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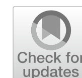

Re-negotiating the curriculum?

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Abstract

Garth Boomer can rightly be described as one of Australia's foremost curriculum thinkers. His heyday was the 1970s and 1980s, however, and little is known now about the actual nature or the details of his work. Indeed, I suspect that he functions for many, and especially for more recent curriculum workers, as something of a mythic figure. In this presentation I revisit what is perhaps his most iconic idea: *curriculum (as) negotiation*, or as it was originally known, 'negotiating the curriculum'. What does this involve? How is it to be understood? Why is it important? Taking due account of the context of its formulation and asking about its relevance and value now, in what are clearly very different circumstances, I argue that curriculum (as) negotiation is best seen as a distinctive curriculum orientation, with continuing relevance, and possibilities and opportunities not only for the present moment but also for the future, as a key resource for curriculum inquiry *and* praxis.

Keywords Negotiating the curriculum · The classroom curriculum · Curriculum inquiry · Garth Boomer

Introduction

Garth Boomer can rightly be described as one of Australia's foremost curriculum thinkers. I say this with confidence, despite knowing that such a statement might be received sceptically at least in some quarters. That is perhaps understandable, especially given that his heyday was the 1970s and 1980s, and clearly much has changed since then, and since his far-too-early death in 1993. But it is also because, as I have suggested elsewhere, the local curriculum field has a relatively brief history, at least formally (Green, 2003a, 2003/2015). The Australian Curriculum Studies Association (ACSA) itself was established only in the early 1980s, with the journal *Curriculum Perspectives* emerging around the same time. There had been earlier signs of activity and interest in this regard, as part of what has been described as a general 'curriculum breakout' (Connell, 1985), especially practically and systemically. But it was only in the decade of the 1980s that momentum gathered in terms of professionalisation and institutionalisation, and more focused intellectual work. Boomer was deeply implicated in these developments; indeed, he was convenor of the first national ACSA conference, held in Adelaide in 1983. Moreover, I think he can be seen as a leading figure in Australian education more generally, always working within the system, and occupying increasingly senior and more influential roles and positions.[1] His *modus operandi* remained the same, however. He was constantly on the move, delivering conference presentations and keynote addresses, and he wrote extensively. He worked with ideas, and he played with words. He inspired and he provoked.

I need to say something at this early point about Boomer's 'writing', his written work—the only basis now, in fact, for accessing and engaging what I have called his 'curriculum thinking', and hence for assessing his historical and intellectual significance. It is important to realise that much of this published work was originally presented as 'speeches', at specific conference events. The focus was on the occasion: *this* audience, here and now—who he was addressing, and why. Ideas and arguments are developed *across* texts, rather than worked up in detail or elaborated in any one occasion. As I write elsewhere: "Revisiting Garth's written work is not straightforward. Much of it is dispersed and fragmented,

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[1] Among these were heading up the national Curriculum Development Centre and the Australian Schools Commission, both based in Canberra, and his last substantive position as Deputy Director-General (Curriculum) in South Australia.

and profoundly (and splendidly) occasional". I further noted: "Some have expressed puzzlement that it sometimes doesn't seem to live up to its recommendation or reputation, at least in an 'academic', expository sense" (Green & Meiers, 2013, p. 2). The point is that it differs from the usual academic-intellectual exposition—the scholarly paper.

In this regard, there is a fascinating connection to be made with the work of Ted Aoki, one of Canada's foremost curriculum scholars and widely acknowledged and indeed admired within the North American curriculum field more generally. This is what Bill Pinar has observed of Aoki's work: "I know of no other scholar who took as seriously as Aoki did the scholarly conference as an educational event. Often working from conference themes Aoki takes these opportunities to teach, and with great savvy and subtlety" (Pinar, 2005, p. xv). I believe the same can be said of Boomer, and strikingly so. Boomer typically worked up the conference occasion as a *pedagogic* opportunity; indeed, the links between pedagogy and rhetoric are worth acknowledging here. There are other points to make regarding the affinity between Boomer and Aoki, in fact, including that they were working at much the same time, with a deep commitment to practitioners. It is somewhat surprising to note, then, that Aoki's reputation as a curriculum scholar would seem quite secure, whereas Boomer is much less well known or appreciated in this regard, and yet, again as I have suggested elsewhere, his work is "a distinctive kind of 'practice-based' curriculum inquiry …, closely attentive to classrooms and other sites of educational praxis" (Green & Meiers, 2013, p. 2). I will resume this matter later in the present paper.

I shall also be suggesting, further, that Boomer can be understood with reference to both curriculum theory and curriculum history. Regarding the former, I concentrate here on perhaps his most iconic idea, the formulation with which he is indelibly associated: 'negotiating the curriculum', or *curriculum-as-negotiation*, as I shall call it. I do so because I suspect that little is known now about the actual nature or the details of what this actually involves, or indeed of Boomer's work overall.[2] With regard to curriculum history, one way of seeing this as a line of inquiry addressed to the history of educational ideas—in which case, there can be little doubt that 'negotiating the curriculum' is indeed a distinctive and resonant idea within the context of Australian education, and arguably beyond. Boomer (1988e) himself talked about how "[g]ood ideas prevail and grow" (p. 237), noting the manner in which "powerful ideas" (p. 241) take hold, and insinuate themselves. This might be the best way of understanding this notion of curriculum-as-negotiation, then as a powerful idea, one which has persisted for quite some time now, despite changing circumstances, and also as a metaphor, one that lingers, reminding us of other possibilities, other ways of being in the educational world.

Understanding curriculum

It is useful to begin by making several observations about *curriculum* itself, which I understand as a concept, a practice, and a field. This is where an informed understanding of curriculum inquiry and praxis becomes imperative, along with a sense of the value of curriculum scholarship—something most definitely *not* seen in opposition to, or separate from, curriculum practice, whether that be in schools or other educational sites. One all too common misconception is to mistake schooling for curriculum, or to conflate curriculum and schooling. The two are distinct, although it is true that schooling is the form in which curriculum has been realized in modernity. This has been called 'curriculum-as-institutional-text' (Pinar et al., 1995). The curriculum concept is larger than schooling, however, as is the practice; which means, in turn, that the field needs to be expanded, although that is unlikely at the present moment.

