A *Mission to the Heart of Young People*

CATHOLIC CURRICULUM

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INTRODUCTION: REFRAMING THE CONVERSATION

The hope of this book is to re-invigorate discussion in Catholic schools about what it means to have a 'Catholic curriculum' as opposed to taking the school curriculum as largely circumscribed by the public curriculum with the 'Catholic' part dealt with in Religious Education, a range of faith development activities and social justice initiatives. The conversation is about 'a Catholic curriculum' rather than 'the Catholic curriculum' since, as we will argue, there are many ways for a curriculum to be Catholic.

A CONVERSATION IN CONTEXT

The immediate context for attempting to reframe discussion about a Catholic curriculum is the implementation in Australia of a national curriculum which has put curriculum, an often taken-for-granted aspect of school life, again in the spotlight. All curricula are based on a set of theoretical assumptions and principles, and the advent of the national curriculum has highlighted the fact that the different states in this country operate either from different curriculum models, or from different interpretations of the same model. As a consequence, the national curriculum represents *a negotiated compromise* in which not only educational interests play a part, but also power interests and ideologies as well. Understanding the dynamics at work in developing the national curriculum is important to understand the directions it will set for Catholic schools.

However, it is the broader context that interests us. This is the context of 'deep change' now engulfing education in most Western cultures. This broader interest encompasses the power interests and ideological movements driving deep change at the intellectual, moral, economic, social, political and religious levels of human experience. This is not just a local phenomenon, although it plays out locally; it is a global phenomenon. As a consequence, it is a brave educator who can predict the shape of the world that students entering primary school will inhabit by the time they complete their studies – 12, 15 or 18 years from now. Yet education, and within this the curriculum of the school, has to be planned in the students' interests at least

with some such prediction in mind. If leadership often involves making decisions when you have only a fraction of the data needed to make truly informed decisions, it is not hard to see why educational leadership is so challenging, and why the public curriculum holds the place that it often does in the minds of school leaders. The uncritical adoption of the public curriculum can short-circuit the need to discern the future and so transfers this responsibility elsewhere. *Real educational leadership involves an inescapable dilemma – to plan for a future that can only be dimly discerned.*

RESOLVING THE CURRICULUM LEADERSHIP DILEMMA

One way to resolve this dilemma is to pose the question – *what capabilities do students need to develop to live effectively and well in an ever-changing world?*[1] The answer we can readily see will involve a certain stock of knowledge, skills in accessing and using knowledge, ways of valuing and judging, and a sensibility to what is happening around them that enables students to make sense of people and events as change, so characteristic of our society, continues to unfold. Such capabilities will give young people *the capacity to respond creatively* to the situation in which they will live their lives, not as victims of change, but as its shapers. In most cases this will involve working collaboratively with others and being able to communicate effectively with them.

The future is created not only by human action, however, it is also influenced by the creative action of God in the world as this plays out in human aspiration. We argue later in the book that a Catholic curriculum carries within it a mission to the heart of young people. We make the point at this early stage that, to be future-oriented, such a curriculum needs to promote a deep, intelligent and meaningful relationship with Jesus which becomes the axis on which all else turns. From this relationship springs the capability and drive to develop the skills and competencies to make the Kingdom of God, which was central to Jesus' life and mission, present in the complex world of family, society, culture and Church. It is in commitment to Jesus and his mission that the creative action begun in Jesus' earthly ministry, and continued by his followers through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit is brought to fruition. This creative action is achieved in collaboration with Jesus' disciples living and working in dialogue and hope.

1 Howard Gardner takes this question up insightfully in *5 Minds for the Future* (Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2008).

Developing such an outlook and capabilities in their students is the great hope of Catholic school teachers, the reason why we get up in the morning and look forward to re-engaging with our students. It is this hope that enlivens this book and provides the broader perspective in which a conversation about a Catholic curriculum needs to be reframed.

THE TARGET AUDIENCE

Curriculum is not only about students and what they learn; it is also about teachers and what they know, what they aspire to, what they value and are committed to. It is also concerned with the forms of support available to them as they go about their important task. In particular, it reflects *what they think and how they think,* since this determines how the curriculum is delivered, irrespective of what its designers may have prescribed. Since this book is addressed primarily to teachers at all levels in Catholic education it has to be concerned with 'what teachers think' and unashamedly seeks to influence this.

While our primary audience is teachers in schools, the issues we raise have clear implications for those *who influence the thinking of teachers* in schools – school leaders, Church leaders, those who teach teachers how to think about their profession and its meaning, Catholic tertiary educators, and those involved in various forms of teacher development.

