



Curriculum History and Progressive Education in Australia: A Prolegomenon

Bill Green

INTRODUCTION: HISTORY, ‘PROGRESSIVISM’, AND TRANSNATIONAL CURRICULUM INQUIRY

This chapter is focused on curriculum history, as a distinctive (sub)field within curriculum inquiry. I am convinced that historical imagination is a crucial feature of both curriculum scholarship and praxis, although this is not always evident in the work of the field—to say nothing of its various entanglements with policy. Curriculum history needs to be understood, further, within the broader context of transnational curriculum inquiry, and an important aspect of it. This means attending to national culture and schooling, in its geographical and institutional specificity, but with due regard for matters of internationalisation and cosmopolitanism. Phenomena such as ‘neoliberalism’ or ‘progressivism’, along with many other issues of this kind, need to be engaged historically, but also geo-spatially, and comparatively. Nations (still) matter.

B. Green (✉)
Charles Sturt University, Bathurst, NSW, Australia
e-mail: bigreen@csu.edu.au

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In what follows, I look first at curriculum history, focusing on work from Australia, although also making reference to developments and debates in this regard elsewhere, and worldwide. I then turn to what is variously called ‘progressive education’ or ‘educational progressivism’, or perhaps ‘learner-centred education’—the so-called progressive strand in Australian education and schooling, expressly from a curriculum-historical perspective. Here I want to acknowledge, right at the outset, Julie McLeod’s pioneering efforts and achievements with regard to the history of progressive education, and undoubtedly one of Australia’s leading educational scholars. Indeed much of what I have to say is deeply informed by her now extensive investigations of the ‘progressive’ project in Australian educational history (McLeod, 2015). My aim is to draw out certain aspects of this, relating in part to my own work in English teaching and curriculum history, an area that I see as particularly relevant to understanding progressive education in Australia, but also in the Anglophone world more generally. To what extent it is relevant more widely remains to be seen.

CURRICULUM HISTORY IN AUSTRALIA; OR, THINKING CURRICULUM HISTORICALLY

Curriculum history is a relatively recent phenomenon in Australia.¹ Nonetheless I will sketch here an account of how I see this field today, making specific reference to education and schooling. This involves beginning with due acknowledgement that Australia is a relatively new nation, still, with its establishment reaching back little more than a century, from Federation in 1901. This is despite the fact that it was originally ‘discovered’, colonised, and settled from the late eighteenth century, by the British, and also that it was homeland to Aboriginal peoples and nations for tens of thousands of years prior to that. So let me be very clear: this is very much a *white* curriculum that I am focusing on here, and the educational realisation of a ‘selective tradition’ that is thoroughly and often insistently Anglo-European. At the same time, and in terms of the project of transnational curriculum inquiry, the case I am putting forward about the necessity and value of the historical imagination has a

¹Of course, much the same might be said for many other countries as well.

much broader relevance, geographically and spatially. It affirms the entanglements of nation and empire in curriculum and schooling, worldwide, something likely to be occluded without a rich and ongoing investment in curriculum-historical inquiry, as a distinctive academic-intellectual enterprise. There is much to gain and to learn in thinking historically, as I hope to demonstrate.

There are several points to make, at the outset. The first is that a distinction needs to be made, as I see it, between curriculum history and the history of education, as fields of inquiry. What I am more broadly concerned with here is curriculum inquiry, and I see curriculum history as a subset of that larger field. This is different from seeing it within, and as subsumed by, the history of education. It isn't that these are entirely separate undertakings or perspectives; clearly there are overlaps, and dialogue is to be actively encouraged.² But for the moment I want to insist on the specificity and distinctiveness of curriculum history. This means work that is deliberately and self-consciously *curriculum*-oriented and -informed, and marked by what Whitson (2009, p. 352) has called "a framework of curriculum consciousness". Baker (2013) similarly points to the usefulness of distinguishing between curriculum history and history of education, noting the former's "broader location relative to history of education – that is, beyond social science into the humanities, and attuned to both popular cultural and academic conceptions" (p. 43). She also provides an intriguing, if rather provocative, inventory of some important differences and developments in this regard (Baker, 2013, pp. 31–32). There are rich possibilities, then, in a reconceptualised view of curriculum history, which has various implications for Australian scholarship.