There are a number of preliminary points to make. The first is that curriculum is usefully understood as operating at different 'levels', rather than simply being one more or less amorphous thing. Westbury (1998) proposes that there are three such 'levels of curriculum making', each of which needs to be duly appreciated, *as* distinctive forms of curriculum:

- The *institutional* curriculum
- The *programmatic* curriculum
- The *classroom* curriculum

Picking up on Westbury, Deng (2011, p. 546) writes "Broadly construed, curriculum making runs across three types of context, the *institutional*, the *programmatic*, and the *classroom*, each of which is characterized by a distinct kind of curriculum".[3] Moreover, he suggests that it is important to

[2] See however Bron et al. (2016), a very useful account of Boomer's work, published in *Curriculum Perspectives*—one of the very few such discussions available, focusing or elaborating on the work. (In this regard, see also Mayes [2013] from Australia, and Hyun [2006] in the USA.) It is worth noting that the Bron et al. paper is written by Dutch curriculum scholars.

[3] I suggest that there is a fourth 'level' of curriculum that needs to be accounted for, which can be called 'the *symbolic* curriculum'. This sits above the others, although an important sense exists in which it pervades them. It is best exemplified by Madeline Grumet's classic formulation, that curriculum is "the story we tell our children about our past, our present, and our future" (Grumet, 1981). This notion of curriculum as 'story' is one that Boomer himself was very interested in, and mobilised often, including in his 'negotiating the curriculum' work.

be "aware of and attentive to all three realms of curriculum consideration" (p. 548). The first two of these together—that is, the 'institutional' and the 'programmatic'—correspond to what has been called the "the technical form of the curriculum" (Luke et al., 2013, p. 7), that is, the state and system documents outlining curriculum policy and associated syllabi; what Westbury (1998, p. 66) describes as the 'policy' and the 'technical' aspect of curriculum making.[4] Together, the 'institutional' and 'programmatic' levels of curriculum can be identified with the Australian Curriculum (ACARA), as I indicate elsewhere (Green, 2018a, b, c, d, p. 265). What is missing altogether in the case of the Australian Curriculum is due consideration of "the classroom curriculum", the classroom *as* curriculum. Instead, this is seen simply and simplistically in terms of 'implementation', with teachers positioned more or less as 'technicians'. It is at this level, however, that Boomer was most directly concerned, at least at the time of first proposing and introducing curriculum negotiation. It is at this level, too, that teachers are to be seen as 'curriculum makers', and also as 'curriculum theorists', in their right. Boomer is important, then, because of this deliberate focus on *the classroom curriculum*—moreover, he maintained a consistent emphasis on teachers and teaching, as key agents in curriculum and schooling.

Boomer's own explicit observations on curriculum are worth bringing in here. As he wrote, early on: "A new definition of curriculum is needed, and new ways of evaluating it must be found" (Boomer, 1992, p. 32). This is needed because, as he put it, "[t]he curriculum is no longer a prepackaged course to be taken; it is a jointly enacted composition that grows and changes as it proceeds" (p. 32). That notion of curriculum as 'composition' is a typical instance of his thinking, and his distinctiveness. Boomer goes on to say that while "[i]t would be aesthetically offensive to coin the word 'curriculuming'", nonetheless "that is what I mean when I think of 'curriculum'" (p. 150). Curriculum is too often understood as a 'noun', whereas it is better seen as a 'verb':

> The noun can too easily seduce educators into a notion of curriculum as simply a plan of content, activities, methods and outcomes. Curriculum is a process beginning with the teacher's or the curriculum writer's conception, proceeding through planning, and eventually reaching enactment and evaluation. (Boomer, 1992, pp. 150–151)

This is still an arresting and generative view of curriculum, as concept and as practice—and perhaps a necessary counterpoint to current (official) constructions. Understanding curriculum as a 'process', as dynamic, as unfolding in time, as a matter of lived experience, grounded in the material reality of classrooms in action, is a very different and distinctive perspective. It is crucial, I suggest, in engaging the "powerful idea" of curriculum-as-negotiation—and in appreciating Boomer's contribution to curriculum inquiry. There is, moreover, considerable congruence between Boomer's position here and that of Aoki, whose work I evoked earlier. I am thinking particularly of Aoki's formulation of 'curriculum-as-plan' and 'curriculum-as-lived experience', which he presented as two distinctive "curriculum worlds". Boomer's deliberate wordplay with 'curriculuming' (or 'curriculum-ing'), while very much characteristic of how he worked, his 'style', can be linked very readily with Aoki's notion of curriculum-as-event, as I would reformulate it. In both, action and experience come together as curriculum. Account must be taken too, of course, of the very different intellectual and cultural traditions they draw on, in their respective curriculum thinking. In summary, then there is still much to attend to, and to develop, in working from Boomer's suggestive formulations here.

Finally, in considering how best to frame Boomer's work as curriculum inquiry, I want to briefly introduce an argument I have made elsewhere (Green, 2018a) concerning the relationship between curriculum and communication. This involved drawing in the work of Douglas Barnes (1976), an important influence on Boomer, to highlight an opposition between 'transmission' and 'interpretation' as what I call curriculum orientations. This is to evoke a familiar opposition between what is often far too simplistically presented as 'traditional' and 'progressive' education respectively, with the former foregrounding teaching and the teacher while the latter foregrounds learning and the learner, and indeed is often associated with so-called 'child-centred education'. Boomer's contribution here is to propose a third perspective, under the sign of 'negotiation'. That is, as I formulate it, he introduced the notion of *curriculum-as-negotiation* to those of *curriculum-as-transmission* and *curriculum-as-interpretation*, thereby supplementing them as well as effectively critiquing them.[5] This has been represented in Table 1.

Table 1 Orientations to curriculum

Transmission	Teaching
Interpretation	Learning
Negotiation	Teaching/learning

[4] This is what Goodson (1988) some time ago now described as 'the written curriculum'.

