

**Keynote address to the
Christian Schools National Policy Forum, David de Carvalho
24 May 2021**

Special thanks to the Christian Schools Groups for having me and the heads of the Christian Schools Groups represented here today.

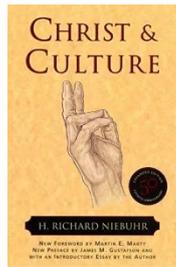
Allow me to acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the land on which we gather today and pay respects to their Elders who have been, are now, and will continue to be, true educators: passing on the knowledge and wisdom of the world's oldest living culture from generation to generation and offering that knowledge and wisdom to the wider Australian community.

Of course, in making that acknowledgement, I am conscious that certain media and think-tank commentators would take that as confirmation that ACARA is determined to re-open the "culture wars" via the Review of the Australian Curriculum that is currently underway and about which I have been asked to talk to you today. But I am 100 percent agreement with Noel Pearson, who recently said that "In fighting repudiation of recognition of our Indigenous heritage, no answer lies in the repudiation of our British heritage" and with Minister Tudge, who has said that highlighting the experience of Indigenous people should not come at the expense of highlighting the importance of our Western liberal traditions.

So, for the record, let me also acknowledge that we are meeting today in the capital city of one of the world's most successful, prosperous and peaceful democracies, and that our nation owes much to its Christian heritage, with its respect for the inherent dignity of each individual, whether gentile or Jew, servant or free, woman or man, and that this respect for human dignity has in turn shaped Western civilization's traditions of freedom of speech, assembly and religion that are so necessary, but not sufficient, for a just society. For that to be achieved, we need rights to be combined with responsibilities, and that is why education is so important. And, as I will highlight in my address, any suggestion that the draft revisions to the Australian Curriculum have air-brushed away reference to our Christian heritage is, to use Trumpian phrase, "fake news".

Of course, the issue of how Christianity engages with culture, especially through educational institutions, is the key issue that you face every day. I faced these questions in my first job as a teacher in a Catholic school and in subsequent role as CEO of the National Catholic Education Commission. I am sure you all have cause to reflect regularly on which of Richard Neibhur's five models - of how Christianity engages with culture - is most relevant to the task of education. Is it Christ *against* culture, Christ *of* culture, Christ *above* culture, Christ and culture *in paradox*, or Christ *transforming* culture? Hopefully my remarks today may help you in your reflections on this question, with respect to the issue of curriculum.

Richard Niebuhr (1951): Christ and Culture



1. Christ against culture
2. Christ of culture
3. Christ above culture
4. Christ and culture in paradox
5. Christ transforming culture

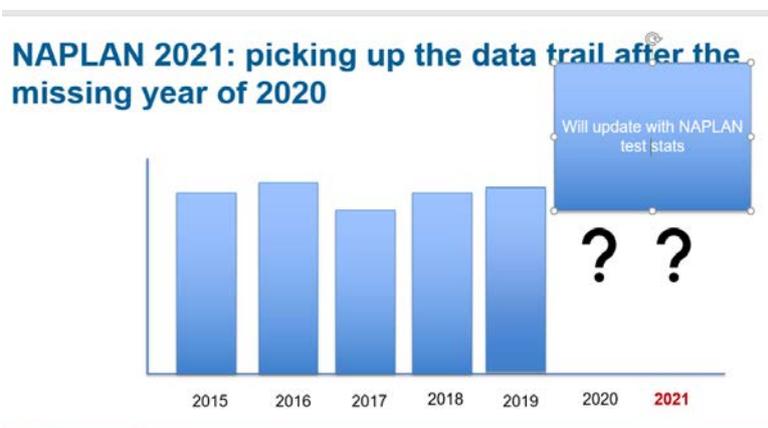
I am particularly pleased to be here today sharing some of ACARA's work because I am speaking to you at possibly one of the most important and busiest times in ACARA's history – and I believe one of the most significant eras in education in Australia.



