Intercultural Understanding in the Australian Curriculum

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Abstract

Intercultural Understanding and Personal and Social Capability are two General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum. However, the level of engagement anticipated by students in addressing these general capabilities across the learning continua provided in the curriculum differs significantly both in terms of the cognitive level expected of this engagement (as measured by Bloom's Taxonomy), and of the level of interaction expected between students in meeting the capabilities' learning objectives. Using the work of Bernstein and Fairclough, this paper argues that the Intercultural Understanding general capability requires less intellectual and inter-social engagement than the Personal and Social capability due to underlying assumptions that operate so as to distance the cultural Other, placing them on the periphery of Australian society, despite cultural diversity being, in fact, the lived experience of virtually all Australians. The learning continua, once scrutinised through a linguistic analysis and the lens of Bernstein, point to the absences of deep engagement in Intercultural Understanding capability, particularly when compared with that expected for the Personal and Social capability and begs the question of how Intercultural Understanding can become imagined, sustained or respectful within pedagogical encounters across the Australian Curriculum.

Keywords Intercultural Understanding · Australian Curriculum · Discourse analysis · Bernstein

Australia is an ethnically diverse nation. The 2016 Census shows that, "Nearly half (49%) of Australians had either been born overseas (first generation Australians) or one or both parents had been born overseas (second generation Australians)" (ABS 2017). As such, the need for intercultural understanding that allows young people to engage with and learn from people different from themselves is an increasingly essential aspect of Australian life which will involve cross-cultural social interactions that young people will need to feel comfortable with. The *Australian*

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Curriculum provides two general capabilities that seek to facilitate how students learn the "knowledge, skills, dispositions and behaviours" (ACARA 2019c) that will enable them to successfully engage with others. These are the *Personal and Social* and the *Intercultural Understanding* general capabilities. This paper compares how the curriculum assesses these two general capabilities and considers the differences in assessment of these and what this may say about the place of the cultural Other within Australian society more generally.

The *Personal and Social* capability seeks to help students "understand themselves and others, and manage their relationships, lives, work and learning more effectively" by involving students in "a range of practices including recognising and regulating emotions, developing empathy for others and understanding relationships, making responsible decisions, working effectively in teams, handling challenging situations constructively and developing leadership skills" (ACARA 2019b). The *Intercultural Understanding* capability is developed as students "learn to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others…intercultural understanding involves students learning about and engaging with diverse cultures in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, create connections with others and cultivate mutual respect" (ACARA 2019a).

While intercultural understanding is a general capability in the Australian curriculum and although Australia is becoming increasingly culturally diverse, there are social forces operating to make the Australian school system increasingly segregated both in terms of student ethnic background (Ho 2015) and social class (Rowe and Lubienski 2017). This works to systematically undermine the development of intercultural understanding. School choice enables some parents to 'shop for peers' (Rowe and Lubienski 2017) for their children, although this ability is mostly reserved for those with the economic capacity to either purchase a property in the catchment area of a 'good school' or to send their child to a private school. As Teese (2011) notes, "Policies of parental choice enable geography to be by-passed" (p. vii). Increasing school segregation actively works against students developing intercultural understanding since it denies students one of the most consistently proven means of becoming interculturally aware; interaction with cultural Others (Pettigrew and Tropp 2006).

This paper considers the learning continua provided by the *Australian Curriculum* for the two general capabilities, *Intercultural Understanding* and *Personal and Social* analysed in terms of Bernstein's (1975) conceptions of the three messaging systems of education (curriculum, evaluation, and pedagogy) and his characterisation of curricula as either collective or integrating. While viewing the Australian curriculum as essentially a collection type curriculum, this paper raises the question of how well these general capabilities sit within the curriculum. The paper applies a Critical Discourse Analysis (Fairclough 1989) by considering the use of verbs within the learning continua attributed to Bloom's revised taxonomy (Anderson et al. 2001) so as to assess these two general capabilities, particularly in terms of the expectation that the chosen verbs might have in encouraging students to interact with others, with both their school peers and those who are culturally different from themselves. As such, it considers how well the *Australian Curriculum* meets

the demands of intercultural understanding as a capability, despite it not requiring 'successful' cross-cultural interactions (Deardorff 2004).

Theories of intercultural understanding present the benefits of intercultural interaction as a means to reduce racism and cultural misunderstandings (Bennett 2008; Bredella 2003; Byram 1997; Hill 2006). While developing student knowledge of the cultural Other is an important step in this process (Deardorff 2006), intercultural understanding implies interaction between people (Dervin 2016), something often underestimated when curricula place too much stress on developing 'understanding'. As such, "Schools are ideal places for this kind of cross-cultural interaction, and for this reason, play an important role in fostering everyday multiculturalism and social cohesion" (Ho 2015, p. 1). In fact, "In a multicultural society like Australia, it is unnatural and unhealthy for our schools to be ethnically divided" (p. 6).