[5] Elaborating how these notions are to be understood remains work to be done. Suffice it here to note that 'curriculum-as-transmission' and 'curriculum-as-interpretation' might be linked to the familiar discursive constructs of 'traditional' and progressive' forms of education. Furthermore, and for example, the 'transmission' orientation is usefully discussed with reference to notions such as the 'grammar of schooling' and the 'recitation'.

The point is that a context exists in which Boomer's work must be understood, and of which he was very much aware, in introducing what is effectively a third term or a third space in curriculum theory and practice. What is this notion of curriculum-as-negotiation, then, and how best is it to be understood? This is what I turn to next.

Negotiating the curriculum, revis(it)ed

The single most direct statement of what 'negotiating the curriculum' involves as follows:

> Negotiating the curriculum means deliberately planning to invite students to contribute to, and to modify, the educational programme, so that they will have a real investment both in the learning journey and in the outcomes. Negotiating also means making explicit, and then confronting, the constraints of the learning context, and the non-negotiable requirements that apply. (Boomer, 1992, p. 14)

Described elsewhere as "a theory of teaching and learning" (Boomer et al., 1992a, b, c, p. ix) or better perhaps an educational philosophy, curriculum-as-negotiation is presented first in what is something of a manifesto, as a position paper for a national working-party on the role of language in learning. As such, it presumably distils and seeks to succinctly express the deliberations of the group involved, and their respective networks across the country. That is important to note.[6] This was part of a more general curriculum movement in Australia at that time, an opening up of possibilities: what Teese (2014, p. 154) describes with specific reference to Victoria in the 1960s and 1970s as a process of "grassroots curriculum reform", within which notions of 'negotiation' and accounting more for student involvement figure significantly.[7] As he writes: "The curriculum, as a set of demands on students, could not be preconceived and planned without regard to the characteristics and views of students" (p. 154). Among others, then, Boomer was looking for a way to bring such initiatives together in and for classroom practice, with the notion of 'negotiating the curriculum' emerging as "… a strong conception of learning and teaching which required a co-curriculum planning relationship between teachers and students" (Boomer, 1988e, p. 230). But it was much more than simply a matter of '(co-) planning', or 'programming':

> Within such an emergent framework of understanding, … the project of 'negotiating the curriculum' was always more than simply a pedagogical strategy but, rather – at least potentially – an important socio-political initiative, opening up the possibility of a more critical-dialogical view of curriculum and schooling, and indeed of education and democracy. (Green, 2018a, p. 87)

That is, the opportunity was thus provided not only to enhance student learning but also to connect this to social practice more generally. But this was not at all guaranteed, and indeed the struggle that it implied and ushered in quickly became apparent, certainly to Boomer himself. Hence, it is important to read beyond the 'Negotiating the Curriculum' paper, to take in both the various case-study accounts and reports that figure in the two main books (Boomer et al., 1992a, b, c; Boomer, 1982a, b, c) but also Boomer's own commentaries and reflections, across a range of papers, if one is to better appreciate the project.

However, the idea of 'inviting' students in, as above, is itself clearly important in this regard, and even fundamental. "Negotiation … means deliberately planning the curriculum with the complicity of the students" (Boomer, 1982a, b, c, p. 4). It is a way of encouraging students to become involved, invested, yes, and to draw them in, to engage them, which on one level might be seen as pedagogically useful. But it is also, at least potentially, much more than this, in that it provides for the possibility of establishing a more active, authentic exchange, a dialogue, a 'partnership'. These are metaphors, and indeed metaphors figure heavily in Boomer's work, as central to his rhetoric and his pedagogy. They point, in this instance, to the striving that I think can be discerned in his work for an adequate language—something akin, say, to Aoki's phenomenology—which does justice to the experience and the phenomenon he is concerned with, but which may not be available in the pragmatic even prosaic Australian discursive context.

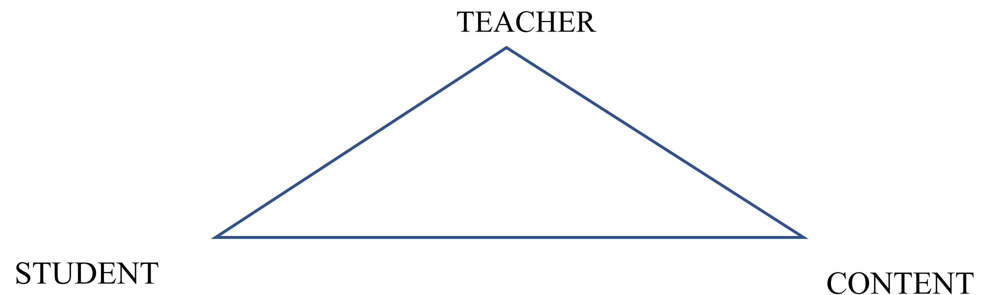
Hence, it seems entirely appropriate to link Boomer's thinking in this regard, retrospectively, with the European tradition of *Didaktik*. I believe he would have been absolutely fascinated by this work, had it been available to him. However, it is only in recent times that it had emerged (e.g. Westbury, 1998) as a rich alternative (and complement) to the Anglo tradition (Hamilton, 2009) which has largely informed and framed Australian curriculum inquiry. Central to *Didakik* studies, then, is a particular view of the teacher as professional, actively mediating between educational knowledge[8] and student learning. This is typically represented by what is called the *didaktik* triangle (Fig. 1).

[6] Importantly it qualifies the notion that this is simply an individualist, subject-centred view of history and of innovation.

[7] Similar initiatives were evident in other Australian states in this period, notably South Australia; in this latter regard, see the chapters by Allan Reid and Jim Dellitt in Yates et al. (2011).

[8] Realised more prosaically as 'content', or 'subject matter'.

