



PPTA TE WEHENGARUA ANNUAL CONFERENCE 2024

WHAT GOOD CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT LOOKS LIKE

THIS PAPER DISCUSSES POLITICAL INTERFERENCE IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT AND PROPOSES PRINCIPLES FOR GOOD CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT



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RECOMMENDATIONS

1. That the paper be received.
2. That PPTA Te Wehengarua rejects political party interference in the development of the curriculum.
3. That PPTA Te Wehengarua be guided by the following four principles for effective curriculum development when responding to any sector proposals:
 - Principle 1: Te Tiriti is valued and is visible;
 - Principle 2: Learners are at the centre so that the curriculum is inclusive and equitable;
 - Principle 3: The curriculum is manageable, is well resourced, coherent, and well communicated;
 - Principle 4: Teachers are valued as curriculum designers and their expertise and specialisation are recognised and valued; and,
 - Principle 5: The curriculum is regularly reviewed through research on effective practice to make sure it is fit for purpose.

1. BACKGROUND

- 1.1. *It is important to acknowledge that education is essentially a political activity. The political climate prevailing in a state or country is very important in determining the type of schooling and curriculum for the young.*¹
- 1.2 This statement, from a book chapter on ‘Sociological and political issues that affect curriculum’, firmly sets the direction of this paper by acknowledging that, like it or not, education is a political activity and by default, so is the curriculum that sits within the education system.
- 1.3 Of course this is not a new idea, with the relevance of education being given prominence across the decades with multilateral agencies such as OECD and UNESCO frequently leading the way with education manifestos, reports and rafts of imperatives that aim to drive global developments and reforms in education.² Whether curriculum development is a re-design, reform or refresh, depending on where one looks across the globe, different governments will take different approaches, often to address declining results from one or other measure (usually PISA). The reforms of 2012 -2018 in Mexico had a focus on teacher performance alongside a top-down design and implementation of a competency-based curriculum. Likewise, during a similar period, Peru also focused on rewarding effort and performance of teachers while at the same time trying to improve opportunities to learn for all by supporting bilingual education for indigenous students. Finland, on the other hand, adopted a more collaborative and participatory approach with a large number of participants and government-funded pilots and a focus on the Definition and Selection of Competencies (DeSeCo) twenty-first century learning descriptions.³
- 1.4 We are fortunate in Aotearoa New Zealand that, compared to other countries, we have a history of curriculum development that is largely free from direct political party interference, and the most recent approach taken in Aotearoa New Zealand with the Curriculum Refresh and the development of Te Mātaiaho⁴ was more akin to the collaborative and participatory approach of the Finnish reforms.
- 1.5 While not without its challenges (assessment changes leaping ahead of curriculum changes; little acknowledgement of secondary specialisms in early curriculum groups to name just two), the processes followed have on the whole been open, robust and inclusive of the profession and a wide range of community, academic and student voice.
- 1.6 However, since the October 2023 election, we have found ourselves in the unprecedented situation of specific commitments being made, in the most recent coalition agreements to the government, pursuing political party policies that directly interfere in the curriculum.

¹ [Button, L.J. \(2021\) Curriculum Essentials: A Journey](#)

² [Fernando M. Reimers, \(Ed.\) \(2020\). Audacious Education Purposes, How Governments Transform the Goals of Education Systems](#)

³ OECD.(2005). Definition and selection of competencies (DeSeCo): Executive summary. Paris: OECD Publishing. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/pisa/35070367.pdf>.

⁴ The name given to the Refreshed New Zealand Curriculum: ‘Mātai’ means to study deliberately, examine, and observe, and ‘aho’ describes the many strands and threads of learning.

1.7 These include:

- From the agreement between the National party and the New Zealand First party⁵
 - Refocusing the curriculum on academic achievement and not ideology
 - The removal and replacement of the gender, sexuality, and relationship-based education guidelines
- From the agreement between the National party and the ACT party⁶
 - Restoring balance to the Aotearoa New Zealand's Histories curriculum
 - Amending the Education and Training Act 2020 to enshrine educational attainment as the paramount objective for state schools.
- a more prescriptive approach to *how* teachers should deliver their craft such as the introduction of structured literacy up to year 8.

1.8 We have also seen all consultation and sector reference groups put on hold, and replaced, in the case of English and Mathematics and Statistics learning areas, with hand-picked curriculum writing group members (and to only include Ministerial appointments) to the exclusion of subject association experts and indeed excluding Ministry of Education leaders in curriculum development.⁷ After strong objections from PPTA Te Wehengarua the process for science and technology writing groups has been much more transparent. This is a reminder of the importance of our advocacy as the professional association for secondary teachers.

