevance to the perceived needs and interests of the local community. Then there were those whose concept of relevance was more clearly instrumental, among which can be distinguished societal relevance (relevance to the perceived needs and interests of contemporary Australian society); economic relevance (relevance to the needs and interests of the economy and/or the workforce) and educational relevance (relevance to further education or training).

Central to the debate over curriculum reform, particularly structural reform, is an ongoing but somewhat contrived debate between rigour and relevance. The traditional academic curriculum, it is argued, provides intellectual substance and rigour which are watered down in attempts to make the curriculum more relevant and accessible to a wider range of students, leading to an inevitable decline in academic standards. Academically able students, particularly, are seen as being disadvantaged by this process. The proponents of curriculum reform, on the other hand, argue that the traditional academic curriculum is unnecessarily narrow and restricted, and irrelevant not only to the needs of the majority of students, but also to the demands of a changed and changing world.

In many ways, however, the distinction is an artificial one. Rigour is not, and never has been, wholly characteristic of the traditional academic curriculum in schools. What passes for rigour is often little more than rigidity, a degenerative hardening of the categories. Inquiry is reduced to method, and method to routine application. It is worth remembering that the curriculum reform movement of the 1960s and 1970s was as much concerned with making the school curriculum more intellectually challenging as it was with making it more accessible. That said, however, it is also true that many of the alternative courses developed, particularly at school level, have been little more than watered-
down versions of traditional academic subjects, managing to escape both rigour and relevance. All too often the problem has been conceived of as one of catering for the so-called 'non-academic' or 'less able' students, and not as one of curriculum reform in the interests of all students. Hence the proliferation, particularly in the secondary curriculum, of second-class curriculum alternatives recognised as such even by the students enrolled in them, and the persistence of an anachronistic 'prestige' curriculum masquerading as mainstream.

It is the contrived nature of the debate itself, however, that points the way to its resolution. An artificially contrived choice between rigour without relevance or relevance without rigour is in fact no choice at all. We know that in the real world of human endeavour rigour and relevance are not incompatible or mutually exclusive, so why in the sheltered world of the school curriculum should we work so hard to keep them apart? The question needs to be asked in whose interests the dichotomy is maintained. Rigour without relevance, like art for art's sake, is a form of decadence, a hangover from the days when the main purpose of education was to put a decorative gloss on the conversation of the leisure class and education was valued in precise proportion to its inutility (Veblen, 1970). Relevance without rigour is professional collusion in the reproduction of disadvantage (Reynolds, 1988; Hargreaves, 1989b; 1989c).

**Equity, Diversity and the Principle of Entitlement**

Earlier in this chapter we noted an important shift in the debate on a common or core curriculum during the 1980s away from the traditional formulation in terms of such issues as uniformity and diversity to a more sharply focused formulation in terms of such issues as equity, social justice and student entitlement. Few educators nowadays would seriously argue for the value of uniformity in its own right, and to continue to formulate the issue in those terms is indeed to set up a straw man. Both equity and diversity, on the other hand, are valued in their own right, and that value would be strongly argued for by most educators, so that when they are brought together as competing goods they constitute the classic value conflict. Equity, while it may be differently defined across the political spectrum, is central to the concept of a democratic society, and therefore central to the concerns of education in a democratic society. Diversity is similarly central to the concept of a pluralist society, and therefore similarly central to education in a pluralist democracy. Indeed, the question arises as to whether, in a pluralist
democracy, it is possible to have equity without diversity. If, however, it is the case, as is increasingly argued, that school-based decision making has produced not only diversity in curriculum offerings but considerable variability in the quality of those offerings, and that it is those who are already disadvantaged who are most likely to be further disadvantaged by poor quality curriculum provision, there is a powerful case for some limitation of diversity in the interests of equity and social justice. Despite the remarkable increase in retention—and hence in the productivity of schooling—over the past decade, there are still too many students who are poorly served by their schooling, emerging from the system underskilled, undereducated and, perhaps more importantly from the point of view of life chances and life choices, underqualified; and there are still too many people, both inside and outside schools, who view education as a privilege rather than as a right.

This dilemma has given rise to proposals for a reconceptualisation of the common or core curriculum as an entitlement curriculum. This has significantly shifted the focus of the debate from the pedagogical implications of individual differences to the social and political implications of institutionalised disadvantage and educational apartheid. As we have noted previously, the concept of an entitlement curriculum has created a good deal of nervousness in the educational bureaucracies because of its legal implications and the prospect of unleashing a situation conducive to widespread litigation, suggested as a possible reason for the dropping of the term from the final drafts of the national statement on mathematics. It would indeed be a pity if a narrow legalistic interpretation of entitlement were to prevail, since that would almost certainly lead to a minimalist definition and a hedging about of the concept with defensive provisos. By the same token it would be unfortunate if legalistic reservations were to lead to an abandonment of the concept as a criterion for determining the nature and extent of common curriculum provision.

Obviously a concern for student entitlement has implications for teacher and school autonomy, as indeed does any concern for cooperative or collaborative action. There is no intention here of setting up simplistic judgmental dichotomies—autonomy is good, entitlement is bad; entitlement is good, autonomy is bad—but rather to underline the inadequacy of one-dimensional perspectives on the complex dynamics of curriculum reform, and to raise a key question at the centre of this issue: whose interests does the school curriculum serve—those of the students and the community, or those of the teachers and principal (Apple, 1979)? Which is not to suggest that teachers and principals do
not have the interests of students and the community at heart, but rather that it would be naive to expect their perspective to be any less blinkered by self-interest and professional socialisation than that of any other comparable professional group (Anderson, 1991).

This in turn leads on to the contentious issue of whether a common curriculum framework should be prescriptive or descriptive in its formulation. Terms like ‘ownership’ and ‘empowerment’ are grand slogans, but they beg the question of who is dispossessed and disempowered in the process. Typically it is the students, the learners, who are marginalised in the conflicts and power struggles surrounding curriculum control. The argument for prescription is that without it the idea of a common curriculum is meaningless, since without some form of mandatory requirement it is impossible to guarantee implementation. The argument against it is that it represents a return to the bad old days of centralised syllabuses that were unresponsive to the diverse needs of students and communities, and removed curriculum decision making too far from the point of implementation. Given the complexities of school-based curriculum decision making and the highly charged ideological context within which it operates, it seems unlikely that a common curriculum framework, however democratically formulated, would be widely implemented with integrity without some form of prescriptive requirement. Prescription can require – although perhaps not ensure – compliance. But compliance is not commitment, and without commitment little effective implementation will occur (Boyd, 1979; Fullan, 1982; 1991).

To return to the image with which we started this review, that of the curriculum as a chariot: whoever designs the chariot, whoever builds it, whether it is an official model, a local model, a personalised model, or an imported model, it still requires a committed and able driver if it is to perform effectively, or indeed if it is to perform at all. If that commitment requires home-grown models and backyard designs, then home-grown models and backyard designs it must be – although we might want to insist on some guarantees of roadworthiness and acceptable safety standards if we are to entrust the lives of our children to them. It is by no means clear, however, that committed and able driving is dependent on do-it-yourself engineering, and it is at least possible that even the best drivers might benefit from a better designed vehicle and a good mechanic. As we have argued previously, the challenge for curriculum reform over the next decade will be to reconcile demands for professional autonomy, which is necessary to maintain commitment and effective implementation, with the equally pressing
and equally valid demands for safeguards and guarantees to protect the rights of students and the public interest. Getting the balance right is not going to be easy, or rapidly accomplished, but it is a crucial challenge for effective curriculum reform in Australia's schools. The leadership role of Curriculum Corporation could be significant in meeting this challenge, but whether it is able to exercise that role effectively given its limited resources and the constraints on its independence remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Divisive as they often are, issues concerning the content and structure of the school curriculum are amenable to resolution by rational discourse and a modicum of goodwill. Issues relating to the function and purpose of the curriculum, on the other hand, tend to be more intractable, since they impinge on the more fundamental areas of aspirations, beliefs and ideology. It is characteristic of the educational debate in Australia – and, indeed, of political debate in general – that we are always more comfortable talking about means rather than ends. Hence the relative lack of interest shown, by the educational community no less than by the media, in the national goals for schooling, as compared, for example, with the national assessment profiles or the employment-related key competencies.

The national goals for schooling do, however, provide us with a basis for potential resolution of many of the issues of function and purpose identified in this chapter, since they provide us with an agreed set of aspirations for schooling in Australia, albeit in general terms. There is, of course, room for debate on the goals themselves, and that is a debate we as a nation need to have. Indeed, in the absence of such debate, the arguments over the scope, sequence and outcomes of the curriculum become meaningless.

The capacity of the national goals to provide a unified sense of direction for the curriculum in Australian schools, however, is and always was dependent on the willingness of the educational establishments in the states and territories to suspend self-interest in the national interest. As we have seen, however, there is little indication that this is likely to occur, not because of any particular incompetence or malevolence within the establishments themselves – they are staffed, in the main, by able and honourable people – but because of the old fear that in expanding their vision they may lose their grasp. We are a small nation,
with common aspirations and a common history. Our cultural pluralism is not defined by state boundaries. The question must be asked whether, in the current global context and in an area so vital to our aspirations as education, we as a nation can afford to continue our current *laissez-faire* approach to curriculum reform in Australian schools.
Weighing your pig frequently will not make it grow fatter.

Tongan proverb

Assessment has always loomed larger in the public debate on education – and, indeed, in the culture of schooling – than its ideally subordinate role in the teaching-learning process would warrant. From a purely educational perspective, assessment is only justified when it contributes to learning, as a means to an end. In that role it is an indispensable component of good teaching and effective learning. When, for whatever reason, it becomes an end in itself, as it frequently does, or when it assumes an importance disproportionate to this essentially service role, it is likely to distort the curriculum and act as a barrier to learning. The importance attached to assessment in the public imagination and the culture of schooling, however, is only marginally related to its educational functions, which brings us to the key question of the purposes for which assessments are carried out. We will return to this central question of purpose, and in particular the confusions created by conflicting purposes, in later sections of this chapter.

Active in the managerial ideology which has become dominant in the educational bureaucracies at both state and federal level in recent years is a persistent tendency – reflected in, or possibly reflecting, a similar tendency in the media, and hence in the public imagination – to
reduce evaluation to assessment (and in particular the assessment of student achievement) and to reduce assessment to testing (and in particular the testing of basic skills or competencies). Indeed, the focus in this chapter on assessment rather than evaluation is itself a concession to this reductionism, although not in any sense an endorsement of it. While the terms are often used loosely and interchangeably, even in official documents, their relationship is essentially one of the parts to the whole. Testing is a part, but only a part, of assessment; assessment is a part, but only a part, of evaluation. Each in turn is a wider term which suffers by reduction to its partial component.

*Testing* is the attempt to *measure* student learning and/or achievement. It implies a view of learning as cumulative and expressed in terms of numbers or quantities, even though the concept of quantity or amount is very difficult to define in the context of learning. The term *assessment*, as it is used in the educational context, is the process of gathering and interpreting information related to student learning and/or achievement. As such it is not confined to a view of learning as a cumulative process expressed in terms of quantities, but may also (or alternatively) mean a view of learning as an organic process expressed in terms of growth and development, or as an adaptive process expressed in terms of enriched experience. In pursuit of this function there is a range of techniques employed, both formal and informal, which may include testing, but which is also likely to include such things as projects and assignments, research and inquiry, performances and presentations, and, most importantly in the classroom context, observation. *Evaluation* is a much wider term, concerned with the whole of the education process, not merely with its outcomes: as much with the quality of the teaching as with the quality of the learning, as much with the learning environment as with the products of that environment, as much with curricula, courses, school organisation, school climate, and resources as with students and their performance, although much of its interest in these diverse elements will be related back to the performance of students as the clients of the educational enterprise.