Fig. 1 The *Didaktik* triangle



Not that Boomer would have been taken by surprise by this 'new' discourse. Indeed, it is worth noting that he refers explicitly in his "Negotiating the Curriculum" essay to "the eternal triangle of education: the *teacher*, the *child* and the *curriculum*" (Boomer, 1992, p. 4).[9] But its elaboration would have intrigued and excited him, I feel sure; although, I have no doubt that his engagement with it would have interrogative and critical, and openly dialogical. Where he would have been most active would almost certainly have been with regard to the relationship between teacher and student(s), which as we have seen is at the heart of his view of curriculum-as-negotiation. Is it too much to suggest that he would have pushed back against the perhaps overly presumptive attitude of the *Didaktik* work that it was the teacher's agency that mattered most? I think so. The line from the teacher back to the state is perhaps rather too firmly drawn in that tradition. For Boomer, what mattered was to harness the "learning power" (Boomer, 1982a, b, c, p. 1) of the students(s), which meant entering into dialogue with them and drawing them into engagement. "A major tenet behind 'negotiation' is that those in power should be as explicit as possible about the designs they have on students" (Boomer, 1988b, p. 169). But it is how this is done that counts. While it can involve some form of (authorised) 'coercion', it is far better that it be a matter of 'consent'. There are links that can be made with Gramsci, in this instance with his notion of hegemony. This relates to persuasion, and to moral and intellectual leadership, and moreover to rhetoric. Fontana (2002, p. 28) points to "the necessary role [that] speech, language and rhetoric play as the vehicles by which the people or the masses are shaped and formed—that is, by which they are persuaded and educated". In this case, it is the student body that is to be "persuaded and educated", to be drawn into engagement and collaboration ('partnership'). We have already seen how, for Boomer, education was fundamentally a matter of narrative and metaphor, and language and speech, and indeed rhetoric. Hence, it is possible to argue that what is at issue, in curriculum-as-negotiation, is an educational version of hegemony.

A crucial consideration however is Boomer's constant emphasis on what he called 'constraints'. This is the necessary counter to the view that what he was proposing was unrealistic, or at best idealistic. Inviting students into the curriculum process, sharing responsibility in some fashion and to some degree—sharing the 'theory', sharing 'power'—will undoubtedly seem to some as simply asking too much, or going too far, then as much as now. But is it? Here is where the notion of constraint becomes especially relevant, linked as it must be not only to the issue of what is practical but also to power. From the outset, he stressed the need to make explicit "the constraints of the learning situation" and, linked to this, "the non-negotiable requirements that apply". Moreover, these constraints were not simply to be made explicit but also "confront[ed]"—that is, it was not enough simply to name them, or indeed to understand them, since they needed to be *challenged*. Once again, this was (and remains) always a pragmatic matter: a calculation of what is possible, now, in these circumstances and on this occasion. This is why Boomer always insisted on teachers as *intellectuals*, explicitly drawing on Henry Giroux's (1988) notion of the teacher as "transformative intellectual" (Boomer, 1992, p. 284), but characteristically reworking this as "the pragmatic-radical teacher", whose work in classrooms (and beyond) is always informed by "a rich apprehension of the context and constraints that impinge on the negotiations which are about to take place" (p. 284). It is this conjoining of 'pragmatic' and 'radical' that remains so important, and so evocative, and which must continue to be thought through. I do not think it is unreasonable to link all this, again, to Gramsci's notion of the organic intellectual, which I have elsewhere (Green, 2009) appropriated in formulating the idea of 'organic professionalism' (as opposed to 'bureaucratic professionalism'), which in part is what Boomer means in referring to "teacher power". He was concerned with teacher *agency*, with teachers as key 'agents' in curriculum and schooling, as 'experts' in their own right, capable of speaking with authority, and speaking back *to* authority. This was central to his emphasis on action research (Boomer, 1985) and, relatedly, teachers

[9] While Boomer may well have not known much about the European tradition in this regard, if at all, nonetheless there are clear signs in Australian educational history that some degree of familiarity with European educational thought was evident in the early twentieth century, and even before then. Is this a trace of that?

as writers, in their programming as much as in their own classroom inquiries and investigations, their considered reflections *on* practice as the other side of their reflective practice (i.e. *in* practice). This is certainly relevant to, and intertwined with, his work on curriculum-as-negotiation—his sense of 'curriculum-ing', in all its serious playfulness.

But crucially, it was the learner's agency, or agentiveness, that Boomer was concerned to promote, which is directly relevant to understanding his notion of curriculum-as-negotiation, and it is here that what he is proposing is rather different, as I see it, from the *Didaktik* account. Rather than preparing how best to bring 'content' and 'student' together, and working with both accordingly, Boomer was actively inviting the learner in, as a co-curriculum maker. He was recognising the learner's critical role in curriculum as purposive activity, and he saw this as extending potentially from conceptualisation and design through enactment to realisation and evaluation. Hence, his description of "negotiation as a means of securing the intention that unlocks tacit powers" (Boomer, 1988e, p. 230) points to the centrality of learning and the learner for curriculum and teaching. 'Intention' here maps onto to notions of engagement and investment, as something that can never be assumed, but rather needs to be encouraged and even nurtured, and secured. Practically, this means taking a 'developmental' view of classrooms in action over time:

> A negotiated classroom will at least require the teacher to be quite explicit about plans at the beginning and then to seek continuing feedback from the learners as to its effectiveness during the process. A more advanced negotiator will develop methods of allowing the learners to *co-plan the curriculum* to the point where they are involved in helping to recommend and provide resources, in suggesting learning paths and even in the setting and assessing of assignments. (Boomer, 1988d, p. 204)

This is an important point. It is a mistake to assume that curriculum-as-negotiation is a matter of all-or-nothing, or something that to realised once and for all, and it either works or it does not.[10] Instead, it must be seen as a *philosophy*, a way of being-in-the-world educationally, an ever-revisable meta-theory of education, with particular relevance to the classroom. The links between curriculum-as-negotiation and participatory action research become very clear at this point.