Intercultural Understanding is defined:

> In the Australian Curriculum, students develop intercultural understanding as they learn to value their own cultures, languages and beliefs, and those of others. They come to understand how personal, group and national identities are shaped, and the variable and changing nature of culture. Intercultural understanding involves students *learning about and engaging with diverse cultures* in ways that recognise commonalities and differences, *create connections with others* and cultivate mutual respect. (ACARA 2019a – emphasis added)

It would seem from this definition that interaction between members of diverse cultures would be an expected aspect of the curriculum.

Intercultural interactions, segregation and understanding

In Australia, regimes of school choice are reducing intercultural exchange. Ho's work shows that in some areas of Sydney, for example, "In public schools, an average of 80% of students are from LBOTE (language backgrounds other than English), while in private high schools, it is about half this figure, at 42%" (p. 6). Other research notes, "Whiteness becomes a valuable choice marker for school choosers—perhaps a surrogate source of information on school quality" (Rowe and Lubienski 2017, p. 349).

Research conducted in England (Reay et al. 2011) found that even middle-class families who sent their children to the local comprehensive high school so as to provide them a cosmopolitan educational experience, felt considerable dissonance and hesitation. While the parents were keen for their children to form multi-ethnic friendships, this rarely proved to be the case. These parents did not send their children into these schools to be a vanguard "actively opposing inequalities. Rather the ambition is more that children are to become inured to, and learn to cope with a socially unjust world" (p. 155). The parents were also keen to find ways for their children to avoid interacting with children of the white working class, who they saw as effectively 'valueless' (p. 91). School choice results in schools becoming increasingly segregated both in terms of the ethnicities represented in them and in terms of

the social class of the students attending—with the poor being residualised in poor schools (Lamb 2007).

Australia has become negatively perceived internationally for its treatment of asylum seekers (see, for instance, Albeck-Ripka 2018). Australia spends more (in fact, over five times more) on sustaining its offshore detention regime than the UNHCR spends on refugees in the whole of South East Asia (ABC 2015). And yet, this expenditure makes the lives of those trapped in such facilities a misery. In the 6 months between 9 February and 25 August 2018, 13 children were transferred to medical facilities in Australia after either attempting suicide in Nauru or suffering from 'resignation syndrome' (Refugee Council 2018, p. 7). The call in the curriculum to develop empathy towards the cultural Other must be reconciled with such facts.

The Australian Curriculum and the place of the General Capabilities

The *Australian Curriculum* is composed of three interconnected dimensions: the discipline-based learning areas, cross-curriculum priorities and the general capabilities (ACARA 2019e). The eight discipline-based learning areas form the core of the curriculum, since it is within these that the other two dimensions are to be realised. The general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities have proven controversial (Gilbert 2018) mainly due to them being understood as cluttering an already overcrowded curriculum (Donelly and Wiltshire 2014).

There are seven general capabilities that are "addressed through the content of the learning areas" (ACARA 2019c). The capabilities are defined in the curriculum as encompassing "knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions" and are intended to add "depth and richness to student learning via content elaborations". The capabilities are also understood as providing students with twenty-first century skills where "students develop capability when they apply knowledge and skills confidently, effectively and appropriately in complex and changing circumstances". However, Gilbert (2018) asserts that many of the capabilities, including intercultural understanding, "seem to have little necessary connection to economic goals" (p. 130) despite this having been a key objective of the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA 2008). Nevertheless, Gilbert points out that in a 'matrix curriculum' where the general capabilities are realised within the learning areas, such capabilities are "seen as 'add-ons' and of secondary importance" (p. 132). In fact, the *Australian Curriculum* itself discusses them in terms of their ability to "offer opportunities to add depth and richness to student learning" (ACARA 2019c), thereby diminishing them since they cannot also then be centrally important.

Although the general capabilities are realised across the learning areas of the curriculum and are thereby intended to tie the curriculum together, frequently, *Intercultural Understanding* and the *Personal and Social* capability are barely referenced in many of the subjects. For instance, there is not a single reference to *Intercultural Understanding* in the entire science curriculum and the last reference to the *Personal and Social* capability in science is in the Year 7 syllabus. This situation is similar

to that in mathematics. Further, as Gilbert (2018) points out, "where capabilities icons do appear (that is, in the parts of the curriculum where they are expected to be taught), they are linked to content descriptions, but not to concepts or inquiry skills" (p. 135). Thereby undermining the ability of the general capabilities to integrate the curriculum across subject areas.