Unfortunately evaluation has received very little attention in the national collaborative curriculum development process, although it is a good deal more important to effective curriculum reform than assessment. It was not mentioned in *Strengthening Australia's Schools* (Dawkins, 1988) and, apart from some rather limited trialling and validation of the national assessment profiles, appears to have been largely overlooked in the development process that flowed from it. Nor does there appear to be any systematic plan for evaluating the impact of the national
curriculum statements and assessment profiles on schools and systems. Hence the focus in this chapter on assessment rather than evaluation, at some cost to the wider issue of curriculum reform. That said, however, many of the issues raised in this chapter in relation to assessment are also relevant to the wider issue of curriculum evaluation, and should be seen in that wider context.

National Assessment in Australia: A Historical Overview

As with proposals for national curriculum, proposals for national assessment have a long and troubled history in the context of Australian education. Indeed the two tend to have been intertwined, arising from similar concerns in similar contexts and often sharing similar fates, although it would be wrong to assume that the concerns of the one have always been in harmony with the concerns of the other. Spaull (1987: 240-241) sees this context as it emerged during the 1970s as 'characterised by the beginnings of a decline in public confidence in state education...a corresponding (if not antecedent) campaign of critical rhetoric in the media...and a tightening of financial support and financial commitment for state schooling', and links it with economic recession and the political disillusionment that set in following the downfall of the Whitlam Government. The reader will no doubt not be slow to draw parallels with the economic and political context in which the Dawkins proposals emerged in 1988.

Curiously, the first national assessment of student performance in Australia did not emerge from this particular context at all, although it very quickly became caught up in it. Rather it arose from a concern on the part of the Federal House of Representatives Standing Committee on Specific Learning Difficulties, set up in October 1974 under the chairmanship of Mr Race Matthews, at the absence of reliable evidence on the extent and distribution of specific learning difficulties in the Australian population. The Select Committee, through its chairman, approached the Australian Council for Educational Research with a proposal for a national survey of learning difficulties among Australia's school children. The study (Bourke & Lewis, 1976; Keeves & Bourke, 1976; Bourke & Keeves, 1977) was thus not concerned, ostensibly at least, with the performance of schools and schooling, but with the characteristics of the student population. This did not deter the media – or
sections of it – from seizing on the results of the study as ammunition for its attack on schools and as evidence of ‘declining standards’. Neither the logical absurdity of purporting to detect a trend from a single study, nor the ethical impropriety of selective reporting and, at times, deliberate misrepresentation, served to deter a media ‘beat up’ that was on the whole more a revelation of the standards of Australian journalism than of the standards of Australian schooling. It did, however, serve to increase pressures at the political level for regular national assessment:

The findings of the Select Committee, and particularly the ACER study, were released at a time when the issue of educational ‘standards’ was being widely debated in Australia and elsewhere. As part of this debate a series of parliamentary questions to the Commonwealth Minister for Education, Senator Carrick, sought statistics on educational standards which could not be supplied. Carrick was now concerned that a national monitoring system was essential.

(Spaull, 1987: 242)

and a determination at the educational level to resist it:

The treatment which schools received in the media over the results of the 1975 national survey created resentment among the senior officials of education systems, teachers’ unions and state school parents’ organisations, most of whom are suspicious of the uses to which the results of any system of national assessment might be put.

(Power, 1982: 11-12)

The scene was set for a battle between the political and the educational wills that was to dominate the educational debate in Australia for the next five years.

At its October 1979 meeting, the Australian Education Council, acting against the advice of the Directors-General, and of its own Steering Committee (which had recommended deferral of the survey tests until the Curriculum Development Centre’s working party on core curriculum had completed its report) decided, by a narrow majority, to proceed with the development of national survey tests to be administered on an annual basis for a five-year period commencing in 1980.

The decision to proceed with the testing program was made against the advice of the Directors-General and without consulting the unions or securing their support. Politically, ASSP [Australian Studies in Student Performance Project] became a powder keg. The subsequent attempts by the Education Departments to minimize its potential dangers and the unions to destroy it seem destined to limit whatever impact, good or bad,
the project might have had. The suspicions and tensions generated seem to have inhibited frank and open discussion of such issues as the quality of education, the accountability of schools and the contribution of assessment to policy and practice.

(Power, 1982: 31)

At their June 1980 meeting the Ministers, shaken by the extent of opposition the testing program had generated within the educational community, accepted a recommendation from their Steering Committee that the 1980 testing, plans for which were well advanced, should go ahead as planned, but that further testing should be deferred pending an evaluation of the 1980 program, to be commissioned by the Council through the Education Research and Development Committee.

Ironically, the report of the 1980 testing (Bourke, Mills, Stanyon & Holzer, 1981) was something of an anticlimax, fulfilling neither the hopes of its supporters nor the fears of its detractors. The evaluation study commissioned by the Australian Education Council concluded:

In all sectors of the community surveyed the response to the results of the 1980 testing has been minimal in comparison with the 1975 results. At the political and media level, the results were noted briefly and put aside. One can only wonder if the reaction would have been as low key if the results had shown declines in a number of areas instead of an improvement.

(Power, 1982: 114)

Certainly, where education is concerned, good news is no news.

The June 1980 meeting of the Australian Education Council also accepted a proposal for the collaborative development of progress and review tests for use at the school level, thus initiating what was subsequently to become known as the Australian Cooperative Assessment Program (ACAP). This move was widely interpreted at the time as an attempt by the Directors-General to create a structure that would pre-empt any further threats to the state and territory systems from national assessment. Certainly the history of the Australian Cooperative Assessment Program shows little evidence of any serious effort to develop collaborative procedures or a national approach to assessment, either at the school or system level. The development of the progress and review tests was only sporadically pursued, and where individual Program members undertook projects under the aegis of the Australian Cooperative Assessment Program, these appear to have been largely in pursuit of state interests and state policies, and rarely taken up by
other member systems. Nevertheless it is probably true to say that the Australian Cooperative Assessment Program provided a useful forum for the sharing of information, and some cross-fertilisation of ideas.

In all events, by the end of 1980 the crisis had passed. Honour was satisfied, and nobody had much stomach for reopening the deep divisions in the community exposed by the episode. The Directors-General had reasserted their influence in the Australian Education Council, territorial imperatives had been preserved, and the issue of national assessment was to disappear from the agenda almost as quickly as it had appeared.

Towards a Common Approach to Assessment

Given the intensity of the passions aroused by these events, it is hardly surprising that many Australian educators had an uneasy feeling when they came to the section of Strengthening Australia's Schools dealing with a common approach to assessment; and yet there is nothing specific in the proposals to give cause for concern. Few would deny the reasonableness of the claim that 'a common curriculum framework should be complemented by a common national approach to assessment', or of the call for the development of assessment procedures which could 'provide a comprehensive, systematic and useful view of the work of our schools'.

As is often the case in educational discourse, however, the language in which the argument is couched may provide a better indication of underlying intentions than the details of the argument itself. Prominent in the statement on assessment in Strengthening Australia's Schools are words such as 'effectiveness', 'standards', 'objectives', 'strategies', 'outcomes', 'benchmarks', 'measuring', 'achievement' and 'performance'. Noticeably absent are words such as 'improvement', 'quality', 'goals', 'opportunities', 'processes', 'development', 'evaluation', 'learning' and 'understanding'. The point is not that the words used are inappropriate, but rather that they constitute a very limited framework for the discussion of the complex issues involved. Suddenly we find ourselves locked into a managerial perspective, a perspective not noticeably dominant in other sections of the policy document.

It is possible to make too much of this. It may simply mean that the assessment advice and the curriculum advice came from different sources (although that in itself constitutes a problem); or that the statement was trying to give the impression of a no-nonsense hard-nosed approach to appease the technocrats. While over-simplification is often
a characteristic of hard-nosed approaches, however, it is not in itself
hard-nosed; and there is a need to be very hard-nosed indeed if we are
to achieve reasonable professional standards in common assessment
procedures.

It is a sign of the complexities and difficulties surrounding the issue
of a common approach to assessment that the Hobart meeting of the
Australian Education Council deferred yet again a decision on the
issue, although it did agree to implement a system of annual national
reporting on schooling, beginning with the 1990 school year (Austra-
lian Education Council, 1989: 1). Meanwhile there was a flurry of activity
in the states and territories to implement procedures for system-wide
monitoring (Masters, 1990) without, it would seem, any collaboration
or coordination. No doubt it would be uncharitable to suggest that this
was anything more than a coincidence, but it does suggest that the states
and territories were anxious to improve their bargaining position be-
fore any impending showdown on a common approach to national
assessment.

Part of the difficulty with the proposals for a common national
approach to assessment was the uncertainty and confusion surround-
ing the purpose and function of national assessment. It was not its for-
mative contribution to the development of quality curriculum but rather
its summative contribution to some sort of national audit of efficiency
that appeared to lie behind the Dawkins proposals, and perhaps ex-
plains why they sit so uneasily in the context of Strengthening Australia's
Schools. It may also explain why the Australian Education Council
encountered so much difficulty in coming to any agreement on a com-
mon approach to assessment, and why it eventually opted for subject
profiles as a relatively non-threatening alternative.

Such an interpretation is reinforced by the first tangible manifesta-
tion of the new collaborative approach, the National Report on Schooling
in Australia for the school year 1989 (Australian Education Council,
1991a), initially produced as a pilot report designed to 'provide the basis
for future decisions on national reporting arrangements' (Australian
Education Council, 1991a: i), and subsequently produced on an annual
basis.

The reports are essentially descriptive rather than evaluative. We get
a good deal of the 'what', a little of the 'how', and very little at all of the
'how well'. Whether the states can be nudged towards a more critical
and evaluative stance in their system reports, as envisaged in the
Dawkins proposals, remains to be seen, but seems unlikely given the
sensitivities involved; and on the whole this may not be a bad thing. As
the documents stand they are useful and informative, and achieve this modest aim extremely well; to attempt to do more might well be to jeopardise that achievement. At least that way we may be spared the dangers that can arise from the over-enthusiastic application of dubious ‘indicators’, or our own local version of the ‘Lake Wobegon effect’, whereby all fifty American states reported test scores above the national average (Cannell, 1988a; 1988b).

A second significant development was the decision of the management committee of the Australasian Cooperative Assessment Program (‘Australian’ became ‘Australasian’ with the admission of New Zealand in the late 1980s) to proceed with the development of ‘subject profiles’ in mathematics and English/literacy to serve as agreed national frameworks for assessment in school years 1–10 (Australasian Cooperative Assessment Program, 1990). The profile development was conceived as an extension of the work of curriculum mapping and the development of national curriculum statements which would ‘in effect complete a phase 3 in Mathematics and literacy/English by describing the student outcomes which might progressively be achieved across the first 3 bands of schooling’ (Boomer, 1990). With the amalgamation of the Australasian Cooperative Assessment Program and the Directors of Curriculum into a single body, the Curriculum and Assessment Committee, in mid-1991, the task of developing the national assessment profiles was transferred to the new body, and extended to include all eight Key Learning Areas.

The ready acceptance of the profile proposals was at least as much political as it was educational, since they offered a palatable alternative to the threat of national assessment. It would, however, be unfair to suggest that educational considerations played no part in the decision. While Hannan’s (1993: 1) claim that the profiles represent ‘one of the rare seminal ideas in education – an idea as important in its time as the idea of universal schooling was in its’ is no doubt excessive, there is much to be said for an approach to assessment that places the emphasis on growth and development rather than on spasmodic achievement, and allows a student’s progress through the curriculum to be charted in an ipsative rather than in a normative way – that is, in a way that allows the point of comparison to be the student’s own previous performance rather than the performance of others (McGaw, 1992). For our purposes in this review, however, the question is not whether assessment profiles represent a significant advance in our approach to charting student progress, but the extent to which the national assessment profiles are adequate to the task.
The profiling project of course inherited all the limitations evident in the first two phases of the national collaborative process, and added a few of its own. The lack of any clear conceptual structure, the locking of the curriculum statements into the status quo in the states and territories, the structural problems with the Key Learning Areas, the confusions over function and purpose, and in particular the variability in the quality of the curriculum statements in the various learning areas, are all reflected, and in some cases amplified, in the national assessment profiles. As with the national curriculum statements, the earlier profiles, such as those in mathematics and English, which had the luxury of adequate time for conceptualisation and development, are the most satisfactory; although it should be added that these also had the advantage of a more clearly focused learning area, and a more substantial body of research on learning in the area to draw on. The assessment profiles in the more diffuse and ill-defined areas, such as studies of society and environment, are cumbersome and confused, and likely to bring more headaches than handclaps from busy teachers and administrators.