A crucial consideration here is the question of *power*. I think this aspect of the theory can be underestimated, especially now that we have available to us a highly sophisticated understanding of power and politics, social justice and social control. But Boomer was working in various ways with this issue, right from the outset. Indeed, he moved as I see it from a somewhat left-liberal political positioning to one which was, in various ways, much more radical—rather ironically perhaps, since he was working throughout within the belly of the beast, and in the very heart of the system, as a senior bureaucrat. It is true that he often used the notion metaphorically, more so earlier on, but later he became intrigued by Foucault and others, recognising that "there are multiple and complex insurrections of new ideas in any system, each representing an upsurge of power, no matter how miniscule", and moreover, that "[e]ven when there is a major downsurge of hegemonic power, this is not necessarily unidirectional" (Boomer, 1988e, p. 237).[11] Bernstein was clearly an important early influence, especially his work on social control and the "framing and sequencing of curriculum" (Boomer, 1992, p. 5). As he wrote: "When I think back on many years of work in schools, I think that education is an almost self-perpetuating chain of subjections" (Boomer, 1992, p. 5). But he was always open to more flexible, dynamic views of power and subordination, resistance, and enfranchisement. Even while becoming notably more pessimistic over the last decade of his life, he insisted on looking for gaps and contradictions, spaces to move, and cracks in the wall. He re-assessed the role and significance of 'compromise', of working tactically and over the long haul, working with *and against* the grain.[12] Not that this pleased everyone, and he was keenly aware of his critics, and the risk of confusing or alienating his various constituencies.

A final consideration here is the significance of language-and-learning theory for Boomer's curriculum thought. He was strongly committed to the insights and arguments of the British educational thinkers who emphasised the importance of language as a crucial resource for learning, notably James Britton but also Douglas Barnes, in a new process-developmental perspective on English teaching and working-class

[10] Rather, it must be seen in *developmental* terms, as something that teachers and students learn to do, over time, working together. As Boomer (1982a, b, c, p. 5) writes early on: "Fully fledged negotiation is rarely possible in the beginning". See also Nadine Crane's case-study account of her work with Grade 5–6, where she notes the *process* involved in developing, on the part of *both* teachers and students, specific skills and understandings with regard to negotiating the curriculum (Crane, 2016).

[11] He continued to refine his understanding of power, for instance noting at one point the need to "complicate the quite simplistic mono-dimensional view power projected in *Negotiating the Curriculum* [1982]" (Boomer, 1988b, p. 171), describing that book as "oversimplifl[ying] the question of power and largely ignor[ing] the negotiation of affection" (p. 172).

[12] "After all, what is negotiating the curriculum but a process of mutual compromise between teacher and learner, an agreement to work together on certain tasks in certain ways?" (Boomer, 1988e, p. 231).

schooling. As he wrote: "The tenets of negotiating the curriculum are directly related to the principles of *Language, the Learner and the School* (Barnes et al., 1986)" (Boomer, 1988e, p. 230).[13] Britton's view was that learning must be seen fundamentally as *interactive*: "Interactive learning (like the cooperative ploys of infant and child) is a *joint* undertaking" (Britton, 1982, p. 3). Moreover, he proposed that what was at issue here was better described as "[a]dult *and* child-centred" [my added emphasis], seeing this as "appropriate to an interactive view of learning", and highlighting "the crucial role of language, in its many modes, as the principal instrument of learning" (p. 4). Other work supported him in this regard, notably Gordon Wells (1995), who argued that education, at whatever level, is "not achieved by the one-way transmission of knowledge, be it ever so cogently expressed, but through a dialogue between teacher and learner that has its aim the *co-construction of meaning*, in relation to tasks and topics that are of mutual interest and concern" (Wells, 1995, pp. 234–235). Further, "Co-construction is … the key" (Wells, 1995, pp. 265). Such an 'interactive view' is readily extended to draw in Bakhtin and his dialogic theory of language and power. Although Boomer did not himself take up a Bakhtinian perspective; nonetheless, his work evinces a keen awareness of what can be called a 'critical-dialogic' sensibility regarding curriculum and classrooms—*and* he was clearly working in a tradition at least compatible with such thinking.[14] This makes the following statement all the more resonant: "An integral part of language and learning theory is a theory of power and enfranchisement" (Boomer, 1988d, p. 237). Boomer's work on curriculum-as-negotiation needs to be understood accordingly.

From 'programming' to 'curriculum composition'

I want to turn now to the notion of 'programming', or what is sometimes rather inadequately called 'teacher planning'—what I think is much better and more appropriately described as *curriculum design*. This is, for me, a key area where teachers' curriculum agency is realised, and yet it is rarely acknowledged as such, in either curriculum scholarship or curriculum policy. Boomer is a key figure in this regard. Indeed, the 'negotiating the curriculum' work can be seen as providing a fundamental resource for (re)thinking teachers' programming—the preparation of units of classroom work, or mini-courses of study. Boomer (1988c, p. 187) uses the term himself, for instance describing "[a] programme" as "by definition a public written announcement of a sequence of events", usually written beforehand. But he works against what was then the norm, quickly shifting from 'plans' to 'texts', and mobilising the metaphor of 'curriculum composing'. This is, in fact, a clear indication that Boomer is working differently from conventional curriculum discourse, and it is here that I see him as congruent with the reconceptualist tradition in curriculum inquiry, which at the time was relatively new and little known or appreciated in Australia. While he was drawing on (then) new developments in writing pedagogy, he was also working with a *literary* mode of thinking and expression which was quite at odds with mainstream social science perspectives in the field. This linked however to his sense of pedagogy—including the pedagogy involved in presentations ('speeches', addresses', 'lectures'). "The more richly the teacher can spin a tapestry of metaphor and analogy into a 'thick' redundant text of thinking about something new, the more likely it is that students will find a way in" (Boomer, 1982b, p. 120)—and similarly, in public forums, with 'speakers' and 'listeners'. It is in the shift from 'programming' to what Boomer called 'curriculum composition', however, that his reconceptualist orientation becomes most evident.

