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THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM IN THE MOANA

COMMENTARY

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Reading this issue's five reflections on the Aotearoa New Zealand Curriculum (ANZC) has provoked us to think again on a returning question, that is, what is a curriculum—and its reform? We have thus come to think about the curriculum as an event that determines “at least in part, what we are, what we think and what we do today” (Foucault, 1984, p. 32). Furthermore, we have been musing on the shifts and movements of *vā* (Fa'avae, 2018) and power, and consider that a useful concept to think of the curriculum may be the *moana*—the vast ocean or space of interconnections. The curriculum conduces forms of power that ‘make us up’ (Hacking, 1986) and produces shifts of the *vā* that animates the souls (Ball, 2003) of those that take part in education. This commentary is an open conversation with the articles of this special section, and between the writers, an attempt to bring us together and think differently. It is riddled with contradiction, which we embrace as a prolific space where we can think together. First, we set the grounds for a decolonial reading of the curriculum, and ANZC's reform specifically. Secondly, we consider the curriculum as the currents that bring together and conduct a heterogeneity of beings (policy texts, discourses, technologies, actors, etc.) creating a sense of shared identities that connect the past, present and future. We also understand the ANZC as a fluid space where specific forms of power circulate and flow, and make us up as beings with particular capabilities. Finally, we conclude by asking what kind of life is possible in these waters. The articles in this issue agree on the potency of the ANZC to contribute to the making of productive, socially engaged and culturally aware citizens. We ask further as to what forms of knowledges, identities and subject positions are made available for students and educators in the curriculum.

A decolonial reading

A curriculum arranges a (much needed) space for the critical interrogation of our specificities—the similar yet distinct, the subtle yet intricate specificities, that allow us to make-sense and make-meaning of our shifting and mobile identities and ways to navigate such boundaries/intersections/in-betweenness of interconnection and interdependence (Te Punga Somerville, 2012). This form of critique is crucial to uncover what knowledges matter and whose knowledges are privileged more. To orient and make-sense of the ANZC from the margins, an in-between space in which Indigenous communities often use to re-orient their meaning-making, is to disrupt and begin from *mātauranga* (knowledge) that is grounded in the *moana*. For instance, *vā* is a central construct in a community's relational meaning-making in the *whenua* and *moana*. *Vā* and its derivatives, *veitapui* and *va tapuia*, inherent in Tongan and Samoan practices, highlight the fluid and shifting nature of ‘beings’, an appreciation of the shifts and changes over time and space (Fa'avae, 2017).

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The introduction of the NZ Histories Curriculum throughout the ANZC sets a reorientation that allows the confronting of colonial and postcolonial analysis for *tangata whenua* and all settlers who have oriented themselves into *Aotearoa whenua*. By placing *mana moana*, the agency of Indigenous Pacific peoples at the centre of analysis, we call forth the ANZC and its capacity to enable self-determination, sovereignty, strength, empowerment for *tangata whenua* and settlers based on *vā* and *whanaungatanga*. We also acknowledge the potential limitations of such a project. Can schooling be conducive to self-determination if “the more we learn, the more we are made subject” (Ball, 2017, p. 29)? How can a policy text that attempts to organise, classify and frame the fluid and shifting nature of beings as it reproduces modern/colonial rationalism contribute to such a project? We also propose here to unmake the curriculum through a critical conversation that attempts to expand its imagination, as it ‘writes over’ it (Bowe et al., 1992).

The curriculum in the *mana moana*

Although familiar waters in *Moana nui a kiwa* can be perceived and unpacked through geographic boundaries in maps, for instance, the ways in which waves move and orient themselves cannot be easily represented. Thinking with Shirin White’s article in this issue (pp. 45–50), the curriculum is often understood as a map that fabricates a fragmented and reified world. White’s article points out that the New Zealand curriculum emerged within the Tomorrow’s Schools reform. It is a historic and political event that was enabled under particular conditions, such as the Hunn Report, the Picot Report, neoliberal globalisation, etc. Also, it is an event that enabled several other policy texts, such as official documents, as well as processes of reinterpretation in schools and other forums—like this one. That is, the curriculum is more than a document, it entails a proliferation of policy texts and their intertextuality.