TOWARDS A WORKING DEFINITION OF A CATHOLIC CURRICULUM

What is a 'Catholic curriculum'? In setting out the understanding that informs this book we do so using what Berger and Luckmann call the 'social stock of knowledge'[2]. Within this understanding:

> *A Catholic curriculum assists young people to engage constructively with the wisdom and faith of the community in a way that is meaningful to them, living as they do, in a particular cultural and historical setting, with the life chances this setting has to offer, and the constraints that it imposes on them, in establishing their identity as individuals and as members of the community.*

There are a number of key elements in this understanding that we will elaborate further as the conversation proceeds and its scope becomes more clearly defined.

2 Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise on the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1967), 41.

DEVELOPING AN INTERPRETIVE MAP

If we are to present the 'wisdom and faith of the community' to students in a way that is meaningful to them, then we have to pay attention to the way in which people come to make sense of their world. They do this with reference to 'sources of public meaning'.

Public worldviews as sources of meaning

Education seeks to introduce young people to these sources in a way that ensures that they are passed from one generation to the next as a valuable inheritance. This inheritance is passed on as 'master stories'. There are competing versions of these master stories so the process of transmission is 'critical' in the sense that young people have to learn how to discern between authentic and bogus presentation of the 'master stories'. The master stories provide the means by which public worldviews are conveyed. A public worldview is one owned by a community which determines what are, and are not, authentic presentations of it. There are three such public sources of meaning in Western societies: the *worldview of culture* that is sponsored by a cultural community, in our case the Australian community; the *worldview of the age* which has currency across Western societies; and *the worldview of faith* that has currency within a particular faith community, in our case the Catholic community.

These three public worldviews – of culture, faith and the age – and their associated 'master stories' have cognitive, affective and evaluative dimensions that, when taken together, define for each *a coherent tradition*. These traditions, while meaningful in their own terms, also contain a wisdom that is partially shared with the other two traditions. The worldview of the age, for instance, influences that of culture and of faith. The worldview of culture moderates how the worldview of the age is understood in a particular culture. Put more concretely, 'being Australian' influences how we think of ourselves as 'being Catholic' because of the particular way in which the worldview of Australian culture shapes the worldview of faith among Australian Catholics.

There is an ebb and flow in the interaction between all three traditions, that causes each to flourish sometimes in sympathy with, and sometimes in opposition to, the others. We each construct our *personal interpretive map* against the background of such dynamics. Understanding these public worldviews is therefore important once the focus of education shifts to meaning making. However, as Hack has pointed out, meaning making has often been a by-product of education rather than an end-goal[3]. A Catholic curriculum now demands that this process become more intentional.

3 Joanne Hack *Meaning Making: A Key Pedagogical Paradigm for Schooling in the Third Millennium* (Sydney: Catholic Schools Office Broken Bay, 2011), 3.

The interpretive map that we create for ourselves to make sense of life, *our personal worldview,* can be imagined as a kind of personal *Lonely Planet Guide to the Familiar* which also provides us with our orientation in making sense of the unfamiliar. The process by which we create this guide lies largely out of our awareness. Its construction depends on our understanding of the three sources' maps: the three public worldviews. These stand behind its development whether we realise this or not. For most people the construction of this map is unproblematic. They call on what sociologists call 'the social stock of knowledge' or 'recipe knowledge' in negotiating meaning in everyday life.[4]

The situation becomes problematic only when the three public maps lose alignment, provide contradictory or competing conceptions, or make seemingly irreconcilable demands. It is at this point that we are required to move beyond the 'recipe knowledge' we use in negotiating everyday life, and are forced to look more deeply into the issues of life. However, being Western, *we are confident that we have the tools at our disposal in terms of knowledge bases, narratives, value sets, and methods of enquiry to do this.* We know that the major problems of life generally involve a shift in the equilibrium points that define our taken-for-granted view of the world and that a new equilibrium point will eventually be established that is more responsive to the demands of living.

We construe the immediate challenge as 'getting our head around' what is happening, the feelings this generates, why it is happening, and forming some idea of what should be happening, in order to get to 'the heart of the matter'. Once this is located, it becomes possible either to make a response, or at the least to evaluate the adequacy of the responses that others are making as a step forward.

The advantage of living within three tested, and often complementary, traditions each of which has an array of resources for negotiating change, and each of which has its own wisdom in negotiating change, is that we are confident we can work through problems to reach a solution[5]. We do not accept that this cannot happen, that the solution lies totally outside our capacities. We do not see ourselves as the victims of fate. This understanding is integral to 'the wisdom and faith of the community' into which Western people are born.

4 See Berger and Luckmann, 19–46, for a discussion of this phenomenon.

5 In many ways the present study reflects this confidence in accessing the resources available in sociology, history and philosophy of science, social philosophy, education, missiology, theology and cultural anthropology and bringing them to bear on the problem of a Catholic curriculum.