Regarding curriculum history in Australia, it would appear that there is in fact little work available of this kind—and for perhaps quite understandable reasons (Green, 2003/2015). In this regard, educational historian Craig Campbell has made the following observation:

Broad, cohesive, critical historical studies of school curricula from colonial to more modern times barely exist. There are studies for individual school subjects, and curriculum for limited periods of time, but curriculum remains a field barely scratched. It is an important issue for the history of

²See Lindmark (2015) regarding the state of play in Nordic history of education, within which curriculum history as a specific topic is explicitly located, and similarly so.

ideas, the sociology of knowledge and the historical role of curriculum in the educational development of Australia. (Campbell, 2016, p. 7)

Although sympathetic to the cause, it needs to be said that Campbell is nonetheless not working within the disciplinary ambit of curriculum scholarship, which I think limits his sense of the field and its constraints and possibilities. Among other things, such accounts from within the history of Australian education rarely problematise the coupling of curriculum and schooling, or the view of curriculum as more or less exclusively an institutionalised practice.

A further consideration is that Australian work in curriculum history to date has tended to be distributed across subject-areas—for instance, Music, Mathematics, Technical Drawing, Nature, Study, English, etc.—and to some extent, levels of schooling (e.g. reading pedagogy and the primary school). Hence it can be hard to keep track of and to bring together, or to develop this inquiry as an organised resource. Furthermore, while such work might well be working with an explicit, articulated understanding of curriculum (i.e. as concept), this is not at all necessarily the case, which means that curriculum as a term is often being used in a more or less descriptive or commonsense way, without drawing in and building on relevant theory in curriculum history itself—or indeed recognising that something of this kind exists. What constitutes *curriculum* history, of course, or how it is best to be understood, remains awaiting further conceptual work. But there have been some initiatives in this regard, and some promising signs of growing if still rather sporadic scholarly momentum. Writing in 1989, Seddon sought to challenge the prevailing ‘technical’ perspective in existing historical work and instead to develop a ‘social’ view, referencing among other Richard Teese’s remarkable historical-sociological studies of Australian curriculum and schooling, focused on Victoria in the second half of the twentieth century (Teese, 2000, 2014). Work of this kind certainly represents an important strand in curriculum history in Australia.

LOOKING ELSEWHERE

At this point it is helpful to look outside Australia, to other recent accounts of curriculum history. How consistent is the account I am offering here with these? Not all that much, it would appear. Or rather these other accounts seem to be marking out different territory, which

is perhaps understandable since the significance of national culture and context has been acknowledged, notwithstanding the internationalisation project. Linné (2011) for instance argues for the importance of notions of time, narrative and history for curriculum theory, although despite claiming to be “re-thinking curriculum history” she seems to underplay curriculum history as a distinctive form of curriculum inquiry in its own right. For Tröhler (2016a), curriculum history is necessarily to be seen within curriculum studies, which he identifies as “an offshoot of a particular US way of understanding the organization of schooling and instruction” (p. 280). As he writes: “The fact is that curriculum history, together with curriculum studies in general, is in its origin and in a dominant way an *American tradition of research*, a particular result of a particular way of doing research in the field of education” (Tröhler, 2016b, p. 4). It becomes clear, however, that he regards curriculum itself as essentially an Anglo-American phenomenon, whereas “in Europe a more or less continuous research tradition under the catchword ‘curriculum’ has never really existed” (Tröhler, 2016b, p. 9). Others might well want to debate that point. His own sense of the field is worth quoting here at length:

[C]urriculum history ... offers a sophisticated way to do educational research, particularly as it allows the combination of traditionally separated *philosophical history of ideas* (for instance, social justice or political philosophy), *social history* (for instance, with regard to educational opportunities and life chances) and *the history of institutions*, if this integrated view is understood as part of a *cultural history* that asks for particular systems of reasoning and modes of sense-making that emerge and may prevail (or not) in areas and regions, whereby very often the idea of the nation-state has more or less successfully defined where these areas and regions are to be defined geographically. (Tröhler, 2016b, pp. 17–18; my added emphasis)

The reference here to ‘history of ideas’ is particularly significant. Coupled with social and institutional history, such work involves combining intellectual history with the history of ideas, and of systems of reasoning. This is indeed a particular and even partial view of curriculum history, although it needs also to be said that it is consistent with the so-called Popkewitz School, and also broadly speaking with the Reconceptualist tradition in curriculum inquiry (Tröhler, 2016b, p. 283). I am keen not to deny or underplay the insight and value of such work—quite the contrary, as I have certainly learnt much from it. Nonetheless I think it is fair to say

that a greater and more immediate influence in Australia has been the British work of Ivor Goodson (1988, 1994) and others, organised to a large extent around school subjects.³

Goodson's influence in this regard might be traced back to the relative paucity of curriculum inquiry in Australia (Green, 2003/2015), although it also attests to the strong tradition of Australian work in the subject-areas. It is worth noting that Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery, and Taubman (1995)'s monumental study of historical and contemporary discourses in curriculum inquiry confirms that "[t]he study of curriculum history ... has emerged in the 1980s as one of the most important sectors of contemporary curriculum scholarship" (Pinar et al., 1995, p. 42), and point to "an emerging "self-consciousness regarding the historicity of curriculum work, theoretical or institutional" (p. 43). With their principal focus being on the United States, they clearly endorse curriculum-historical inquiry, and the centrality of the historical imagination in curriculum inquiry more generally. Coming back to Australia, however, and notwithstanding the undoubted local relevance of this point, two issues mitigate against the development of such work in the Australian context. One is the relative lack of substantial and effectively organised archives, of the kind available in the United States, for instance, or in Europe.⁴ The other is, more recently, the impact of neoliberalism in educational policy and its characteristic refusal of history (Reid, 2019).⁵ Even so, the case for curriculum history remains compelling.

A POST-LINGUISTIC TURN?

It is another strand, however, that I focus on here. This is one interested more in questions of language. Influenced by poststructuralist and especially Foucaultian thinking, this is a particular line of inquiry associated in different ways with what has been called the 'linguistic turn'

³This has been described by Brazilian curriculum scholars (Lopes & Costa, 2019) as the "History of School Subjects" (HSS).

⁴An important initiative in this regard is the resource developed by Lyn Yates and colleagues at the University of Melbourne, which provides a review of curriculum policies in Australia 1975–2005 (<http://web.education.unimelb.edu.au/curriculumpoliciesproject/>). See also Yates, Collins, and O'Connor (2011).

⁵Clearly neoliberalism's influence in education has been evident worldwide. However, how it has played out in Australia has, arguably, its own specificity.

or the ‘textual turn’. I would argue, indeed, that it has had distinctive inflections in the Australian context.⁶ Addressed specifically to developments and debates in curriculum history in Australia and New Zealand, Baker (1996) provided an influential and more theoretically informed account than hitherto the case in such work. As she writes, her concern is “with the nature and structure of discourse available with which to reason, to explore and to describe the curriculum history field” (Baker, 1996, p. 107). This paper can be seen now as an early expression of her later, more mature scholarship based in the USA, which would become much more explicitly informed by Foucault. It is aligned in various ways with work such as that of Popkewitz and others, with Popkewitz (2007, 2011) in particular a highly influential figure in recent decades (González-Delgado & Woyshner, 2017). This is undoubtedly important work, internationally. It has deeply informed our distinctly Australian studies, and I see it moreover as potentially highly generative for our ongoing inquiry.