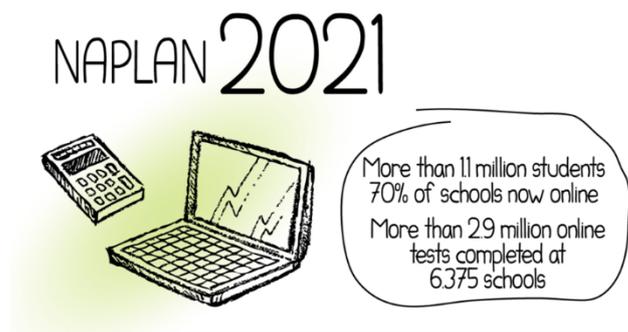
2021 is of course an important year on its own because it is the year of reflection on the impact of COVID. COVID is by no means over, and who knows how long it will go on. Even when we are all vaccinated and the infections and deaths have stopped, the economic, social and cultural impact of the pandemic will be felt for years.

What of the educational impact?

On the upside, COVID has led to a greater appreciation of our teachers' professionalism and dedication. But the cancellation of NAPLAN in 2020 left a big data gap.



We have just completed NAPLAN 2021 and the data will be particularly important in helping to show the impact COVID has had in terms of learning gain (or loss) in literacy and numeracy.



This year more than 1.1 million students took NAPLAN across more than 9,000 schools and campuses. We had approximately 70 per cent of schools participating in NAPLAN Online, with all schools to be online next year. This is a huge undertaking with almost 3 million online tests now submitted from 850,000 students undertaking NAPLAN online across the country.

The return of NAPLAN 2021 also saw a return of the debate about the value of NAPLAN, with a number of NAPLAN's opponents helpfully suggesting that it is too stressful for students in the same week as the students are sitting down to undertake their tests. On this point, I agree with the point made by Jennifer Buckingham in a recent tweet:



The data that we get from NAPLAN is vitally important for helping parents, teachers, principals, education authorities, the general public and government ministers know how we are travelling in terms of these fundamental capabilities. But, as Ministers themselves have stated, NAPLAN it is *not* a measure of overall school quality, because we need to remember that education is a complex, multi-dimensional process where quality does not rely solely on the rationalistic analysis of data and the application of associated managerial techniques.

There are many aspects of schooling that arguably cannot or should not be captured as quantitative data. Schooling should be data-informed, but not be data-driven.

This because essential nature of education involves a sense of historic continuity and a broader conversation between generations, between teachers and their students, where a learner is engaged in the process of becoming a well-rounded human being; that is, a person who recognises themselves to be

related to others in virtue of participation in, and enjoyment of, multiple systems of meaning, feeling, imagination, desire, recognition, intellectual pursuits and collective actions, moral and religious beliefs, customs and conventions, principles of conduct and rules that denote rights and responsibilities.



This conversation between the generations is the basis of the curriculum.

And now, with the review of the Australian Curriculum, we are having a national conversation about what we want to say to future generations. Whether we are talking about the way we learn maths or science, the First Peoples context and content in our curriculum or the role of phonics, these are conversations that have to be had. These dialogues are important to have and this consultation window is the time to be having them.

Consultation to date



- 18 teacher and curriculum reference groups
- 360 teachers and curriculum experts
- Subject associations
- Key academics
- 24 primary schools

The Australian Curriculum has been under review since June last year, when Ministers agreed to terms of reference. It was first reviewed in 2014 and the current version has been in place since 2015. The review will be completed by the start of next year, and will be reviewed every 6 years. We've undertaken extensive consultation to date, but we now three weeks into our public consultation phase.

We have already seen 107,878 hits on the website. The work we have done leading up to this point was critical but there is no doubt this window is the most important time in the Review. This is a chance for everyone to tell us their thoughts on the *proposed* curriculum – because that is exactly what it is – a proposal, a work in progress.

To date it reflects the views of our teachers and expert reference groups. Now it is ready to be further shaped by you and the broader community.

Once in a six year opportunity



This consultation is a once in six-year opportunity for the Australian community to give feedback on the proposed national curriculum and I expect many of you have already begun to do so – and it is my sincere hope that you have told us what you like about it as well as what you don't like about it!

The Australian Curriculum sets the expectations for what all young Australians should be taught, regardless of where they live or their background.

It is one of the most important levers we have that helps to set up our young people not only for their future but for our country's future as a democratic, equitable and just society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally and religiously diverse.