A major challenge facing the development of effective assessment profiles of students' intellectual development is the complex interaction of content and process in characterising stages of development. Thus it is not only the acquisition of new knowledge (a cumulative process), but an increasing sophistication in the handling of previously acquired knowledge (a developmental process) that characterises intellectual growth in the learning area. Whether this complexity can be captured in a single profile that is both practical and generalisable across the learning area is an open question, but an assessment or reporting profile that fails to capture it runs the risk of distorting not only the assessment, but the learning itself. By and large it is not captured in the national assessment profiles in their present form, although this is less of a problem in those learning areas, such as mathematics and English, that by their nature are more process oriented. This, however, is less a criticism of the developers of the profiles than of the conceptualisation of the task, and was no doubt not helped by the curious decision to include processes as a separate strand in the national curriculum statements, thus inviting a separation of process and content. Whether this problem can be resolved in future revisions of the national assessment profiles; whether such revision is possible given the ambiguous status of the profiles – they have not been endorsed by the Australian Education Council or by its successor – and in the absence of any identified mechanism or procedure for revision; and whether the uncoordinated
revisions currently being undertaken by the state and territory systems will result in too much divergence to permit reintegration, must remain open questions, but questions which are crucial if the national assessment profiles are to achieve the high hopes held for them.

In contrast to a relative lack of enthusiasm for the national curriculum statements, all state and territory systems moved some way towards incorporating the national assessment profiles into their curriculum and assessment procedures in the two years immediately following their publication. Generally speaking, the smaller systems, which had the most to gain from collaboration, were the most enthusiastic in adopting the profiles. Queensland and Western Australia have selectively incorporated the national profiles into their existing Student Performance Standards and Outcomes Statements respectively, with varying degrees of adaptation and modification (McGaw, 1994b). Victoria has also used the national assessment profiles selectively in its Curriculum and Standards Framework (Victoria, 1995), but in some Key Learning Areas, notably mathematics and science, the Victorian outcome statements are markedly different. New South Wales began work in late 1993 under instruction from the then Minister on ‘incorporating the national profiles in all future and current syllabus documents’ (Eltis, 1995: 8). In August 1995, however, a review committee set up by the new Minister recommended that ‘the Board of Studies no longer be required to incorporate the National Profiles directly into NSW syllabuses’ and that statements of syllabus-based outcomes be developed for each subject to ‘replace the current use of such terms as “profiles” and “levels” in NSW’ (Eltis, 1995: i). These recommendations have since been accepted by the Minister, thus effectively removing the largest state system from any further participation in a common approach to assessment.

Why Do We Assess? A Question of Purposes

Much of the controversy surrounding assessment practices stems from a confusion of purpose. There is little to be gained from arguments over assessment procedures unless we have established why we are conducting the assessment in the first place, and whether there is in fact agreement on what the purposes of the assessment are – even perhaps whether there is some conflict of purpose which will render the assessment problematic, if not invalid. As was noted earlier, Strengthening
Australia's Schools itself displays some uncertainty and ambiguity, if not confusion of purpose, in its proposals for a common national approach to assessment, which in part accounts for the suspicion with which the proposals were received in the educational community.

Administrative or Managerial Purposes

Broadly speaking, the purposes of assessment can be considered as falling into three quite separate and sometimes conflicting categories: administrative or managerial purposes; political purposes; and pedagogical or educational purposes. The administrative or managerial purposes of assessment revolve around the organisational requirements at system, school and classroom level associated with the effective performance of the socially ascribed roles of schooling, in particular its role as a sifting, sorting and labelling agency for the society at large. The most visible manifestation of this role is at the system level with the various certification and selection procedures employed, these days largely confined to the top end of the secondary school. At the school and classroom level it finds expression in the various school-based contributions to the external credentialling system, in the issue of school certificates or records of achievement for school leavers, and in decisions relating to promotion, course placement and, where streaming is still practised, grade placement.

Less obvious, but probably more ubiquitous, is the use of assessment as a means of control. At the system level this is mainly reflected in efforts to control the curriculum, and is principally evident in Australian systems at the top end of the secondary school, where the curriculum is largely if not completely determined by the assessment procedures associated with certification and selection. It is nevertheless a potential purpose of national assessment, as is illustrated by the use of attainment targets and associated assessment procedures to control the implementation of the British core curriculum (Hargreaves, 1989b; Burstall, 1990; Flude & Hammer, 1990). At the school and classroom level it is mainly reflected in the use of assessment to control student behaviour – for example, to control the completion of homework or assignments, or their submission on time. While this may be defended from the perspective of classroom management, it does distort the assessment by presenting a management problem as if it were a learning problem. Where this is clearly understood between teacher and student and kept within the classroom, perhaps no great harm is done;
but where it feeds into decisions on student learning or the credentialling process it is at best misleading, and at worst unethical, since it consciously misrepresents student learning, and perhaps also student achievement, depending on how one defines that highly ambiguous term. Even less defensible, but probably more widespread than is generally acknowledged, is the use of assessment as a reward or punishment for conformity or lack of conformity with the school’s – or the teacher’s – norms and expectations.

In fairness, however, it must be said that it is extremely difficult in the hothouse culture of the classroom for teachers to separate their personal relationships with students from their professional judgments of learning and performance. A tendency to mark up the ‘good kids’ and mark down the ‘trouble-makers’ can occur almost inadvertently, if not entirely unintentionally. Despite the rhetoric, and despite its aspirations to objectivity, assessment is essentially a subjective process (Barrow, 1984; Burstall, 1990); which is not to condone a lack of concern with fairness and impartiality, but rather to suggest that they are more likely to be approximated if the problems are recognised. Nor is it to concur in the oft expressed view that external assessments are necessarily fairer or more impartial than internal assessments. Their very remoteness and vulnerability to manipulation by powerful interest groups such as tertiary institutions and employer groups should warn against any such easy assumptions, as should the artificiality of assessment at arm’s length from the teaching-learning process in which it is naturally embedded.

Political Purposes

The political purposes of assessment are related to the pressures on the school or the system to be accountable for its expenditure of public funds and for the performance of its role as a social institution in a way which is consonant with public expectations. Historically these pressures have increased in times of crisis, and particularly in times of economic crisis (Power, 1982: 14–15; Spaull, 1987: 240–241); hence the increasing pressures for political accountability and the increasing emphasis on the political purposes of assessment in the current period of economic uncertainty. The American anthropologist Jules Henry (1972: 234–235) explains this phenomenon in terms of the ‘ancient paradox’ that in times of crisis, when the occasion demands adaptation and constructive change, ‘we must hold our culture together through clinging to old ideas lest, in adopting new ones, we literally cease to exist’.
When, in anxiety about the present state of our world, we turn upon the schools with even more venom than we turn upon our government, we are ‘right’ in the sense that it is in the schools that the basic binding and freeing processes that will ‘save’ us will be established. But being ‘right’ derives not so much from the faults of our schools but from the fact that the schools are the central conserving force of the culture. The Great Fear thus turns our hostility unerringly in the direction of the focus of survival and change, in the direction of education.

At the system level these pressures are reflected in the current spate of system-wide testing programs, particularly at the primary level and particularly focused on the basic skills of literacy and numeracy, although these are probably also influenced by managerial concerns with curriculum control. At the school level the political purposes of assessment are mainly associated with the very considerable demands of reporting to parents and, to a lesser extent, the local community. Whether in fact the demands of parents are as influential in determining school assessment procedures as is sometimes claimed, it is certainly true that much of the assessment activity carried out in schools is perceived to be meeting parental demands and expectations, and is justified accordingly.

It is sobering to reflect that it was possible to write in the mid-1970s of accountability as an exotic concept that had had little impact on Australian schools and systems; exotic enough, indeed, to be placed in quotation marks (Piper, 1976: 10). Reference has already been made to the declining public confidence in schools and schooling over the intervening period, and it is in this context that the concept of accountability has gradually insinuated itself into the fabric of public education in Australia to the point where it is virtually taken for granted, and no longer considered problematic.

For schools and teachers, however, it has continued to be problematic, not least because of its contradictory demands. No matter how certain the proponents of the concept may be that they know what it means, there always remains uncertainty at the school level over accountability to whom, for what, on whose terms. Thus there are many forms of accountability. There is contractual accountability, which is accountability to one’s employing authority and one’s immediate superiors (accountability to the system); there is political accountability, which is accountability to parents, employers, taxpayers, governments and the wider community (accountability to the society); and there is professional accountability, which is accountability to one’s students, one’s colleagues, and one’s own professional standards (accountability to
clients). More often than not the demands of these different forms of accountability are in conflict with each other, and more often than not it is professional accountability that is put under pressure by that conflict, leading to a lowering of morale and, ironically, to lower standards of professional performance.

The concept of responsibility which has largely been superseded by these demands for accountability, while certainly not free from conflicting pressures, was more manageable because it tended to be professionally defined and incorporated into the culture of schooling as a set of mutual expectations.

Teachers, of course, are not alone in having their professional definitions of expectations publicly challenged. Even the hitherto sacred professions of medicine and the law have felt the effects of changing public attitudes, as have the banks and financial institutions, and have found themselves the subject of public scrutiny and criticism in a way unthinkable even a decade ago. Communities are less willing than they once were to defer to professional omniscience in matters of policy or practice, and on the whole this process of demystification of the professions and the concomitant transfer of power to clients and consumers has been a positive development. It has not, however, come without some cost in a diminished emphasis on professional responsibility, and the attendant dangers of token compliance, cynicism and strict adherence to the rules. Perhaps more dangerously, accountability encourages timidity. It no longer pays to take risks, and if the safer path is not only the easier one, but also the one most likely to be rewarded, only the most committed will resist the temptation to take it.

Pedagogical or Educational Purposes

The pedagogical or educational purposes of assessment, on the other hand, are concerned with the enhancement of student learning, and as such are focused at the classroom level and in the context of teaching and learning. They embrace such functions as monitoring student progress, diagnosing student strengths and weaknesses, determining the need for curriculum modifications such as remedial or extension activities, and making decisions relating to teaching strategies or approaches. As such, they are closely tied up with the quality of learning, providing valuable feedback to the student as well as the teacher. They tend to dominate the informal assessment procedures in the classroom, but in the formal assessment practices are often overshadowed by the managerial and political purposes, which can easily work against the
achieved by educational aims. The issues here are closely related to the distinction between summative and formative assessment. Summative assessments are assessments designed to measure or describe the outcomes of learning; formative assessments are assessments designed to improve or facilitate learning as part of the teaching-learning process (Scriven, 1967; Bloom, Hastings & Madaus, 1971). Summative assessment is best suited (although not exclusively so) to the managerial and political purposes of assessment; formative assessment is best suited (although not exclusively so) to the educational purposes. The implications for national assessment are of key importance. It is particularly important, for example, to be quite clear in advance whether the intention of any proposed common national approach to assessment is to control the curriculum, or to improve it; whether, in other words, its purpose is to be political/managerial or educational, and its function is to be summative or formative. Assessment information can, of course, be used for either purpose, and to fulfil either function; the important difference is in the kind of information one sets out to collect, and the integrity with which one sets out to collect it. An important limitation of information derived from summative assessment, for example, is that, while it can alert us to a problem, it rarely provides any help in deciding what to do about the problem. That kind of information implies carefully designed formative assessment, preferably on an ongoing basis.

Elitis (1990: 16) is no doubt right when he argues, in relation to the Higher School Certificate in New South Wales, that the community neither wants nor expects terminal assessments to be diagnostic or formative. Certification and selection are, after all, quintessentially summative. It would be a serious mistake, however, to assume that the absence of a formative intention implies the absence of a formative effect on teaching and learning. The assessment procedures employed, for example, more so than course designs or proclaimed syllabuses, determine what is taught and what is learned in senior secondary classrooms. What is less well recognised is that the influence of these procedures extends down into the curriculum of the junior secondary school, sometimes in ways that are inappropriate to the needs of the students in those years and are contrary to the emphases and directions of official curriculum guidelines (Piper, 1979a; 1983a).