For the best part of thirty years now, I have been working with colleagues on a research program addressed to thinking historically about English teaching, teacher education, and public schooling in Australia, with particular reference to the first half of the twentieth century.⁷ In the course of this work, following the pathways of our interests and preoccupations has taken us into times both before and after the period between Federation (1901) and World War I. Some investigations have traced back into the early nineteenth century while others are focused on the more recent past, in accordance with the notion of the ‘history of the present’. Overall, this work can be characterised as formed within and framed by a ‘post-theoretical’ perspective, that is, by what has been called ‘*post*’-theory, or the various discourses of poststructuralism, postcolonialism, and ‘postmodernism’, which I now prefer to call simply the Postmodern (Green, 2017). This is captured in the title of a paper first presented in 2000 and eventually published in 2009: ‘curriculum history and the linguistic turn’ (Cormack & Green, 2009). We referenced this ‘turn’

⁶An important precursor here is Musgrave (1988), in which he makes explicit reference to language and textuality—notwithstanding the fact that his own curriculum-historical work, illuminating as it is, clearly cannot be seen within such a ‘post-theoretical’ frame of reference.

⁷Further work associated with this research program has looked at reading pedagogy and literacy debates.

in Derrida, in his (in)famous assertion of “the moment when language invaded the universal problematic, the moment when, in the absence of a centre or origin, everything became discourse” (Derrida, 1978, p. 280). But Foucault also provided a crucial resource for our work, and indeed has been a much more influential figure in education studies more generally, perhaps especially in Australia. Along with Derrida and Foucault, we drew on others from somewhat different perspectives such as Bakhtin, in arguing for a new attention to language and textuality, discourse and signification. ‘Discourse’ became a crucial concept to work with, and indeed in many ways an organising principle. “[W]hat are the implications of this turn to discourse for the conduct of curriculum history?” (Cormack, 2005, p. 122), we asked. Not just its ‘conduct’, either, but also its very conceptualisation. In this regard, a line of inquiry had been developing for some time, asking questions about the ‘modernist’ character of curriculum, especially given that schooling was clearly a signature project of modernity. Was it possible to think curriculum *beyond* modernity? *After* modernist schooling? (Because of course curriculum goes on going on...) Or was it the case that it was inescapably caught up in that particular epistemo-historical frame? It was in this context that it became strategic to introduce notions of *post*-curriculum history, not simply as a provocation but also as an experiment, a ‘thought-experiment’.⁸

Taking due account of the ‘linguistic/textual turn’ has been especially productive in re-reading the historical record, as well as attending to archival research. As noted, an important resource has been post-structuralist theory and philosophy, with Foucault an important resource, both for his understandings of discourse, knowledge and power, and for his methodological notions of ‘genealogy’ and ‘archeology’. One way in which this has been realised is a wariness regarding received categories, and an unwillingness more generally to take these for granted, as given. This has meant focusing on the categories themselves, *as* categories and concepts. As Cormack (2005, p. 121) writes: “Concepts such as *knowledge*, the *learner* (or *child* or *adolescent*) the *teacher*, the *school*, from a poststructuralist perspective, are not assumed to have some foundation in the ‘real’, or to be an unchanging ‘background’ to the study of curriculum[,] but to be formed out of the same discourses that shape the curriculum”. This is not just a matter of “examin[ing] the histories

⁸See Lather and Clemens (2010) for a relevant account of ‘post’-theory and the history of education.