Ministers have given ACARA the task of improving the Australian Curriculum by refining, realigning and decluttering the curriculum to make it more helpful for teachers, which then makes it more accessible for students.

Australian CurriculumReview



Improve the curriculum by

- Refining
- Realigning
- Decluttering

But what do we mean by decluttering? Obviously, it entailed some reduction in content, but that is not the only focus, and arguably not the main one.

I've heard some stakeholders say that we should be "taking a chainsaw to the curriculum", but chainsaws are not particularly subtle, and can leave an awful mess behind.



I prefer to use the analogy of a hedge-trimmer and the pruning secateurs, which not only cut back, but also tidy up, reshape and clear out old and redundant branches to make room for new growth or the grafting on of new elements.



Another way to describe what are hoping to achieve is that we want to give the Australian Curriculum the Marie Kondo treatment so that regardless of how much content is left in the curriculum, it is properly organized, logical in its presentation and sequence, coherent, clear and easily accessible.

Structure of the Australian Curriculum: 3 dimensions



The Australian Curriculum has three dimensions: the eight learning areas, the three cross-curriculum priorities and the general capabilities.

As part of the decluttering, we want to clarify the relationship between the three dimensions of the curriculum. We need to be clear that learning areas have primacy of place in the curriculum. The general capabilities and the cross-curriculum priorities are best taught by being integrated appropriately and authentically into the teaching of the learning areas, not as separate “add-ons” that would contribute to an over-crowded curriculum.

Not every cross-curriculum priority and general capability can be addressed in every learning area. Some learning areas are better suited to the development of particular general capabilities than others, and each of the three cross-curriculum priorities find more natural homes in certain learning areas.

Take, for example, the issue of the relationship between “knowledge” and “skills”, or the relationship between the content of the learning areas and capabilities such as critical and creative thinking. This seems to be another false dichotomy that is very hard to kill.



Alan Finkel
Australia's Chief Scientist
2016-2020

‘Generic skills only have meaning within specific domains of knowledge.’

‘What’s the use of learning to collaborate if you don’t have anything distinctive to contribute?’

As the former Chief Scientist, Alan Finkel was fond of saying,

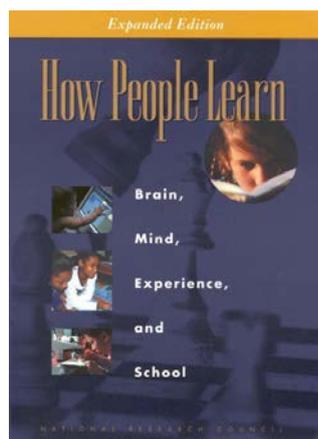
“Generic skills only have meaning within specific domains of knowledge.”

“What’s the use of learning to collaborate if you don’t have anything distinctive to contribute?”

You can’t engage critically and creatively on a topic if you lack the relevant background knowledge.

This is why, if you hear people talking about the need to emphasise capabilities such as critical and creative thinking over and above factual knowledge, you should raise an eyebrow and interrogate such statements closely. They are often preceded by some version of the following notion: “Students don’t need to learn facts now. They can go to Google.”

This sets up a false dichotomy between factual knowledge and the ability to think creatively and critically. It also confuses knowledge with the ability to recall facts. While knowledge and recall overlap, they are not the same thing.



“...facts are important for thinking and problem-solving. Research on expertise in areas such as chess, history, science and mathematics demonstrate that experts’ abilities to think and solve problems depend strongly on a rich body of knowledge about subject matter.

However, the research also shows clearly that ‘usable knowledge’ is not the same as a mere list of disconnected facts. Experts’ knowledge is connected and organised around important concepts (eg, Newton’s second law of motion); ... it supports understanding and transfer (to other contexts) rather than only the ability to remember.”

In “How People Learn”, the US National Research Council stated that facts are important for thinking and problems solving.

“Research on expertise in areas such as chess, history, science and mathematics demonstrate that experts’ abilities to think and solve problems depend strongly on a rich body of knowledge about subject matter.

However, the research also shows clearly that ‘usable knowledge’ is not the same as a mere list of disconnected facts. Experts’ knowledge is connected and organised around important concepts (eg, Newton’s second law of motion); it supports understanding and transfer (to other contexts) rather than only the ability to remember.”