There is no easy resolution of the dilemmas created by these conflicting purposes. Schools are social institutions and as such they cannot readily discard their managerial and political functions, even if they want to. While we might wish it were possible for schools to concentrate on their educational function, in practice they would probably cease
to receive public, and perhaps even client, support. However, the question arises as to whether the balance is unduly weighted towards the non-educational purposes of assessment in current practice, and whether both schools and the wider community might find it in their own interests to reassess their priorities in this matter. Certainly it would be in the interests of a national effort for the improvement of schools and schooling.

What Do We Assess? A Question of Targets

Given the conflicts and confusions surrounding the purposes of assessment outlined in the previous section, it is hardly surprising to find similar conflicts and confusions surrounding the targets of assessment. Decisions on what it is we are trying to assess are prerequisite to decisions on how we propose to assess it, and hence are central to the debate on a common approach to assessment. This is a large and complex question, and it is not possible to address it in depth in a review such as this. Two aspects of the question, however, do stand out as particularly relevant in the context of curriculum reform – the problem of identifying what we are aiming to assess, and the problem of selecting from among the many possible targets those we propose to focus on.

Achievement and Learning: The Problem of Aim

The cynical have always viewed schooling as a qualifications system rather than an education system, an instrumental pursuit of personal advantage in the accumulation of educational 'capital'. Against this, at least some students, and perhaps most teachers, have emphasised the intrinsic value of education in enhancing the quality of life of the individual and the society. In practice, of course, education is both, sometimes neurotically so. Even the most dedicated educator cannot ignore the importance of qualifications to the life chances and life choices of his or her students. Even the most pragmatic crammer cannot ignore the boost provided by intrinsic motivation to the achievement of instrumental goals. Nowhere is this tension between the intrinsic and the extrinsic, between education and qualifications, more evident than in assessment policies and practices.

Traditionally assessment policies and practices have been oriented towards achievement, often to the detriment of learning, and often with
scant regard for the effects of such an orientation on the outcomes of schooling. Education is not a commodity, but qualifications are, and the distinction is easily blurred, particularly in the minds of students. The quest for the holy grail can slip into the quest for the holy grade almost unnoticed. Certainly such a view is unlikely to be deplored, and might even win approval. It is noteworthy that the debate on assessment in the post-compulsory years of schooling, which tends to have occupied centre stage in the assessment debate in recent years, is conducted almost exclusively in terms of achievement, no doubt reflecting the dominance of the managerial and political purposes of assessment at this level. Even the most radical of the proposals for assessment reform at this level appear to have focused their energies largely on a broadening of the definition of the concept of achievement – with consequent implications for policies and procedures – rather than on questioning the concept itself, or its dominance. There would seem to be a general acquiescence in the view that at this level assessment, and perhaps schooling itself, is essentially instrumental.

An achievement focus on this question implies a concern with competitive assessment, that is with ranking students or their performances on some differentiated order of merit. A learning focus, on the other hand, would tend to imply a non-competitive approach, since it would tend to assume that different students would learn different things, would probably learn them in different ways, and would certainly value them differently. An achievement focus is thus heavily dependent, in a way that a learning focus is not, on a concept of merit – that is, on an essentially ethical notion of rewarding the deserving and punishing the undeserving – and this ethical dimension helps explain – or perhaps justify? – the dominance of an achievement focus in a schooling culture that might, on the face of things, be expected to emphasise learning. In a democratic society which values both equality and individual freedom, there are strong ideological pressures to rationalise the manifest inequities existent in the society, and a strong bias towards attempting to locate the causes of such inequities in the individual rather than in the society. Such justification is found in the concept of merit – the successful deserve their success, the unsuccessful have only themselves to blame – and, humbug though it may be, such ideological props becomes essential in modern democratic societies if the fabric of the society is to hold together. In the context of schooling, as in the wider society, merit is commonly defined along the lines of Young's (1961: 94) formula of merit = intelligence + effort. In the current context of school assessment, however, and perhaps also in the wider society,
some elaboration of this formula would seem more appropriate, along the lines of:

\[ \text{merit} = \text{ability} + \text{industry} + \text{compliance} \]

It is important to note about such a formulation that, while there may be a good deal of agreement on the components of the formula, different assessors, and, more importantly, different assessment procedures, will apply different weightings to the formula elements. Thus aptitude tests will tend to reward ability – albeit a fairly narrowly defined ability – at the expense of industry and compliance, which underlies the common complaint from teachers that such tests penalise the 'good kids'. Traditional examinations tend to reward industry at the expense of ability and compliance; ironically, the common criticism by the universities of the exam-driven system of the 1950s and 1960s was that it produced 'industrious dolts'. School-based assessment, and in particular the newer negotiated and contractual varieties, will tend to reward compliance at the expense of ability and, sometimes but not always, industry; the Protestant ethic runs deep in the culture of schooling, and is interwoven with compliance in subtle ways (Little, 1984). Part of the enthusiasm on the part of teachers for school-based assessment is that the 'good kids' come into their own, which reinforces the traditional 'social engineering' role of schooling admirably, but perhaps at some cost to the health of a democratic society. Different procedures will thus produce different orders of merit, irrespective of the learning involved, since the elements rewarded are only indirectly related to the nature and quality of learning – an obvious point, perhaps, but one commonly overlooked in judgments based on school 'achievement'.

Then, of course, there are the students who are disadvantaged by a focus on achievement whatever weightings are applied – the non-competitive, the unconventional, the intrinsically motivated, what Auden (1952: 58) refers to as 'the sons of Hermes', who:

\[ \ldots \text{love to play,} \]
\[ \text{And only do their best when they} \]
\[ \text{Are told they oughtn't.} \]

The Hermetic virtues, of course, are creativity, independence and originality – qualities traditionally undervalued, and sometimes penalised, by school assessment procedures, although not entirely irrelevant to learning, nor indeed to achievement in the wider sense of that word. One wonders at the cost, both to the assessment and the assessed, of excluding them from the reward structure.
Inclusive Assessment: The Problem of Multiple Targets

Whether assessment should be representative of the full range of student learning or whether it should be selectively focused is the question at the centre of the issue of inclusive assessment. External assessment—and, one suspects, a good deal of school-based assessment—is highly selective in what it assesses. Some aspects of learning are included, others excluded. If such inclusions and exclusions were made on the basis of importance, perhaps no great harm would be done—I say perhaps, because it is not clear that even this proposition is sustainable. In practice, however, they are usually made on the basis of expediency. Those things which are easiest, or cheapest, or least risky to assess are included; those which are too difficult, or too expensive, or too risky to assess are excluded. Thus it is not unusual in large-scale testing programs to find writing, for example, assessed by a multiple-choice test of the conventions of written English, not because that is considered to be an adequate measure of writing skills, but because the cost of including a more valid writing test in the assessment program is considered prohibitive.

Given that selectivity is the rule rather than the exception in assessment both at the system level and the school level, it therefore becomes of some importance to ask what is typically included and what is typically excluded from the assessment process, and to explore the possible implications of such inclusions and exclusions for the nature and quality of curriculum provision in Australian schools. We might consider, for example, why, typically, the cognitive outcomes of education are more likely to be assessed than the affective outcomes; why traditional academic knowledge is likely to be valued more highly than the practical, technical, or creative skills demanded in the workforce; why independent learning, inquiry and problem solving, all highly valued in the aims of education, tend to be undervalued in the reward structures of the assessment system; why highly valued educational outcomes such as initiative, confidence, originality, citizenship, leadership and the ability to work with others are rarely recognised in assessment procedures; why higher level skills are often excluded from the assessment process while basic skills are excessively emphasised; why oral language development and the skills of social interaction are neglected in favour of reading and writing; why, in sum, many of our most highly valued educational outcomes are scantily represented in our assessment procedures.
Such patterns of inclusion and exclusion do not on the whole reflect either curriculum goals or community priorities (Piper, 1977; Raven, 1984a; 1984b; Piper & Miller, 1986; Beare & Millikan, 1988; McGaw, Piper, Banks & Evans, 1992) but rather a long-established assessment tradition and the limitations of the assessment techniques available. That said, of course, it is not possible to assess everything, and indeed it would not be desirable to do so, since it would deny to students the space and the freedom to experiment and make the mistakes so essential to effective learning. The question arises, however, as to whether we need to examine more carefully the current basis of our selective procedures and re-examine our priorities in the interests of a more effective realisation of our educational aims.

Another important aspect of inclusive assessment, but one rarely addressed, is the extent to which the assessment recognises, and accommodates, the various views of knowledge, and the various pedagogical, curricular and learning styles that have been the object of our attention in previous chapters. Thus it seems reasonable to suggest that the structured, discrete-item, forced-choice format that is commonly employed in large-scale testing programs is more likely to favour an epistemological style which sees knowledge as public, given and molecular than one which sees it as personal, problematic and molar; a curriculum style that is prescriptive, definitive and logical/sequential than one which is descriptive, generative and conceptual/relational; and learning styles conducive to knowers rather than seekers, convergent rather than divergent thinkers, and 'splitters' rather than 'lumpers'. This raises the interesting and important question of the meaning that can be attached to the performance of those students whose epistemological and learning style preferences are not well catered for by the assessment procedures employed. If we add to these the well-documented difficulties and disadvantages attributed to gender, class and ethnicity, it would seem that the concept of the level playing field so central to the competitive ethos is as fragile a metaphor in the context of assessment as it appears to be in the context of economics.

The ways in which this issue is resolved have a profound effect on the received curriculum, that is the curriculum as it is actually learned by students, which may be very different to the planned or intended curriculum. This is not simply because of the frequently observed phenomenon of 'teaching to the test', but also because what is valued and seen as important by students is not what is valued and seen as important by their teachers, but what is valued and seen as important in the assessment procedures employed (Piper, 1979a; 1983a; Burkhardt, Fraser...
& Ridgway, 1989). Whether this intrusive relationship between assessment and curriculum is an advantage or a disadvantage is debatable, but it is central to the success of any serious attempt at curriculum reform or improving the quality of teaching and learning in Australian schools.

How Do We Assess? A Question of Methods

Even when we are quite clear about the targets of our assessment, and our purpose in carrying out the assessment, it is not always easy to find the tools for the job, certainly not with any degree of precision. Despite some remarkable advances in educational measurement, particularly over the last three decades, the techniques available to us for assessing the outcomes of learning remain limited and imperfect (Stake, 1987). This is a large and contentious area, and there is no intention here of attempting to address all the issues it gives rise to. Rather, again we will focus on two issues of particular relevance to the wider issue of curriculum reform with which this review is essentially concerned: problems for authentic assessment that arise over the demand for comparability, and problems for valid assessment that arise when the assessment is too far removed from the context of learning.

Authentic Assessment and the Problem of Comparability

Should assessment be principally concerned with ‘getting it right’ in terms of the learning being assessed, or should it be principally concerned with establishing common and agreed procedures which will allow reliable comparisons to be made – between students, between schools, between systems – in the interests of fairness, equity and the maintenance of ‘standards’? This is the question that lies at the heart of the debate over authentic assessment and, as readers will no doubt be aware, it is one that arouses considerable passion and prejudice in the public debate on schools and schooling. It has been particularly evident in recent years in the debate over reforms to curriculum and assessment in the senior secondary school, and more recently over the propriety of system-wide testing programs, particularly at the primary level. It is also the question that lies at the heart of the debate over national assessment, and underpins the call in Strengthening Australia’s Schools (Dawkins, 1988) for a common national approach to assessment. So, too, the development of the national assessment profiles was an
attempt to resolve the issue of comparability by tying the assessment procedures to a common set of learning outcomes while allowing considerable freedom to schools and teachers in the methods employed to assess those outcomes.