of some of the fundamental and often unexamined categories ... implicated in the design and conduct of curriculum”, but also, importantly, problematising “objects and structures such as the school and the classroom”, as well as “organisations such as education departments or the state itself” (Cormack, 2005, p. 122). That is, it is not just ‘concepts’ that are of interest here, but also *practices*, along with artefacts and even architectures—a mixing of materiality and the semiotic. For Cormack, this involves a new understanding and appreciation of the ‘technical’. “The implication for curriculum-historical work”, he writes, “is to understand the humble techniques of curriculum as being as important as the rationalities and ideas that are used to justify them, and not to assume that the former necessarily derive from the latter” (p. 123). Hence, among his writings, for instance, is an account of the ‘slate’: “a key material object in the teaching and learning of literacy in schools for the general population as they became compulsory, secular and free” (Cormack, 2016, p. 95). This concern for the material, and for the mundane practices of curriculum and schooling, is particularly noteworthy, especially given a tendency in some quarters to see discourse-oriented work as merely ‘textualist’.

A key feature of the (post-)linguistic turn has been its assertion of historical ‘data’ as ‘text’, and its insistence on historical inquiry as a form of discourse analysis. This takes two forms. One is more directly linguistic and textual in orientation, and works more empirically with available texts, for instance drawing on the methodological and conceptual resources of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). A key reference here is the work of Fairclough (e.g. Cormack, 2005—see also Cormack & Green, 2009).⁹ Cormack in particular has now done extensive work in this regard, drawing in other figures such as Bakhtin. Approaching conventional historical ‘data’ as text means that it can be interrogated beyond its ‘content’ or its informational value. As such, it is an important complement to traditional work in educational history using quantitative data—census and enrolment figures, for instance. But there is another side to this work, drawing more on the Foucaultian view of *discourse*,

⁹It needs to be said, too, that discourse analysis has been a particularly strong area within Australian educational research (Lee & Poynton, 2010; Luke, 1995, 1997). See the Special Issue on ‘Critical Discourse Analysis’ in the journal *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education* (Vol. 18, No. 3, 1997).

that is equally productive. Here, emphasis is placed on a particular understanding of ‘context’ as the conditions of possibility and intelligibility of educational ‘statements’, which comprise actions as well as utterances or articulations. Discourses are to be seen as higher-order manifestations of particular formations-in-flight of knowledge and power, constructing the ‘objects’ of which they speak, and permeating the social field. Hence a distinctive relationship exists between discourse and history, as a complex field of force and signification. One can inquire therefore into the play of discourses at work in any one moment, constructing subjectivities and author(is)ing particular domains of knowledge and conduct. How for instance are children to be known or thought about?—as ‘children’ or ‘pupils’, or ‘delinquents’, or ‘at risk’, etc. When does a ‘child’ transmute into an ‘adolescent’? Where, and how, are the boundaries set in this regard? By whom, or is it by what?

Further, it became clear an explicit engagement with the non-discursive, the material, and relatedly, the heterogeneous—the hybrid, the mixture—was crucial. How is discourse to be understood as *matter* as well as meaning? This has taken the work into the realm of practice theory (Reh, 2014), and also into drawing out the relationship between discourse and practice.¹⁰ How is ‘practice’ itself to be reconceptualised within such a frame? Within a conventional view of discourse as enabling distinctive, preferred ways of thinking, acting, being, etc., the social field is to be understood in terms of the ‘discourses’, ‘programs’, and ‘effects’ that are produced. At any one historical moment, a particular social field is marked by multiple and competing *discourses*, *programs*, and *effects*. In such a formulation, ‘programs’ can be technologies as well as practices, thereby drawing in the non-discursive, or the sociomaterial; while attending to the realm of ‘effects’ acknowledges unpredictability and contingency, the ‘failures’ and the unforeseen. Moreover this is not to be seen hierarchically, rather as a two-way movement, up and down. In a sense it doesn’t matter where one starts, methodologically, since any starting point is immediately, organically connected to the larger material-discursive field, and any point or pathway within it. Presented as “a tri-stratal view of historical practice” (Green, 2005, p. 117), the formulation is accompanied by “a sharp emphasis on ‘(dis)continuity, interruption and uneven development” (p. 118), along with notions

¹⁰Initial engagements with practice theory were in the context of professional education (Green, 2009), including teacher education.

of non-correspondence and heterogeneity. The point is to allow for contingency and the accidental, and to encourage “careful attention to “the local specificity of historical circumstance” (p. 118), the mundane as well as the monumental. In this way, the complexity of history is foregrounded, as a field of possibilities and probabilities, designs and desires.