So the ability to recall facts from memory is not necessarily evidence of having genuine understanding.

A student might, for example, memorise the formula for calculating the volume of a prism but do they understand *why* that formula works every time and when they should use it to solve some real-world problem? The process by which a student arrives at that point of understanding, with the assistance of the teacher, is what makes learning exciting. And it’s what make teaching exciting. Seeing the look of excitement on the face of the student when they experience that “aha!” moment.

“Aha! Now I get it!” : the moment of INSIGHT



And when we understand a topic, it is easier to recall the facts because they are no longer just random bits of information but are organised into intelligible ideas. Not only do we know where the dots are, but we know why they are there and how to join them.

The drive that impels us from simply having a collection of facts or a bank of disconnected experiences in one’s memory towards understanding is our innate human curiosity, the spirit of wonder, the unquenchable desire to know, which is the eros of the human spirit.

Allow me here to take a brief detour into the field of epistemology.

As the parent of any three-year-old knows, once you start answering their questions that take the form of “what’s that?” pointing things out to your child, what follows soon after is a series of “why” questions. We naturally want understanding, we want intelligibility, we want meaning.

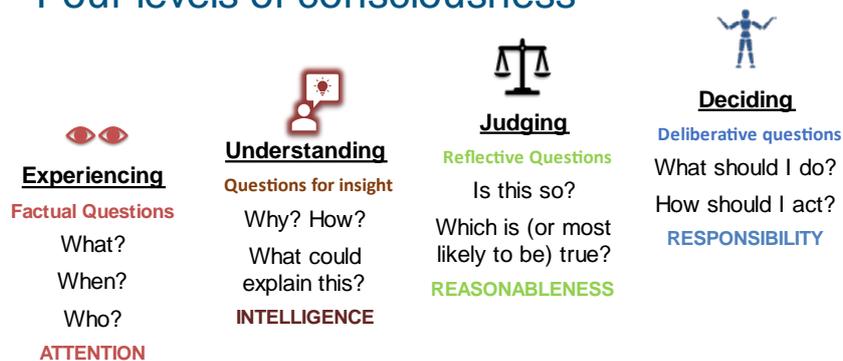


I'm reminded of the young boy in the TV commercial a few years ago who asks his father about why the Chinese built the Great Wall, to which the father replies: "Yes, well that was in the time of the Emperor Nasi Goreng, to keep the rabbits out".

The son then puts this into his school project to the class. Here is an example of a potentially plausible explanation – after all, we had a Rabbit-Proof Fence in Australia – but it needs to be tested against other plausible explanations and other data before it can be verified, before we can make a judgement about the truth or falsity of the explanation. So there is yet another type of question, a question for judgement of fact: is that explanation true?

This dynamic ascension through different levels of consciousness, driven by different types of questions, has been described by the Canadian Jesuit philosopher Bernard Lonergan, and can be set out as follows.

Four levels of consciousness



On the first level of *experience*, we notice things and are *attentive*, and ask "what?" "where?" "when?" The answers to these questions yield a whole range of data. But how do we make sense of this data?

So then further questions impel us to the second level of *understanding*: "why?" and "how?" The answers to these questions for *intelligence* yield insights and possible explanations.

These possible explanations then have to be tested through questions for *judgement*, questions that require us to reason, of which the most important is: "Is this true?"

Answering this question conclusively requires reference back to the real world to search for further evidence that either verifies and disproves the proposed explanation. When all the relevant questions have been asked, we can make a judgement and give our assent to the proposed explanation as being true, as representing *knowledge*, notwithstanding that this judgement is *contingent* may need to be *revised* later as more evidence comes to light. This is how knowledge grows over time.

So, if we want our young people to be creative and critical thinkers and problem solvers, then it is crucial that factual knowledge about a topic is taught in ways that promote understanding.

I will come back to Loneragan's schema shortly in relation to the issue of the decisions we make about what we *do* about the knowledge we acquire, how are we to act *responsibly* in and for the world.

Depth of understanding is built up over time, which is why, in the revisions to the Australian Curriculum, there has been a focus on creating more time for teachers to teach key concepts and facts in a way that deepens understanding and makes it possible to think critically and creatively about a topic and solve related problems.