At the centre of the comparability v authenticity debate are questions of quantification and measurement, and their capacity to reflect accurately, and adequately, the complex outcomes of learning. There is a strongly entrenched belief in the managerial ideology currently dominant in Australian education, and probably also in public perceptions of the assessment debate, linking comparability with quantification and, superficially at least, this is understandable. The link is only warranted, however, when an identity (or at least a close similarity) can be assumed in the meanings attached to the quantities in the various disparate contexts being compared. Where the assessments are direct measures of quantities – for example, pupil enrolments or the amount spent on teachers’ salaries, and, if we are very careful, retention rates and teacher-pupil ratios – such an assumption is warranted. Where they are quantitative analogies representing qualities, however, the assumption is much more problematic, even when the same ‘instrument’ is being used. In such cases the assumption of comparability may in fact be more misleading than illuminating.

By and large, teachers, schools and systems are content with marks and grades not because they necessarily believe them to be accurate and adequate, but because they are more convenient, more manageable and less vulnerable to attack – although not necessarily less deserving of it – than more sensitive assessments. Marks and grades have an air of solidity about them. They are, after all, ‘hard’ data, with all the warm glow that metaphor bestows, whatever their status in terms of accuracy and adequacy. None of which should be taken as questioning the utility and value of quantitative assessment, which is, and will continue to be, an integral component of educational assessment. The problems lie not with quantification itself, but with the widespread tendency to attribute to it a good deal more significance, a good deal more precision and a good deal more objectivity than it typically possesses, and with a persistent tendency to see inaccuracy as a greater sin than inadequacy. The question arises, however, as to the status of comparisons based on assessments that are in themselves limited or inadequate, and whether the sacrifice of authenticity in the interests of comparability may not be as unsatisfactory for the assessor as it is for the assessed; whether, in fact, it is possible to have genuine comparability without authenticity.
Contextualised Assessment: A Question of Validity

Our second issue is concerned with the extent to which the assessment is, or should be, located within the teaching–learning process, or separated from it. Contextualised assessment is most broadly represented by those forms of school-based assessment which make use of evidence collected during the normal day-to-day activity of the classroom as the basis for the assessment of student learning and/or achievement. Of course good teachers have always used such contextual evidence as a basis for making judgments about student progress and decisions about curriculum and pedagogy. What is different about the more rigorous application of assessment in context is the systematic recording and use of such evidence as the basis for formal assessment. The term is more frequently encountered in the current debate, however, in connection with the student profiling and records of achievement movement in Britain (Moon, 1983; Broadfoot, 1986) and, more recently, in Australia (Baumgart, 1988; Reynolds & Wheatley, 1988), and the various forms of goal-based or work-required assessment which involve students in the negotiation of assessment targets and procedures (Hannan, 1985; Johnston & Dowdy, 1988; Withers & Batten, 1990; Withers & Low, 1990; Withers & McCurry, 1990).

It should be noted that contextualised assessment in the sense we have been using it here is necessarily school-based, although it does not follow that school-based assessment is necessarily contextualised. It is by no means uncommon for school-based assessment to be based on, or include, standardised tests, assignments and tasks which may or may not be closely related to the context of learning. Where the assessment takes place in situations external to or independent of the classroom, a contextualised approach seeks to develop assessment procedures which reproduce or simulate the teaching–learning context as closely as possible. Burstall (1990: 7–8) describes the attempt to develop such contextualised assessment tasks in the British national assessment program:

Standard Assessment Tasks are theme-based and cross-curricular . . . To complete a SAT, the children will be carrying out experiments, making things, having discussions with one another and their teacher, observing, recording, making graphs – a host of real and meaningful things . . . This means that there is no sharp dividing line between teaching and assessing. The two activities look very much like one another, and in fact the children themselves do not know they are being assessed.
Victorian readers will notice a family resemblance, at least in intention, to the Common Assessment Tasks developed in conjunction with the Victorian Certificate of Education.

The supporters of contextualised assessment tend to cite its superior validity and its greater compatibility with the educational purposes of assessment; its detractors its lack of reliability and its inappropriate-ness to the managerial and political purposes of assessment. Validity and reliability are, of course, key concepts in the debate on assessment, and of particular relevance to this issue. Validity has to do with the closeness of the relationship between the assessment and what it purports to assess, and hence is vital both to the integrity of the assessment and to its practical utility. Reliability has to do with the consistency of the assessment – from one occasion to another, from one assessor to another, from one task to another – and hence is vital to the fairness of the assessment and to its comparability. From the purist’s perspective, neither is expendable in the interests of good assessment. In the realpolitik of public assessment, however, it is not uncommon to find validity sacrificed in the interest of reliability, and this bias continues to be a major obstacle to the introduction of more contextualised assessment procedures.

The proponents of contextualised assessment, particularly those forms of it involving student participation and negotiation, also stress its potential for assessment-led curriculum reform through the linking of curriculum and assessment to individual student needs, talents and interests (Raven, 1984b; Burstall, 1990; Withers & McCurry, 1990).

Hargreaves (1989b; 1989c), on the other hand, is critical of negotiated approaches in the British context as showing a lack of concern with the content of learning; as contributing to curriculum differentiation – and in particular differentiation in the quality of curriculum provision – and hence to the gradual demolition of the comprehensive ideal in British education; as reinforcing the role of the school as an agent of social reproduction; and as involving students in complicity in their own disentitlement (cf. Reynolds, 1988). Clearly, where assessment procedures are concerned, there is a need to be very wary indeed of toxic side-effects.

These two issues come together in one of the major controversies surrounding proposals for national assessment and large-scale testing programs: whether assessment procedures that are questionable on the grounds of both authenticity and validity can be considered acceptable from either an assessment or curriculum perspective given the complexities of the task and the limitations of the techniques available (Stake,
It is not the limitations of the techniques themselves, however, so much as the failure to recognise those limitations in the uses to which the assessment is put, together with assumptions of accuracy and adequacy that are rarely, if ever, warranted, that constitute the essence of the problem. Sensibly used, the information provided by national assessment could be immensely valuable, perhaps indispensable, in the process of curriculum development and reform; but the potential for the abuse and misrepresentation of that information remains a real and ever-present danger, and one of which concerned educators are understandably wary. It is significant that the loudest calls for national assessment come from groups with a very explicit political agenda, suggesting that for some of its proponents national assessment is seen more as a mechanism for curriculum control than as a means of curriculum improvement. Once again we come up against the fundamental question of purpose, and a climate in which the educational purposes of assessment are persistently subordinated to the political and managerial purposes; and once again we come up against the role of assessment as a good servant but a bad master in the process of curriculum development and reform.

Assessment-led Curriculum Reform: White Knight or Good Night?

Assessment policies and procedures have a profound effect on what teachers and students do in classrooms. What Burkhardt, Fraser and Ridgway (1989: 317) refer to as the WYTIWYG effect – 'What You Test Is What You Get' – is one of the few sustainable generalisations in education. Curriculum reform implies assessment reform, and the very centrality of the relationship has led to a series of proposals for assessment-led curriculum reform as a solution to the problems of curriculum implementation (Flecknoe, 1983; Brooke & Oxenham, 1984; Little, 1984; Raven, 1984a; Broadfoot, 1986; Batten, 1989; Burkhardt, Fraser & Ridgway, 1989; Burstall, 1990; Withers & McCurry, 1990). Harnessing the power of assessment in the interests of curriculum reform has an immediate intuitive appeal, but the proposals themselves sometimes betray the possible limitations of the approach. For example, the full range of desirable curriculum outcomes would have to be subject to saturation-level assessment programs for curriculum practice at the classroom level to be substantially affected.
Hargreaves (1989b: 99) has argued that it is no exaggeration to claim that the 1980s in Britain were 'the era of assessment-led education reform', and it is certainly true that the 1980s witnessed a remarkable focusing of policy and practice on issues of assessment in Britain. Many of these initiatives – for example the introduction of a single certificate to replace the old GCE/CSE distinction, and the widespread adoption of pupil profiles and records of achievement – were aimed at better realising the aims of comprehensive education in Britain through reformed assessment procedures. Whether we can legitimately refer to this as 'assessment-led education reform', given the fact that comprehensive education had been introduced into Britain almost two decades earlier, is open to question; but certainly the impulse to reform in Britain in the 1980s was singularly focused on assessment.

What is significant about these events for our concerns in this review is that for two decades after the introduction of comprehensive education in Britain the anomaly of a binary certification system operating in an ostensibly unitary education system was apparently not seen as a major policy contradiction. This example serves to illustrate the extraordinary capacity of assessment procedures to linger long after their educational relevance has passed. Ironically, the decade ended in Britain with the introduction of national assessment as a support measure – some would say a control measure – for the introduction of the new national curriculum, which many have seen as a retreat from the comprehensive ideal (Dale, 1989; Hargreaves & Reynolds, 1989; Flude & Hammer, 1990). Burstall (1990), on the other hand, has claimed a potentially positive formative influence on teaching and curriculum for the attainment targets and Standard Assessment Tasks developed in conjunction with the national assessment program because of their close relationship to good classroom practice and desirable curriculum outcomes.

Closer to home, the past decade has witnessed a radical and often painful reform of the upper secondary school curriculum in all Australian state and territory systems, brought about by a remarkable increase in retention to senior secondary schooling – the number of students staying on to complete their secondary education more than doubled during the decade. This meant that senior secondary education could no longer be viewed as an elite academic education for a minority of students, but must now be seen as a normal expectation for all or most students. The development of more inclusive curricula to meet the needs of a greater range of students was complemented by a wide-ranging reform of assessment and credentialling procedures. Significantly, it was
not the curriculum reforms at the heart of the matter but the proposed changes to the assessment and credentialling procedures that sparked controversy and debate, in many cases forcing concessions and modifications to the proposed assessment reforms that weakened their potential role in supporting the curriculum reforms. The problem is neatly, if perhaps inadvertently, encapsulated by the then Vice-Chancellor of the University of Melbourne, Professor David Penington, in the context of an attack on the proposed assessment procedures for the then new Victorian Certificate of Education (VCE):

> All of the studies provide for independent work by students or by groups of students in preparing reports or essays. Let me say that I unequivocally support this approach as an important part of education. It is independent study and problem-solving which are most likely to motivate people to learn—a principle of education which I share with the VCE's architects. However there are problems in assigning the assessment of such project work a weight equal to other CATs [Common Assessment Tasks] in the process of selection for higher education.

(Penington, 1990: 33)

What is disturbing about this argument is the ease with which the assumption is made that the managerial purposes of assessment—in this case their role in facilitating the universities' selection procedures—should take precedence over the educational aims of the curriculum, even those aims which, on his own analysis, would contribute to more effective preparation for university studies; for Penington is surely aware that to diminish their 'weight' in the assessment process is to diminish their importance, certainly in the eyes of the students, and probably also in the eyes of their teachers, given the strong pressures towards instrumentalism in senior secondary schooling. If Penington is aware of a dilemma here, he does not acknowledge it in the argument. We can only conclude that, for him, the issue is unproblematic. Accuracy takes precedence over adequacy; comparability over authenticity; and assessment over curriculum.

These two examples, each in its own way, illustrate a dilemma inherent in proposals for assessment-led curriculum reform. Assessment procedures, particularly public procedures of a kind likely to influence classroom practice, may constitute a more formidable obstacle to change than the curriculum itself or the conservatism of practice. By the same token they also attest to the power of the WYTIWYG effect in supporting or inhibiting curriculum reform, and suggest that assessment reform, whether in a leadership or supportive role, is an indispensable
component of sustained and sustainable curriculum reform. Whether this close relationship between assessment and curriculum is seen as symbiotic or parasitic depends on one's point of view, but it is central to any serious consideration of assessment-led curriculum reform. Certainly the principle that assessment programs should aim for beneficial curriculum outcomes is an important one, and one worth encouraging as a prerequisite of any national approach to assessment.

Conclusion

The late Garth Boomer with his customary wit and insight once suggested that assessment packages should be required to carry toxicity warnings, as is required for household cleaners, medications and other potentially dangerous goods. Perhaps we should also require tamper-proof lids and 'Keep Out of Reach of Children' warnings. With the national profiles, and the assessment programs and procedures that emerge from them, as with other potentially useful aids to good health and good housekeeping, much will depend on the way they are handled. The promise is that we could gain a much better understanding than we now possess of the knowledge and capacities of Australian students as a basis for more informed curriculum decision making; the danger that the temptation to misuse will prove irresistible, and impede curriculum reform by promoting (and rewarding) a narrow focus on those things which are assessed and readily assessable, but which may not be those things which are most valued or most valuable (Raven, 1984a; 1984b). The ultimate irony may well be that by focusing on outcomes, narrowly conceived, we may be contributing to a decline in the quality of inputs, and thus to a decline in the very standards of educational provision we have been so concerned to preserve.