Boomer begins with the task of constructing a unit of work, and with a particular group of students in mind, a 'class' (Boomer, 1992, p. 35). This is important. If pedagogy is understood as 'teaching-*for*-learning', as I argue elsewhere, then the focus must be on learning (and the learners) right from the outset, as an organising principle. It is here that the *Didaktik* triangle can service as a reference-point. Recall that it involved working with two key considerations, the particular knowledge[15] at issue and the students(s) in one's class, as a distinctive group, with the aim of bringing the two together in the most productive manner. For the teacher, however, it is the student(s), the learner(s) that matter most, or at least it is this that s/he must attend to, *as a teacher*. S/he also has a commitment to, and investment in, the knowledge, undoubtedly—what is to be taught. But, first and foremost, it is learning and learners that is the focus, and this is why I referred earlier to curriculum-as-negotiation as *teaching/learning*-centred—that is, a matter of both-and, rather than either-or. What distinguishes Boomer's curriculum thinking is precisely this: its focus on *pedagogy*

[13] Another highly influential figure was Harold Rosen, who authored with Barnes and Britton the original versions of *Language, the Learner and the School* (1969, 1971). A further important influence working in this context was Nancy Martin, Boomer's supervisor at the London Institute of Education, who was similarly committed to the idea of teachers as writers and researchers. See Richmond [Ed.] (2017) and Green (2020), and also Lofty (2010).

[14] In this regard, see Dixon (1991).

[15] The question of 'knowledge' and its necessary transformations remains a key albeit contentious issue in curriculum debate (Gericke et al. [2016]). I have not considered Boomer's distinctive view of knowledge and 'content' here, although to do so would be both illuminating and productive.

(Green, 2003b). So while he was not in any way dismissive of knowledge, or the importance of quality 'content', declaring that "[a] unit of work without solid *content* will be 'at risk' (Boomer, 1992, p. 36), nonetheless he prioritised pedagogy. He would have been pleased, therefore, to see "the renewed interest in pedagogy within the sociology of education" (Lingard, 2010, p. 168), along with the assertion that "it is through pedagogy that schooling gets done" (p. 168),[16] just as he would have been bemused by the refusal of pedagogy in recent curriculum scholarship (Pinar, 2006; Young, 2013).[17]

Beginning with an informed sense of what is to be undertaken, in this particular instance, teachers start to assemble their 'programme', their script, their projection, their representation, as they engage in putting the story together, imagining the curriculum, projecting themselves into the future. 'Story', 'imagination'—these are entirely consistent with Boomer's *modus operandi*: his sense of curriculum as a story that is jointly composed, and of teaching therefore as a form of storytelling. Hence his depiction of learning as a process, a 'journey', comprising "the challenge", "the preparation", 'the search", "the test", and "the reflection" (Boomer, 1992, p. 34)—recalling myth, or the epic tale of old. This is deliberate, and deeply considered. Others have worked along these lines, notably Kieran Egan (1988), but Boomer is unique in stressing how teachers must first imagine what is to happen, and then call it into being.

This is akin to, and connects readily with, Aoki's view of "teaching as indwelling between … curriculum worlds". Early on, Boomer separates out 'planning' from 'negotiating', and both from 'teaching and learning' and 'performing', but this may well be more a matter of presentation than anything else, because he consistently draws attention to the recursive nature of the process. Moreover, there is a dynamic interplay between 'text' and 'action', 'script' and 'performance', 'plan' and 'event', and increasingly a joint-composition of the curriculum, from conception and design to enactment and realization. Where Boomer appears to differ from Aoki is his emphasis on the *teacher*'s articulation of curriculum-as-plan and curriculum-as-event. This may be a function of the different national contexts in which they were working: Canada was then, and remains, differently organized and administered from Australia, and indeed is more like the situation in the USA. Aoki's terms 'indwelling' and 'tensionality' nonetheless is entirely apposite for what Boomer is concerned with, in focusing on how the teacher actively mediates between plan and event, in the course of moving through the unit, as the curriculum unfolds. This is a 'lived experience' shared moreover with the students(s), although always differently. But there can be no doubt that the teacher remains a significant, authorising presence, in a curious, paradoxical position of authority. S/he is a 'licensed' professional, after all. S/he has final oversight, and s/he bears ultimate responsibility.[18] This is one manifestation of what I have called the "(im)possibility of the project" (Green, 2010): balancing the in-between, the 'undecideable', in this case, with regard to teaching and learning, as agencies and priorities. This is surely what Boomer (1999, p. 47) is alluding to, in part, when he describes teaching as "a highly complex act, about which we know too little". Hence, too, his own fascination with teaching, and his ongoing investigation of teachers and teaching (for example, 'Mrs Bell' [Boomer, 1988a], his counterpart to Aoki's [2005] 'Miss O').

Curriculum, learning, democracy

But it remains necessary to give due consideration to the student(s), the learner(s), the other participant in this classroom-curriculum partnership—the Other(s). What part do they play in this drama, this story? Two reasons are given for drawing them into the play of the curriculum. One has to do with *learning*, primarily. Learning is likely to be greatly enhanced, it is argued, when students become involved, engaged, and committed—when their 'intentions' are harnessed, thereby "unlock[ing] tacit powers" (Boomer, 1988e, p. 230). The other is political in nature, and therefore potentially more challenging, and dangerous. It has to do with *democracy*—with the practice of democracy in the classroom. This is implicit from the outset, though expressed earlier more as a concern with social justice. The stress on democracy is much more explicit when it comes to the 1992 book, and in the later essays. Bron et al. (2016) highlight this latter aspect, explicitly linking curriculum negotiation to citizenship education and the student voice movement. As they write, "[w]e consider curriculum negotiation a means to provide students with opportunities to practise 'citizenship-as-practice' as opposed to 'citizenship-as-status'", with citizenship learnt by "enacting [democratic] behaviors in daily situations within and outside the institution" (p. 19). The ultimate focus for Boomer (1992, p. 227) is "the formation of a collaboratively radical democracy which values enquiry and negotiation as essential elements in the progress of civilization", but this begins in the classroom, in practice.

[16] In this regard, see also Hickey et al. (2021)—"The dialogic and embodied encounter (Lingard [2010]) between teachers and students represents the 'ground zero' of education, in which education gets 'done' and where students and teachers establish the conditions for learning" (p. 3).

[17] See Green (2018b) for a critique of Pinar's account in this regard.

[18] In Aoki's (2005, p. 161) terms: "She knows that, as an institutionalized teacher, she is accountable for what and how she teaches, but she also knows that the ministry's curriculum-as-plan assumes a fiction of sameness throughout the whole province, and that this fiction is possible only by wresting out the unique".

