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TEACHERS AND CURRICULUM

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SOCIAL SCIENCES IN *THE NEW ZEALAND CURRICULUM*: A CASE OF ARRESTED DEVELOPMENT? MEDIATING CHALLENGES AHEAD

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In late 2006 I critiqued the draft national curriculum social sciences learning area arguing that it reflected a politically adjudicated and limited conception of a learning area. I provided evidence that the learning area's structure and framing rejected the dynamic interrelated nature of social sciences ideas and collection of subjects, marginalised social studies, and suggested an unquestioning positioning of teachers and learners (Hunter, 2006). I reflected on the Ministry of Education's empty promise of curriculum revitalisation and hoped curriculum consultation would offer a catalyst for open critical dialogue to support development.

Responding a year later to *The New Zealand Curriculum* (Ministry of Education, 2007) it is evident that the draft's consultation process has shaped a coherence of the national curriculum's vision, values, principles, key competencies and school curriculum. However, these significant underpinnings are not coherently developed in the social sciences. Questions remain about policy decisions informing the social sciences and what and whose knowledge and curriculum preferences have counted in development and consultation. I suggest little has changed from the draft to the NZC. The social sciences learning area reflects a kind of arrested development within the curriculum. I use the term in the sense of the Fox Channel's sitcom *Arrested Development* that draws on themes of reversal of fortune, riches to rags, regression, and family dysfunction. These themes apply to the conception and intent of a learning area that appears stuck in development. I write this opinion piece as a teacher educator of social sciences curriculum. The commentary offers insights into the changes in intent and structure of the social sciences learning area, and considers omissions and features of arrested development. I consider social sciences positioning alongside other learning areas and reflect on mediating the changes in my work.

To make sense of the NZC social sciences conception, I need to revisit the status quo of social sciences as developed through the earlier NZCF vision. From the 1980s to 2000, social science subjects of social studies, history, geography, and economics developed similar conceptual framing skills and assessment processes. (All deal with human agency and relationships, concepts and ideas; questioning, accessing and interpreting information and evidence through inquiry and research methods, values and attitudes, perspectives thinking, establishing generalisations and connecting ideas, working with issues and decisions, and evaluative processes.) In 1997, confidence in the rationale, nature and place of social studies in the New Zealand curriculum was strengthened by research (Barr et al., 1997) that enabled the completion of the *Social Studies in the New Zealand Curriculum* (1997). SSNZC is spatial in design, enabling integration of concepts and ideas that align with contemporary issues including the contextual preferences and thinking in tertiary social sciences and humanities. Over the last decade, the SSNZC's achievement objectives have aligned with history, geography, and economics disciplines and supported the development of years 11-13 social studies, sociology, and other school-based subject studies. The development of NCEA achievement standards in the social sciences domain enhanced opportunities for integration and assessment of these.

A new curriculum document engenders a certain excitement when you work in the field. My initial reading of the NZC began in an optimistic vein. Steve Maharey's letter of introduction as Minister of Education predictably invoked the rhetoric of cultural diversity, citizenship, the pace of social and economic change and national and global participation. I noted with interest his reference in the letter to "new social roles". I was encouraged by the policy, vision and principles statements that strengthen the place of the Treaty of Waitangi, acknowledge Māori and Pākehā as

full Treaty partners in Aotearoa New Zealand, and cultural diversity and inclusion in the national curriculum. In her foreword, (p.4) Karen Sewell comments on the pace of social change, increasing population diversity, sophisticated technologies, and the need for education to respond to contemporary challenges. This tenor suggests alignment with social issues and concerns as the stuff of social sciences education. However, my reading of the social sciences statement's contradictory articulation of intent and structure, (p.30) together with unfamiliar Levels 1-8 achievement objectives, turned incipient promise to disappointment. The social sciences development sits uncomfortably within the NZC vision, principles, key competencies and pedagogy. Opportunities for building social sciences capacity as a critical area of the curriculum have been missed.

The beautiful people-centred Whakatauki¹ informing the key focus on people in the SSNZC is used to introduce the social sciences learning area. Its presence serves as a reminder of the heart of social studies above a statement remarkable for its neutral approach to human agency. The statement of what the social sciences are about abstracts people from society and suggests a complex and significant learning area is now mainly orientated around citizenship participation. The section on reasons for studying social sciences is expressed more coherently, signalling emphasis on the concept of communities, citizenship participation, and ideas of sustainability in a range of communities in New Zealand and beyond. Mention is made of critical engagement with societal issues. Whilst there is mention of New Zealand's bicultural nature deriving from the Treaty of Waitangi, there is no reference to Aotearoa, tangata whenua, or Māori concepts. There is limited reference to the concept of culture.

Compared to statements of other NZC learning areas, the social sciences statement lacks elegance and reads as though it is a work in progress. In contrast, I am impressed with the clarity and purpose of the English statement and the succinct forward-looking synthesis of the mathematics and statistics statement. Three other learning area statements enviably articulate their purpose and rationale informed by current theories and thinking about the nature and construction of knowledge in their fields. These are the science, the arts and technology statements. Their confidence in drawing from a range of contexts - for example social, issues-based, cultural, historical, political, economic and environmental - makes the social sciences statement appear limited in conception and scope. The culturally centred arts statement is the one learning area that coherently and consistently reflects bicultural, multicultural intent and diversity of cultural expression, practices and thinking.