One of the more recent additions to the criteria for judging the quality of assessment procedures is the concept of consequential validity (Messick, 1988; 1989; Glaser, 1991), the notion that assessment procedures must be judged not simply in terms of their technical efficiency, but in terms of their outcomes, and in particular their effects on student learning. This is an important principle, and one well worth incorporating into our traditional notions of validity. Perhaps it is time that assessment, so long promoted as the mechanism for accountability, should be made more accountable itself, not only for its effects on student learning, but for its role in enhancing or impeding the process of curriculum reform in Australia’s schools.
Nostalgia for the Future: The Search for Resolution

It is not the job of the botanist to eradicate weeds. Enough for him if he can show just how fast they grow.

C. Northcote Parkinson

A recurrent theme in the curriculum debate in Australia over the past three decades has revolved around efforts to establish a national focus for and a national approach to curriculum provision and reform in Australia’s schools. The purpose of this review has been to explore this theme in its historical context and current manifestations, and to examine the issues it gives rise to, not simply as a matter of historical interest but as a matter of ongoing concern. In choosing as a focus for the review the Dawkins (1988) statement Strengthening Australia’s Schools there is no implication of an endorsement of federal government policy or of support for a mandated national curriculum along the lines of the British model. Rather it is its watershed role as a crystallisation of these ongoing concerns and as a catalyst for the most recent and most comprehensive attempt to articulate a national approach to curriculum development and reform that has determined its focal position in this review.

In particular, the Dawkins statement gave public voice and policy backing to a growing awareness, both nationally and globally, that curriculum development and reform, while most sharply realised at the point of implementation, has ramifications for the wider community and the national interest, and could no longer be viewed solely in terms of local and parochial interests. The statement called for a national effort for schools, and invited the cooperation of the states and territories in
the development of a national perspective and a shared commitment to a redefinition of the goals and priorities of Australian schooling. The analysis of these proposals in the opening chapter of this review identified four key questions emerging from the proposals in relation to curriculum reform:

- What might be meant by the development of a national perspective?
- What might be meant by a common curriculum?
- What might be meant by a common framework?
- What might be meant by a common approach to assessment?

Subsequent chapters of the review have explored each of these questions in turn through the identification and analysis of issues related to the development, content, structure, function and assessment of the curriculum in Australian schools, and the extent to which they have been resolved in the national collaborative curriculum process emerging from the Dawkins proposals. The review has been not so much concerned with providing answers to the questions as with setting out the parameters of the debate.

In seeking to draw together the threads of the argument in this final chapter, I have adopted the somewhat unusual approach of attempting to summarise the major aspects and issues arising from the review laterally across the chapters rather than vertically within them; that is, instead of attempting to summarise these aspects and issues sequentially as they appear within the various curriculum elements considered in the review – elements of development, content, structure, function and assessment – they are summarised laterally in terms of their various manifestations, mutations and variations across the curriculum elements. The approach is, of course, not without its dangers. The risk is that it may appear contrived, and even lead to some distortion of the issues themselves; the promise that by presenting the various aspects and issues in a new configuration, they can be viewed in a new light. But perhaps most importantly, it helps to reinforce a view of curriculum as an integrated process in which the various elements come together to produce a purposeful and coherent entity, in itself a central theme of this review.

Past Indicative: The Historical Context

Eltis (1993: 49) is, of course, right in criticising the tendency of curriculum commentators to identify Strengthening Australia’s Schools ‘as the
starting point for the intense collaborative activity that has gone on since mid-1988’, and in reminding us that ‘there was life before Dawkins’; and indeed it has been a central purpose of this review to place these developments in their historical context as just the latest manifestation of a longstanding concern, extending back over several decades, with establishing a national approach to curriculum development and reform. This concern gained momentum in the late 1960s with the inauguration of the Australian Science Education Project and the establishment of the National Committee for Social Science Teaching, the first of three national committees set up by the federal government to stimulate reform in key curriculum areas deemed to be of national significance (Connell, 1993: 545-549).

The establishment of the national Curriculum Development Centre in 1975 provided a focus for this concern and signalled the direct entry of the Commonwealth government into the process of curriculum development and reform. In its relatively brief life the Curriculum Development Centre mounted important national curriculum projects in social education, English language education, environmental education, Aboriginal education and core curriculum, among others, and established a national and international reputation for leadership and expertise in curriculum development. Perhaps its most important contribution was to raise the level of public debate and public awareness of curriculum issues in Australia, and stimulate the dissemination of ideas across state borders, thus creating for the first time in any sustained sense a genuinely national presence in curriculum development and reform in Australian schools. Its demise in 1981 as a result of federal government cost-cutting measures was effectively hastened by a noticeable lack of support from the states and territories for its retention.

In 1983 the Hawke Labor government reconstituted the Curriculum Development Centre, but not with the same degree of independence it had previously enjoyed. As a consequence it was unable to adopt the high-profile leadership role of its predecessor, constrained instead by design to a more political, more conciliatory role of negotiator, cajoler, persuader and facilitator of greater cooperation with and between the states and territories in curriculum development and reform. The process was a convoluted and frustrating one, with the Curriculum Development Centre often reduced to little more than a funding and coordinating agency, but it did result in a number of significant national curriculum initiatives, particularly in the areas of mathematics education, early literacy and languages other than English. Perhaps most importantly for our purposes in this review, it was the Curriculum
Development Centre, in conjunction with the state and territory Directors of Curriculum, that negotiated the 'collaborative' procedures that were to form the basis of the national collaborative curriculum process that emerged from the Dawkins proposals in *Strengthening Australia's Schools*, and initiated the curriculum mapping work that was to provide the first phase in the development of the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles (Directors of Curriculum/Curriculum Development Centre, 1987; Eltis, 1993).

The same period that produced these pressures towards a national perspective on curriculum reform also witnessed a somewhat contradictory development in all Australian school systems towards greater devolution of curriculum decision making to schools and their communities. This in turn produced a dramatic change in the conceptualisation of curriculum development and provision away from the production of detailed syllabuses towards the development of more general guidelines and curriculum frameworks allowing greater scope for interpretation and variation, and away from prescription and regulation towards the development of flexible resources, support services and the professional development of teachers. The economic constraints of the late 1980s led to a serious reduction in all systems in the support services for school-based curriculum development, with a corresponding reduction in the capacity of systems to respond effectively to pressures for curriculum change. One response to these changing circumstances has been a movement in most systems towards a degree of recentralisation of curriculum decision making; another has been a rekindling of interest in collaborative curriculum development as a cost-saving measure, especially among the smaller states and territories. It was these economic imperatives, rather than any enthusiasm for the national interest, that fuelled the national collaborative curriculum process that flowed from the Dawkins proposals in *Strengthening Australia's Schools*, and it is these continuing economic imperatives that may yet serve to sustain them despite the failure of the Australian Education Council to endorse the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles (Directors of Curriculum/Curriculum Development Centre, 1987; Speedy, 1992).

Parallel to these developments, and in part as a response to them, the period also witnessed sporadic demands for national assessment, particularly in the so-called 'basic' skill areas of literacy and numeracy. Following the somewhat surreptitious introduction of the first national assessment of literacy and numeracy in 1975, there was spirited debate within the Australian Education Council about the desirability of
implementing similar assessments on an annual basis, culminating in a decision in October 1979 to implement such a policy for a five-year period beginning in 1980. Such was the level of opposition to this policy, however, including the vehement opposition of senior bureaucrats in the state and territory systems, that the policy was abandoned after the 1980 assessment. In its place the Australian Education Council accepted a proposal from the Directors-General of Education for the collaborative development of progress and review tests through the Australian Cooperative Assessment Program, the subsequent history of which suggests that it was less a serious attempt to develop common assessment procedures than a collaborative effort to head off any further threats of national assessment.

It was in this historically unpropitious climate that the Dawkins proposals in *Strengthening Australia’s Schools* were launched. The Dawkins proposals were considered in a series of meetings by the Australian Education Council, culminating in the historic April 1989 meeting in Hobart which agreed on a set of national goals for schooling, the creation of a new national curriculum development agency, and the implementation of a national collaborative curriculum process initially in five key learning areas, later extended to eight. The delay in setting up the new national curriculum agency, largely because of inability to reach agreement on its structure and functions, allowed the state and territory Directors of Curriculum, through their role in the mapping of current curriculum provision in the state and territory systems, to slip in and effectively take over the direction of the national collaborative curriculum process. This was in many ways unfortunate, since it locked the national collaborative process into a ‘collaborative’ model that was more political than educational, and more geared to the protection of state and territory interests than it was to the pursuit of the national interest (Directors of Curriculum/Curriculum Development Centre, 1987). It also locked the national collaborative process into building on areas of commonality among the states and territories as identified through the curriculum mapping exercise rather than building on the agreed national goals to develop a genuinely national curriculum framework. While this approach can readily be defended as political realism, it was an approach predicated on the status quo and the maintenance of existing divisions, and thus avoided the challenge of a genuinely forward-looking national effort for schools called for in the Dawkins proposals and implicit in the Hobart Declaration.

The amalgamation of the Directors of Curriculum and the Australian Cooperative Assessment Program into a single new body, the
Curriculum and Assessment Committee, in 1991 further formalised the dominance of state and territory interests in the national collaborative curriculum process. Under the new body, and particularly after its restructuring in July 1992 to provide for an executive and a full-time secretariat, the process became more managerial, more authoritarian, less consultative and more overtly political, its energies devoted to the efficient completion of the national collaborative tasks by a June 1993 deadline that most observers, and indeed most participants, considered absurdly unrealistic and certainly not conducive to the development of quality products. Meanwhile, the new national curriculum agency, Curriculum Corporation, was effectively locked out of the development process, its role reduced to that of service provider and eventual publisher of the finished products.

The failure of the Australian Education Council at its meeting in Perth in June 1993, and later at its final meeting in Hobart in December of that year, to endorse the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles, and their referral back to the states and territories to do with as they would, left the national collaborative curriculum process in limbo. The statements and profiles were eventually published by Curriculum Corporation in early 1994, although significantly without the word ‘national’ in their titles, their future uncertain and their fate indeterminate. There is a depressing predictability about these events as we witness yet another attempt to develop a workable model for cooperation between the Commonwealth and the states and territories in a national approach to curriculum reform founder on the reef of state and territory recalcitrance. If this seems a harsh judgment, and one not sufficiently appreciative of state and territory sensitivities, it is nevertheless a judgment amply supported by the historical record, whether we view that record as laudable, defensible, or reprehensible.

Present Conditional: The Current Context

So what then do we have to show for five years and an estimated $6.5 million dollars of sometimes frantic national collaborative curriculum development? The optimistic view suggests that the states and territories will now take the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles and incorporate them constructively into their own curriculum and assessment initiatives, and that this was all that could realistically have been expected anyway, even if the statements and profiles had been endorsed by the Australian Education Council. This, it is argued,
will of itself bring about greater cohesion and common purpose in the curricula of Australia's schools, while preserving valuable diversity and flexibility in interpretation and implementation. The pessimistic view suggests that the states and territories will simply return to their old ways, perhaps paying some lip service to national goals and the national interest, but essentially pursuing their own policies and their own priorities in their own ways; in other words, a return to the status quo, with little to show for the years of collaborative effort, a view reinforced by the recent decision of the largest system, New South Wales, to abandon further efforts to incorporate the national curriculum statements and profiles into its syllabuses (Eltis, 1995: i-ii, 40-41).