"On the classroom level, the curriculum is open for debate" (Bron et al., 2016, p. 21). The classroom is thus envisaged as a crucial site of curriculum *and* democracy. Reckoning student-learners into account here is important, and indeed necessary. This is partly a matter of imagining the curriculum, of what elsewhere, directly influenced by Boomer, I have called the imagination of otherness: "Teaching is very much a matter of the imagination of otherness […]. What is imagined here is not just the otherness of that future landscape, the classroom, as a specific configuration of time and space, but also the otherness of the characters, the *actants,* the students" (Green, 1990, p. 50). How much are students to be drawn into 'curriculum-ing', as described here? How is the delicate balance of responsibilities and capabilities to be realized, within the intergenerational exchange of the classroom? This would differ, of course, according to factors such as age and maturity, and also prior experience.

It matters greatly, then, what kind of democracy is played out in the classroom curriculum, as well as more widely, just as it does how democracy itself is understood. This needs to be pushed beyond the representative, aggregative democracy that seems to characterise the work of ACARA and other like bodies. Alan Reid (2005) has proposed that what is needed is "a model of deliberative democracy" (p. 40) while elsewhere (Green, 2018a, b, c, d) I have suggested that this needs to be supplemented by a notion of "agonistic democracy".[19] Ultimately, this depends on the manner in which the growing heterogeneity of Australian society is realised and managed, about which there is cause for growing concern, it seems to me, and even a certain measure of pessimism. The point I want to return to here, however, and reiterate, is that curriculum-and-schooling has a double focus: on student learning *and* on social organization. This is especially pertinent to curriculum-as-negotiation, as I see it, with its concern being emphatically on learning, and on enhancing learning, but also on democracy, as both a social vision and a social practice.

Beyond the classroom curriculum

I have so far emphasised the level of the classroom, as curriculum. What then is the relationship of the classroom curriculum to other levels of curriculum formation? How does the classroom curriculum-in-action connect to what is beyond or outside the classroom? For Boomer, this became an important concern, as his primary theatre of operation shifted from classrooms to systems. He began to give more thought to how the principles and practices that he advocated extended to other sites, with possibly more indirect or even attenuated links with classrooms and teaching. Negotiation became a reference-point as well as an organising principle. As he wrote, "… the principles underlying the democratic classroom should be congruent with the principles underpinning the [educational] bureaucracy" (Boomer, 1999, p. 107)—and, by implication, vice-versa. The principles that he proposed were that, from a democratic perspective, classrooms *and* bureaucracies should demonstrate and be informed by *explicitness*, *negotiation*, *questioning*, and *reflection*. This was an ideal, to be sure, but still something to work from, nonetheless. In the 'letter', he wrote to James Britton, about "negotiating the system", he reported on.

> how we are learning to work at all levels of the system at once, and how, at our best, we are abandoning labels in order to work with people of like mind, whose ideas have been generated in different ways, in different contexts, and are represented in slightly different language. (Boomer, 1988e, p. 240)

He continued thus:

> We are also coming to understand that, to enable teachers to apply the principles of language and learning, that you have advocated, we need to change the ruling discourse and the containing structures of society. This requires a sophisticated theory about systems and the way they work, as well as a learning theory. (p. 240)

Moreover, "Theories of negotiation must grow within theories of society" (Boomer, 1988b, p. 177). It begins however with classrooms, *in* the classroom. That is the crucial message here—the challenge. There is perhaps no better statement of the centrality of the classroom-as-curriculum, in all its everyday-ness, its repetition, its ebbs and flows of affect and power, the play of its positionality and its performativity. This is something that remains still to be adequately researched, and documented, although work in this regard is undoubtedly gathering momentum. It is at this point, too, that curriculum-as-negotiation joins up with notions such as the "socially critical school" (Kemmis et al., 1983; Green, 2018c), in linking schools and classrooms with communities and other constituencies. This is, again, a reminder that political struggle is protracted and inevitably caught up in all sorts of constraint and compromise, and so too is truly significant educational change.

[19] This shift in views is implied, I think, in the following statement: "As soon as 'democracy' is unpacked and shown to be highly problematic, the major dilemma of the teacher is revealed. To teach in a liberating way that recognises the legitimacy of the brains and voices of all students, the teacher must eschew harmony and go far beyond the cosmetics of conventional democratic practice, which through the 'ballot box' may serve to entrench existing power differentials and injustices" (Boomer, 1999, p. 103).

Negotiating the (national) curriculum

At this point, it is worth considering how what I have been calling curriculum-as-negotiation stacks up in the age of mandated national curriculum. How possible is it in such circumstances? How 'practical'? We cannot know, of course, how Boomer himself would have viewed the movement towards national curriculum, including its international context, or how it was eventually manifested and monumentalised. But I think he would have been quite unhappy to see how teachers and classrooms have been positioned in this regard, that is, within the space of 'implementation' (Mockler, 2018); quite the contrary, in fact. This is where it becomes important to think and act *strategically*, taking due account of Boomer's strictures regarding 'constraints' and 'non-negotiables',[20] and his recognition from the outset that "[f]ully fledged negotiation is rarely possible in the beginning" (Boomer, 1982a, b, c, p. 5), and indeed that it is something that must be learned and practised, by all involved, and developed over time. That means, too, that it is necessarily, unavoidably realised differently, depending on the circumstances. There can be no single 'model'. Hence, the need for ongoing empirical work, in classrooms, with teachers operating as researchers of their own practice, in the spirit of action research. Undoubtedly, a major constraint for teachers in the current conjuncture is the national curriculum; it is mandated, and hence non-negotiable, at least in the sense that it must be taken into account, and teachers and schools must work within its frame. The question is how it is worked with, and how it is mediated, or 'recontextualised'.