1.9 It is important to acknowledge here also that PPTA Te Wehengarua is not necessarily against particular teaching approaches being made available, nor to funds being provided for a range of resources and professional learning to support the implementation of effective pedagogy. However, PPTA Te Wehengarua is consistent in its rejection of *legislating* for pedagogy (e.g. the Common Practice Model brought into legislation by the previous government) and any insistence of a single approach, to the exclusion of other approaches.

1.10 We need only to look to the United States to the recent decision of an elected official from a political party that requires teachers to teach the Bible and the Ten Commandments,⁸ which could be interpreted as disregard of the first amendment⁹ to see where political interference in the curriculum can lead.

1.11 PPTA Te Wehengarua members have a diverse range of views on the substance of curriculum in different learning areas; the purpose is not for us to 'take a side' on these questions, but to set out principles that empower *teachers* to control the direction of the curriculum for the benefit of our young people.

1.12 The purpose of this paper is therefore to outline principles that will guide PPTA Te Wehengarua when responding to proposals relating to the curriculum.

1.13 As interesting as the epistemological debates are about what counts as knowledge, or how we know certain knowledge(s) exist, this paper will not be delving into these debates.¹⁰ Likewise, this paper will not be arguing for specific pedagogies that bring curriculum to life. Rather, it proposes principles that will support a robust process of critique and consultation.

⁵ [Coalition Agreement National and New Zealand First](#)

⁶ [Coalition Agreement National and ACT](#)

⁷ <https://www.rnz.co.nz/news/national/521737/leaked-emails-on-rewriting-curriculum-show-process-not-followed-teaching-association>

⁸ <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/06/27/us/oklahoma-schools-bible-curriculum/index.html>

⁹ The First Amendment itself establishes six rights, the second is 'the right to be free from governmental interference with the practice of religion.'

¹⁰ OECD Education Working Papers provides a good starting point to delve into these debates e.g. https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/education/curriculum-frameworks-and-visualisations-beyond-national-frameworks_2a4bdce6-en

2. WHO SHOULD BE INVOLVED IN CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT?

- 2.1 As has been indicated above, it's important to acknowledge that curriculum development and the education systems that curriculum sits inside are of interest to us all, are often highly contested, and involve many stakeholders and multiple components. These education systems are 'made up of a large number of actors (teachers, parents, politicians, bureaucrats, civil society organizations) interacting with each other in different institutions (schools, ministry departments) for different reasons (developing curricula, monitoring school performance, managing teachers). All these interactions are governed by rules, beliefs and behavioral norms that affect how actors react and adapt to changes in the system'.¹¹
- 2.2 The following table provides an overview of the actors involved, the levels of involvement, and some examples of activities the various actors are involved in.

Level	Description and examples of activity	Examples of actors in the Aotearoa-NZ context
Supra	International: Transnational curricular discourse generation, policy borrowing and lending; policy learning	OECD; Common European Framework of References for Languages ¹² ; UNESCO; Education International
Macro	Systems at government level: Development of curriculum policy frameworks; legislation to establish agencies and infrastructure	Curriculum agencies: Ministry of Education; NZQA – qualifications and examinations; NZ Curriculum -guidance; writing groups
Meso	School, Institute: Production of guidance; leadership of and support for curriculum making; production of resources	Boards, Principals, senior and middle leaders; School-specific programmes; Subject Associations; Networks of Expertise ¹³ ; resourcing including textbook publishers. Evaluation agencies: ERO; ākonga and whānau
Micro	Classroom, Teacher: School-level curriculum making; programme design; lesson-planning	Teacher planning, instructional materials, modules, coursework (including assessment); learning experiences outside the classroom; ākonga and whānau
Nano	Pupil, Individual: Curriculum making in classrooms and other learning spaces: pedagogic interactions; curriculum events	Teachers; students - personal / individual plans for learning; ākonga and whānau

Adapted from Priestley et al. 2021¹⁴

- 2.3 PPTA Te Wehengarua asserts that the expertise and input of teachers should be considered- at the very least - at all levels of curriculum development with increased involvement from macro level.
- 2.4 Teachers are the experts for interpreting and implementing the curriculum through programme design and lesson planning and are indeed held accountable for their actions through the Professional Teaching Standards, so it is unconscionable to suggest that they are shut out of curriculum planning at macro level.¹⁵

¹¹ Global Education Partnership. (2019). Country level evaluations (Synthesis Report). https://www.globalpartnership.org/sites/default/files/2019-02-gpe-synthesis-report-country-level-evaluations_0.pdf.

