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Teachers and Time: Histories and Futures in Education

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Debra is passionate about connecting curriculum to the life-worlds and futures of students. She is very concerned about current moves to return to very classical modes of disciplinary curriculum, especially for the Primary School.

There is much rhetoric in education about the ways in which students are prepared for 'the future'. There is a great deal more certainty and direction about the teaching of history. I argue through my research that Australian curriculum is temporally biased towards the past, and in order to develop multidimensional citizenship, greater attention must be paid to the development of temporality, with a specific focus on futures. This paper focuses on the ways teachers talk about notions of time in order to develop futures-based curriculum.

The teachers at the centre of this research are based in a primary school south-east of Melbourne, Australia, which is internationally acknowledged as 'innovative and leading' in 'educating for the future'. Through a number of discussions, it became apparent that this notion

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of the future was assumed, and that these specific teachers had given little thought to what that future looked like and, moreover, how that connected to students' learning requirements. Arising from this research were significant key findings that highlight the need for a reconceptualisation of the ways in which curriculum and pedagogy are enacted with regard to notions of multiple futures.

"The view that one of the key roles of schools is to develop and prepare young people for 'the future' is a given, and rhetoric around this theme has long been a feature of curriculum" (Gidley, Bateman, & Smith, 2004). Since the early 1980s, educational and political leaders across Australia have identified themselves as contributing to students' futures. Schools in recent history have, for example, been referred to as *Schools of the Future* and *Lighthouse schools* acting as beacons in the metaphoric waters of life's journeys. Today, there are *Blueprints for the future* (Department of Education & Training Victoria, 2004) *Essential Learnings for the future* (Department for Education, 2002; Department of Education Tasmania, 2002; Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, 2004) and a range of *Pathways* (Department of Education & Community Services (ACT)) to be explored dependent upon which state or territory a person lives, learns and/or teaches in. Yet, the ways in which these futures dimensions are developed in school curriculum are not explicitly articulated within the various curriculum documents that guide planning within schools.

Time & Curriculum

The place of time and curriculum within schools predominantly occurs within the teaching of history. Currently, in school curriculum, time concepts are mainly developed through the learning areas of mathematics and history. Mathematics tends to focus on functional time. Functional time teaches children to measure, record and read time from a number of sources, e.g. analogue and digital clocks,

calendars, timetables (Gellert, Jablonka, & Keitel, 2001). Effectively, it teaches children to use time to work within the demands and constraints of their society.

The other way in which time is developed within schools is conceptually through history. From the early years of schooling, children are taught about different events and times that have occurred in the past. The construction of history, traditionally, is strongly influenced by a hegemonic and political narrative (Harris & Bateman, 2008). The dominant content focus of Australian history curricula tends to focus on Australian history (settlement and colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, federation/national identity), ancient and medieval histories and world history (20th century and 21st century).

While some attention is paid to the basic tenets of time, such as sequencing and chronologisation, and change and continuities (Clark, 2006), the limited development of temporal capacities within children and adolescents is not sufficient. The distinct lack of parallel or integrated futures perspectives highlights an explicit temporal bias within curriculum. In teaching students to be competent in functional time capacities, we are teaching them to manage their present and, in the use of diary writing techniques, to re-engage with their pasts. In the explicit teaching of historical literacies (Taylor & Young, 2003), interpretations and understandings as conceptual time, we offer our students a limited capacity to engage with multiple time perspectives. History, as it is currently positioned within Australian curricula and the ways in which it is enacted in schools, anchors its temporal mobility between present and past time perspectives, where past actions are promoted and glorified, to some extent (Macintyre & Clark, 2004). This notion of time, in schools and curriculum, must be broadened, and a richer connection between history, past and present must be established (Bateman & Harris, 2008). It is interesting to note the lack of explicit futures capacities that are being taught, even though schools are 'educating for the future'.

