



Thomas Stonestreet

Questioning equity in Australia's national schooling agenda: A Critical Policy Analysis of the  
Australian Curriculum policy framework

Master's thesis

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

Education and Globalisation

2021

University of Oulu

Faculty of Education

Questioning equity in Australia's national schooling agenda: A Critical Policy Analysis of the Australian Curriculum policy framework (Thomas Stonestreet)

Master's thesis, 119 pages

December 2021

## **Abstract**

Since the 1980's many national governments have sought to exert greater influence over their education systems. This trend was mirrored in the Australian context where, in 2008, the Australian Government announced a suite of reforms that would significantly determine the state of contemporary schooling. The most significant reform was the adoption of the Australian Curriculum, a landmark achievement that took close to four decades to realise. The rationale for adopting a national curriculum was stated as a means for improving the equity and quality within the Australian education system. This research seeks to explore the intersections between Australia's national curriculum policy and issues of equity in Australian schooling. My research aims are twofold. First, I aim to analyse, understand, and explain the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum. Following this, I aim to critique whether these motivations correspond with the Australian Curriculum's stated rationale of improving equity within the Australian education system. My theoretical framework draws from a tripartite combination of critical theory, post-structuralism, and post-colonial theory and where they intersect is through my selected research methodology of Critical Policy Analysis. Through conducting a Critical Policy Analysis of the two policy texts that constitute the Australian Curriculum policy framework: The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (2008) and The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Version 4.0. (2012), I seek to determine how the value of equity is positioned relative to the other policy values. Based on my analysis I conclude that the Australian Government's primary motivation to adopt a national curriculum stemmed from an ideological belief that education — and by extension, curriculum — is to serve the national economy. This is reflected in the Australian Curriculum policy framework, where the value of equity has been rearticulated into efficiency terms. Without a reconsideration of values, Australia's long sought after goal of improving the equity within its education system will always remain elusive.

**Key words:** politics of education, social justice, educational policy, critical policy analysis, critical discourse analysis, neoliberalism

## List of acronyms

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority
ALP	Australian Labor Party
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CPA	Critical Policy Analysis
GERM	Global Education Reform Movement
HCT	Human Capital Theory
ICSEA	Index of Community Socio-educational Advantage (ICSEA)
LNC	Liberal–National Coalition
MCEECDYA	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
TNCs	Transnational corporations

## Figures

Figure 1: Research process

Figure 2: Conceptualisation of policy

Figure 3: Motivations behind the Australian Curriculum

Figure 4: The GERM in Australia’s national schooling agenda

Figure 5: National Priorities in the Melbourne Declaration

Figure 6: Positioning equity in the Australian Curriculum policy framework

# Contents

<b>1. Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. The significance of a national curriculum in Australia	3
1.2. Positionality of the researcher	7
1.3. Research aims	10
1.4. Research questions	10
1.5. Research process and thesis structure	12
<b>2. Background: Towards a (world-class) Australian Curriculum</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1. 1980–1996: The economic imperatives of education	14
2.2. 1996–2007: The complexities of Australian federalism	17
2.3. 2007–2015: The Education Revolution	19
<b>3. Theoretical Framework</b>	<b>24</b>
3.1. Research paradigm	25
3.1.1. Ontology and epistemology	25
3.1.2. Theoretical and methodological frameworks	28
3.2. Conceptualising policy	32
3.2.1. The authoritative allocation of values	32
3.2.2. Power and ideology	33
3.2.3. Discourse and hegemony	34
3.3. Globalised education policy discourses	36
3.3.1. Theorising globalisation	37
3.3.2. Globalisation in the neoliberal imaginary	40
3.3.3. The neoliberal imaginary and the allocation of values in education policy	45
3.3.4. Human Capital Theory and the rise of the OECD	46
3.3.5. Policy convergence or divergence?	49
3.4. A national curriculum in a globalised world	52
3.4.1. Motivation 1: A shared ideological agenda	56
3.4.2. Motivation 2: To control legitimate knowledge	58
3.4.3. Motivation 3: For political gain	59
3.4.4. Motivation 4: Developing a stronger sense of national identity and cohesion	60
3.4.5. Motivation 5: Standardising the context to marketise the system	62
<b>4. Methodology</b>	<b>64</b>
4.1. The Australian Curriculum policy framework as data	64
4.1.1. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians	64
4.1.2. The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Version 4.0	66
4.2. Critical Policy Analysis as methodology	67
4.3. Critical Policy Analysis of the Australian Curriculum policy framework	69
4.3.1. Data collection and analysis methods	69
4.3.2. Analytic process	70

4.4. Equity in the Australian Curriculum policy framework	74
4.4.1. Equity as improving outcomes	76
4.4.1.1. <i>The discursive construction of 'disadvantage'</i>	78
4.4.1.2. <i>Increasing transparency and accountability</i>	81
4.4.2. Equity as sameness of achievement	84
4.4.2.1. <i>Flipped accountability and the ideology of agency</i>	85
4.4.2.2. <i>High expectations of decontextualised students</i>	87
<b>5. Ethics and Limitations</b>	<b>90</b>
<b>6. Discussion: Australian schooling at a crossroads</b>	<b>94</b>
<b>7. References</b>	<b>99</b>

## 1. Introduction

Since the 1980's, many national governments have sought to exert greater influence over their education systems through various national-level education policies (Plank & Davis, 2010, p. 299; Sahlberg, 2016, p. 141). This trend has commonly been attributed to both the reconstitution of the nation-state in the wake of increasing globalisation, and the economization of education policy (Lingard, 2010, p. 129). Often enacted through political discourse of raising standards, increasing efficiency, and improving outcomes, national governments have acted to reform their education systems via policies that introduce a suite of “new governing technologies” (Ball, 2013, p. 30). The most prominent governing technologies have included the introduction and emphasis of national and international large-scale assessments; greater systems of transparency and accountability; and centralising control over education through the implementation of national curriculums (Apple, 1993, p. 5; Sahlberg, 2011, pp. 99-100; Verger, et al., 2018, p. 1).

These reforms are evident within many education systems globally, but are particularly evident within countries aligned with the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and especially evident within the Anglo-American sphere. In recent decades, countries like the US, UK, Ireland, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia have all, at various stages and to varying degrees, initiated national-level, top-down reforms that serve to tighten control over students, teachers, administrators, and schools (Cahill, 2015, p. 303; Fuller & Stevenson, 2019, p. 1; Lingard, 2010, p. 129; Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 11; Sahlberg, 2016, p. 131; Savage & O'Connor, 2014, p. 609). It is widely argued that education reforms take a similar shape in these countries on account of them holding what is considered a neoliberal vision for education. Within a neoliberal paradigm, education is seen as an extension of the national economic agenda. Here, schooling is repurposed primarily as a means of developing the human capital necessary for nation-states to be able to compete in the global economy (Lingard, 2018, p. 58).

Coupled with the global rise of neoliberalism has been the emergence of a “global education policy field” (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 489). The emergence of this field has increasingly meant that national reforms are shaped by transnational policy ideas and practices beyond the nation-state (Savage & O'Connor, 2014, p. 626). Whilst there are many actors within this field, two have become dominant: the OECD and World Bank (Mundy, Green, Lingard & Verger,

2016, p. 12). Together these two international institutions have coalesced to define new educational discourses and policy norms across the globe. Most relevant to the Anglo-American sphere has been the OECD, who, particularly since the inaugural Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2000, have gained increasing influence by promoting international comparisons across national school systems (Elfert, 2019, p. 46). PISA's two measures of comparison, quality and equity, are key drivers of educational policy globally (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 493). By amassing large quantities of data, the OECD has been able to exert soft power through gaining "epistemic influence" (Lingard & Sellar, 2016, p. 359) over policy-makers seeking solutions to social and economic problems (Acosta, 2019, p. 178). The ascendancy of the OECD has enabled a growth in policy borrowing and learning between nation-states. This has seemingly led to a convergence of education reforms, with education systems globally being framed by cultures of high-stakes testing, datafication, standardisation, comparison, and accountability (Ydesen & Andreasen, 2020, p. 1). However, whilst these policies and their subsequent reforms may look similar across the globe, they are localised and take on a vernacular character according to the political, economic, historic, and cultural contexts in which they are implemented (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 97).

This study seeks to understand how discursive practices which operate globally came to effect Australia's national schooling agenda. Australia is an interesting case study due to the fact that the national (Australian) government holds only limited legislative power over school-based education, with authority being constitutionally enshrined to the states and territories. Over the past 40-years however, the Australian Government has managed to attain greater power within school education. In 2008, the power of the Australian Government reached its zenith when, under the banner of 'Education Revolution', it was able to enact a suite of reforms consistent with the aforementioned governing technologies, including: the administering of a large-scale national assessment program (NAPLAN); increased transparency and accountability via a national school reporting system (My School); and the implementation of a national curriculum. The adoption of Australia's first national curriculum (hereafter, the Australian Curriculum) was a particularly significant achievement given that previous attempts had been made but invariably failed since 1980. This was despite the Australian Government maintaining bipartisan support across both major political parties at the national level. However, with the promise of "improving



the quality and equity of Australia's schooling system" (ACARA, 2012b, p. 5), a national curriculum in Australia would become a reality.