The *Intercultural Understanding* and *Personal and Social* capabilities are largely absent from subjects one might otherwise expect to find them. For instance, they hardly appear at all in *Economics and Business*, or in *Art* subjects. When they are referenced in many *Art* subjects it is in relation to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. To give an example, "Practise and refine the expressive capacity of voice and movement to communicate ideas and dramatic action in a range of forms, styles and performance spaces, including exploration of those developed by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dramatists" (ACARA 2019d). Although this example does not preclude extending intercultural understanding beyond Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander dramatists, it could hardly be said to encourage it either. As such, the role of these general capabilities as an integrating force within the curriculum must be considered. The two capabilities are not expected to be taught in all subject areas and frequently 'intercultural understanding' has a meaning restricted in its application to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures—which has its own cross-curriculum priority within the curriculum.

Methodology

This paper relies on documentary analysis of the general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum and Fairclough's use of discourse analysis on these textual formats. The documents analysed are published as open access, online documents and are freely downloadable, and are a hallmark of the Australian curriculum. Fairclough (1989) points to how discourses need to be understood from within networks of power, such that how a culture frames a discourse must be understood in terms of how it frames similar discourses, where "language is a part of society; linguistic phenomena *are* social phenomena of a special sort, and social phenomena *are* (in part) linguistic phenomena" (p. 23—emphasis in original) and the process of normalising ideology is linguistic in that "the exercise of power, in modern society, is increasingly achieved through ideology, and more particularly through the ideological workings of language" (p. 2). Intercultural understanding in Australia exists within a paradigm that privileges western cultural traditions (Hage 2015) and a history of western appropriation of the cultural Other that Said (2014) described as Orientalism. Such a paradigm means that the cultural Other is generally understood in essentialist terms, where the westerner becomes the 'knower', and where the Other becomes the object of western understanding. Such knowledge of the cultural Other does not imply the messiness of human contact and interaction, but rather is exemplified by the application of rational western thought processes to gain insights into what are defined as more childlike Others. Our application of CDA is itself framed by the understanding that the western gaze upon the cultural Other is ideological in that the underlying assumption of such a gaze is that the cultural Other will be

an object of investigation and that such a relationship is both unacknowledged and unchallenged.

We turn now to our method of considering the learning continua provided with these general capabilities.

Learning continua for assessing general capabilities

The *Australian Curriculum* provides a learning continuum for both the *Intercultural Understanding* and *Personal and Social* capabilities, which the authors believe are structured, in part, according to Bloom's Taxonomy. The learning continua of the general capabilities of the Australian Curriculum have six levels from Foundation year to Year 10. Each of these levels typically encompass 2 years of schooling. The levels are composed, in the case of *Intercultural Understanding* as an example, of three elements and these three elements are also composed of three sub-elements. The elements and sub-elements are identical across all six assessment levels. For each assessment level there is a learning objective associated with the sub-elements for the capability. These learning objectives are the only parts of this structure that change across the six levels of the learning continuum. These, as is normal for a learning continuum structured according to Bloom's Taxonomy, are focussed for assessment purposes upon the verbs they use. It is these verbs that have been subjected to a linguistic analysis referencing the cognitive levels they can be associated with according to Bloom's Taxonomy.

For *Intercultural Understanding*, the learning continuum consists of three elements, each of which is composed of three sub-elements—giving a total of nine sub-elements. These sub-elements are realised across the six learning levels of the curriculum, ranging from Foundation to the end of Year 10—giving a total of 54 learning objectives. The *Personal and Social* general capability is composed of four elements. These four elements are composed of three, four or five sub-elements—giving a total 16 sub-elements which are realised across the six learning levels of the curriculum. However, the *Personal and Social* capability divides Level 1 of the structure into Levels 1a and 1b—giving a total of 106 learning objectives (see Table 1).

The learning objectives consist of a sentence that invariably begins with at least one unmarked verb. Sometimes a single learning objective will be composed of two independent clauses each beginning with at least one unmarked verb. Other sentences begin with two or more such verbs. This means that there are more verbs than there are learning objectives. For *Intercultural Understanding* (ICU) there are 76 verbs in the learning objectives, and for *Personal and Social* (P&S) capability there are 154 verbs. However, many of these verbs are repeated. Counting only different verbs used, we found that *Intercultural Understanding* has 19 different verbs, while *Personal and Social* capability has 58 different verbs. Such a difference between the two general capabilities immediately implies that students are expected to engage in a broader range of learning experiences in relation to the *Personal and Social* capability than they are in *Intercultural Understanding*.

Table 1 Learning objectives and their verbs in Intercultural Understanding (ICU) and Personal and Social (P&S) Capability

	ICU	P&S
Learning objective	54	106
Total verbs in learning objectives	76	154
Total different verbs in learning objectives	19	58

Bloom's revised taxonomy

This paper provides a linguistic analysis of the learning outcomes associated with these two general capabilities by comparing the verbs used within their learning continua with the cognitive level these verbs have in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson et al. 2001).