In a previous analysis of curriculum, Gough (1990) described what he saw as three levels at which futures education was occurring: tacit, token and taken-for-granted. He suggested that futures was tacitly present in educational enquiry even when the object of study is thought to be located in the past or the present. Gough defined token futures as the utilisation of futures concepts and terminology for purposes which are chiefly rhetorical, or to rationalise choices, decisions or judgements which may, in fact, have been made on other grounds. Taken-for-granted futures are passively received as we pass through different phases and stages of our life. Building upon previous publications (Bateman, 2009), and upon Gough's identification of futures within curriculum, I identify the ways in which futures studies, or futures

education, can be identified within Australian curriculum documents as implicit or explicit.

Implicit and Explicit Futures Education

Implicit futures education refers to statements, comments and curriculum outcomes that refer to the future, but are framed as tacit, token or taken-for-granted. Gough (1990) argues that a concept of futures is present in all educational discourse, even if it presents as no more than a tacit inference. Such comments and statements do not suggest the ways in which futures concepts will be developed through the curriculum, nor how they have been considered in developing the curriculum. Typical curriculum statements include: "developing citizens of the future" and "personal and civic development of the person". Such claims are broad and neither connected to specific images of the future, nor associated with explicit ways in which the curriculum will develop these futures capacities.

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There are multiple curriculum areas in which futures education is implicit – such as Science, Humanities (History, Geography, Economics and Civics and Citizenship), Environmental Education and Technology. The assumed and taken-for-granted futures within these curricula are based upon the notion that in thinking about the sustainability of the environment, for example, we are automatically

considering the future. While offering a range of important concepts and skills, the taken-for-granted future is often considered in terms of vocational orientation, civic responsibility and lifelong learning. Such approaches tend to be reactive in terms of the future and, more often than not, will serve to enforce the status quo through an uncritical adoption of a taken-for-granted future with an unexamined past in terms of worldview. Implicit futures concepts include sustainability, technological futures, change and continuity, civic responsibility, globalisation, vocation and careers knowledge – the future of work and personal development.

Within an implicit futures approach, the learning is described as lifelong, holistic, flexible or 'just in time'. Alternatively, it is seen in connection with skills associated with problem solving, cognitive development or in preparation for a complex world. In these ways, implicit futures in education may be seen as valuable, but they still markedly limit the ways in which students can engage in, explore, share, shape and critique the possible futures in which they might exist. For this reason, futures perspectives, tools and processes that are explicitly developed within curriculum are valued more strongly by futures education.

Explicit futures education as an overarching framework for curriculum work is considered as a 'missing dimension in education' (Hicks,

2002). Explicit futures education is that which attempts to develop futures literacy, drawing widely upon futures studies literature for processes and content, and expressed in curriculum statements and outcomes that clearly cast the future in a problematic light. In particular, an important point of departure from implicit futures is the use/inclusion and reference to the explicit knowledge bases, concepts and tools around possible, probable and preferable futures. Explicit futures also consider deep structures using a variety of approaches, which encourage exploration of issues at the level of paradigm/worldview. Explicit futures within curriculum may be identified as those that directly develop temporal awareness as evidenced by relevant standards or outcomes for assessment. Furthermore, they will be apparent through the ways in which curriculum embraces specific futures thinking, and the inclusion of the multiple levels of futures possibilities – personal, local and global.

A Small Glimpse of Some New Research

In this study, I examined the ways that six teachers at a local primary school thought about their own futures and about their roles in educating students for their futures. I was interested in the ways that teachers enacted their futures perspectives in the everyday experiences within a classroom. My initial claims in this project led with the idea that teachers did not explicitly link their practices within the classroom to their thinking about the future, regardless of the rhetoric that surrounded curriculum documents and the role of schools. In this research, I considered teacher views of the future, and encouraged them to reflect upon their practices to identify ways in which their curriculum explicitly develops notions of the future, or more specifically develops capacities 'for the future', towards generating greater temporal balance.