### **1.1. The significance of a national curriculum in Australia**

Curriculums are perhaps the most powerful governing technology of schooling because they determine what takes place within the classroom in regards to both student learning and teachers' work. National curriculums, however, are especially significant because they frame what knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions are deemed important for the nation's younger generation to possess. In this regard, national curriculums act in a way which institutionalises conceptions of what it means to be an educated person within the nation. In addition to delineating what is and is not considered useful or 'legitimate knowledge', national curriculums are powerful tools in helping to create the national imaginary. Yates and Grumet (2011, p. 204) capture this well, stating that: "national curriculums induct the younger generation into who is 'we' and who is 'other'; who is important who is inferior; who are friends, who are sources of one's cultural heritage, and who are alien." National curriculums are therefore powerful tools in the exercise of nation-building, as they organise and provide the nation with a sense of cultural identity, goals that are worth striving for, and an idealised vision of the future (Seddon, 2001, p. 308). Put succinctly, nations construct curriculums and curriculums construct nations.

However, deciding which knowledge, values, and beliefs will be passed on makes the forging of a national curriculum an inherently selective tradition. As Kennedy (2009, p. 6) argues, national curriculum debates are "... debates about a nation's soul. About its values. About its beliefs." By this logic, the Australian Curriculum should be reflective of, and consistent with, 'Australian values and beliefs'. But given the heterogeneity of Australia as a nation — where cultural values, traditions, and knowledges are multifarious — determining what Australian 'values' and 'beliefs' are can be problematic.

Heterogeneity in Australia begins at the political level. Australia has a federal political system, comprising six states and two territories. Law-making authority is separated between one central government (the Australian Government, also referred to as the Commonwealth Government or Federal Government) and eight regional governments (the State and Territory Governments).

There are two major political parties — the Australian Labor Party (ALP) and the Liberal–National Coalition (LNC) — as well as a number of minor parties. Each government is independent of one another and pursues their own economic and cultural agendas. This means that the agenda of the State and Territory Governments may not necessarily align with the agenda of the Australian Government. Since federation in 1901, school education has remained the constitutional responsibility of the State and Territory Governments, with each maintaining sovereign powers over their education systems. Generally speaking, the functions of the state and territory education departments include the training and hiring of teachers, the registering and regulating of schools, operating government schools, and, traditionally, managing their own curricula, assessment, and reporting procedures (OECD, 2012b, p. 12). Whilst there are many similarities between curriculums, there are also many differences, with each state and territory maintaining a curriculum that reflects their own unique history, geography, demography, and cultures (Gable & Lingard, 2013, p. 1; Seddon, 2001, p. 313). To achieve the Australian Curriculum, the Australian Government needed to first gain the consent of the State and Territory Governments in order to bypass the Australian Constitution. This achievement was a significant feat, evidenced by the fact that no other federated country in the OECD has a national curriculum.

Geographically speaking, Australia is both spatially immense and ecologically diverse. This point is often hard to conceptualise for someone who is not from, or has not visited, Australia. In numerical terms, it is the world's sixth-largest country. It has a land mass roughly 50% greater than continental Europe and could fit Finland inside of it 23 times. It has a relatively small population of around 26 million, the vast majority of whom (about 85%) live within 50km of the coastline (ABS, 2020). However, the population is by no means evenly dispersed, with nearly two-thirds living in only five cities (and two-fifths living in only two cities, Sydney and Melbourne) (ABS, 2021). Due to its geographic immensity and relatively small population, Australia also holds the title of the world's sixth-most sparsely populated country. Whilst this means that much of Australia is uninhabited, there are a plethora of regional, rural, and remote towns scattered throughout the country, each with their own unique histories, demographics, and cultures (Herbert, 2020, p. 65).

An unfortunate reality of Australia's geographic size to population ratio is that socio-economic disadvantage is geographically concentrated, with many residing in rural and remote towns being victims of "place poverty" (Niesche, 2018, p. 4). So whilst Australia is an economically prosperous nation, largely derived from its rich deposits of natural resources (i.e. iron ore, coal, natural gases, gold) and recent influx of immigration, this point cannot be generalised as this prosperity does not extend to all. For instance, more than 1.5 million Australians are considered to be socio-economically disadvantaged (Martinez & Perales, 2017 as cited in Niesche, 2018, p. 4). Furthermore, in the report, *Poverty in Australia 2020*, it was estimated that 3.24 million people (13.6% of the population or over one in eight) live in poverty (Davidson, Saunders, Bradbury & Wong, 2020, p. 9). This is amplified when looking at children under the age of 15, where an estimated 774,000 (17.7% of all children or over one in six) live below the poverty line (ibid.).

Culturally, Australia is one of the most diverse societies in the world, comprising a multitude of spoken languages, customs, beliefs, and traditions. Increasingly since the post-war years, Australia has come to rely on immigration. In the most recent census data, nearly half (49%) of the Australian population had either been born overseas or had one or both of their parents born overseas (ABS, 2017). Linguistically, there were over 300 separately identified spoken languages in Australia, with over one-fifth (21%) of Australians speaking a language other than English whilst at home (ibid.). Again, this is amplified in homes with young people. For example, in the most populated state of New South Wales, one-third of all students attending government schools come from language backgrounds other than English (Ho, 2019, p. 3).

Australia is also home to the world's oldest continuous cultures. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (Indigenous or First Nation) peoples have lived on the continent for over 60,000 years. Having overcome a dark colonial past, which involved government policies of segregation and assimilation — or what Morgan (2017, p. 2) phrases, "a not-so-veiled form of cultural genocide" — Indigenous Australians today make-up approximately 3% of the total population and 6% of the school student population (ABS, 2021). But even under the umbrella of 'Indigenous' lies a plethora of diverse histories, languages, customs and traditions (Morgan, 2017, p. 2; Parkinson & Jones, 2018, p. 75). In 2016 there were 150 active Indigenous languages spoken and it is not

uncommon for Indigenous students living in remote communities to have English as their third or even fourth language (ABS, 2017).

The heterogeneity of Australian society is mirrored by the heterogeneity within the Australian school system. The Australian school system is made up of three school sectors: government, Catholic, and independent. In 2019 there were close to four million students enrolled in nearly 10,000 schools, two-thirds (65.7%) of whom were enrolled in government schools with the rest attending non-government schools: either Catholic (19.5%) or independent (14.8%) (ABS, 2021). Each school sector holds widely varied visions and missions and are comprised of diverse student groups who have parents with varying levels of educational aspirations for their children (Gorur, 2013, p. 220). For instance, government schools (also referred to as public schools) educate over 80% of students from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, as well as the majority of Indigenous students, students in remote and rural areas, students from language backgrounds other than English, and students with a disability (Sahlberg, 2019, p. 157). Recently, government schools have expanded to include ‘specialist schools’ which emphasise particular subject areas (e.g. sport), and ‘selective schools’ which recruit students based on academic performance (Gonski, et al., 2011, p. 5). Conversely, non-government schools (also known as private schools) generally educate students from more advantaged backgrounds (Bonnor & Shepard, 2016, p. 28). Also boasting great diversity, non-government schools can be either co-educational or single-sex, day school only or boarding, based on religious (e.g. Christian Anglican, Jewish, Islamic) or educational preferences/needs (e.g. Montessori, behavioural schools). Comparatively, Australia has one of the highest percentages of non-government/private schools in the OECD (OECD, 2020, p. 297).

Whilst heterogeneity is a defining characteristic within Australia’s school system (and within Australia as a whole), this heterogeneity seemingly had little influence on the motivations to adopt a national curriculum. In the rationale for introducing the Australian Curriculum, it is stated that the curriculum is built upon the twin pillars of improving quality and equity in Australia’s education system:

Quality — an Australian Curriculum will contribute to the provision of a world-class education in Australia by setting out the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for

life and work in the 21st century and by setting common high standards of achievement across the country.

Equity — an Australian Curriculum will provide a clear, shared understanding of what young people should be taught and the quality of learning expected of them, regardless of their circumstances, the type of school that they attend or the location of their school. (ACARA, 2012b, 5)

Incidentally, it does not matter where students are located, what their backgrounds are, or what kind of school they attend; Australian students are expected to meet the same common high standards of achievement across the country.

Although proponents argue that national curriculums serve as means of bringing social cohesion and a shared sense of national identity, critics argue that the effect will be the opposite (Apple, 1993, p. 14). However formed, a national curriculum has implications for the distribution of authority and influence in society, and those who vie to shape it will do so in a way that reflects their identity and interests (Seddon, 2001, p. 308). The potential adverse effect of this is that not all cultural groups' identities and interests are responded to (Apple, 2004, p. 44). In any case, the economic, cultural, ideological, and political interests that guide curriculum design are never neutral, but embody commitments that could potentially contribute to inequality (ibid., p. 61).

## **1.2. Positionality of the researcher**

My interest in the topic of curriculum stems from previous experiences as both a student and teacher within the New South Wales (one of the six states) education system at a time when the Australian Curriculum was being designed and implemented. Salient in my mind are memories of the various media criticisms and heated debates that extended from Australian Parliament into teacher staff rooms. It became evident to me early in my teaching career that a national curriculum was a contentious issue which multiple people and groups had a stake in (or at least felt like they did). Amidst the controversy that a national curriculum seemingly entailed, I began to question the idea of a 'national curriculum': what it meant, why was it being introduced, in whose interests would it serve, and why was it so important for the Australian Government to have control over it?

As a nation, Australia claims to be based on egalitarian values of democracy, justice, and equity (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 9). Collectively, these values form what is colloquially known in Australia as ‘a fair go’. The latter of these three values, equity, has long been viewed as important in Australian education policy (Savage, Sellar & Gorur, 2013, p. 161), but became emphasised after the inaugural PISA results were published in 2001, where the Australian school system was labelled as “high quality, low equity” (Gorur, 2013, p. 220). From that moment onwards, improving equity in Australia’s school system has been a policy priority of the Australian Government, and was a key reason behind the 2008 Education Revolution reforms (Gorur, 2013, p. 218; Kayrooz & Parker, 2010, p. 164).