I believe a key purpose of social sciences learning is to encourage critique and engage learners in thinking about social practices and processes around ideas such as discrimination, social justice, sexism, racism, gender, ethics, tolerance, power and powerlessness, and equity. The learning area development does not communicate contemporary thinking about the nature of social sciences and associated theories, e.g. socio-cultural, cultural, constructivist, gendered, postcolonial and indigenous. The decision to underplay the concept of culture means an expansive view of the concept is omitted. The potential for study of manifestations of culture such as dominant culture, counter-culture, popular culture, youth culture, the media as social arbiters of culture, the ways technology constructs cultural meaning and cultural literacies is undermined. An emphasis on concepts of *community* and *participation* might have been conceived as hopeful suggesting that social cohesion exists; however, the reality might be different. A sense of community does not necessarily presuppose unanimity of opinion or experience. The concepts of *society*, *community*, *citizenship*, *sustainability* are not defined in the statement. Unlike the seven other learning areas that express their curriculum purpose in sophisticated language appropriate to their fields of knowledge, the social sciences statement does not reflect this confidence.

The social sciences structure represents a shift in thinking to an explicit orientation of citizenship and consumerism. Four strands offer achievement objectives for integration through Levels 1-5. Teachers will find new strand titles and conceptual orientations through *Identity, Culture and Organisation, Continuity and Change, and Economic World* strands. We have lost the *Culture and Heritage* strand of the SSNZC. The *Place and Environment* strand remains familiar and is the one strand (including geography across Levels 6-8) that asserts a focus on ideas, connections and perceptions. In this case these are contextualised around peoples' relationships with the environment. The possibility of integration of ideas and critical thinking is surely lessened by the rejection of the *Resources and Economic Activities* strand

of the SSNZC and its metamorphosis into the *Economic World* that draws heavily on the economics curriculum of the senior secondary school. It is closely aligned to the rhetoric of business, consumption and self-interest. The conception of an economic world sits uncomfortably as a separate sphere within a supposedly integrated conceptual framework across Levels 1-5.

The separate framing of Levels 6-8 achievement objectives into four subject disciplines of social studies, geography, history and economics is in direct contrast to the integrated years 1-3 conceptual model of the SSNZC. This structural change reflects the contested nature of the learning area, and capture by the dominant senior school disciplines of history, geography and economics. Unfortunately this has been at the expense of the integrated years 11-13 social studies, and specialist teachers of senior social studies will find the narrow conception invalidates social studies and limits integration of concepts and ideas. Likewise, teachers of sociology and other school-based studies will find themselves marginalised by the territorial boundaries within the learning area.

The achievement objectives are almost entirely new across all levels of the learning area. Many SSNZC achievement objectives have been rewritten to signal the orientation to citizenship participation and economic outcomes. Some achievement objectives are now exclusively tied to New Zealand contexts. Teachers will find that current social studies contexts, pedagogy and programme objectives and outcomes do not align with the NZC changes. The social sciences achievement objectives have been reduced from the 80 of the SSNZC to 59. Levels 1-5 achievement objectives number 35 and levels 6-8 number 24 (each of the four disciplines has eight new objectives). Other learning areas have varying numbers of achievement objectives. For example, English has 80, the arts have 171, Health and PE has 114, science has 135. The most significant structural contrast of the social sciences with all other learning areas lies in its separation of disciplines in the senior level of the curriculum. Whilst all other learning areas acknowledge opportunities for disciplinary specialisation, they structure spatial integrity of strands concepts and generic processes across and through Levels 1-8.

The social sciences statement links the understandings of achievement objectives to a social inquiry approach. Whilst this is described in the statement, it is not included in the arrays of the levels achievement objectives. It is a concern that

the NZC's formatting of the social sciences structure and achievement objectives appears incomplete without the naming of the strands through Levels 1-5 in contrast to all other learning areas. Nor are social sciences skills processes of inquiry, values clarification, social decision-making, and evaluation included as processes links to knowledge and understandings of achievement objectives. Again, this reflects the uncertainty of the social sciences development and the implications of changes that, to date, may not have been fully considered.

What research and critique was taken into account in this development of social sciences? The lack of detail and clear guidance about the nature, purpose and rationale of the social sciences in the curriculum is telling. Development appears to have forgotten the issues manifested by curriculum contestation in the 1990s. The growing body of research and critique, particularly in relation to social studies processes and pedagogy, does not appear to have influenced the learning area's structure and intent as much as thinking around citizenship education.