It is about knowledge and capabilities being acquired together.

Another way we are trying to improve the curriculum is by revising the language used in the content descriptions and the achievement standards to make it clearer, more explicit, detailed and specific. That way teachers do not have to spend excessive amounts of time working out exactly what is expected.

Some learning areas have only required some tidying – but others have required more focus. Maths for example has required greater improvement and updating. As we all know, our PISA results in mathematics have been declining steadily over the last two decades, and we need to look how curriculum can make a contribution to turning this around. One way we are doing this is making it more explicit that students are expected to understand the mathematical concepts and procedures they are learning about and to be able to use to them to solve problems.

The public conversation about the Maths curriculum has already got underway in earnest and we have seen some of our proposed revisions being debated.

JOINT MATHS STATEMENT

“ We need education systems and curricula that help deliver students to society who are up for such a challenge – just having knowledge is no longer enough. Instead, the abilities to problem-solve, mathematise, hypothesise, model are all skills that add worth to acquired knowledge. Mathematics learning cannot sit in silos that focus on content and procedures. Instead, it must be something that gives the knowledge purpose. ”



Reinforcing the statement that I referred to earlier from the US National Research Council, this joint statement from five of the leading maths and science organisations in the country is an indication of the level of interest out there about the curriculum.

“Just having knowledge is no longer enough. Instead, the abilities to problem-solve, mathematise, hypothesise, model are all skills that add worth to acquired knowledge. Mathematics learning cannot sit in silos that focus on content and procedures. Instead, it must be something that gives the knowledge purpose.”

I also mentioned that we are looking to clarify the relationship of the learning areas to the three cross-curriculum priorities, namely Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures, Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia, and Sustainability.

This is another area of contention, as we saw in the media in recent weeks.



Our review looked at whether the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories and Cultures Cross Curriculum Priority was appropriately incorporated into the curriculum. This has been a focus for the Humanities and Social Sciences learning area, in particular Civics and Citizenship and History as these subjects are about understanding different perspectives and considering different points of view, beliefs, values and experiences.

The proposed revisions in the curriculum give students the opportunity to discuss and understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives; for example, how the arrival of the First Fleet was perceived and interpreted by First Nations Australians.

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples experiences and perspectives are part of Australia’s past and present reality, but they do not invalidate other perspectives and experiences. “Perspectives” and “Interpretation” are core concepts in the study of history.

In History, there is a proposed new topic in Year 7 called ‘Deep time history of Australia’. This topic focuses on understanding the archaeology of early First Nations Peoples of Australia and how they have occupied the Australian continent. The inclusion of this topic allows students to develop an understanding of important historical concepts such as evidence and significance in an Australian context, and to recognise that the First Nations Peoples of Australia are the world’s oldest continuing cultures.

Another way of expressing what we are trying to do here is to give effect to the words of the Senior Australian of the Year, Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann:

Dr Miriam Rose Ungunmerr Baumann

Senior Australian of the Year

*"We learnt to speak your English fluently, walked on a **one-way** street to learn the white people's way. **Now is the time to come closer to understand us** and to understand how we live and to listen to what needs are in our communities."*



However, we have attracted some criticism that this improved focus on the experience of our First Peoples has come at the expense of reminding our young people of the Australia's debt to its Christian heritage and the values of Western society. When you look at the detail, this suggestion is very hard to sustain.

For example, earlier this month, one of the tabloid papers published a story in which it claimed that "the proposed curriculum would replace teaching about the rights to free speech, assembly and religious belief with language encouraging activism and 'direct action'."

This statement is just not true.

Explaining how democratic freedoms, such as freedom of speech or assembly and religion, support active participation in Australia's democracy is part of the Year 7 *proposed* curriculum, whereas in the *current* curriculum this reference is in Year 8. In other words, this important content has been moved, not removed altogether (as suggested by the story) as part of resequencing of the proposed Civics and Citizenship curriculum.

Had the journalist contacted ACARA, this fact would have been pointed out to them, but we weren't given the opportunity to let facts get in the way of the story he wanted to tell.