Equity is a common feature of contemporary national and supranational education policies globally, and long predates Australia’s Education Revolution. Notions of equity appear in Article 21 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights (1948) and over 40 years later in Article 28 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) (Harber, 2014, p. 28). Most recently, equity in education features within the Sustainable Development Goals as Goal 4: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all” (UN, 2015). Equity as a policy priority has been widely popularised by the growth of the OECD’s PISA, which established that the most successful education systems are those that combine high quality with high equity (OECD, 2004a; 2012a; 2018). Thanks to their ability to combine the two, countries such as Finland are today considered the international benchmark for successful education systems (Lingard, 2010, p. 139; Sahlberg, 2011, p. 3; Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 13).

Equitable education is considered an important vehicle for fostering equity — and more broadly, social justice — within society. However, defining what an ‘equitable education’ means is subject to contention. Savage, Sellar and Gorur (2013, p. 162) outline three possible ways to conceptualise equitable education. There is the Rawlsian conception, which treats equity as ‘fairness’ and where some social groups require greater support and resources over others (e.g. redistributive policies). Building from this is Nancy Fraser’s (1998) conception, which argues that, in addition to a fair redistribution of resources, there needs to be a ‘recognition’ of cultural and social differences. Hence, an equitable education is conceived as one which is fair, inclusive and participatory. And finally, there is equity as ‘equality of opportunity’ and ‘sameness of

treatment' most commonly advocated by the OECD. Equity here doesn't mean that all students obtain equal education outcomes, but rather, that "schools and education systems provide equal learning opportunities to all students" and that "personal or social circumstances such as gender, ethnic origin or family background, are not obstacles to achieving educational potential" (OECD, 2012a, p. 9). Due to these varying conceptions, there is an inherent risk of equity being ambiguously or ill-defined in education policy.

My conceptualisation of an equitable education is most closely aligned with Nancy Fraser's (1998), which not only necessitates the fair distribution of resources (e.g. school funding), but also the recognition of student differences and needs. Education, in my view, has the potential of being one of the great levelers in society that enables a person, regardless of their background, to thrive. Conversely, I conceive of an inequitable education as one where resources are not distributed fairly, nor personal factors such as geographic location, or cultural and linguistic differences, taken into account. The ramifications of an inequitable education are potentially severe and far reaching, having the potential to further entrench disadvantage and further marginalise those groups who need the greatest support. In addition to entrenching material disadvantages (i.e. less education preventing access to future jobs), there is an immaterial effect, where those students who receive less, may begin to see themselves as less deserving and/or as less capable than those whom the system serves.

My starting point in this research is that there is nothing inherently inequitable about a national curriculum, however, it is my view that the Australian Government's motivation to adopt one has not corresponded with their stated rationale of improving equity in Australian schooling. In fact, I come from the position that not only has the Australian Government's national schooling agenda (of which the Australian Curriculum is a constituent part) not improved equity, it has hindered it. This positionality stems from personal experiences of having worked and studied within a wide variety of Australian schools across the spectrum of advantage, talking with teachers and school leaders, and comparing those experiences with my time as a student in Finland — a country renowned for their equitable education system. Further, this view is empirically backed by data which shows that equity in Australian schooling is worsening at the same time students' performance in PISA and NAPLAN is declining (Bonnor & Shepard, 2016, p. 11; Gonski et al., 2018, p. 8).



### **1.3. Research aims**

This research seeks to explore the intersections between Australia's national curriculum policy and issues of equity in Australian schooling. My research aims are twofold. First, I aim to analyse, understand, and explain the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum. Following this, I aim to critique whether these motivations correspond with the Australian Curriculum's stated rationale of improving equity within the Australian education system.

Although critique is often held in a 'negative' connotation, I do not intend this for my research. My purpose is not to critique for critique's sake. Rather, it is by being critical that I strive to challenge taken-for-granted assumptions, to open up complexities, and to show connections which may otherwise be hidden. Educational theorist, Michael Apple (2004, p. 12), argues that it is only "[b]y looking critically at education that we lay bare the political, social, ethical, and economic interests and commitments that are uncritically accepted as the way it is." Based on my starting position that the Australian Government's national schooling agenda has hindered equity rather than improved it, the purpose of my critique is to unveil and deconstruct power relations and ideologies within Australia's national curriculum policy which may (un)intentionally (re)produce social inequalities. My hope is that by demystifying these power relations and ideologies within policy-making processes will serve to enable greater teacher voices to engage in dialogue with policy-makers. Forging closer relationships between those who develop policy and those who enact it daily will help to contribute to a democratic, just, and equitable education. It is my belief that through collective voice, issues of equity in Australian schooling will be a thing of the past.

### **1.4. Research questions**

Achieving my research aims will be done by answering my two research questions:

- 1) What were the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum?
- 2) How is equity positioned within the Australian Curriculum policy framework?



The type of questions that I chose, as well as my choice of the wording within them, was carefully done as a means of achieving the overall aim of this study.

My first question draws heavily from theory and will thus be answered in Chapter 3, *Theoretical Framework*. My choice of the words ‘motivations’ and ‘move towards’ derive from my assumption that the Australian Curriculum was always driven by a particular motive which varied over a 40-year timespan. I had previously considered using ‘rationales’ instead of ‘motivations’, however I chose not to as rationales to me implied a logical set of reasonings; whereas the idea of a motivation implied something which acted as a driver (not necessarily in a logical or coherent manner). Additionally, rationales was the language used by the Australian Government in their previous attempts to adopt a national curriculum. To make my distinction between a ‘rationale’ and a ‘motivation’ clear, I will outline the findings of Professor Alan Reid, who, prior to a national curriculum being agreed upon in 2008, was tasked by the Australian Government to review why previous attempts at achieving a national curriculum had failed. What he found was that only three ‘rationales’ for a national curriculum were ever stated. They were:

1. That a national curriculum would bring greater consistency across education systems to benefit students required to transfer across State/Territory boundaries;
2. That a national curriculum promotes efficiencies through the sharing of scarce resources;
3. That a national curriculum will help produce a sense of national cohesion and a feeling that we are all Australians (Reid, 2005, 21).

Indeed, these rationales appear logical and coherent on the surface, but I see them as diluted and masking the true motivations of the Australian Government. In order to ‘delve deeper’ and unmask these motivations, emphasis is placed on the role political discourse played in the move towards and development of the Australian Curriculum.

My second research question is empirical, where I apply the research methodology of Critical Policy Analysis on the two policy documents that constitute the Australian Curriculum policy framework: The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians (MCEETYA, 2008) and The Shape of the Curriculum: Version 4.0 (ACARA, 2012). These two

documents serve as my data for this study, and it is through their analysis that I will be able to determine how equity is positioned within the Australian Curriculum policy framework. My use of the word ‘positioned’ is indicative of how policy is conceptualised in this study. This will be elaborated on in Chapter 3 in the section, *Conceptualising policy*. But briefly, when policy is conceptualised as the authoritative allocation of values, it is suggested that policies articulate values across five domains: equity, efficiency, security, liberty, and community. These values may exist simultaneously but need to be assembled, organised, and positioned relative to one another, with some values taking precedence over others. Hence, my analysis seeks to establish how equity is positioned in relation to these other values.

### **1.5. Research process and thesis structure**

The way that this thesis is structured is reflective of the research process. In the upcoming chapter, *Background: Towards a (world-class) Australian Curriculum*, I will provide contextual background to the development of the Australian Curriculum by focusing on political discourse. As alluded to above, the development of the Australian Curriculum has had a long and contentious history. Understanding this history plays an important role in helping to understand the motivations behind the Australian Government’s motivations to move towards a national curriculum. As this chapter then works in tandem with its succeeding chapter, it may be useful for the reader to conceptualise Chapter 2 as ‘what happened’ and Chapter 3 as ‘why it happened’.

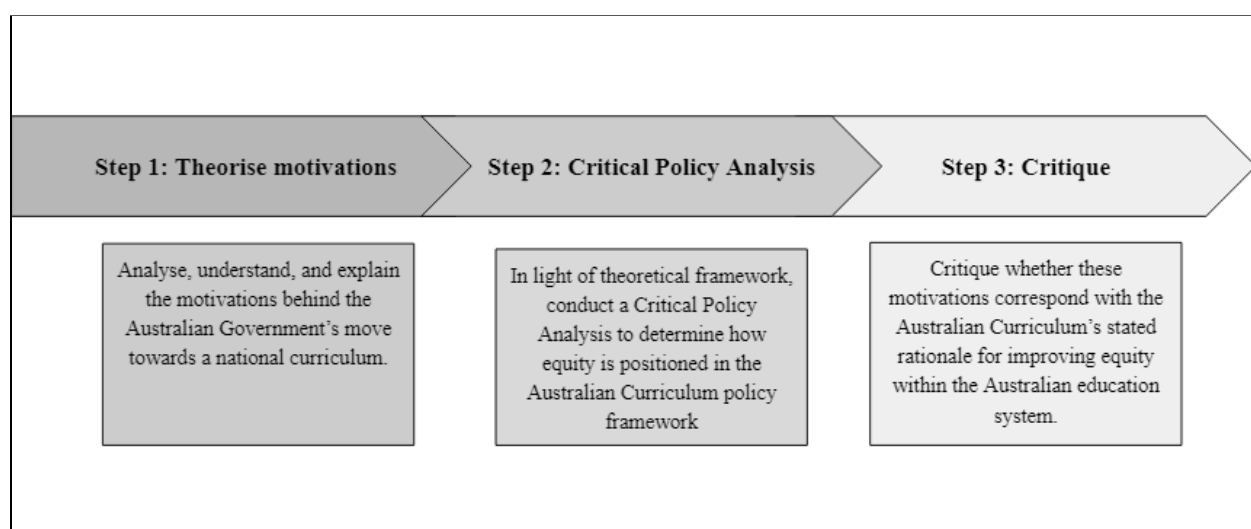
I begin Chapter 3, *Theoretical Framework*, by outlining my research paradigm, consisting of my ontological and epistemological position, as well as my theoretical and methodological choices. Following this, I define my conceptualisation of policy. This conceptualisation contains several concepts that are central to this study, including discourse. Next, I theorise how the phenomenon of globalisation has led to the creation of education policy discourses which circulate globally and influence national education policy-making. The final section of this chapter is reserved for answering my first research question. Here I infuse Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 to theorise on the motivations behind the Australian Government’s move towards a national curriculum.