It should be said that this ‘framework’ is presented as a resource for and a guide to curriculum-historical inquiry, and most definitely not as a template. Nonetheless, it has proved to be useful over several decades now, as a reference-point for researching English curriculum history in Australia (e.g. Green, 2003). But there has been more to this work than simply studying just the English subjects and their various aspects (‘reading’, etc.), as matters of interest and concern in themselves. As Goodson (1992, p. 25) notes, “[s]tudying school subjects ... provides us with a window on the wider educational and political culture of a country”. That this might be particularly the case with English teaching in Australia is still to be appreciated, as with other L1 subjects. This issue can be further illuminated, however, in turning now more directly to the history of progressive education in Australia.

THE ‘PROGRESSIVIST’ PROJECT IN AUSTRALIAN EDUCATION

I now turn to consider thinking historically about so-called progressive education, especially in Australia.¹¹ As noted above, McLeod’s extensive investigations of the ‘progressive’ project in Australian educational history have been especially important here. Crucially she points to “the shadow side” of the various reform initiatives identified with educational progressivism (McLeod, 2015), noting the need to account for things that are excluded or occluded in such programs, for absences, and silences.¹² At

¹¹ Perhaps needless to say, so-called ‘progressive education’ is clearly a transnational phenomenon *par excellence*, manifesting in many different contexts across the world (Brehony, 2002; Howlett, 2013). Historically, it is linked in Europe to what is called ‘*Reformpädagogik*’ (Hopmann, 2007, p. 114).

¹² McLeod is particularly concerned in this regard with the relationship between progressivism and race, which she sees as particularly salient for Australian education history, although by no means exclusively so (McLeod & Paisley, 2016). This particular concern is taken up with specific reference to English curriculum history in Brass and Green (2020).

the same time, she is adamant that the more positive or productive, even utopian aspects of educational progressivism are to be neither denied, overlooked, or underestimated, and this is equally something to bear in mind. So what is progressive education, and how might be engaged as curriculum history?

What is primarily at issue in progressive education is a new (renewed?) emphasis on matters of experience, activity and interest in curriculum and schooling, in the face of their devaluation and even denial in previous or established forms of education. “Progressive education typically denoted an emphasis on child-centred and active learning, immersion in the natural world, growth of the inner life of the child, and a valuing of cooperative relationships among students and between teachers and students” (McLeod, 2019, p. 452). Understanding curriculum as the articulation of knowledge and pedagogy, this applies as much to ‘content’ or subject matter as to teaching and learning, teachers and learners. A different view of the pedagogical relationship is implied here, crucially, a shift away from transmission and recitation to student engagement and active involvement. Knowledge is also differently conceived—although this is always a vexed and difficult question. Milieu changes too, even if only within the space of the classroom, although often there are indeed moves outwards, into the school more generally, including its playgrounds, and even beyond. Different relationships between school and community become at least imaginable, even though sometimes they are still somewhat phantasmatic. Classroom order maps differently onto social order. As Baker (1999, p. 81) describes the US context: “Reforms in the present are considered to be identifiable as progressive if they project a more liberal rather than conservative vision of public schooling and its function”. She continues thus:

Progressive education is currently associated with building a more democratic democracy, with concerns for social justice, with methods based on cooperation and group decision making, with organic and culturally relevant teaching, and with a centering of the child in pedagogical strategies. (Baker, 1999, p. 81)