¹² Referenced in the creation of the *Learning Languages* learning area of the New Zealand Curriculum, 2007

¹³ <https://pld.education.govt.nz/find-pld/networks-of-expertise/>

¹⁴ https://www.storre.stir.ac.uk/retrieve/e68166a2-7fa0-4caa-b8d9-6e73d5fe7f59/Intro_curriculummaking.pdf

¹⁵ <https://educationhq.com/news/torrid-times-ahead-furore-as-teachers-shut-out-of-curriculum-change-process-174750/>

2.5 Indeed, some go as far to say teachers are the most effective participants in such processes.

*Curriculum making strategies that allow actors to experience themselves as trusted and capable participants in curriculum making and make sense of it together with others are the most effective ones – ‘effective’ meaning here that people relate to the aims of the curriculum they co-construct and feel ownership, and through that are willing to adapt and develop not only curriculum, but also the educational system and settings within which they work”.*¹⁶

3. PPTA TE WEHENGARUA’S PRINCIPLES TO GUIDE CURRICULUM DEVELOPMENT

3.1 As the professional association for secondary teachers, the PPTA Te Wehengarua has an influential voice in education sector reform in Aotearoa New Zealand. The following principles are recommended to provide a strong professional direction for our Association, and those acting on behalf of the Association, as we navigate through changes associated with curriculum development and reform, regardless of who is in government. While the principles have been addressed separately below, there will understandably be much overlap in their application.

PRINCIPLE 1: TE TIRITI IS VALUED AND IS VISIBLE

3.1.1 The Education and Training Act 2020 provides, in section 127, that one of the primary objectives for School Boards is to give effect to Te Tiriti o Waitangi as it outlines the duty of the Crown to actively promote and protect Tiriti rights and to develop education settings in a way that reflects Māori-Crown relationships.¹⁷ In keeping with this requirement therefore, the Teaching Council’s Standards for the Teaching Profession also require that teachers ‘[d]emonstrate commitment to tangata whenuatanga and Te Tiriti o Waitangi partnership in Aotearoa New Zealand’.¹⁸

3.1.2 Not surprisingly then, under Rule 4(c), the Constitution of PPTA Te Wehengarua states that one of the objects of the Association shall be:
To affirm and advance Te Tiriti o Waitangi (The Treaty of Waitangi) as embodied in the First Schedule of these rules.

3.1.3 PPTA Te Wehengarua takes its commitment to affirm and advance Te Tiriti o Waitangi seriously and including this as the first principle in this work on curriculum is a demonstration of this ongoing commitment.

3.1.4 Under this principle PPTA Te Wehengarua will commit to the following (examples of actions, rather than a definitive list):

- encourage Māori member representation on sector advisory groups.
- consult with relevant members and staff when responding to or developing policy: Te Huarahi, Māori members, Kaihautū Māori.

¹⁶ Alvunger, D., Soini, T., Philippou, S. & Priestley, M. (2021). Conclusions: Patterns and trends in curriculum making in Europe. In: M. Priestley, D. Alvunger, S. Philippou. & T. Soini, Curriculum making in Europe: policy and practice within and across diverse contexts. Bingley: Emerald. The original publication is available at: <https://doi.org/10.1108/978-1-83867-735-020211013>

¹⁷ <https://www.education.govt.nz/our-work/legislation/education-and-training-act-2020/the-education-and-training-act-te-tiriti-o-waitangi/>

¹⁸ <https://teachingcouncil.nz/professional-practice/our-code-our-standards/>

- protect and enhance the mana and dignity of Mātauranga Māori as it relates to curriculum development.
- be inclusive of Te Marautanga o Aotearoa and incorporate the knowledge of papers such as Te Tamaiti Hei Raukura.¹⁹

PRINCIPLE 2: LEARNERS ARE AT THE CENTRE SO THAT THE CURRICULUM IS INCLUSIVE AND EQUITABLE

- 3.1.5 Curriculum should hold a broad view of ākonga success. Value should be placed on both wellbeing (cultural, physical, emotional, social, and psychological) and excellence as connected and important outcomes of schooling. A curriculum that reinforces the values of inclusion, through a focus on positive, inclusive relationships, a sense of belonging for all, and the promotion of diversity as ordinary and expected is one that aspires to being inclusive and equitable. It sets an expectation of planning from the outset for all ākonga and views every learner as having open-ended potential.²⁰
- 3.1.6 A good curriculum makes space for the recognition of each learner's personal, social and cognitive capacities, and respects differences in the ways in which children prefer to learn. It will support teachers in leading, assisting and encouraging each student to achieve his or her potential.²¹

PRINCIPLE 3: THE CURRICULUM IS MANAGEABLE, IS WELL RESOURCED, COHERENT AND WELL COMMUNICATED

- 3.1.7 It is common in much curriculum thinking and scholarship to place pedagogical considerations – how students are taught – at the heart of curricular thinking.²² These questions are, of course, worthwhile. It is also true that curriculum content does, to an extent, have an impact on pedagogy in schools. However, pedagogy is not the same as curriculum; curriculum is a statement of what students are to learn, and is silent on the question of how this should be taught to them.²³ There is an important role for guidance to teachers on pedagogical approaches, but both curriculum and pedagogy are important enough that they need to be considered separately. This allows for coherence, clarity, and resourcing of the curriculum to all be prioritised in the curriculum development phase. It also means that teachers with a wide range of pedagogical preferences and approaches will be able to use the curriculum, as it will specify content rather than methods.
- 3.1.8 This pedagogical variety is particularly the case in New Zealand, where public schools have considerable autonomy over their pedagogical approaches. These approaches are often radically different to each other,²⁴ and students deserve clarity about the core concepts that they will learn, regardless of the approach their school takes to how they will learn it.