Chapter 4, *Methodology*, provides the empirical part of this study. I start by briefly describing my data before outlining my chosen research methodology of Critical Policy Analysis. Before

conducting my Critical Policy Analysis of the Australian Curriculum policy framework, I detail the methods used in my analysis, as well as the steps taken. To conclude this chapter, I produce my interpretations of how equity is positioned in the Australian Curriculum policy framework, and in the process, answer my second research question.

In Chapter 5 I outline the *Ethics and Limitations* of this study. By situating myself in this study, I consider the potential limitations and ethical implications of my findings with the sole purpose of increasing the trustworthiness of my findings.

Finally, in Chapter 6, *Discussion: Australian schooling at a crossroads*, I put both of my research questions into conversation with one answer to critique whether the Australian Government's motivations behind their move towards a national curriculum has corresponded with its stated equity agenda. In addition to offering my critique, I outline some potential ways forward to enhance equity in Australian schooling.



**Figure 1: Research process**

## **2. Background: Towards a (world-class) Australian Curriculum**

The purpose of this chapter is to provide the reader with background information on the development processes of the Australian Curriculum. This historical development is a well researched area within Australian academia. As such, there exists a plethora of accounts which proved pivotal in developing my understanding. However, rather than attempting to provide an exhaustive synthesis of these accounts, I chose to limit my focus on the role political discourse played in the construction of the national curriculum. My belief is that through analysing the use of political discourse in these development processes, I will be able to better understand and explain the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum. In addition to reviewing academic literature, I chose to incorporate key policy documents that pertained to the development of the Australian Curriculum. This information is not only relevant for answering my first research question, but is also essential in creating the context for conducting my critical policy analysis.

The move towards the Australian Curriculum was a period that stretched close to four decades, from when a national curriculum was first advocated for by the Australian Government in 1980, until when it was officially endorsed by all State and Territory Governments in 2015. Drawing from Humphreys (2018, p. 75), I utilise the approach of periodisation to highlight how the motivations for a national curriculum varied according to the various Australian Governments, who were themselves framed by varying social, cultural, political, and economic contexts. As such, I have split this timeframe into three periods: Period 1 stretches between 1980–1996 and focuses on national economic reform and its linkages to education under the the Hawke–Keating Governments; Period 2 lasts from 1996–2007 under the conservative Howard Government; and Period 3 between 2007–2015, wherein emphasis is placed upon the Education Revolution and reforms of the Rudd-Gillard Governments. Although employing differing political tactics and discourses, each of these governments had the aim of delivering Australia its first national curriculum.

### **2.1. 1980–1996: The economic imperatives of education**

Despite achieving Federation nearly eight decades earlier, a national curriculum was not a part of the Australian Government's agenda until 1980, when the Curriculum Development Centre

sponsored a document proposing, *A Core Curriculum for Australian Schools: What it is and why we need one* (Skillbeck, 1980; Brennan, 2011, p. 265). This document, colloquially referred to as ‘The Common Core’, called for “consistency amongst the States and Territories” through a common learning framework, comprising the “basic and essential learnings and experiences ... expected of all students who pass through our schools” (Skillbeck, 1980, p. 4). It was argued that a core curriculum needed to be seen as “a central and crucial part of general education for all Australians” (ibid., p. 4), and that the Curriculum Development Centre, a national body established by the Australian Parliament, was fit to devise and develop it. The then Australian Government (under Malcolm Fraser of the LNC) cited several interrelated issues that led to them addressing core curriculum, including: social change (i.e. the increased demands for basic and essential skills; Australia’s growing regional and international roles and interests; changing patterns of employment and structural youth unemployment; increased mobility of persons; rapid scientific and technological change); community concern with education as well as more people having access to education; innovation in the field of education; and limited education resources (ibid., pp. 6-7).

The Common Core can be seen as a watershed moment in Australian education as it marked the first instance of the Australian Government’s desire to influence curriculum. This desire was progressively amplified following the election of Bob Hawke (ALP) to the role of Australian Prime Minister in 1983. Under the mantra, ‘Bringing Australia together’, Hawke and the man who eventually succeeded him as Prime Minister in 1990, Paul Keating, set out to repair the failing Australian economy through a suite of reforms that would integrate into the global economy (Humphreys, 2018, p. 5). Within this new economic paradigm, education and schooling would gain new significance, becoming reimagined as a central part of Hawke–Keating’s national economic agenda (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 300).

The appointment of the former Finance and Trade Minister, John Dawkins, to Australian Minister of Education gave a clear indication of this reimagining (Connell, 2013, p. 104; Kennedy, 2009, p. 5). Dawkins was a strong advocate for “a national presence in education” which “was required by Labor governments for economic and equity reasons” (Dawkins & Costello, 1983 as cited in Lingard, et al., 1995, p. 44). In the document *Skills for Australia*, he argued that the Australian Government “should play an active role in responding to the major

economic challenges now facing Australia” by producing a “multi-skilled and flexible workforce” (Dawkins, 1987 as cited in Lingard, et al., 1995, p. 44). The following year he would release another policy document titled, *Strengthening Australia’s Schools* (Dawkins, 1988). This document called for “a nationally coordinated curriculum,” which would “be a major asset in meeting the challenges of achieving economic growth” (ibid., p. 4). Here, Dawkins simultaneously addressed perceived issues of the past (i.e. a lack of coherence and consistency across state and territory systems) whilst articulating a view that school education was the best means to achieve economic prosperity. This document would play a significant role in promoting future national cooperation by creating a shared vision for the purposes of education and schooling in Australia.

In 1989, an Australian national curriculum started to look like it would become a reality after a “historically significant display of national cooperation” and “an unprecedented commitment to intergovernmental cooperation on matters of education” (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 303). The *Hobart Declaration on Schooling in the 21st-century* (MCEECDYA, 1989) was ratified by all State, Territory and Australian Education Ministers, who were conscious to the fact “that the schooling of Australia's children is the foundation on which to build our future as a nation” (MCEECDYA, 1989, p. 1). This declaration included 10 common national goals for schooling and the announcement to establish a national curriculum agency as a first step towards a national curriculum. Evidently, federal cooperation was in vogue during this period, typified by the establishment of the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in 1992 and The Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) in 1993. COAG was established as a site to “increase cooperation among levels of government so as to achieve a more efficient national economy and single national market” (Lingard et al., 1995, p. 42). MCEETYA, comprised of the New Zealand Education Minister and all eight Australian Education Ministers, was established as the forum for national education policy, and would exist under the umbrella of COAG. Arguably, the historic show of federal cooperation in education and economic matters during this time was exacerbated by the recession in 1989-1990, an event that resulted in youth unemployment hitting 40% nationally (Graham, et al., 2015, p. 238).

By 1991, the states and territories had all agreed to cooperatively complete ‘curriculum statements’ (known as the National Statements and Profiles) about the shape and rationale of the

national curriculum's eight key learning areas (Savage & O'Connor, 2014, p. 615). Nevertheless, whilst the National Statement and Profiles would be finalised in 1993 — effectively providing the framework for a national curriculum — their adoption by the states and territories was subsequently rejected. Reid (2005, p. 10) believes that their rejection was on account of the states “getting cold feet” for fear of losing control over the curriculum to the Australian Government. Hence, the states and territories were reasserting their constitutionally enshrined rights.

## **2.2. 1996–2007: The complexities of Australian federalism**

Following the ill-fated attempt of a national curriculum via the National Statements and Profiles, an Australian national curriculum partly fell off the Australian Government's agenda. This was primarily due to the changing political complexion of the Australian, State and Territory Governments. Prime Minister Paul Keating, who had succeeded Hawke as the leader of the ALP in 1990, lost the federal election in 1996 to the incumbent John Howard (LNC). This marked the end of Labor's ‘golden years’ and signified a new era in the Australian political and educational landscape. Traditionally more federalist, Howard and the LNC maintained state sovereignty over their respective schooling systems. From the outset, however, the new Australian Government flagged their intention to influence curriculum, albeit needing to resort to more minimalist and indirect means (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 304; Lingard, 2018, p. 57; Reid, 2019, p. 200).

Ten years after the Hobart Declaration there was a second forum for national education policy development. This time the product was the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century* (MCEETYA, 1999). Building on the Hobart Declaration, the Adelaide Declaration reaffirmed the belief that “Australia's future depends upon each citizen having the necessary knowledge, understanding, skills and values for a productive and rewarding life in an educated, just, and open society” (ibid., p. 1). Whilst there were a number of similarities between the two declarations (e.g. the entitlement of all young people to high quality schooling), there was also a clear distinction in national educational priorities. Notably, this involved an acknowledgement of the greater effect globalisation was having on society, the championing of greater diversity in educational providers so as to enable a greater range of educational choices and aspirations, and promoting the economic use of public resources (ibid., p. 1-2). Whilst the States and Territories were vested “constitutional responsibility for schooling” (ibid., p. 1), the Adelaide Declaration would also emphasise the need for “continuing to develop



curriculum and related systems of assessment” (ibid., p. 2). Accordingly, although the motivation for a national curriculum had waned in the mid-to-late-1990’s, it would be reignited in the early-2000’s (Lingard, 2018, p. 57; Savage & O’Connor, 2016, p. 616).