An excellent example of the sort of practice-referenced inquiry that is needed is provided in Nadine Crane's MPhil dissertation, based on her work with Grade 5/6 students in her school (Crane, 2016).[21] Informed and inspired by "Boomer's (1992) description of negotiation [as] 'tightly constrained but open to negotiation at all points by either teacher or children' (p.12) …" (Crane, 2016, p. 2), she brought together 'negotiating the curriculum' with 'inquiry-based learning' and 'student voice' in a study of a primary classroom in action, over time. She concluded that "Negotiated approaches continue to have relevance for current curriculum, engaging with the learning areas inquiry emphasis in the Australian Curriculum and the critical and creative thinking [General] Capability" (p. 98). As she writes, further, "The findings and discussion have shown that Garth Boomer's proposition of negotiating the curriculum with students can still have currency in today's schools and classrooms despite the dominant 'grammars' of schooling (Reid, 2005) and the narrowing of the curriculum attributed to national testing […]" (pp. 119–120). This is precisely the kind of work needed now, realistic, situated, with teachers operating as practitioner-scholars, 'experts' in their own right, researching their own practice and theorising the curriculum.[22] The implications and challenges for teacher education and curriculum renewal are considerable.

Boomer clearly sees negotiation as relevant in other educational spheres. Hence, he would have endorsed the following, I am sure:

> A 'negotiated' national curriculum would be continuously constructed and reconstructed in an interlocking network of local (school level), regional (local government level) and national forums. At each level representatives of functional groups in our society – teachers, parents, employers, employees – and of appropriate levels of government, would share and negotiate in dialogue their respective visions of educational aims and processes, and attempt to translate the common understandings which emerge into forms of practice that leave room for further debate. (Elliot, 1998, p. 61)

A British scholar well known for his work in action research and curriculum inquiry, Elliott was referring more specifically to the UK situation, several years after the formal installation there of the National Curriculum, but his statement applies as much to Australia more recently. Again, I think it can be appropriately understood with reference to the Gramscian concept of hegemony (or counter-hegemony). Crucially, it would require due recognition of the classroom as a crucible for democracy. There are implications here, certainly, for how we might proceed in reviewing and renewing the Australian Curriculum, although this would require a radical re-assessment of the role and significance of teachers in this process. This would clearly be consistent with Boomer's (unfinished) project.

Conclusion: resourcing (Australian) curriculum inquiry

I have sought here to outline and elaborate on Boomer's work in curriculum theory and practice, and to locate it within curriculum scholarship more generally. In doing so,

[20] "[T]he pragmatic radical [teacher] enters the classroom with a rich apprehension of the context and constraints that impinge on the negotiations which are about to take place" (Boomer, 1992, p. 284).

[21] Importantly she was working with two teacher colleagues in this endeavour, and in a school open to such inquiry.

[22] It is in this regard that the important link between curriculum negotiation and action research needs to be more fully considered. See Boomer (1985) and Green (2018c).

I have concentrated on the notion of 'negotiating the curriculum', which I described as a powerful idea, with continuing and enduring relevance and resonance. There are other aspects of his work worthy of reconsideration in this context, and I leave this for other occasions and perhaps for others to take up—bearing in mind my proposals earlier for how best to read him. In concluding, I want to address two points, very briefly, as a way of underlining his significance as a curriculum thinker.

The first concerns what is described here as *curriculum-as-negotiation*. I see this as providing what can be called a 'thirdspace' for curriculum inquiry and praxis. Further work is needed on the related notions of curriculum-as-transmission and curriculum-as-interpretation, as introduced here, as counterpoints to curriculum-as-negotiation. These are all appropriately understood within a theoretical framework being together curriculum and communication, culture and power. What I present as a 'thirdspace'[23] is more than simply an alternative 'third way', moreover, as I want to claim that, in fact, curriculum-as-negotiation is what happens anyway, and inevitably, given the exchange dynamics of the classroom.[24] Even the most closed and seemingly 'coercive' of classrooms features a certain measure of student resistance, however submerged that might be, or invisible. There is always only difference, and while this needs to be managed, it can never be suppressed, at least fully. Hence, to some degree, "teaching has always been a matter of 'negotiating the curriculum'" (Boomer, 1992, p. 32). That is surely a liberating insight.

Secondly, the importance of drawing student-learners in, and hence of mobilising 'student voice', cannot be underestimated. Brennan et al. (2021) argue that students must be seen as much more than simply "the object[s] of curricular reform", but rather as *agents* in their own right, with considerable and immediate stakes in the curriculum and schooling in which they are engaged. They do in the context of student climate change activism. In this regard, they argue that "[c]entralised control of curriculum and associated assessment leave very little curricular space or pedagogic time for students to address issues of deep concern to them" (p. 2)—notably in this current moment, climate change and indeed the fate of the earth. Hence, they see greater possibility in the cross-curriculum priorities and the general capabilities than in the Australian Curriculum's designated learning areas, locked as they still are into a traditional disciplinary logic. This is an argument wholly consistent with Boomer's overall project, as is their advocacy for "radical reconsideration of the work of schools and how that is democratically determined, such that school curriculum, and curriculum policy, develop in active partnership with young people, their communities, their teachers, academics, and policymakers" (p. 11). Now, and perhaps more than ever, it becomes imperative that our young people become actively and passionately involved in their own education, in schooling the future. Directly related here is the need for "a new formulation of curriculum" (Onore and Lubesky, 1992, p. 253), to rethink curriculum itself, and curriculum work, as necessarily including teachers and students, classrooms and other educational practices, as sites and sources of curriculum praxis and possibility. Boomer's work remains a rich resource for such curriculum reconceptualisation. Classrooms matter in curriculum scholarship as much as they do in the lived worlds of teachers and students. In an era of mandated curriculum and increasingly imperialistic assessment, it is timely, then, and productive, that we revisit and re-read Boomer's work, and learn again to think *with* him, into a future worth struggling for.

[23] See Borch (2002) on Edward Soja and the notion of 'thirdspace' in his work, or what Soja calls 'thirding', that is, "a deconstruction of a prevailing binary logic … and the creation of a third, an alternative, *a significantly different logic or perspective*" (p. 113—my added emphasis).

[24] The point however is to capitalise on this, rather than seeking to suppress it, or to deny it. In a brilliant passage on classrooms in action, Boomer (1988b, 171) writes of "quite amazing flows and ebbs of affect and primal resistance in teachers and taught from moment to moment". On student disaffection as a curriculum issue, see Elliot (1998 [Ch3]).

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