Christianity and Western heritage

Rationale statement for Year 7-10 Civics and Citizenship:

"The Australian Curriculum recognises that Australia is a secular nation with a culturally diverse, multi-faith society and a **Christian heritage**."

Content elaborations:

"appreciating the cultural and historical foundations of **Australia's Christian heritage** and their impact on Australian political and legal systems"

"identifying **Christian traditions and values** that have influenced the development of Australian society, democracy and law..."

As regards recent discussion of the place of Australia's Christian heritage in the curriculum, it should be noted that the Rationale in the proposed Australian Curriculum in Civics and Citizenship, which sets out the

overarching framework within which the content should be interpreted, states the Australian Curriculum “recognises that Australia is a secular nation with a culturally diverse, multi-faith society and a Christian heritage.”

Content elaborations in the proposed curriculum include “appreciating the cultural and historical foundations of Australia's Christian heritage and their impact on Australian political and legal systems” and “identifying Christian traditions and values that have influenced the development of Australian society, democracy and law, including the positive and negative impacts upon First Nations Australian communities and other groups within Australian society.”

The Shape of the Australian Curriculum v.5

- "The Australian Curriculum exemplifies a shared commitment to high expectations of achievement across the country, to respectful and rational discussion of different perspectives, values and beliefs, and to democratic processes as the means of promoting the common good of all.
- "The Australian Curriculum must ensure young people have a good understanding of the nature of Australian society within which they will be living and working as adults. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives are an important part of the development of our nation, as are the traditions and values of what is often referred to as 'Western society'."

The Shape of the Australian Curriculum paper, which guides the development of the Australian Curriculum, was updated for this Review to explicitly include reference to the traditions and values of Western civilisation and to the curriculum's role in building national community.

It states:

"The Australian Curriculum exemplifies a shared commitment to high expectations of achievement across the country, to respectful and rational discussion of different perspectives, values and beliefs, and to democratic processes as the means of promoting the common good of all.

"The Australian Curriculum must ensure young people have a good understanding of the nature of Australian society within which they will be living and working as adults. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges and perspectives are an important part of the development of our nation, as are the traditions and values of what is often referred to as 'Western society'."

Now, ACARA will be listening carefully and considering all the feedback we get about proposed revisions and making any necessary changes in response. But what is perhaps most interesting about this misleading narrative about the proposed revisions is the intensity and unrestrained nature of the critique with little effort at balanced assessment, and the willingness to impute malevolent motives. All this is symptomatic of a much more troubling cultural decline that education must have a role in addressing.

Is there a risk that our national community, similar to what we are seeing a number of other Western nations with whom we share this heritage, is becoming too polarized? Are we becoming habituated to the production and dissemination of “fake news” and knee-jerk reactions, such that, in the words of W.B. Yeats,

writing after World War One and in the midst of a devastating flu pandemic, “the centre cannot hold”. Arguably, we have stopped listening to one another and being genuinely curious, preferring to jump to conclusions that fit our existing views.

I earlier referred to the Canadian Jesuit philosopher, Bernard Lonergan, who described the end-game of cultural decline in the following and eerily familiar terms:

“Finally, the divided community, their conflicting actions, and the messy situation are headed for disaster.

For the messy situation is diagnosed differently by the divided community; action is ever more at cross purposes; and the situation becomes still messier to provoke still sharper differences in diagnosis and policy, more radical criticism of one another's actions, and an ever deeper crisis in the situation.”



Bernard Lonergan, 1904 -1984

Cultures shape a society's ability to respond to new challenges. It is the function of culture to discover, express, validate, criticise, correct, develop, improve meaning and value as is needed to sustain a society's way of life.