According to Woolfolk (2007), "Bloom's Taxonomy (has) guided educators for over 50 years. It is considered one of the most significant educational writings of the twentieth century" (p. 481). The taxonomy has its origins in cognition, mastery and outcomes-based curriculum practises. As Finn (1972) points out, the taxonomy is a second dimension on which educational outcomes, such as the cognitive-affective, may be classified and involves general types of behaviour that the individual may exhibit (p. 107). Bloom (1968), "proposes the exploitation of the reverse relationship: that is, increasing learning to a level of 'mastery' in order to increase affect toward learning and toward a given discipline" (Finn 1972, p. 109).

The Taxonomy is "used as the basis for curriculum development, test construction, lesson planning, and teacher training" (Anderson 2003, p. 375) and consists of six cognitive levels that rise from remembering and understanding facts, through to the evaluation of information and finally requires the creative application of what has been learnt in novel situations (Churchill et al. 2016, p. 281). The intended point of the Taxonomy is to give teachers a means to ensure that the focus of education is to be broader than the simple acquisition of knowledge. However, as Bloom (1984) pointed out, after "over a quarter of a century of use of this domain in preservice and in-service teacher training, it is estimated that over 90% of test questions…deal with little more than information…our testing materials rarely rise above the lowest category of the Taxonomy" (p. 13).

Bloom's Revised Taxonomy is widely used in Australian schools and as such is familiar to Australian teachers. For this reason, and the fact that the Taxonomy is intended to illuminate the cognitive levels associated with student learning, we have applied the Taxonomy to analyse the verbs used in the learning objectives of the two general capabilities.

Table 2 provides the five most frequently used verbs in the learning objectives of the two capabilities, and compares the proportion of these frequently used verbs with all verbs used in the learning continuum. The verbs are also assigned a level in Bloom's Revised Taxonomy. Note that none of the top five verbs for *Intercultural Understanding* (which constitute 65% of all verbs used in its learning continuum) rise above the second of Bloom's cognitive levels, that of Understanding. Note also

Table 2 Top five verbs in Intercultural Understanding (ICU) and Personal and Social Capability (P&S) learning outcomes by proportion of total verbs in capability and verb Bloom's level

ICU			P&S		
Verb	Proportion (%)	Bloom level	Verb	Proportion (%)	Bloom level
Describe	22	Understanding	Identify	19	Remembering
Identify	21	Remembering	Describe	9	Understanding
Discuss	8	Understanding	Assess	4	Evaluating
Explain	7	Understanding	Explain	4	Understanding
Recognise	7	Remembering	Analyse	4	Analysing

Table 3 Proportions of verbs in the Intercultural Understanding (ICU) and Personal and Social (P&S) capability learning outcomes matching Bloom's Taxonomy levels

Bloom's level	ICU proportion (%)	P&S proportion (%)
Remembering	29	27
Understanding	47	27
Applying	11	23
Analysing	12	15
Evaluating	1	6
Creating	0	2

that for the *Personal and Social* capability a broader spread of Taxonomy levels is represented, including a number of words approaching the top of the Taxonomy.

Table 3 provides the proportions of verbs for each of the six levels of Bloom's Revised Taxonomy according to how the verbs have been assigned to the Taxonomy levels according to the work each was doing in the learning objective sentence.

Slightly over three-quarters (76%) of all learning objective verbs for *Intercultural Understanding* relate to the two lowest Bloom's levels—while this is only true of slightly over half (54%) of those for *Personal and Social* capability. This means that the proportion of verbs for each capability that expects students to analyse, evaluate or create given what they have remembered and understood is nearly double for the *Personal and Social* capability than it is for *Intercultural Understanding* (23% compared to 13%). Importantly, the *Personal and Social* capability expects students to apply their knowledge at twice the rate (23% compared to 11%) that they are expected to in *Intercultural Understanding*. In all cases, *Personal and Social* capability requires higher level cognitive engagement from students than does *Intercultural Understanding*.

In Bloom's Revised Taxonomy (Anderson et al. 2001), the first three levels are associated with acquiring and applying knowledge. The top three levels imply students must manipulate that knowledge such that they are able to draw inferences from it, or provide a creative application of it. *Intercultural Understanding* contains a dearth of verbs linked to the top three levels of the taxonomy, there are 10% more of such level verbs in the *Personal and Social* capability learning objectives.