Omissions or losses of valued aspects of knowledge and skills processes are inevitable in curriculum change and development but any change needs to be justified by a vision, a policy, and knowledge of the iterative developments of the curriculum reform in question. To date, the Ministry of Education justifies curriculum changes by the number of people consulted and quantity of submissions. What is not clear in the case of the significant reconceptualisation of the social sciences, is the Ministry's agenda from start to finish, and how dialogue and the submissions received in consultation supported, countered, or challenged this agenda. A key loss in the NZC social sciences is the change to a one size fits all approach to social inquiry. This means the processes of values clarification, social decision-making and communication of understandings are underplayed in favour of stronger emphases of participation, contribution and reflection on the social consequences of actions. The nature of inquiry and methods and skills processes particular to history, geography and economics are not outlined in the statement or achievement objectives. The SSNZC processes and achievement objectives indicators have been discarded in development. The English learning area, however, provides a clear framework of processes and strategies (including indicators) that support its interconnected strands.

The diminished status of perspectives thinking and learning about New Zealand suggests that any critical engagement

with social contexts and issues may be nominal. Whilst the Treaty of Waitangi is mentioned in the social sciences statement and has a specific focus in a Level 5 achievement objective, there is no reference to the centrality of the Treaty in relation to Aotearoa New Zealand's intercultural relationships and processes of colonisation and decolonisation. The social sciences need to signal opportunities to develop these understandings in integrated ways through political, historical, cultural, economic and environmental contexts through a number of levels. Issues of global importance are implicit in the statement, but it is disappointing there is no reference to global challenges of conflict, religious diversity and the politicisation of religion, ideas of sovereignty, security, and ethnic division. Professional development will need to focus on countering such omissions and consider creative and critical ways of interpreting achievement objectives.

A significant loss is that of the weakened social sciences positioning in the national curriculum. Analysis of the statements of the seven learning areas accompanying the social sciences, reveals the considerable influence of socio-cultural thinking that informs learning within social, cultural, economic, environmental and issues based contexts and applications. I am not convinced that social sciences developers considered the impacts of this. I believe the social sciences learning area has lost ground in not taking a lead to align with social sciences aspects of accompanying learning areas and seeking external integration as well as modelling coherent internal integration.

The critique is informed by my work as a teacher educator of the history and social studies curriculum that includes sustained involvement in social sciences research, and curriculum and assessment initiatives. Experience and knowledge of the wider picture of social sciences prompts me to ask the critical questions about the nature and purpose of the social sciences curriculum and pedagogy, and identify limitations of the NZC learning area. However, an immediate challenge to be faced lies in interpreting the NZC's significant conceptual and structural changes that reflect a step backwards rather than iterative refinements for forward thinking to connect with the challenges of the society we live in. Two significant concerns and challenges for my work in teacher education are exacerbated by the NZC social sciences development. These are the number of differing conceptual frameworks and structural matrices, and the lack of a coherent history curriculum guideline.

- The number of differing conceptual frameworks and structural matrices of achievement objectives and achievement standards that exist across the social sciences including: the social studies exemplars the SSNZC, the NZC, the NCEA history and social studies achievement standards, the NZC's newly devised Levels 6-8 history and social studies achievement objectives. I also work with the National Educational Monitoring Project's (NEMP) social studies framework of for assessment purposes.

The question remains of why the NZC social sciences structure presents little opportunity for alignment with curriculum and assessment structures that currently inform social studies and history education.

- The lack of a coherent history curriculum guideline to support specialist history or integrated history programmes in the social sciences or wider curriculum learning areas (Hunter & Farthing, 2004). Guidance is urgently needed to support teachers in understanding the reshaped nature of history in the social sciences and humanities and its place and purpose in the curriculum. Theoretical underpinnings and ideological aspects of history, along with historical thinking and historical processes, need to be considered in any guidance to promote revitalisation and interest in history education. Likewise, support for school-based development of new contexts for study, pedagogy, working with technologies, and new ways of accessing evidence is needed. Currently, history teachers work with a range of curriculum and assessment documents. The 1989 history syllabus remains the foundation for the NCEA history achievement standards that have become the history curriculum by proxy.

The question remains of the status of the NZC social sciences history Levels 6-8 achievement objectives. Does the Ministry of Education envisage these objectives as constituting a history curriculum?

Full implementation of the NZC is scheduled for the beginning of 2010. My work with the NZC social sciences learning area in teacher education needs to begin in 2008, as many pre-service teachers will be involved in school-based dialogue and curriculum planning prior to implementation. They may only have one window of

opportunity to engage with social sciences within their pre-service programmes in 2008. Just as any school-based curriculum initiative needs to engage in dialogue between teachers of subjects and specialisms within and across learning areas, I am of the view that more emphasis on work as a curriculum and disciplinary-intermediary will be required within curriculum contexts and processes in teacher education programmes. I anticipate dissonances, tensions and professional compromise in mediating with pre-service teachers and teachers, a social sciences learning area of arrested development that sits somewhat out of place in the contexts of the forward thinking national curriculum and the dynamic, changing and challenging contexts of human society.

THE WHAKATAUKI

*Unuhia te rito o te harakeke kei whea te kōmako e kō?
Whakatairangitia – rere ki uta, rere ki tai;
Ui mai koe ki ahau he aha te mea nui o te ao,
Māku e kī atu he tangata, he tangata, he tangata!*

*Remove the heart of the flax bush and where will the kōmako sing?
Proclaim it to the land, proclaim it to the sea;
Ask me, "What is the greatest thing in the world?"
I will reply, "It is people, people, people!"*

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