Whilst Howard would extend Hawke-Keating’s economic rationality, his vision for a national curriculum was built upon more ideological grounds, honing in on a philosophy of “aspirational nationalism” (Anderson & Parkin, 2010, p. 87). The Australian Education Minister under Howard, Brendan Nelson, mirrored the discourse of his predecessor, Dawkins, by explicitly linking the idea of a national curriculum with the Australian Government’s economic agenda. In addition to this, Nelson claimed that a national curriculum was “in Australia’s national interest, and that it would support proud and well-developed Australians” (as cited in Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 305). Seddon (2001, p. 316) framed this approach as a “conservative backlash to curriculum,” wherein due to the cultural disruption globalisation was having on the nation-state, the Australian Government sought to reclaim notions of national identity. In an attempt “to create one account of the nation’s historical past and implicitly a possible future” (Lingard, 2018, p. 57), Howard emphasised the teaching of Australian history and values by calling for a National Inquiry into the Teaching of History in 2000, and convening a National History Summit in 2006.

But after discourses of nationalism and identity politics had failed to invoke national curriculum collaboration, Nelson would resort to discourses of crisis, deficiency, and pessimism (Yorke, 2004, p. 8). Utilising an ‘evidence by numbers’ approach, Nelson painted the picture of a fledgling school system that was at risk of lagging behind the rest of the world (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 299). From this, he promoted the idea that Australia ‘needed’ a national curriculum, arguing that it was not possible to prepare students to be ‘internationally competitive’ across eight educational jurisdictions (Yorke, 2004, p. 13). Evidently, although the Australian Government had initially respected the states’ and territories’ constitutional rights over education, this would no longer be the case, with Julie Bishop (Nelson’s successor as Education Minister) telling the States to hand over curriculum responsibility to a “sensible centre” (Reid, 2019, p. 201).

Towards the end of Howard’s tenure, state–federal relations had become acrimonious (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 296; Reid, 2019, p. 201). Tiring of indirect strategies to influence curriculum and schooling, the Australian Government resorted to coercion tactics in order to get



the states and territories to comply with the federal agenda. Utilising a “vertical fiscal imbalance” of power (Gable & Lingard, 2013, p. 4), the Australian Government tied pre-specified outcomes and targets to accountability and funding (Seddon, 2001, p. 320). The most prominent example of this came in the form of Howard’s 2004 Schools Assistance Bill, which announced that federal funding for the next four years (2005–2008) was contingent on the states and territories agreeing to: a) curriculum initiatives as benchmarks for testing literacy and numeracy; b) schools having functioning flag poles and value posters in their foyer; c) nation-wide A–E reporting; d) performance pay for teachers; and d) compulsory teaching of Australian History in Years 9 and 10 (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 310). By manufacturing consent through this “carrot and stick of Commonwealth funding” (Reid, 2005, p. 10), the Australian Government had worked out a way to wield power over the States and Territories in order to have them comply with the federal agenda (Seddon, 2001, p. 296). However, Howard’s vision for a national curriculum would never be realised, with his 11-year reign as Australian Prime Minister coming to an end the following year.

### **2.3. 2007–2015: The Education Revolution**

In late-2007, Kevin Rudd of the ALP ousted John Howard to form the new Australian Government. Central to Rudd’s election campaign was the promise of delivering an ‘Education Revolution’, designed to improve both the equity and excellence of Australian schooling. Rudd saw education as the platform on which Australia’s future economic prosperity would rest, evidenced by a paper he had co-authored in the months prior to being elected, titled, *The Australian economy needs an education revolution* (Rudd & Smith, 2007). In it, he argued that the key for Australia’s future economic prosperity was investment in its human capital which would be the key driver for economic productivity growth (ibid., p. 5). Subsequently, education was placed within the national ‘productivity’ agenda (Gorur, 2013, p. 217). Wary of Australia’s exposure in the global economy, Rudd maintained that Australia needed to foster a competitive, innovative, knowledge based economy, lest it become “China’s quarry or Japan’s beach” (Rudd & Smith, 2007, p. 4). His aspirations for Australia to become “the most educated country, the most skilled economy and the best trained workforce in the world” (ibid., p. 3) were met with virtually no opposition from either the LNC or general public (Kayrooz & Parker, 2010, p. 161).

Under the banner of Education Revolution laid a suite of “significant standard-setting reforms” (Lambert, 2016, p. 470) that aimed to deliver a “world-class school system that would serve the needs of every Australian student” (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 307). Whilst Rudd articulated a vision for Australian schooling which mirrored the equity agenda of Hawke–Keating, he, in a similar vein to Howard, premised his calls for intervention into schooling on the basis that standards were not high enough, and that failing schools needed to be held accountable (Gorur, 2013, p. 220). This was despite the fact that Australian was a consistently high-achiever across all domains of PISA in each of the three previous instances (Brennan, 2011, p. 264; Thompson, 2013, p. 62). As a result, the new Australian Government’s reform agenda emphasised the need for lifting the achievement of students from disadvantaged school communities, raising the quality of teaching, and improving transparency and accountability of schools and school systems (Thompson, 2013, p. 62).

The most significant part of Rudd’s reforms, however, rested on the promise of delivering Australia’s first national curriculum — a challenge which had proved insurmountable for his predecessors. To achieve this, Rudd would need to first repair an increasingly dysfunctional federalism left in the wake of the Howard years (Anderson & Parkin, 2010, p. 90). Opting for a distinct approach to Howard in managing state–federal relations, Rudd sought to navigate the complexities of Australian federalism through discourses of “cooperative federalism” (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 309). Whilst some critics had labelled Rudd’s vision for a cooperative federalism as an attempt at standardisation, Rudd saw it as the only means for implementing “a more challenging, ambitious national policy agenda” (Rudd, 2007a, in Anderson & Parkin, 2010, p. 100). Here he suggested that the only viable option to get all Australian Governments to work together was by elevating COAG to a more central role (Rudd, 2005 as cited in Anderson & Parkin, 2010, p. 100).

Chaired by Rudd himself, COAG was elected as the key institution where the Australian Government would enact their education reforms. Undoubtedly, federal cooperation through COAG was made easier by a rare ‘political lining of the stars’, which saw eight out of the nine Australian Governments being represented by the ALP (Anderson & Parkin, 2010, p. 91). Through COAG, the State and Territory Education Ministers — who had historically been unwilling to secede control over education — would consent to the development of a national curriculum. Knowing this window of opportunity would not last, Rudd promptly moved to

formalise this consent through the ratification of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008), as well as legislating the establishment the *Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority* (ACARA) to oversee curriculum development. Both of these events were significant in determining Australia's contemporary educational landscape.

Once again endorsed by the State and Territory Education Ministers, the Melbourne Declaration outlined a clear vision for Australian schooling and an explicit agenda for national school reforms. In comparison to preceding declarations, the Melbourne Declaration was by far the most elaborate. This, as Lingard (2018, p. 57) points out, was likely due to the unique political complexion of ALP hegemony, which for the first time allowed for the idea of the 'national' to be achieved. Unlike preceding declarations, the Melbourne Declaration was not only able to articulate the national educational goals, but describe and detail the strategies that would allow these goals to be achieved. In addition to the setting of national teaching and learning standards, these strategies included the development of a national curriculum, assessment, and reporting program (Lambert, 2016, p. 464).

Three days after the signing of the Melbourne Declaration, an equally important piece of legislation passed through Australian Parliament which would dictate Australia's schooling future. Unanimously agreed upon by all Education Ministers, ACARA was established as an independent statutory body that would be jointly funded by all Australian Governments and overseen by MCEETYA (replaced in July 2009 by the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs [MCEECDYA]). ACARA was given functions to: a) develop and administer a national school curriculum; b) develop and administer national assessments; c) collect, manage and analyse student assessment data; and d) publish information relating to comparative school performance (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). These functions would manifest into the Australian Curriculum, the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN), and My School, respectively.

Development of the Australian Curriculum began in 2009 at the same time NAPLAN was launched. In alignment with the Australian Government's agenda for increased transparency and accountability, NAPLAN was seen as key for promoting quality and equitable education in Australia (Thompson, 2013, p. 63). NAPLAN is Australia's national large-scale assessment

which tests individual students' attainment of basic skills in literacy (reading and writing) and numeracy in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 annually. Again utilising a fiscal imbalance of power, Rudd announced that federal funding was conditional depending on school's participation in NAPLAN (OECD, 2012b, p. 14). The results of NAPLAN would then serve as the main source of data for the My School website, launched in 2010. My School measures a schools performance in NAPLAN against "60 'like-schools' across the nation" (Lingard, 2010, p. 130) and was the brainchild of the Australian Education Minister under Rudd, and his replacement as Prime Minister, Julia Gillard. In the face of significant opposition from teacher's unions, who objected to making NAPLAN data public, Gillard argued that the information provided by My School would inform debate and supply the evidence needed to make informed decisions about where resources should be allocated (Gorur, 2013, p. 220; Kayrooz & Parker, 2010, p. 175; OECD, 2012b, p. 15). Additionally, as Bonnor and Shepard outline, there was a dual intention of My School, wherein by making NAPLAN results publically available, the Australian Government sought to "coerce schools, systems, and governments to 'lift their game'" (Bonnor & Shepard, 2016, p. 22).