On the positive side we do have, for the first time in our history, agreement to a set of common national goals, although there is little evidence to date that their implications for curriculum policy and practice have been taken seriously either at national or system level. We also have an agreed set of eight Key Learning Areas which, in theory at least, will provide a common curriculum organisational structure across the state and territory systems, although, as we have seen, these learning areas as presently constituted display serious structural and conceptual weaknesses that will make them difficult to apply with any degree of consistency and coherence. Moreover, there is already evidence in some state and territory systems of tampering with the learning areas to make them more compatible with current local curriculum provision (McGaw, 1994b). We also have a new national curriculum agency, Curriculum Corporation, to provide a focus for national collaborative curriculum development and support for implementation of the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles. As we have seen, however, Curriculum Corporation lacks both the authority and the independence to pursue a proactive role in national curriculum reform; although the economic constraints that have reduced the capacity, especially of the smaller state and territory systems, to meet the demands of curriculum development and support seem likely to give it the potential to influence curriculum reform through its publications and products.

The failure of the Australian Education Council to endorse the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles has left them without political legitimacy. This has meant that their survival and potential for implementation will be dependent on their perceived educational legitimacy; and that, as things currently stand, is a fairly fragile basis for survival. As we have seen, there is considerable variability in the quality of the statements and profiles across learning areas. In particular, in those learning areas that were late in starting the
developmental process, the statements and profiles in their current form could most appropriately be described as early drafts, suffering from confused conceptualisation, hasty development and forced compromise. Unfortunately, too, even those statements and profiles that do have the benefit of a coherent structure and clear focus, such as mathematics and science, have also come under fire, particularly from groups of conservative academics. One result of these attacks has been that the mathematics statement and profile which, along with English, seemed most likely to gain national acceptance, became a particular target of the then Victorian Minister for Education, and will not be implemented in that state, at least in the immediate future.

A further barrier to educational legitimacy is the widespread criticism of the process whereby the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles were developed, in particular the lack of consultation and public debate, and the absence of any theoretical underpinning for the curriculum framework provided by the statements and profiles (McTaggart, 1991; Piper, 1991; Kenway, 1992; Reid, 1992; Boughton, 1993; Davison, 1993; MacPherson, 1993; Collins, 1994, Ellerton & Clements, 1994; Eltis, 1995, among others). Consultation is, of course, something of a double-edged sword, since it is likely to further compound confusion and incoherence in its attempt to marry inconsistent and incompatible demands; but it would have helped to legitimise the process, and perhaps to identify some of the more intractable issues requiring resolution prior to development. A more serious omission is the lack of a theoretical justification, or indeed of any overall conceptual structure, underpinning the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles, since it deprives the statements and profiles of any collective basis for defending their educational legitimacy. There was in fact a belated recognition of the need 'to set the development of national statements and subject [sic] profiles in the context of an agreed national conceptual framework' which 'should take account of current overarching curriculum statements used in the systems, but provide a new forward looking formulation' (Conference of Directors General/Directors of Curriculum, 1991: 8) but in the rush to complete the tasks in hand and the confusion following the June 1993 meeting of the Australian Education Council this task was never undertaken. However, it is doubtful whether, even had such a document been prepared, as a post hoc justification of a largely directionless process it would have commanded much credibility. These problems of educational legitimacy are compounded by the absence, following the collapse of the Curriculum
and Assessment Committee, of any agreed structure or process for evaluation and review of the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles, which would appear to be crucial to their effective implementation – unless of course Curriculum Corporation is entrusted with that role.

In the absence, then, of both political and educational legitimacy, the survival and implementation of the national curriculum statements and profiles, whether in current or modified form, would appear to depend on the commitment of the state and territory Ministers and senior educational bureaucrats to the incorporation of a national focus into their current and future curriculum initiatives. On the surface of it this would not appear to be a very likely basis for survival, particularly in the long term, although the economic imperatives referred to above may well force the smaller states and territories towards a degree of collaborative implementation, at least in the short term.

Barriers to Reform: The Political Context

A major impediment to the development of a national approach to curriculum reform in Australia’s schools has been, and will no doubt continue to be, the Australian federal system. A variety of attempts over the past three decades to bring greater coordination and cohesion to Australia’s disparate education systems in the national interest and in the interests of students in Australian classrooms have faltered at the barrier of states’ righteousness, and the very persistence of the phenomenon – over a long period of time, over many areas of the national interest in addition to education, and involving a large and varied cast of actors and a range of models and procedures – suggests that it will not be an easy barrier to overcome. The increasing momentum of the move towards a republic, now seen by many on both sides of politics as inevitable, will no doubt bring in its wake a reassessment of the role and viability of the states, but that is at best a long-term prospect, and one whose outcome is by no means a foregone conclusion.

Political historians distinguish three forms of federalism – coordinate federalism, in which the component parts operate independently; cooperative federalism, in which the component parts operate collectively while remaining autonomous; and organic federalism, in which the component parts are largely administrative units of the collective entity (Sawyer, 1977; 1983). There is less agreement on whether these three
forms represent developmental stages in the growth of federal systems, but it is a plausible hypothesis in the context of Australian federalism, and provides a possible explanatory framework within which to interpret current and potential future developments in curriculum reform in their political and historical context. Australian federalism in recent decades appears to have been moving from coordinate federalism towards a more cooperative form, perhaps inexorably, but not unequivocally, and not without a good deal of resistance.

This is not to suggest that the states and territories are incapable of pursuing curriculum reform individually; but they do appear to have difficulty pursuing it collectively, at least on the evidence to date. The national collaborative curriculum process that followed the Dawkins (1988) call for a national effort for schools has been widely touted as signalling a new level of cooperation and a new willingness on the part of the states and territories to collaborate in the national interest, but always within a context that ensured ‘that ultimately the National Statements will be used as systems see fit’ (Elitis, 1993: 51). There is an important distinction to be made between collaborative action in the pursuit of common goals and the national interest, and collaboration in pursuit of ‘ingenious compromises’ (Hannan, 1992) that preserve the private agendas of the participating parties. Collaboration without commitment is at best a contrived collaboration.

At the micropolitical level we have seen how the traditional school subjects, through their powerful lobby groups and their entrenched positions in the culture of schooling, have frustrated the implementation of structural reform in the curriculum of Australian schools. This is not simply a problem at the national level. A decade or more after all Australian state and territory systems switched from traditional subject structures to learning areas as the basic structural organisers for the school curriculum, the ‘balkanised curriculum’ (Hargreaves, 1992) continues to dominate curriculum provision at the school level, particularly in the secondary school. The national collaborative curriculum process, while recognising the problem, failed to tackle it head on, opting instead for ‘ingenious compromise’ at the expense of coherence and intellectual integrity. The point to be made here is not whether learning areas are more effective structural organisers for the contemporary school curriculum than traditional school subjects – although there are powerful arguments to suggest that they are – but rather that, having made the decision to go with learning areas, there has been a failure of nerve at both system and national levels in accepting the implications of that decision for traditional school curriculum structures.
Nor should we underestimate the significance of the shift in the political climate that occurred during the late 1970s and early 1980s, globally as well as nationally, as a continuing barrier to effective curriculum reform. The conservative revival, exacerbated by economic recession, made it easier to dismantle the processes of reform that had been gathering momentum over the previous two decades. It became fashionable to dismiss the reforms of the 1960s and 1970s as romantic excesses, and to redefine reform in terms of cost cutting, economic restructuring and small government. Connell (1993: 683–684), in his scholarly and perceptive review of Australian education during the quarter-century between 1960 and 1985, attributes this shift also to 'a failure of nerve':

The promise of renewal in education, the rejuvenation of the years 1965 to 1975, faltered and broke down. Criticism rather than creativity took over . . . The decade up to 1985 was, therefore, one of struggle to maintain and extend the educational changes of the previous decade which had begun to move Australian education into a new set of meanings . . .

It is a tribute to the braking power of promiscuous conservatism that this assessment seems as appropriate to the decade after 1985 as it does to the decade before it. It is perhaps unsurprising, then, given the political climate, that the national collaborative curriculum process, despite its promise, baulked at the challenge of a futures perspective, a reformist stance and genuine collaboration in the national interest. Koestler (1978) has noted a relationship between conservatism, self-assertiveness and present-orientation; and it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the prospects for curriculum reform in Australian schools looked considerably brighter a quarter of a century ago than they do now. But perhaps that is just nostalgia for past enthusiasms. The challenge for the next decade will be to renew the promise.

Patterns of Difference: The Ideological Context

Underlying most political controversy are powerful ideological differences that predispose particular individuals and groups towards particular resolutions of conflicts in policy and practice. It would therefore be naive to interpret the conflicts surrounding curriculum reform and the national interest solely in terms of self-interest and the pursuit of power. One of the more persistent and enduring myths in educational discourse in Australia is the view that the proponents of curriculum
reform are ‘ideological’ (and therefore suspect in their motives) while the opponents of reform are the disinterested defenders of truth, standards and educational values (Donnelly, 1990; 1993). The fallacy here of course is the assumption that it is possible to have a curriculum, or indeed a curriculum perspective, that is not ideological. Thus we find at the heart of many of the issues identified in this review particular dimensions of difference that have their roots in these fundamental ideological divisions and help to explain patterns of difference that tend to recur across the curriculum elements. In this section we will briefly address some of the more salient of these ideological dimensions of particular relevance to the issues raised in this review.

The Individual and Society

At the centre of political conflict, particularly in a Western-style democracy, is the inevitable conflict between the needs and interests of the society and the needs and interests of the individual; between the obligations and responsibilities of citizenship and the rights and freedoms of the citizen; between community and self-interest; between cooperation and competition; finding ultimate expression at the political level in the conflict between the social democratic and the liberal democratic traditions. The past two decades have witnessed a fairly dramatic shift, not only in Australia, towards an individualist position on this dimension of difference, not without some cost to our sense of community and to our social institutions. Schooling as a social institution specifically charged with the induction of the young into the culture and the society, and in particular the school curriculum as the principal vehicle of that induction, has not been immune to this shift, or to the tensions created by it in the wider society. It is thus not surprising to find this dimension of difference, or aspects of it, recurring in various guises across the curriculum elements that have been the object of our attention in this review.

There is no way that these tensions can be ultimately or completely resolved short of totalitarianism or anarchy, and nor should they be: as Popper (1976: 116) reminds us, a society without conflict would be ‘a society not of friends but of ants’. Resolution thus depends on ensuring that its working out in the school curriculum is as dynamic and constructive as possible, creating a learning context in which individual aspirations are given as free a rein as possible within a framework of equity and community responsibility.
Underlying much of the conflict surrounding curriculum provision and reform is a fundamental philosophical difference between those who view learning as a commodity or product, and those who view it as a process of growth or development. A product-oriented position on this dimension of difference will tend to view the school curriculum as a means to an end, to be judged on how effectively it achieves that end; a process-oriented position will tend to view it as an end in itself, to be judged on how effectively it engages teachers and students in active learning. The economic rationalist philosophy which has dominated public policy in Australia in recent years, with its emphasis on outcomes and the 'bottom line', has tended to push the curriculum debate towards the product-orientation position on this dimension, ostensibly as a correction to the alleged lack of concern with outcomes in the process-oriented curriculum of the late 1970s and early 1980s. Hence the importance attached to the development of assessment profiles in the form of outcome statements in the recent national collaborative curriculum process; hence too the difficulties encountered by the profile writers in adequately incorporating processes into their outcome statements, and in adequately characterising growth and development.

In many ways the distinction is a contrived one, despite its often vitriolic manifestations in the curriculum debate. Products do not exist in isolation, but as the outcomes of some process; processes are rarely indulged in for their own sake, but with a view to an outcome; and it is this complementarity of process and product that points the way to resolution. A curriculum that pays no attention to process runs the risk of having its products unrealised. A curriculum that focuses on process at the expense of product runs the risk of trivialising its processes. The difficulty, as always, however, lies in the integration of process and product in a way that emphasises their complementarity rather than in their isolation as distinctive areas of curriculum 'content', as commonly occurs and as is exemplified in the national curriculum statements with their curious designation of process and content as separate 'strands'.