Knowing, feeling and acting

The sub-elements of the two learning continua (see Table 7 in Appendix for a full list of elements and sub-elements for the two capabilities) can be divided into three categories: those requiring students to develop their understanding; those that ask them to develop an affective response; and those requiring them to take some form of concrete action. For instance, in the *Intercultural Understanding* learning continuum a sub-element assigned to the cognitive category is "explore and compare cultural knowledge beliefs and practices", one assigned to the affective category is "empathise with others", and to the active category is "challenge stereotypes and prejudices". Similarly, for *Personal and Social* capability the cognitive category includes "understand relationships", the affective includes "develop reflective practice", and the active category includes "make decisions".

Table 4 shows the distribution of sub-elements across these two learning continua for these three categories of cognitive, affective and active learning objectives.

The sub-elements of the *Personal and Social* capability are nearly twice as likely to imply the students will be expected to take some form of action than is anticipated in the *Intercultural Understanding* sub-elements. As such, *Intercultural Understanding* is strongly weighted towards students acquiring knowledge and 'understanding' rather than on them interacting with the cultural Other. *Personal and Social* capability, even at this level of analysis, implies more direct action from students. Interestingly too, developing the personal and social capability of students is less interested in developing empathy for other students as an abstract notion, but rather is focussed on learning through doing.

Although developing empathy is an important disposition to acquire in becoming interculturally competent, it is also something that is located within the psyche of individual students (that is, one can become empathetic regardless of the actions or beliefs of the cultural Other). This means empathy can be developed and displayed in this curriculum without requiring any direct interaction by the student with another human. For instance, the verbs used within the *empathising with others* sub-element of *Intercultural Understanding* for levels 1 to 5 are entirely limited to 'imagine' and 'describe' (for example: the level 5 objective is 'imagine and describe the feelings and motivations of people in challenging situations'). At level 6 the learning objective is "recognise the effect that empathising with others has on their own feelings, motivations and actions". This means that literally none of the actions implied in the sub-element *empathising with others* requires the students to actually interact with anyone they are expected to eventually empathise with. Rather they are

Table 4 Numbers of sub-elements in the Intercultural Understanding and Personal and Social capability learning continua by implied student response

	Cognitive	Affective	Action
ICU	4 (44%)	2 (22%)	3 (33%)
P&S	5 (31%)	1 (6%)	10 (63%)

expected to merely imagine such a person's perspective and then, after 8 years of such exercise of their imagination, to recognise their own feelings in relation to such imagined empathising.

This reliance upon imagination is considerably different to many of the learning objectives associated with taking action in the *Personal and Social* capability. For example, the level four learning objective for the sub-element of "work collaboratively" is 'contribute to groups and teams, suggesting improvements in methods used for group investigations and projects'. The level 6 objective of "Negotiate and resolve conflict" is "generate, apply and evaluate strategies such as active listening, mediation and negotiation to prevent and resolve interpersonal problems and conflicts". These learning criteria require action that is significantly different from those for *Intercultural Understanding*. They are impossible to achieve without students literally engaging and interacting with another person. They also require a phased approach, where an action is devised, then implemented, then reflected upon, and finally critiqued by the student. This clearly requires a higher level of engagement by the student compared with the "imagine and describe" of the learning objectives under the sub-element *empathising with others* in *Intercultural Understanding* discussed above.

This is a repeated theme for the *Intercultural Understanding* learning objectives associated with sub-elements that otherwise imply students will be required to take action or to interact with the cultural Other—that is, three of the nine sub-elements, see Table 4 and Appendix Table 7. In fact, as one moves from the elements to the sub-elements to the learning objectives, it is mostly the case in *Intercultural Understanding* that what students are expected to do (as assessed by the learning objective) involves none of the action implied in either the element or sub-element. For example, the element *Interacting and empathising with others* certainly implies some form of cross-cultural engagement will occur—otherwise, what does the word 'interacting' mean in this element? A sub-element is *Communicating across cultures* which similarly reinforces this anticipation of intercultural interaction. However, Table 5 presents the learning objectives that will be assessed for each level of this sub-element. In no case is any literal communication or interaction across cultures required.

In no case in the sub-element 'communicating across cultures' is there a learning objective that requires the student to communicate across cultures. In each case the learning remains at the conceptual level, as theory rather than practice. And while the level 6 objective expects the relatively high cognitive level of analysis, this again remains abstract and is not predicated upon any intercultural interaction.