However, given the heterogeneous nature of Australian schooling, NAPLAN results alone were not enough to suffice reasonable comparison. It was not until ACARA created the *Index for Community Socio-educational Advantage* (ICSEA) that schools were able to be rendered 'comparable'. In a nutshell, ICSEA places schools on a numerical scale from 500 (lowest) to 1300 (highest) in relation to their level of 'advantage' (Gable & Lingard, 2013, p. 2). The factors that determine socio-educational advantage include: the socioeconomic background of the students (which includes parental occupation), school resourcing, level of school remoteness, and number Indigenous and English as a second language students, all of which were considered important in determining a student's educational achievement. As the OECD (2012b, p. 14) frames it, ICSEA was "tailor-made" for the purposes of identifying and comparing schools with similar students and characteristics.

In the background of NAPLAN and My School reforms, the Australian Curriculum continued to be developed, eventually being trialled in a roll out to schools in 2013. But even as it was rolled out, the new Australian Curriculum was not beyond controversy. The election of Anthony 'Tony' Abbott of the LNC in September 2013 saw a revival of old tensions in state-federal relations, as well as a rekindling of Australia's 'culture wars' (Lingard, 2018, p. 58). In early-2014, the

conservative Abbott indicated that there would be a review of the Australian Curriculum. The stated purpose of this review was to “evaluate the robustness, independence and balance of the Australian Curriculum by looking at both the development process and content” (Pyne, 2014, n.p.). In spite of ideological differences at the federal level, all states and territories would endorse the national curriculum by 2015.

Achieving an Australian national curriculum was an arduous and contentious process nearly four decades in the making. Yet, even though Australia has a national curriculum, it will never be ‘completely national’ (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 96). With education remaining constitutionally bound with the State and Territory Governments, the implementation and reception of the Australian Curriculum will always maintain distinct variations (e.g. NSW is relatively independent, choosing to keep their official curricula but aligning it to the Australian Curriculum) (Reid, 2019, p. 202). However, even though the Australian Government has no constitutional responsibility for schooling, today it exerts considerable influence and oversight of education and schooling. As Gable and Lingard (2013, p. 4) summarise it: “Education in Australia is thus a shared (but asymmetric) responsibility of governance, where the [Australian Government] holds potential influence over state compliance with its policy direction.”

### 3. Theoretical Framework

If the aim of the previous chapter was to explore *what* happened, then the aim of this chapter is to explore *why* it happened. This chapter serves two purposes. First, by analysing and explaining the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum, I am able to lay the theoretical groundwork that will be essential in answering my first research question: What were the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum? Secondly, this chapter provides the broader global and historic context from which the Australian Curriculum emerged, and will therefore prove essential in my critical policy analysis of the Australian Curriculum policy framework in the subsequent chapter.

I have split this chapter into four sections. In the first section I outline my *research paradigm*, consisting of my ontological and epistemological position, as well as my chosen theoretical and methodological frameworks. This information will give the reader insight into my set of beliefs which shape how I conduct my research. In the second section, *Conceptualising policy*, I provide my definition of policy, as well as introduce several key concepts that are relevant to this study. In the third section, *Globalised education policy discourses*, I theorise on how the phenomenon of 'globalisation' has affected national education policy-making, so that national and local policies are intrinsically linked to globalised education policy discourses. Here I utilise a large spatio-temporal frame to theorise and understand how these discourses became "vernacularized" (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 79) within the Australian education context. Finally, in *A national curriculum in a globalised world*, I answer my first research question by analysing and explaining how the primary motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum were driven by factors beyond the nation-state.

### 3.1. Research paradigm

#### 3.1.1. Ontology and epistemology

As is typical of qualitative research, the researcher makes their ontological and epistemological position transparent. This is on account of the widely held belief that one's perception of social phenomena substantially influences the way they frame it within their research (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70). As Furlong and Marsh (2010, p. 184) put it, our ontology and epistemology “are like a skin not a sweater; they cannot be put on and taken off whenever the researcher sees fit.” By acknowledging my ontological and epistemological position, I intend to make visible to the reader how I am oriented towards my research and how this has influenced everything from my choice of topic and research questions, to my choice of theoretical and methodological frameworks. This transparency I strive to maintain throughout this research.

I position myself within the critical constructivist paradigm, understanding reality as socially constructed, and knowledge as temporally and culturally situated. Epistemologically, this paradigm rests on the constructivist assumption that what we know of as ‘reality’ is a dialectical process that always involves a knower who constructs what is to be known (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 42). It is believed that, as knowers, our interpretations of the world and our knowledge constructs are “bound to context” (ibid., p. 17). Context is an essential element for the critical constructivist and is hence a key part of this study. Each individual has their own unique context, determined by a complex and interwoven set of dynamics that include historic, sociocultural, economic, and political elements (ibid., p. 25). Relating to education and schooling, students cannot be ‘decontextualised’ from their experiences. Understanding this means rejection of what Freire terms, the “Banking concept of education” (1970, p. 71), where instead of viewing students as unique human beings with their own histories, hopes, fears, doubts, and knowledge, they are seen as “empty vessels” devoid of context (ibid., p. 79).

This research position fundamentally contrasts with those oriented towards positivism, who, in an attempt to mirror the natural sciences, decontextualize themselves as active participants in the process of knowledge creation. In an effort to find ‘objective’ knowledge, positivists generalise phenomena and dismiss differences for the sake of universal comparability (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70). Whilst I do not share the positivist worldview — believing instead that no objective perspective of reality can be achieved as knowledge of the world is limited by social actors' perceptions of it — I do not dismiss it entirely as a way of gaining knowledge; only that I do not believe that a unitary, all-encompassing, or ‘God-like’ body of knowledge cannot exist within this reality.

Whilst the constructivist aspect of the paradigm argues that knowledge of the world is constructed in the minds of all, the critical aspect of the paradigm holds that there are some knowledges which are subjugated by relations of power in society, with only certain groups and institutions being able to determine what is considered ‘legitimate knowledge’ (Kincheloe, 2005, p. 17). As it pertains to curriculum, the selection and omission of certain knowledges is not seen as neutral, but rather as some group's vision of what is and is not considered legitimate knowledge (Apple, 1993, p. 1). Legitimate knowledge, argues Roberts (2017, p. 57), inherently encompasses values, and often the values of the powerful. This is echoed by Bourdieu and Passeron (1990, p. 5) who, in their seminal text, *Reproduction in Education, Society and Culture*, argue that education is divided into ‘dominant’ and ‘dominated’ groups, whereby dominant groups impose by means of pedagogic action a “cultural arbitrary” as the legitimate definition of educational culture. Through this “symbolic violence” (ibid., p. 3), dominant groups in society are able to (re)produce and maintain their power as it is they who are both the proprietors of knowledge and those with the greatest access to this knowledge. Theorising on the relationship between knowledge and power is a central part of the critical constructivist paradigm. As my overarching interest in this study is education’s relationship with economic, cultural, and political power — particularly in regards to curriculum control — the critical constructivist paradigm is fitting.



Before outlining my theoretical and methodological frameworks, I should briefly note that, whilst I subscribe to Bourdieu and Passeron's argument that dominant groups can reproduce their power through the control of knowledge, I also acknowledge Kendall and Wickham's (2011, p. 49) word of caution, understanding that there is a need to avoid "conspiratory thinking" when employing the notion of 'power'. In this regard, I do not see power as "something hidden in the background doing the dirty work" (ibid., p. 49), nor do I see it as only oppressive (as in the dominant/dominated nexus). Rather, drawing from Foucault (1980), I see power as existing relationally between forces; not as something concentrated within a single entity, but as something that is diffused across a network of relations which encompasses the whole of society (Olszen, et al., 2004, p. 24). By this logic, I do not see the Australian Government as a totalitarian, monolithic entity; ergo they did not *own* the power to construct a national curriculum. Instead, this power was diffused across across a network of policy-makers who determine curriculum policy; the State and Territory education authorities who operate and regulate schools; the "thousands of teachers, academics, parents, business, and community groups who were consulted in the curriculum development phases" (ACARA, 2012a, p. 6); and the teachers and students who administer and receive the curriculum, to name only a few.

In essence, power is not not a singular entity possessed by 'the dominant' to oppress 'the dominated' (Cahill, 2015, 303). Instead, power is exercised relationally between individuals, not only placing limits on what we can do, but also opening up new ways of acting and thinking about ourselves. As Hekman (2014, p. 454) expresses, this is the paradox of power, whereby:

"The power that constrains us is at the same time the power that gives us the means to resist and the agency to employ those means... We are within power and it is from this position that we resist power."

Rather than viewing individuals as passive recipients, critical constructivists view them as active participants in the social construction of their own reality (Demarrais, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 22). Accordingly, the aim of the critical constructivist is to produce and convey critical knowledge which enables human beings to emancipate themselves beyond the determinism of the dominant/dominated nexus. This emancipation is achieved through the realisation that, although there are macro-level structures which constrain and oppress, there is at the micro-level, human agency (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 7; Demarrais, & LeCompte, 1999, p. 21). It is through my theoretical and methodological frameworks that I intend to produce and convey knowledge which enables agency.

### 3.1.2. Theoretical and methodological frameworks

The theoretical framework that I have chosen is built upon a tripartite combination of post-colonialism, post-structuralism, and critical theory. These three theories directly relate to the critical constructivist paradigm by maintaining that our knowledge of the world, self, and other is constructed within certain historical, cultural, social, political and economic contexts. The use of three theories instead of one is paramount in my investigation and where they intersect is through my selected research methodology of *Critical Policy Analysis* (CPA). CPA encompasses a number of different perspectives that aim to critique and offer alternative strategies for examining educational policy issues (Young & Diem, 2014, p. 79). Generally, there are six concerns which CPA deals with. These are:

1. Interrogating the roots and development of educational policy;
2. The difference between policy rhetoric and practiced reality;
3. Examining the distribution of power, resources, and knowledge and the creation of “winners” and “losers;”
4. Scrutinising the complex systems and environments in which policy is made and implemented;
5. Exploring social stratification and the impact of policy on inequality; and
6. The nature of resistance to or engagement in policy by members of historically underrepresented groups. (Diem, et al., 2014, p. 1072-1073)

Whilst these concerns are reflected in a great deal of critical policy work, the way they are addressed is wholly dependent on the theoretical perspective(s) in which the analyst adopts. The

inextricable relationship between theory and methodology is a key distinguishing feature of CPA, and it is important for the reader to bear in mind that, if the same policy were explored by another critical policy analyst who was using a different theoretical perspective, the outcome would be different.