Reform implies change, and change is a threat to stability, and a threat to stability produces resistance, and resistance impedes implementation, and without implementation there is no reform; and therein lies the
endemic dilemma of the reform process. It is a familiar enough pattern, and certainly not unique to schools and schooling, affecting planned change and reform in all social institutions, public and private (Schon, 1973). Serious as it is, however, this is essentially a management problem relating to the implementation of reform, and as such would not warrant its inclusion in a section dealing with the ideological context of curriculum reform in Australian schools. Underlying such behavioural patterns, however, is a much more fundamental political division within the society between conservative elements ideologically committed to the maintenance of the status quo and progressive elements ideologically committed to betterment and improvement through change. This of course is elementary stuff, and the familiar basis for ideological divisions between and within political parties, but its ramifications across all elements of curriculum decision making are not always readily recognised or readily acknowledged. The borders between the ideological and the professional are easily blurred, and it is not uncommon to find pressures for curriculum change characterised and castigated as ‘political interference’ while resistance to such change is characterised, at least by the resisters, as ‘apolitical’.

The search for a practical resolution of this dimension of difference is complicated by the fact that reform implies change, and to compromise change in the interests of stability is to compromise the integrity of the reform itself – a process all too evident in the recent national collaborative curriculum process. We can look to better management of the implementation of the change process to minimise its disruptive effects, in particular a more sophisticated understanding of the dynamics of change, a more sensitive recognition of the threats it poses to stakeholders, and a closer attention to optimising the conditions most likely to lead to effective and sustained change (Fullan, 1991). Perhaps the most creative resolution, however, may lie in changing the culture of schooling so that change becomes recognised as a normal and essential part of effective curriculum provision, as natural as the annual departure of one group of students and the arrival of a new. That would be no easy task; but it is not an impossible one.

Inclusion and Exclusion

The introduction of the concept of universal education, and in particular its extension into the junior secondary school and, more recently, the senior secondary school, has ensured that the issue of inclusive curriculum has a prominent place in the debate over curriculum reform.
There are two distinct but not unrelated aspects to this issue: on the one hand, the extent to which the traditional school curriculum is inclusive of the needs and interests of all its students, regardless of background or aspirations; on the other, the extent to which the traditional school curriculum is inclusive of the full range of human knowledge, and in particular its openness to new knowledge and alternative ways of knowing. Supporters of the exclusive curriculum have tended to emphasise the quest for excellence and the maintenance of standards, sometimes presented – or misrepresented, depending on one’s point of view – as a concern for quality. Supporters of inclusive curriculum have tended to focus on equity and social justice, the value of a broad general education for all students, and the rights and entitlements of those students and groups of students traditionally disadvantaged by the exclusive curriculum. The tensions created by these rival views of education as a relatively narrowly focused pursuit of prestige studies, and education as a relatively broad and accessible pursuit of learning across a range of studies characterise this dimension of difference.

The complexity of the issues underlying this dimension, and its dual focus on scope and accessibility, make resolution difficult. Nor is the course of resolution helped by the adoption of improbable slogans like ‘excellence and equity’, which are by definition incompatible. Underlying both positions, however, is a genuine concern for improving the quality of curriculum provision in Australian schools, and it is this shared concern that points the way to creative resolution: the challenge of devising a curriculum that optimises scope and accessibility without sacrificing quality.

The Whole and the Parts

There are relationships between our final dimension of difference and the previous one. Both are concerned in a broad sense with the relationship of the whole to the parts, but whereas the previous dimension was concerned with the relative narrowness or breadth of the curriculum, and its accessibility to a range of talents and interests, our final dimension is centred on a basic philosophical division in Western thought as to whether the path to enlightenment is best attained by moving from an understanding of the whole towards a consideration of the parts, or from an understanding of the parts towards a consideration of the whole, a division reflected in such traditional dualisms as intuitive and analytical thinking, synthesis and analysis, deductive and inductive reasoning, and phenomenological and positivist research. As we have noted
previously, it also surfaces in the epistemological and pedagogical styles of teachers (Berlak & Berlak, 1981), in the research on preferred learning styles (Claxton & Murrell, 1987) and cognition (Arnheim, 1985), and in neurological research into the functioning of the left and right hemispheres of the brain (Springer & Deutsch, 1989; Atkins, 1993).

The centrality of this dimension of difference to so many diverse aspects of human intellectual activity, and the significant contribution of both modes of thought to the growth of human knowledge and understanding, suggest that there is a strong case for considering them as complementary rather than as alternative approaches, and for a transformational resolution which honours both modes. Such a resolution, however, is not likely to arise from good intentions, nor indeed from reliance on current ‘best practice’. Rather it will require a commitment of resources to careful research and coordinated planning across all curriculum areas.

The tensions created by these fundamental ideological divisions are not readily resolvable in the context of curriculum reform any more than they are in the wider context of social policy. It should be noted, however, that they can be creative tensions, in education as in the wider society, and should not therefore be automatically regarded as ‘problems’. By the same token they can all too readily create conflicting pressures and confusions that require careful resolution and accommodation lest they become problems. The challenge is to ensure that their working out in the curriculum is as dynamic and constructive as possible, without resort to incoherence, inconsistency or shabby compromise.

Future Imperative: Towards Resolution

Broadly speaking there are three somewhat different kinds of problem requiring resolution to emerge from this review: problems of definition, problems of development and problems of implementation. Problems of definition revolve around the question of what kind of learning is likely to be most appropriate to the needs of the individual and the community in the twenty-first century. Problems of development revolve around the question of what mechanisms and processes are likely to be most effective in facilitating the formulation of such a curriculum. Problems of implementation revolve around the question of how such a curriculum, once it is defined and developed, can be effectively translated into the learning of students in Australian classrooms. We will
conclude this review of the issues underlying curriculum reform in Australian schools with some brief observations by way of summary on each of these problems in turn.

Problems of Definition

Problems of definition are not essentially, or even principally, about the selection of curriculum content, important as that may be. At a more basic level they are about the purposes, directions and aspirations of Australian society as it tumbles towards the twenty-first century. Western liberal democracies have always had trouble balancing the competing demands of their tripartite legacy of liberty, equality and fraternity. Over the past decade or so the balance has shifted markedly in favour of liberty, with its attendant values of individual rights, personal freedom and competition. Equality, with its attendant values of equity, social justice and that quintessentially Australian value of 'a fair go', has suffered to some extent from this shift, but has generally managed to maintain a relatively high profile in the debate over curriculum provision, at least at the level of good intentions. The big loser in this shift appears to have been fraternity, with its attendant values of community, social responsibility and cooperation. Perhaps it is time we looked to ways of redressing the balance; or at least to a consideration of the possible consequences of continued imbalance.

We do, however, have a starting point for the process of definition in the Common and Agreed National Goals for Schooling in Australia, which do appear to achieve a reasonable balance among the three elements of the democratic triptych and have the inestimable advantage of political legitimacy, having been agreed to and accepted by all Australian state and territory systems, although their educational legitimacy is still to be established. While they are acknowledged in the national curriculum statements, they do not appear to have had any direct input into the definition of those statements. Nor do their implications for curriculum provision appear to have been seriously explored at the state and territory level. But they are there, and could provide an agreed starting point for a curriculum reform process if we are seriously looking for one.

Problems of Development

From a national perspective, the demise of the Australian Education Council and the disbanding of its committee structure, particularly the
Curriculum and Assessment Committee, has created something of a vacuum so far as the developmental mechanisms for curriculum reform are concerned, particularly given the limited capacity of the states and territories to pursue their own curriculum development in a climate of economic constraint and diminishing resources. Curriculum Corporation is, of course, well placed to step into this vacuum, but is limited by its current structure and constitution from adopting the sort of proactive leadership role that would be required if the national curriculum statements and assessment profiles are to attain educational legitimacy sufficient to play a constructive role in the process of curriculum reform in Australia’s schools.

Various attempts over the past quarter of a century or more to develop a national approach to curriculum development and reform have been wrecked on the politics of federalism, and the sorry history of this process suggests that perhaps it is time we sought a new model – a model that works in the interests of curriculum development and reform rather than one that works in the interests of the states and territories. Such a model would require a genuinely independent national curriculum agency, adequately funded and professionally resourced. Such an agency would not, of course, be free of political pressures – that is the nature of curriculum development and reform – but it would be able to distance itself from such pressures and limit their influence on its professional procedures in a way that has so far eluded the reform process at the national level.

An independent national curriculum development agency is not such a radical proposal as it might first appear. Indeed it is the model originally proposed by the Ministers for Curriculum Corporation until it was successfully opposed by the Directors-General of Education, who argued the need for control in curriculum matters. Perhaps it is time we revisited that argument and reconsidered the case for professional independence. There is no suggestion here that such an agency would have prescriptive authority. As we have suggested elsewhere in this review, professional authority may well prove more effective than prescriptive authority in giving educational legitimacy to proposed reforms. Such authority would not be automatically conferred. It would have to be earned. The argument here is that it is more likely to be earned under conditions of professional autonomy and independence than under the politically contrived model with which Curriculum Corporation is currently encumbered.
Problems of Implementation

The best laid plans of curriculum reformers are doomed to the scrap heap of history unless they are effectively implemented in classrooms—a truism, of course, but a truism precisely because it has been the fate of so many otherwise laudable attempts to reform the curriculum of Australian schools. The greatest barriers to the effective implementation of curriculum reform are the conservatism of practice and the culture of schooling (Fullan 1982; 1991; Hargreaves, 1991). The most effective strategy for breaking down the conservatism of practice is the involvement of teachers in the process of reform. This does not necessarily imply the involvement of teachers in curriculum development, but it does imply professional support for school-based decision making on the implementation of the reform. One of the more damaging effects of cost-cutting in educational provision in recent years has been the diminution in resources for such professional support.

The culture of schooling tends to be either isolationist—the ‘egg-crate culture’ depicted by Lortie (1975)—or factionalised—the ‘balkanised’ culture described by Hargreaves (1992). The former is more commonly encountered in primary schools; the latter in secondary schools. The breaking down of such cultures, and their replacement with the more collegial and collaborative processes so necessary to coherent and cohesive curriculum reform will not occur naturally without considerable professional support (Fullan, 1991; Hargreaves, 1991; 1992; Little, 1988; 1990). Unless we are prepared to commit resources to creating the conditions for the effective implementation of curriculum reform, the resolution of the problems of definition and development referred to above will be of largely academic significance. Ultimately it is the riders in the chariot who will determine where it goes. And, indeed, whether it goes.

Conclusion

As we have argued elsewhere in this review, the challenge for curriculum reform over the next decade will be to reconcile demands for professional autonomy, which is essential to the implementation and maintenance of the reform process, with the equally pressing demands for guaranteed student entitlement and the protection of the national
interest. Such a challenge will not be an easy one to meet; but nor will it
be an easy one to ignore. The pressures for reform will continue, as in-
deed they must. The enduring weakness of the conservative position is
that things do not remain the same. If they do not change for the better,
they change for the worse, and the pressures for reform increase. The
choice facing us as we approach the twenty-first century is whether we
want the process of reform to be haphazard, incremental, entrepreneurial
and largely directionless, or whether we want it to be planned, coher-
ent, collegial and purposeful.

Not that we will ever get it completely right, of course. That is the
nature of the reform process, a process akin to Popper's (1963: 129–130)
depiction of the progress of science, which 'advances by the tradition
of changing its traditional myths' through a constant process of criti-
cism and reconstruction. If this review has contributed towards the criti-
cal examination of the current myths underlying curriculum reform in
Australian schools it will have served its purpose. If it has also contrib-
uted, however tentatively, towards the creation of new myths, it will
have exceeded that purpose.


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Despite increasingly loud calls for a coherent national approach to curriculum, Australian States and Territories have generally been reluctant to shed any control over matters of school education. The curriculum dynamic has been further complicated by a culture of schooling that emerged from the 1960s in which school curriculum has been increasingly regarded as an area of local school responsibility.

Riders in the Chariot critically reviews the role played in the shaping of school curriculum by successive Commonwealth governments which, especially since 1965, have increasingly come to regard education as important to the national interest. The author argues that the challenge facing curriculum reformers is to reconcile demands for professional curriculum autonomy, which is essential to the implementation and maintenance of any reform process, with the emerging demand that all Australian students should be entitled to adequate access to valid and comprehensive educational knowledge which is consistent with the national interest.

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