Other sub-elements across the Intercultural Understanding capability that imply (at the element and sub-element levels) that students will need to engage in intercultural interactions similarly lack learning objectives requiring any such interaction. For example, the other sub-elements for *Intercultural Understanding* that imply action, *Challenge stereotypes and prejudices* or *Mediate cultural difference,* do not include a single learning objective requiring interaction with someone from a different culture. *Reflect on intercultural experiences* provides the only sub-element that literally expects interaction with someone from a different culture, however, even in this case the Level 5 objective is to "reflect critically on the representation of various

Table 5 Learning objectives for intercultural understanding sub-element Communicate across cultures (ACARA 2019a)

Level 1	Recognise that people use different languages to communicate
Level 2	Describe how the use of words and body language in interactions may have different meanings for various cultural groups
Level 3	Recognise there are similarities and differences in the ways people communicate, both within and across cultural groups
Level 4	Identify factors that contribute to understanding in intercultural communication and discuss some strategies to avoid misunderstanding
Level 5	Explore ways that culture shapes the use of language in a wide range of contexts
Level 6	Analyse the complex relationship between language, thought and context to understand and enhance communication

cultural groups in texts and the media and how they respond". Again, this objective anticipates no literal cross-cultural interaction—where interaction with texts is presented as a viable substitute for cross-cultural interaction.

This level of abstraction and theoretical student engagement is significantly different from the highly practical engagement that is expected for the *Personal and Social* capability. Table 6 provides the learning objectives for each level of the *Negotiate and Resolve Conflict* sub-element of the *Personal and Social* capability as a counter example.

Table 6, shows that students are expected to gain a practical understanding of conflict resolution techniques and that this involves them in planning for the interaction, engaging in the interaction, and then reflecting upon and evaluating the outcome of the interaction. This pattern recurs throughout many of the learning objectives for the *Personal and Social* capability, and is *never* evident in the *Intercultural Understanding* capability. In fact, the verb 'practise' is reserved for the *Personal and Social* capability, the noun 'practice' is used for *Intercultural Understanding*, a further confirmation of the expected relationships and implied *Other as object of inquiry* or *other as companion* distinction that is made between these two capabilities.

Table 6 Learning objectives for the Personal and Social Capability sub-element negotiate and resolve conflict (ACARA 2019b)

Level 1	Listen to others' ideas, and recognise that others may see things differently from them
Level 2	Practise solving simple interpersonal problems, recognising there are many ways to solve conflict
Level 3	Identify a range of conflict resolution strategies to negotiate positive outcomes to problems
Level 4	Identify causes and effects of conflict, and practise different strategies to diffuse or resolve conflict situations
Level 5	Assess the appropriateness of various conflict resolution strategies in a range of social and work-related situations
Level 6	Generate, apply and evaluate strategies such as active listening, mediation and negotiation to prevent and resolve interpersonal problems and conflicts

Both capabilities under discussion imply an expectation that students will engage in some level of interpersonal interaction. The *Personal and Social* capability is composed of four elements, where the first two and the following two mirror each other: self-awareness and self-management, and social awareness and social management. As such, we might expect that fewer of the learning objectives associated with this capability would relate to interpersonal interactions, since half of the elements are focussed upon personal attributes of the students themselves, rather than upon their social interactions. However, this is not the case. Rather, if one counts the learning objectives across both learning continua that imply that the students must interact with another human so as to address the criteria, 20% of those for *Intercultural Understanding* and 30% of those *Personal and Social* capability have such a requirement.

The level of engagement expected of students in social interactions in the *Personal and Social* capability, compared with that anticipated in *Intercultural Understanding,* is starkly different. For the whole of level five of all learning objectives for *Intercultural Understanding*, for instance, not a single learning objective requires students to interact with another human. And even when learning objectives do require such interaction, the level of engagement for the *Intercultural Understanding* capability mostly remain at the level of gaining knowledge. For example, eight of the eleven objectives requiring interaction in the *Intercultural Understanding* learning continuum asked students to describe (discuss, share, explain) what they have learnt from their intercultural experiences.

The *Personal and Social* capability expects a much higher level of engagement from students on all levels. The only level six objective that implies direct interaction with another person for *Intercultural Understanding* is *Reflect critically on the effect of intercultural experiences on their own attitudes and beliefs and those of others*. Whereas, eight of the learning objectives at level six for the *Personal and Social* capability require interaction and these also anticipate a much higher cognitive level of engagement, as is shown by the fact that three of these eight include the word *evaluate*, and another three the word *analyse*—placing them in the top three levels of Bloom's Taxonomy. Examples include: *Reflect on feedback from peers, teachers and other adults, to analyse personal characteristics and skill set that contribute to or limit their personal and social capability* or *Critique their ability to devise and enact strategies for working in diverse teams, drawing on the skills and contributions of team members to complete complex tasks*. Needless to say, none of the learning objectives for *Intercultural Understanding* require students to reflect on feedback they have received from people from other cultures to evaluate their ability to contribute to or limit intercultural understanding, nor do they require students to critique their own ability to devise or enact strategies for interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds.