Another key distinguishing feature of CPA is the recognition that analysis of policy not only requires analysis of content, but also analysis of context which provides meaning and legitimacy (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 75). In the contemporary era, the context of education policy is thought to be both historically constituted and globally situated (Apple, 2006, p. 21; Ball, 2012, p. 5; Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 289; Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 2; Ozga, 2005, p. 117; Piattoeva, 2010, p. 3). Hence, CPA entails a disposition which recognises the relationality and interconnectivity of education policy processes at the local, national, regional, and global levels. Often, this is done through first acknowledging the profound effects ‘globalisation’ has had on both education policy-making and policy analysis. However, rather than reifying globalisation as the “all-encompassing blanket cause” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 44) of these policy developments, CPA calls for a nuanced and detailed understanding of globalisation’s specific effects on national education policy contexts. As Olssen, Codd, and O’Neill (2004, p. 11) state:

“In order to understand the production of education policy within individual nation-states ... it is necessary to understand the origins and determining influences of that policy in relation to social, cultural, political and economic forces that transcend the context of its national production.”

CPA facilitates such an understanding through critical theoretical frameworks which enable the analyst to develop a nuanced, holistic understanding of the complexities associated with education policy-making, specifically by situating the policy in the context from which it emerged (Taylor, 1997, p. 24; Young & Diem, 2014, p. 79). A more thorough explanation of CPA and its application to this research will be done in Chapter 4, *Methodology*. But for now, I will briefly outline why each of the selected theories are essential to this study.

To establish the context from which the Australian Curriculum emerged, and to highlight the complexity of policy-making processes, I draw from three theories. Firstly, post-colonialism provides a useful analytic tool at both the global and national level. In its most technical sense, ‘post-colonialism’ refers to the period after colonial rule (i.e. post-World War II). However, as a

theoretical lens, this approach will help to unveil and deconstruct the asymmetric power relations of colonialism (and the imperialism that later displaced it), and how these power relations remain embedded in contemporary educational institutions, policies, and practices (Hickling-Hudson, 1998, p. 338). At the global level, post-colonialism will be employed as a way of conceptualising the power relations left intact post-WWII, as well as helping to understand how the OECD, a central actor in the global education policy field, was able to transform itself from a US-centric Cold War institution into a dominant actor shaping contemporary education policy (Centeno, 2019, p. 63). When employed at the national level, post-colonialism will similarly be used to unveil and deconstruct power relations within Australia's "Eurocentric education system" (Morgan, 2017, p. 2). Through a post-colonial lens, my CPA places emphasis upon how Australia, a post-colonial settler society, neglects diversity in order to maintain the idea of a homogenous nation. In this regard, post-colonialism naturally favours a post-structuralist perspective by linking the process and effects of colonialism to discourse and the politics of representation (Kapoor, 2002, pp. 647-648).

Post-structuralism proves essential, particularly as I am interested in discerning how particular dominant discourses came to be formed, how they were made to appear 'rational' and 'unified', and how they shaped and appeared within the Australian Curriculum policy framework. This is post-structuralism in the 'Foucauldian sense', where language is seen as inseparable from the history and culture that condition it (Arribas-Ayllon, & Walkerdine, 2011, p. 2). Although Foucault himself eschewed the label of 'post-structuralist', many of his works were dedicated to similar discernments (e.g. *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison* [Foucault, 1995]). Discourses, Foucault believed, were historically situated and shaped over time, and hence could only be understood with reference to their context (Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 20; Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 5). But instead of attributing the development of discourse to any single cause or principle, Foucault focused on the interplay between knowledge and power at the level of the social institution and the society, and how relations of power enabled some discourses to become hegemonic (Ball, 2013, p. 38). In this study, poststructuralism will be used to interrogate the discursive construction of Australia's national curriculum policy. In order to explore and unveil ideology and power relations which enabled some policy discourses to become hegemonic, I employ a historical perspective facilitated by critical theory.

Although there are many ‘critical theories’ (e.g. Marxism, feminism, critical race theory, etc.), critical theorists are unified by their goal of challenging injustice and the (re)production of social inequalities (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 6). Critical theory’s starting point is that thought is mediated by historically constituted power relations; hence facts are never neutral, but always embedded in contexts (Harris-Hart, 2010, p. 299). Critical theorists argue that it is only by bringing history more centrally into the frame that we can begin to understand the limitations of the present, so as to build the future more wisely (Connell, 2013, p. 104). Taylor (1997, p. 30) elucidates this, stating that in order “to be strategically and politically useful,” it is important to employ ‘relationality’, a notion which is seen as a crucial feature of CPA. Thinking relationally necessitates that analyses are located within their broader context, including their historical context (ibid., p. 30).

Whilst I utilise a historical perspective for this study, it is important for the reader to note that the historical narrative I layout is overlapping and marked by ruptures and discontinuities. Thus, rather than attempting to provide a linear, coherent, and definitive account of historical developments, I only attempt at connecting salient moments in history that can help explain where we are today. It is through critical theory, in conjunction with post-structuralism and post-colonialism, that I am able to establish a large spatio-temporal frame to highlight how the discourses associated with globalisation came to frame the Australian Government’s motivations for its broader national schooling agenda, of which the Australian Curriculum was a constitutive part. This will be done in the following section. But before doing so, I need to take a brief detour to define how I conceptualise policy. Ball (1993, p. 10) contends that a common pitfall in much policy research is that there are frequently taken for granted assumptions about what is meant by ‘policy’. In order to avoid this pitfall, the following section is dedicated to defining how I conceptualise policy. My conceptualisation of policy as the *authoritative allocation of values* subsumes a number of key concepts that are relevant to this study, such as power, ideology, discourse, and hegemony.

## 3.2. Conceptualising policy

### 3.2.1. The authoritative allocation of values

As the focal point of this study is Australia's national curriculum policy, my use of the word 'policy' strictly refers to 'public policy,' in that it is the state (i.e. the Australian Government) and its institutions (i.e. ACARA) who developed it. Following this, I conceptualise policy as the authoritative allocation of values. This long standing conceptualisation of what policy does derives from Eaton (1953, as cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 4), where policies are said to "articulate or presuppose certain values that direct people towards certain actions in a way that is authoritative." In the Australian schooling context, the Australian Government is able to articulate and allocate its value preferences through its education policies. Whether it is for symbolic (e.g. through building a sense of nationhood) or material (e.g. by allocating resources) purposes, the Australian Government's education policies provide the framework which directs educational practice in Australia (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. ix). In turn, this defines the nature and purpose of education and schooling.

Education is a normative concept which has historically been used to meet a number of ends; be they social, economic, political, or moral. Most commonly, it is the state who determines what these ends are, and it is through the institution of schooling that the state is able to allocate its value preferences (Morgan, 2017, p. 3; Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 2). Subsequently, education policy-making necessitates thinking about values. In a liberal democratic society like Australia, education policies are generally thought to articulate values in 5 domains: equity, efficiency, security, liberty, and community (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 76). These policy values are not mutually exclusive per se, nor are their definitions concrete. Rather, they exist simultaneously, but frequently need to be reconciled with other 'competing' values in a process involving compromises and trade-offs (ibid., p. 71). During this process, values are assembled, organised, and *positioned* relative to other values, with some values taking precedence over others. A hypothetical example would be if the Australian Government mandated that each school was required to build a large fence around their perimeters. In this situation, the policy might be seen as both symbolic (i.e. wanting to protect schools) and material (i.e. distribution of resources). But in order to construct the policy, policy-makers would need to first reconcile the value of student

safety (i.e. security) with the potential negative effects this may have on the community and student autonomy (i.e. liberty).

Adding to the complexity of policy-making is the subjectiveness of defining what each value means. Rarely is policy the product of one person and rarely are value definitions uniform, with each value being contested and subjected to negotiation over interpretation at various stages in the legislative process (Ball, 1993, p. 12). Furthermore, even once consensus has been achieved and the policy enacted, this does not guarantee that the policy is ‘complete’. As Ball (ibid., p. 12) notes, policies do not exist in social or institutional vacuums; rather, they have a tendency of being reworked and reoriented in the arena of politics. Most prominently, this is on account of changing political climates (e.g. caused by an economic crisis), as well as the inevitable changing of key interpreters (e.g. Ministers of Parliament). In effect, policy-making is a subjective and messy process that nearly always involves various compromises and trade-offs. Whilst policies allocate values, they also embody values. These values, although subject to contestation and interpretation, are determined by those in power who position them in a way that is reflective of, and in alignment with, their particular ideology (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 11).

### 3.2.2. Power and ideology

Power and ideology are central aspects of policy-making. Throughout recent history, the state’s use of political power was often exercised physically (e.g. when a country chose to occupy another in order to take their resources). In modern society however, the state exercises its political power largely through the ideological workings of language and discourse (be it text, spoken, or visual) (Fairclough, 2001, p. 2; Van Dijk, 2006, p. 115; Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 10). There are many ways to define ‘ideology’. A simple but widely accepted definition comes from Van Dijk (2006, p. 116), who defines ideology as “a shared system of ideas that are the basis of a social group's self-image.” Ideologies are essential in the organisation of group identity, actions, and aims by specifying what values are relevant to the group in relation to other social groups (i.e. what makes us, ‘us’ and them, ‘them’) (ibid., p. 116). It is through policy that policy-makers (as representatives of the state) have the power to express and (re)produce their particular ideology through the creation of discourses which constitute ‘knowledge’ and ‘truth’ (Ball, 2006,



p. 48; Diem, et al., 2014, p. 1078; Foucault, 1980, p. 13). This, in turn, helps them to legitimise and maintain their power, as well as help them to pursue a particular agenda.