In Australia, the scholarly consensus is that there are three distinct periods within which ‘progressivism’ seemingly flourished, namely the first decade and a half of the twentieth century, the 1930s, and the 1960s and 1970s—that is, some forty-five years, or almost half the entire twentieth

century. The question arises then, as to whether progressivism might therefore be seen as something ‘abnormal’ erupting onto the scene of Australian education at particular moments and then disappearing, or rather as more prevalent than is often accepted, and hence more or less ‘normal’—just as much part of the grammar of mass-compulsory schooling, as so-called traditional education. This affords a different perspective on how history plays out as continuous, and relatedly, to the problem of *(dis)continuity*. In this case, it becomes important to be attentive to *(dis)continuity* not only across time, but geo-spatially and comparatively across Australia’s multi-scalar educational history and the significance of the state for curriculum and schooling, partly as a consequence of geography. Campbell and Sherington (2006) have suggested that a distinction should be observed in the Australian context between what they call ‘administrative’ and ‘pedagogic’ progressivism. By this, they seek to stress the way in which hierarchy, regulation, and standardisation play out across the country, albeit differently realised in the various States and Territories. As they write: “Progressivism in this phase of Australian secondary reform apparently had little to say on pedagogic matters, though more on issues of curriculum content or ‘syllabuses’” (Campbell & Sherington, 2006, p. 200; see also Campbell, 2013). Attention to discourse here might illuminate ways in which the actual school curriculum, and in particular the school subjects in their emergence and development across primary and secondary schooling, might represent pedagogic initiatives, or to the manner in which the ‘administrative’ and the ‘pedagogic’ come together in particular biographies and career-trajectories.¹³ This is especially clear in the case of subject English, from my point of view at least, but it is evident also in later phases of progressive education in Australia—in particular, the 1970s (McLeod, 2014). The key point remains however that attending to the specificity of how the educational-progressivist project plays out in the Australian context¹⁴ is crucial, as indeed it would be for other national cultures.

¹³I would suggest, further, that this is a good instance of why an informed and theorised sense of curriculum, as concept, is crucial in *curriculum*-historical inquiry.

¹⁴See Kass (2018), for instance, regrading ‘nature study’ in Australia.

A Discourse-Theoretical Perspective

I want to come back now to the implications of turning to discourse, and to discourse theory, for curriculum history. What, in particular, does this mean for thinking historically about educational progressivism in Australia? Brehony (2001) provides an extremely useful account of the educational history of progressivism, in which among other things he discusses the work of the American educational historian Sol Cohen (1999), and, expressly in terms of the ‘linguistic turn’ (p. 424), highlights the importance of language in historical inquiry, thereby seeming to open up possibilities regarding the value of post-theoretical perspectives of the kind I am concerned with here. There are problems in his account, however. As he writes: “Cohen’s view implies that there is nothing outside language, no classrooms, no schools, no pedagogy that can be called progressive or anything else. *There is only the language of progressivism* [...]” (Brehony, 2001, p. 423; my added emphasis). And there’s the rub. Too often the discursive turn is seen simply as attending to language, as ‘textualist’. Progressivism in such a light is simply a matter of language, a way of speaking. There is something in that, of course. Who is it that talks about progressivism? In an earlier documentary history of literacy debates in postwar Australia (Green, Hodgens, & Luke, 1997), we noted how often this was more often than not those who were critical or at least sceptical about educational change and innovation, and also, but to a lesser extent, its proponents.¹⁵ In this sense, then, this is the way that progressivism was ‘spoken’ into existence, often as a less-than-desirable ‘import’ into a nation that saw itself as ‘coming of age’.