Discussion

Viewing both of these capabilities, it is apparent that the *Intercultural Understanding* capability requires knowledge without action while the *Personal and Social* capability expects social interactions. The literature is clear that to develop intercultural understanding knowledge without action is simply not enough (Deardorff 2011). Walton et al. (2015) in their review of education literature on intercultural understanding found that building cultural knowledge alone produced either little or no long-term change in behaviours and attitudes, and could even, in some cases, reinforce prejudice. They found that actioning one's understanding of one's own cultural background and of other cultures through cross-cultural experiences and interactions informed intercultural understanding since it helped in "making personal connections with individuals of different cultural groups in a supportive environment, and in ways that are meaningful and relevant to students' lives" (p. 182). Recent Australian research has confirmed these findings of practical engagement in building intercultural competence (Halse et al. 2016; Pedersen et al. 2010; Walton et al. 2015).

The composition of a curriculum provides potent messages to teachers and students regarding what is to be learnt and how that learning is to occur. Bernstein (1975) presents a model of education based on three interrelated messaging systems: curriculum, evaluation, and pedagogy, where these 'form a whole and should be treated as a whole' (p. 73). That is, decisions made in any one of these three messaging systems impact the decisions that are available to be made in the other two. Bernstein further discusses the differences between collection type and integration type curricular models. The *Australian Curriculum* is largely a collection type, since it is structured around the dissemination of knowledge from within subject discipline silos. Bernstein stresses that in such a curriculum a student's ability to match their identity to an ideal student anticipated by the learning discipline becomes a criterion for their academic success. How well or poorly students ultimately meet the demands of a particular subject discipline impacts their identity as a learner. For instance, students identify as being either good or bad at mathematics, good or bad at English and so on, and these relations to the subject disciplines themselves go on to define the types of students they are perceived (and perceive themselves) to be. As Bernstein says, such a curriculum makes "sheep of some and goats of others" (p. 74). He understands this identification as anything but trivial, where a student seeking to shift from specialising in one subject discipline area towards another requires a "change of an educational identity (that) is accomplished through a process of resocialisation into a *new* subject loyalty" (page 87, emphasis in the original). In contrast, "Integration, as it is used here, refers minimally to the *subordination* of previously insulated subjects *or* courses to some *relational* idea" (p.84, emphasis in the original).

Bernstein asserts that a collection type curriculum differentiates students according to their abilities to meet the demands of the subjects within the curriculum and thereby does much to create barriers between students according to their own subject discipline loyalties. Fairclough (1989) stresses that how language is used

in documents—particularly in highly political documents, such as a national cur-
riculum—reflects and works to maintain the power relationships that already exist
within a society.

How the *Personal and Social* and *Intercultural Understanding* capabilities are
assessed in the *Australian Curriculum* provides an interesting case study of the
interrelationship between these themes. The *Australian Curriculum* almost invari-
ably implies that the cultural Other must be understood as spatially distant from the
Australian student. For example, one of the learning objectives that was included in
the count of those requiring direct interaction between students and cultural Others
was *Describe and compare the way they live with people in other places and times*.
It is not totally clear that students necessarily need to interact with anyone to meet
this learning objective, but it has been counted as such due to it being under the
sub-element *Explore and compare cultural knowledge beliefs and practices*. Clearly,
students will not be able to interact with anyone from another time. The point is
that this objective is not asking students to engage with the cultural Other in their
classroom or suburb—but one who is not merely culturally distant, but also distant
in terms of space and time. In a nation where half of the population has at least one
parent born overseas (ABS 2017), the cultural Other does not need to be distant,
either spatially or temporally.

Underlying the *Personal and Social* capability learning objectives is an expec-
tation of cultural homogeny. As such, the interactions discussed are perceived as
being between peers who share a common culture to enable them to "participate
in a range of social and communal activities" (ACARA 2019b). These interactions
are to be planned, monitored, reflected upon, evaluated and assessed. Whereas often
intercultural interactions are anticipated as being between students and the charac-
ters in texts. The cultural Other in these learning objectives is mostly to be 'under-
stood'—and so the learning objectives rarely rise above Bloom's level of Under-
standing. Whereas, interpersonal relationships in the *Personal and Social* capability
are repeatedly shown to require a much deeper engagement at a higher cognitive
level.

Said (2014) discusses this attitude extensively in his classic work *Orientalism*.
In this he asserts that the west has always perceived the Orient as its cultural Other,
that is, that the west defines itself as other to the Orient, which is perceived as child-
like and needing to be comprehended through the lens of western rationality. Ori-
entals are perceived as being incapable of understanding their own situation until it
has been explained to them via western understanding. They are the objects of that
understanding.