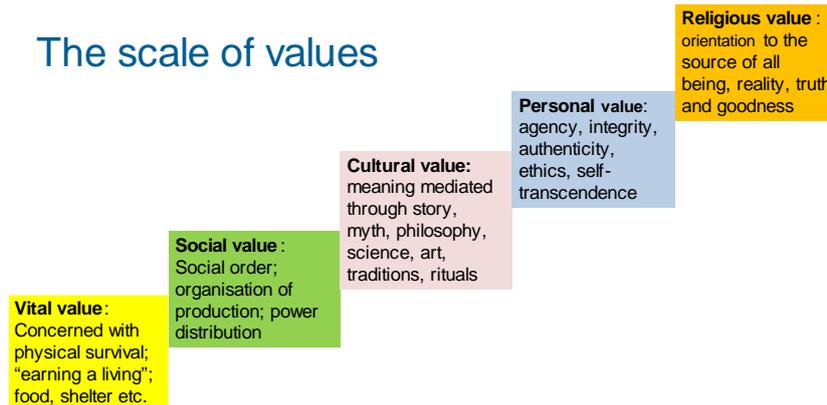
When a culture is functioning properly, it not only infuses social cooperation with meaning and purpose, but it also criticizes and revises social practices in response to new circumstances as they arise both internally and externally. A successful culture is resilient because it is adaptable. A crisis occurs whenever a culture is no longer able to perform its proper function and respond creatively to changing circumstances, and social order begins to break down.

Arguably our Western civilisation has been suffering a cultural crisis, one which was there from the beginning of the Enlightenment in the 17th century, with its optimistic hyper-rationalism, its focus on the autonomous individual freed from the traditional bonds of community, and over-confidence in the inexorable march of progress through science and reason.

Modernity has been unable to accept that virtually all the truths we hold to be self-evident common sense are in fact contingent, not absolute, and that the march of human progress is not inevitable. We could say that it is the failure to adapt to this reality that has given rise to the so-called “culture wars”, with conservatives recoiling in horror from the loss of traditional social and moral norms, while post-modernists embrace and rejoice in the loss of normativity.

Have we reached a tipping point, beyond which there is no return? Here is where education is so important, and why we need to think about the relationship between education and values.

Lonergan proposed a scale of values that can a useful framework for educators to reflect upon, particular those involved in religious schools.



At the most basic level there is what he calls "vital" values which are concerned with the particular goods essential to the quality of physical life such as food, health and shelter and earning a living. Then social values are concerned with the good of order, the organisation of the economy, and the distribution of social power for the sake of ensuring society as a whole has access to those "vital" level goods.

Beyond physical survival and social order, and supportive of them, there is the level of cultural value, which is concerned about the meaning of our common life together, as mediated through story, myth, philosophy, science, history, the creative arts and literature and many other systems that have developed over thousands of years.

But we are not just products of economic, social and cultural forces. These things may shape us, but they don't determine us. So personal values deal with issues of individual agency and integrity, and self-transcendence, and acting ethically and responsibly according to what we believe is good.

But how do we come to know what is good? Here is where religious value makes itself felt in Lonergan's scheme. Religious value is that drive within human beings that urges the person to enter into communion with the source of all reality, the ultimate ground of all being and all goodness. This guides their ethical decision-making at the personal level of value.

However, we are held back from living according these values by bias. Bias is whatever prevents us from questioning what we think we know, and whatever prevents us from acting in a manner that is consistent with our inner drive to do what is good. We must strive to overcome this bias in ourselves. We must strive to expand our perspective beyond the horizon into which we are born and live our lives, and which frames our perceptions and our emotional responses to situations.

This takes deep stores of self-awareness and humility and, according to Lonergan, usually involves some form of conversion - intellectual, moral or religious, or all three. Through conversion one is "turned around" from subtle, unacknowledged illusions about oneself and reality toward a critical appropriation of oneself as one really is, and toward the real world for which one is truly responsible. How does this play out culturally?

Well, just as bias can hold individuals back from approaching the true and the good more fully, so also bias can infect whole societies and the cultures that shape a society's ability to respond to new challenges.

A good test of our ability to respond to new challenges will be the response we make to the uncovering of the dark side of our culture's warped attitude to physical intimacy in personal relationships has also been exposed through events at our Parliament House as well as the testimony of thousands of brave young women who have been educated at our most prestigious schools, places that often pride themselves on the approach to values education.

We have a public reckoning now in Australia on respect for women, respectful relationships and the issue of consent following a chain of shocking events sparking off a conversation that had to be had.

There is increased focus on how these matters are dealt with in the school curriculum, which we at ACARA are currently reviewing. We will be looking to strengthen the way issues of respectful relationships and issues of consent are covered.