¹⁹ <https://kauwhatareo.govt.nz/en/resource/te-marautanga-o-aotearoa-refresh-content/he-tamaiti-hei-raukura/>

²⁰ Adapted from [Te Mātaiaho March 2023 pdf](#)

²¹ <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243975>

²² Lourie, M. (2020). Recontextualising twenty-first century learning in New Zealand education policy: The reframing of knowledge, skills and competencies. *New Zealand Journal of Educational Studies*, 55(1), 113-128. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40841-020-00158-0>

²³ McPhail, G. (2016). The fault lines of recontextualization: The limits of constructivism in education. *British Educational Research Journal*, 42(2), 294-313. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3199>

²⁴ McPhail, G. (2018). Curriculum integration in the senior secondary school: A case study in a national assessment context. *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, 50(1), 56-76. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00220272.2017.1386234>

- 3.1.9 A clear and coherent curriculum should be grounded in the disciplines from which it derives and should promote students' ascent from novice to expert in that discipline.²⁵ This ranges from the natural science disciplines, through to the social sciences,²⁶ and includes the arts, and indigenous knowledge – including especially Mātauranga Māori in the New Zealand context.
- 3.1.10 All of these 'disciplines' are included in our curriculum because they are valued for their own sakes, as well as the capabilities, dispositions and skills they impart on young people. However, it is not enough to say that the curriculum reflects these 'disciplines' in the broadest sense. There are implications for how curriculum is designed. Of course, disciplinary experts – be they academics, practitioners, or cultural experts – should be involved in the design of the curriculum. However, the role of teachers is also crucial.

PRINCIPLE 4: TEACHERS ARE VALUED AS CURRICULUM DESIGNERS AND THEIR EXPERTISE AND SPECIALISATION ARE RECOGNISED AND VALUED.

- 3.1.11 Secondary teachers possess specialist knowledge in their disciplines, but this alone is not the reason that subject associations and teacher voices must be included in the curriculum design phase. Instead, it is because it is within the teaching profession that expert knowledge exists about the translation of the pure discipline into appropriate material for teaching in schools – the 'recontextualisation' of a body of expert knowledge into a school subject.²⁷
- 3.1.12 Each subject and learning area therefore needs a clear decision about how much prescription and detail is needed to ensure the curriculum is clear and coherent. There is already agreement from the original Curriculum Refresh principles that there is some learning that cannot be left to chance in each learning area. Core concepts clearly need to be defined. However, this will look different in different subjects. A subject like history – where big ideas can be taught using many different bodies of specific content – needs to be designed differently to science, where big concepts are inextricably linked with the content used to illustrate them.
- 3.1.13 Some frameworks may make more sense in one learning area than another. Coherence and clarity in the curriculum might not mean the same framework for all learning areas or perhaps all levels of learning. Consideration of different frameworks to avoid an overly prescriptive model that suits policymakers but not necessarily teachers or young people could be recommended. We believe that teachers, in partnership with subject-matter experts and teacher educators, are much better placed to advise on what form the curriculum should take in their learning areas.

4. SUMMARY

- 4.1 This paper calls for PPTA Te Wehengarua to reject political party interference in the development of curriculum. It has outlined the inevitable involvement in curriculum development of systems at government or macro level, but rejects interference at the school (meso), classroom (micro) and learner (nano) levels where other actors, particularly teachers, should have more influence.

²⁵ Winch, C. (2013). Curriculum design and epistemic ascent. *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, 47(1), 128-146. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9752.12006>

²⁶ Young, M.F.D., & Muller, J. (2013). On the powers of powerful knowledge. *Review of Education*, 1(3), 229-250. <https://doi.org/10.1002/rev3.3017>

²⁷ Bernstein, B. (2000). *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: Theory, research, critique*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

- 4.2 This paper proposes four principles for effective curriculum development when responding to any sector proposals. These principles will support members and staff of the Association alike in their involvement in curriculum development at macro and meso levels in particular, as they consider impacts on the micro and nano levels.
- 4.3 PPTA Te Wehengarua wants to ensure that teachers' lived experiences are at the heart of any curriculum change and that teachers are empowered to contribute their expertise to curriculum development. If teachers are part of the planning and creating, they will be more confident in the implementation.