The *Australian Curriculum* similarly stresses how students must learn of other
cultures, rather than *from* or *with* them. Such an emphasis objectifies the cultural
Other—literally making *them* an object to be 'identified and described', a phrase
that, as demonstrated in this paper, is used in 24% of the learning objectives

associated with *Intercultural Understanding*, but with only 8% of those in the *Personal and Social* capability. Cultural power dynamics, as Fairclough makes clear, underlie the language we choose, either in creating our fellow students as peers or in distancing 'us' from the cultural Other, spatially, temporally and emotionally.

Bernstein's (1975) concern that a collection curriculum is premised on moulding student identities so that they may fit the requirements of an ideal student in various subject disciplines with hard boundaries between these disciplines also calls into question the ability of such a curriculum to effectively develop student abilities toward intercultural understanding. As Bernstein says "the deep structure of the specialised type of collection code is *strong boundary maintenance creating control from within through the formation of specific identities"* (p. 87, emphasis in original). That is, it is a curriculum type that is focussed upon the building and maintenance of boundaries between students—boundaries that function to separate students from one another. Such a curriculum seems an unlikely tool to do the work needed to reduce the boundaries that exist between students due to cultural differences, particularly when the curriculum requires so little positive interaction between students of different cultures.

Conclusion

The Preamble to the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA 2008) begins: "As a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society—a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse" (p.4). While some have criticised the *Declaration* and *Australian Curriculum* for being overly focussed on the economic advantages expected to flow from education (see Gilbert 2018, p. 130) it seems clear that a socially cohesive society is more likely to be one that is based on mutual understanding between the groups in a multicultural society.

This paper, by analysing the two general capabilities, *Intercultural Understanding and Personal and Social* of the Australian curriculum, has sought to illuminate the 'common sense' language that reinforces the power relationships within society (Fairclough 1989). As the world becomes increasingly global, as environmental devastation and wars continue to displace millions of people, it is inevitable that rich nations, such as Australia, will be offered choices that will test our ability to respect Others as equals. Intercultural understanding, based upon active engagement between people and across cultural differences towards common goals, would provide steps toward that shared future.

This paper argues that the *Intercultural Understanding* and *Personal and Social* capabilities ought to be brought together in such a way that interactions between students based on difference becomes the excepted norm. However, as we pointed out at the beginning of this paper, the increasing segregation of Australian schooling

is making such interactions rare, and, as such, is wasting what could otherwise be an essential cultural resource in Australian society. As Harrison et al. (2017) have recently noted:

> Pedagogy has become increasingly defined through the nomenclature of deep thinking, self-regulated learning and explanation. Models of quality teaching have evolved over the previous 15 years (e.g. Hayes et al. 2006), along the lines of Bloom's taxonomy to promote the concepts of "deep thinking" and student-led learning…yet opportunities for other ways of learning are often undervalued in curriculum and practice' (p. 504).

Intercultural understanding, as it has been theorised across the literature (see above), suggests that such a society should be based upon respect, equality and shared goals. Our analysis demonstrates the significance of agentic and relational encounters for Australian students. However, in a social milieu where the segregation of Australian schools and the boundaries in the curriculum texts of two key general capabilities are promoting exclusions between students, we have reasons to be concerned. In Australia (as elsewhere), standardised curricula have resulted in a retreat from the knowing and practising of socially just and culturally responsive curricula enactment. We therefore have reasons to be concerned about questions that relate to the assessment of the general capabilities. To teach for intercultural understanding remains central to our educative purposes. This will require teachers, curriculum writers, and researchers to work collectively and individually with refreshed theoretical insights and sustained engagements with the multiplicity of lived, lively and contested curriculum practices. This productive energy will encourage close scrutiny of linguistic imperialism and subsume delimiting past practices evident in curriculum texts.

Appendix

See Table 7.

Table 7 Elements and sub-elements for Intercultural Understanding and Personal and Social Capability

Element	Sub-element
Intercultural Understanding	
Recognising culture and developing respect	Investigate culture and cultural identity
	Explore and compare cultural knowledge, beliefs and practices
	Develop respect for cultural diversity
Interacting and empathising with others	Communicate across cultures
	Consider and develop multiple perspectives
	Empathising with others
Reflecting on intercultural experiences and taking responsibility	Reflecting on intercultural experiences
	Challenging stereotypes and prejudices
	Mediate cultural differences
Personal and Social Capability	
Self-awareness	Recognise emotions
	Recognise personal qualities and achievements
	Understand themselves as learners
	Develop reflective practice
Self-management	Express emotions appropriately
	Develop self-discipline and set goals
	Work independently and show initiative
	Become confident resilient and adaptable
Social-awareness	Appreciate diverse perspectives
	Contribute to civil society
	Understand relationships
Social-management	Communicate effectively
	Work collaboratively
	Make decisions
	Negotiate and resolve conflict
	Develop leadership skills

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