But strengthening the curriculum should not be seen as the solution to this problem. It is not just the having of the conversation that it is important – it is where these conversations are taking place. The classroom is not enough.

What is being talked about around the dining room table, in the boardroom, or at the local bar or in the halls of parliament?

And far more important than the words are our active responses, and it these that are the product of our values. Actions speak louder than words. Values cannot just be taught, because what is taught will be more effective if it is consistent with what values are being "caught" from the wider educational, social, cultural and economic environment in which our young people are growing up.

But what our culture is communicating is that other people can be treated as means to our personal ends. This is the bad fruit of centuries of cultural change that have elevated the status of the individual above that of the community, as opposed to seeing a healthy community and the respect for others as central to the wellbeing of the individual.

So the needed response to the crisis of culture is authenticity - authenticity both on the part of individuals and of society. But authenticity is an ambiguous and contested term. Authenticity is self-transcendence. At its most primordial level, self-transcendence comes back to the underlying human drive to know – wonder, and the ubiquitous phenomenon of questioning, which is at the heart of education.

Genuine questions draw us beyond anything we have as yet come to understand, accept, believe or value. Authenticity, being true to oneself, does not mean, as Friedrich Nietzsche might suggest, following your own will to power.

Rather, authenticity responds genuinely to the questions that one has put to oneself about oneself and one's culture about our own biases that hold us back from discovering truth and doing what is right.

Education, then, must keep consciousness open and flexible by way of expanding it through the realization of how others have experienced, understood, judged, and decided. It must foster critical respect for our past, for the culture we have inherited, always leaving open the possibility of amending cultural practices in response to new realities and new questions. Education therefore serves simultaneously the purposes of social and cultural continuity and social and cultural change.

Christian schools, therefore, could be seen as the means of implementing Richard Neibhur's fifth conceptualization of the relationship between Christ and Culture: they contribute to both cultural transmission and cultural transformation.

However, before I conclude, I want to refer briefly to the views of the American political theorist Hannah Arendt, on this question, because they are very relevant to our current debate and for your reflections as Christian educators. For Arendt, the role of education is cultural transmission as the necessary precursor of cultural transformation.

What Arendt does not do, however, is specify what kind of transformation is needed, how the next generation should exercise their responsibility for the world. Speaking in the context of public education, she states baldly that "the function of a school is to teach children what the world is like and not to instruct them in the art of living." It must not impose the political views of the adults onto the children. She explicitly eschews the temptation of "revolutionary movements of a tyrannical caste", to use the education system as a form of political indoctrination. The final sentences of her important essay, "The Crisis in Education" read as follows (note the references to love):

Hannah Arendt: "The crisis in education"

Education is the point at which we decide whether we love the world enough to assume responsibility for it and by the same token save it from that ruin which, except for renewal, except for the coming of the new and young, would be inevitable.

And education, too, is where we decide whether we love our children enough not to expel them from our world and leave them to their own devices, nor to strike from their hands their chance of undertaking something new, something unforeseen by us, but to prepare them in advance for the task of renewing a common world.



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To conclude, revising a national curriculum is a challenging, high stakes exercise because our students deserve our best efforts and highest aspirations. It takes many hands, but it is not light work.

Here is a quote from the former Chairman of the ACARA Board, Barry McGaw in response to the first Review of the Australian Curriculum in 2014.

“What constitutes essential school learning will always be contested because behind it is a debate about what knowledge is of most worth. Curriculum stirs the passions—and that is a good thing. Curriculum is never completed. It is never perfect and should always be a work in progress”.

- Barry McGaw
Former Chairman of the ACARA Board

This discussion and civil debate is a good thing, and conferences such as this should encourage and contribute to that conversation.

AC Review consultation

Opened: Thursday 29 April

Closes: Thursday 8 July

<http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/consultation>



Our proposed curriculum is open until July 8 through a specially designed consultation website where you can see both the current curriculum and the proposed revisions and you will be able to give your feedback.

We will be considering all feedback carefully and making changes in response to it before we submit the final recommended revisions to Ministers before the end of the year.

National curriculums are nation-building and they are everyone's business. We're hoping many will take the time to read the revisions and give their feedback and in doing so, that we all keep in mind the needs of our students and work together to deliver an Australian Curriculum for them.