But it depends on how discourse itself is understood. In this regard, I want to recall Derrida’s observation, cited earlier, of “the moment when language invaded the universal problematic”—when “everything became discourse”. I read this as pointing to a social-epistemic change when it became no longer possible to work with a sense of realist certainty, a taken-for-granted or assumed foundationalist view of the world, or a single truth. Everything became discourse, or discursive—caught up in complex webs of force and signification. Foucault provides another, complementary perspective. He brings in the non-discursive, the material, the grit and obduracy of the social. Hence it is not enough to focus simply (or simplistically) on language, on what is spoken or written,

¹⁵Subsequently, of course, academic researchers...

on what is recorded, although it is important to do so. It is necessary and indeed crucial to look for ways to take account of bodies and buildings, practices and technologies, personalities and personnel, the minutiae and mundanities of everyday life in classrooms and schools, and other educational(-administrative) sites. Thinking about progressivism as discourse, therefore, means working from the outset with this broader, more comprehensive, heterogeneous view, and bringing together Derrida and Foucault, where and when appropriate. A central issue here is that discourse is *constitutive*: it constructs that which it articulates. What is it, then, that discourse—more specifically, the discourse of progressivism—seeks to construct? McLeod suggests that its object is the ideal child, the ideal learner, although clearly it goes beyond this, to take into account the teacher, the classroom, the school, the community, and the society, among other things, all understood as discursive objects. Ultimately, though, progressivism desires a better world, and undertakes to design it.

Here it becomes useful to think of educational progressivism as a discursive formation—comprising, as outlined earlier, specific *discourses*, distinctive *programs*, and a range of *effects*, or discernible outcomes in the social-educational world. This would enable us to look for relevant *discourses* as realised in texts of various kinds, writings, theories, polemics, etc.¹⁶ It would allow us to discern the *programs* and technologies put in place as a response to such discursive work as policies or practices—ways of getting things done in the educational sphere; and it would alert us finally, to the *effects* generated, or what happened as a result of all this, some of it unforeseen. In this way, something of the sheer complexity of history is exposed, including its unpredictability. This has obvious implications not only for social and educational planning, but also for curriculum research. It is usual now to point to the halcyon period of the 1930s as a highpoint in the history of progressive education in Australia (e.g. Hughes, 2015), but it should also be recalled that the particular reform at issue here actually didn't 'take': it didn't, in itself, effect much of anything, or seemingly so. It was literally a 'mis-take'. This is undoubtedly due partly to the advent of the Second World War, which interrupted everything. It may well be also the case that the discourse subsequently went underground, with "many of the ideas first broached in the 1930s and

¹⁶This would include the school curriculum itself, as both 'text' and 'context'.

1940s only receiv[ing] implementation in the 1950s and 1960s” (Campbell & Sherington, 2006, p. 194). But what does that mean—how did this happen? Something that continues to intrigue, in fact, is the apparent absence of the 1950s¹⁷ from the official history of educational progressivism. Given the three-phase periodization alluded to above, what was happening in the 1950s? If there was indeed an undercurrent of progressivist ideas in this interim period, how was this manifested? That would be a fruitful line of inquiry, it seems to me.

A CONCLUDING NOTE—CURRICULUM HISTORY IN, AND BEYOND, THE NATION

In this relatively brief and even cursory account of curriculum history and progressive education in Australia, I have sought to demonstrate the value of attending to the specificity of educational practice in national cultures and contexts, as well as the importance of transnational curriculum inquiry. Taking a transnational perspective, overall, is both enriched and complemented by local investigations of how curriculum and schooling are realised in particular nation-states, taking due account of matters such as uneven development, coloniality, and the relationship between governmentality and geography. I argue here that Australia has produced distinctive versions of both curriculum history and progressive education, albeit in complicated conversation with other histories, elsewhere. The difference matters. Place matters. Just as these have become guiding principles for curriculum research more generally, so too they are relevant here, and generative in shaping and informing such local-global studies in curriculum-historical inquiry. I would add, in closing: discourse matters too. Hence a locally inflected discourse-theoretical approach to curriculum history, as outlined here, may well be something to think about further, within the larger transnational project of curriculum inquiry.

¹⁷Properly speaking, this is the period from 1945 into and through the 1950s—from the end of the War to the advent of the perhaps mythical 60s. This period is examined to some extent in the documentary history I did with colleagues (Green et al., 1997); although a relatively cursory treatment, much more could be made of it even now.

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