Kelly Davis (pp.20–24) highlights the contradictions between the teaching principles set in the curriculum with the measurable outcomes that set the conditions for standard assessment, such as the National Certificate of Educational Achievement. She observes that “the secondary school tendency to teach to the test for the NCEA, rather than the conceptual inquiry-based learning the NZC promotes) (pp. 22). Davis signals to the enactment of what can be thought of as a “neoliberal pedagogy” (Ball, 2017) in which assessment structures practices contradict the principles of teaching and learning espoused in the curriculum. The latter, as Joshua Martelli says, are a set of recommendations for an effective pedagogy in which the professional judgement of the teacher is upheld. This, however, stands in opposition with practices around ‘teaching to the test’. On a further effect of the outcomes-based curriculum, Ben Deane flags up that “with the introduction of the National Certificate of Educational Achievement (NCEA), schools prioritise meeting achievement standards and this can create inter and intra-school competition” (pp. 28). So the focus on outcomes also sets the conditions for a field of comparison within and between schools that is conducive to competition. In this sense, Deane gestures towards the idea that a neoliberal subject made possible, against the values pursued in the curriculum.

Secondly, the curriculum is a “heterogeneous set” (Agamben et al., 2020, p. 3) that brings together and mobilises actors, technologies and discourses. Kelly Davis associates the outcomes-based curriculum with the prominence that international standardised assessments have acquired in the last decades, or in other words, a “global accountability/assessment culture” (Hamre et al., 2018, p. xiii) where specific forms of assessment have been enacted in education systems across the world (Fischman et al., 2019). Joshua Martelli looks at the theories that inform the ANZC, such as Human Capital Theory in the definition of key competencies for the 21st century. On the other hand, Pascale Prescott illustrates how the Ministry of Education, entrepreneurs and corporations come together in the production of the National Curriculum, with conflicting visions on the aims for national development. He presents the tensions in Technology Education between a framework that aims at economic growth and the development of the productive sectors, and an approach that promotes critical thinking at the intersection between the economy, society, culture, the environment and politics. So the curriculum is not only a policy document, but also a discursive formation. There is a materiality to it, which is heterogeneous, dynamic and fluid.

Continuing the conversation

We have attempted a reading that highlights the ‘readerliness’ of the New Zealand Curriculum, that is, the extent to which it can be ‘written-over’ for the proliferation of meanings, the creative imagination of ways in which it can be acted on, an expansion of the possibilities of being teachers and educators. In this gesture, and acknowledging the discursive conditions of possibility of both the curriculum and those who interpret it, we attempt a reading that exposes the contradictions of the curriculum within the heterogeneity of actors, technologies and discourses that constitute it.

The articles in this special section incite a further imagination of the curriculum. We see the curriculum as a formation that brings together a heterogeneity of elements that are mobilised by specific and strategic flows of power. A fluid formation in the *moana*, that acts on its objects and is acted on, that connects the elements and sets the conditions for their existence. Reading these articles has made us wonder about how teachers, students and all of us engaged with education in Aotearoa New Zealand are partly determined to think, act, be, relate to each other and live, by and within, the event of the New Zealand Curriculum and its reform.

Māori literary studies scholar Alice Te Punga Somerville (2012) provokes the boundaries of Indigenous meaning-making, *mana whenua*, and agency in relation to their ancestral connections with Pacific people and their *mana moana*. The importance attributed to lifelong learning in the languaging of the ANZC is indeed aspirational. But is it meaningfully agentic in ways that enables the close interrogation of settler-colonialism and the neo-colonial yet subtle perpetual impositions of colonial practice? Although the ANZC is seemingly strengths-focused, is it always conducive to confronting *talatalanoa* (ongoing and generative conversations) about what knowledges matter, who gets to tell their story, and whose voices are marginalised both inter-culturally as well as intra-culturally? (Fa’avae, 2017).

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