In the context of this research project, the teachers were 'much more comfortable teaching history than futures in the beginning'. They were experienced in teaching history curriculum that responded to 'what Australian children should know'. They developed historical time through local communities, and more broadly through students' independent projects on the cultures and countries from which they had come. One teacher highlighted the ways she walked her students around their local neighbourhood in order to visualise what it looked like in the past. Another teacher encouraged her students to learn more about their past cultures and countries, to 'help them feel more comfortable here and now with each other'. A third teacher encouraged her students to investigate significant people in history, and a fourth teacher was more interested in exploring scientific discoveries over time. However, early in the PD, when asked how they had developed futures in the curriculum, each in different ways replied, 'I never have'. Retrospectively, it was 'definitely not something I ever learned at school'. This supports Hicks' (2002) claims that futures is the missing dimension in education.

As a result of collaborative professional learning activities over eight months, the teachers underwent temporal transformation, in that they were able to both integrate explicit futures dimensions within their curriculum, and also recognise the ways in which their classroom

practices changed. With increasing futures consciousness, the teachers became more aware of the disjuncture between the rhetoric of preparing students for the future, and the ways in which schools did not explicitly address these claims. One reflected upon her own experiences as a secondary teacher, and the limited opportunities the students had had to think about the future:

Look, you often have secondary school students who never get an opportunity to really discuss or think about their own future. It's all rushed upon them in the final years of schooling and everyone's in a panic and course advisors are overworked, and all of a sudden the future is there and they have to think about it. That, in itself, is a decent reason to do more of this stuff.

Increasingly, as the project unfolded, the teachers believed that the school has a significant role in educating for the futures. As Masini (2006) would concur, these teachers had become more critical in the ways they were working in the futures domain. They had moved beyond the pop-futures and tacit and token futures that had previously informed their reasons for thinking about the future. In the beginning, the teachers made broad and speculative comments about the future, such as:

I think the world is changing at a very rapid pace.

And:

Technologies are passing incredibly quickly. And I think we all need to be prepared. We all need to be sort of able to join it in some point in time. So I think it's a very, very important factor in the school.

Towards the project's end, the teachers were deconstructing such comments and thinking about the ways in which schools could understand these changes. They also 'felt more in control' in the ways they could develop curriculum that would scaffold students' entries into these possible futures. In this, they also recognised the increasing tensions between addressing the state requirements for education, in contrast to providing 'a real education for many futures'. In this way, the role of the school in educating for the future became problematic. Bussey, Inayatullah and Milojevic (2008) describe current attitudes to futures within education in the same way.

The teachers often commented that they had never engaged in such futures-based thinking in their professional experiences. They enjoyed the opportunities to discuss futures in education and to bring 'these ideas to life in the classroom'. These opportunities had been 'worthwhile' and 'added a whole new agenda' to the ways in which they worked. Sadly, there is a distinct lack of research in this area, and the rhetoric around the role of a school in educating for the future remains rife. One teacher represented the group's thinking in claiming that:

We've always been told that our kids will be doing jobs that aren't around now, but we never guess at what these jobs are, or what the kids will need to be able to do. Schools have to prepare students for many futures outside of work, too. Education really rips kids off ... without the future in it.

Along with Hicks (2008) I claim that explicit futures education provides students with greater access to their futures. In increasing a student's

futures consciousness, and in equipping him or her with critical futures tools and concepts, education empowers a student to make critical choices that connect personal, local and global futures possibilities. Without these futures capacities, governments and other powerful agencies (Freire, 2005; Hooks, 1994) within culture and societies continue to colonise futures. Thus, in developing such capacities, teachers and classroom curriculum become central in developing students' thinking in regard to their own and others' futures.

In summary, there is a great deal of futures education rhetoric published in social forums and educational institutions. Page (1996, p. 128) argues that "researchers and policy makers frequently pay lip service to the importance of preparing students for the future without seriously addressing this as an objective in their curricula and methodologies". In my research, I contend that educators must become more conscious of the futures dimension, and that this consciousness must be explicitly stated in curriculum documents in order to assist students to access both their personal and global futures. This futures consciousness and a more temporally balanced curriculum will only arise through change in teacher practices and curriculum development.

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