### 3.2.3. Discourse and hegemony

Similar to ideology, there are many ways to define ‘discourse’. In the context of this study, discourse is understood as an institutionalised way of speaking and writing which constructs the parameters for which we (as subjects) are positioned within, as well as constraining the possibilities of what can be said and done (Bacchi, 2000, p. 50). Policy is seen as “discursive embodiments of ideology and power relations” (Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 2) because of the way it institutionalises and regulates ways of talking, thinking, and acting (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 35). To Ball (1993, p. 14), the primary effect of policy is discursive, for it changes the possibilities we have for thinking ‘otherwise’. Often, policy does this by demarcating which issues are deemed relevant, which are not or ill-defined, and which are plainly deemed unworthy of interest (Bacchi, 2000, p. 49). For example, through the creation of policy discourses, the state is able to steer public opinion regarding the importance of holding failing students, teachers, and schools accountable via increased transparency. However, this discourse may not define, or completely overlook, the reasons why this failure exists. This is an important aspect of policy: rather than reflecting social reality, policy discourses construct reality through the mobilisation of truth claims (Ball, 2015, p. 307). In this sense, there is a dialectical relationship involved, whereby policy both shapes, and is shaped by, discourse. Put another way, it is both the product and the producer of discourse.

The power *of* discourse resides in the fact that discourses are able to delineate what is and isn’t sayable. The power *over* discourse however, refers to those with power in society imposing language and regulating discursive practices so that it becomes more closely aligned with their preferences (Fairclough, 2001, p. 22; Kincheloe, 2005, p. 36). One aspect of such control is ideological, wherein policy-makers and institutions that strive for power will try to influence the discourse of a society so that it is ‘ideologically harmonised’ with their preferences (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 8; Fairclough, 2001, p. 25; Bacchi, 2000, p. 55). Policy-makers are seen as those with power in society because of their unique access to shaping discourse, and in turn, constituting what counts as knowledge (Van Dijk, 1993, p. 280). However, here it is important to remember the relationality of power. Policy-makers still need to operate within the confines of



the state (the traditional container for policy-making), which may include constitutional limitations, various checks and balances in the legislative processes, and the opposing ideologies of other policy-makers. Hence, whilst policy represents the official discourse of the state, it is often the result of negotiated interactions between parties as they form and inform discourses (Cahill, 2015, p. 304).

In complex modern societies like our own, we are enmeshed in a variety of discourses that each compete for power (Ball, 1993, p. 14). Whilst there are multiple discourses, there are a few that become dominant, ultimately shaping and constraining how we view and act in the world. When we are unaware that alternative discourses exist, we arrive at the Gramscian concept of hegemony (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 8). I find that the easiest way to understand the concept of hegemony is through the parable written by American author, David Foster Wallace, titled, *This is Water* (2009, p. 3). The parable goes:

There are these two young fish swimming along, and they happen to meet an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says, “Morning, boys. How’s the water?”  
And the two young fish swim on for a bit, and then eventually one of them looks over at the other and goes, “What the hell is water?”

When a discourse is so widely accepted, losing both its ideological nature and concealing relations of power, it is capable of becoming hegemonic. Once a discourse has achieved hegemony, it appears to be “neutral” (Wodak & Meyer, 2009, p. 8), “common ground” (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 118), or even “common sense” (Harvey, 2007, p. 3). Gramsci (1971 as cited in Apple, 2004, p. 25) argued that hegemony offers a way of understanding the power-ideology-discourse nexus, as those with power in society will seek to control discourse in order to maintain power and to see to it that their ideological goals are realised. Thus, discourses have the potential to become hegemonic when those with power control it in a way that suits their preferences until they are the “socially and culturally accepted ‘normality’” (Cahill, 2015, p. 306).

Figure 2 has been created to help the reader understand my conceptualisation of policy. Beginning within the traditional confines of policy production, the state (or more specifically, the liberal democratic state), the ideologies of various policy-makers and political parties struggle for power. The manifestation of this political struggle are policy documents which allocate

values in five broad domains. In educational terms, the way these values are positioned determine the nature and purpose of schooling. In addition to determining what happens in school, education policies shape, and are shaped by, discourses. They are themselves discursive embodiments of power and ideology and represent the official discourse of the state. When controlled over time, policy discourses have the potential for becoming hegemonic, presenting themselves as the only viable solution and making it difficult to think otherwise. It is only by drawing attention to it that the perpetual cycle of hegemony can be interrupted.

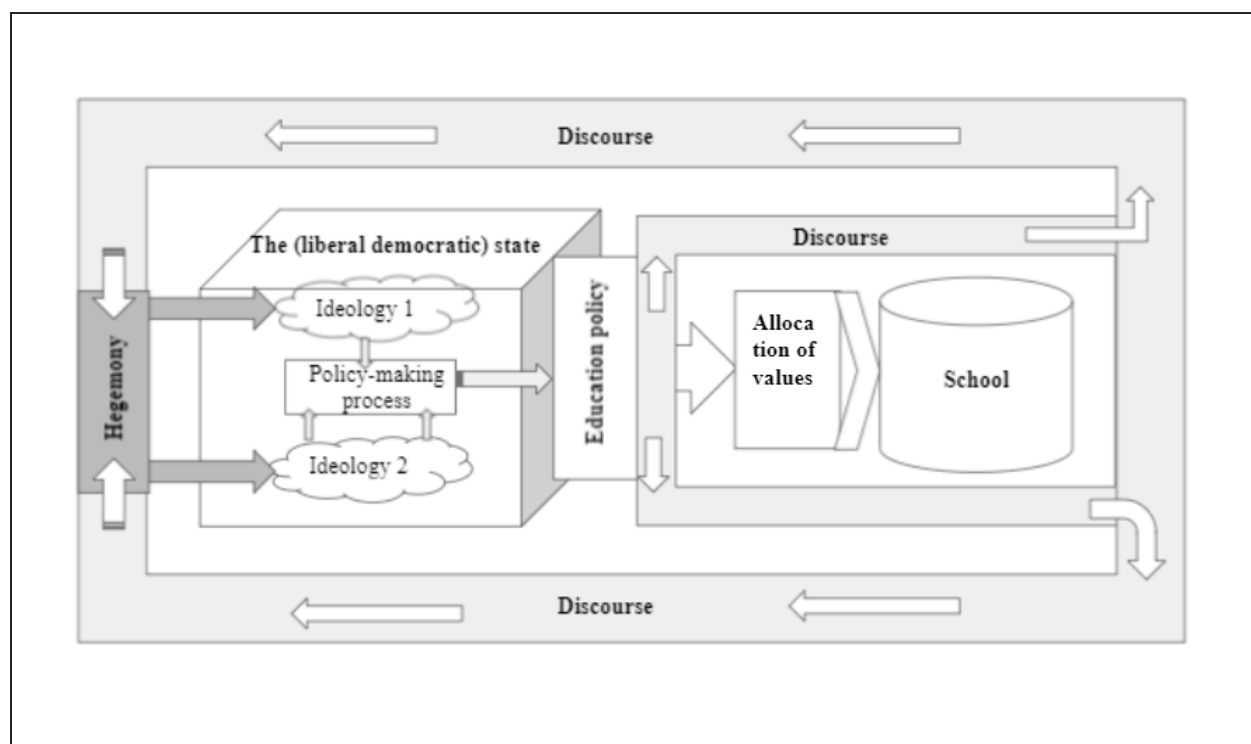


Figure 3: Conceptualisation of policy

### 3.3. Globalised education policy discourses

The state has traditionally been the domain in which education policies have been produced (Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 1). Through its education policy, the state is able to authoritatively allocate its value preferences and, in turn, determine the nature and purpose of schooling. Whilst education policy remains largely determined by the state, the nature and role of the state has been reconfigured (Piattoeva, 2010, p. 9). This is chiefly on account of escalating ‘globalisation’, a phenomenon that has transformed the contents of education policy, as well as the cultural,

political, and economic contexts from which those policies emerge. Under conditions of globalisation, it is thought that the state now represents a site which is increasingly influenced, not only by external actors, but also by external discourses (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. xii).

The purpose of this section is to understand the origins and determining influences of the Australian Curriculum. My starting assumption is that national education policies (such as the Australian Curriculum policy framework) are influenced by globalised education policy discourses. This assumption derives from three texts which formed the basis of my understanding. These texts were: Rizvi and Lingard's (2010), *Globalizing Education Policy*, Olssen, Codd, and O'Neill's (2004), *Global Education Policy: Globalisation, Citizenship and Democracy*, and *The Global Handbook of Education Policy* edited by Mundy, Green, Lingard, and Verger (2016). The unifying feature of these three texts is the emphasis they place on the need for situating national education policy within a broader historic and global context. Hence, in order to understand the Australian Curriculum, I need to first gain an understanding of the broader context which shaped it. I begin by theorising how globalisation has reconstituted the state culturally, politically, and economically. Following this, I outline the post-colonial argument that the Anglo-American ideology of 'neoliberalism' has become the hegemonic understanding of globalisation. Finally, I examine how education policy sits at the nexus of these developments. First by exploring the role intergovernmental organisations, specifically the OECD, have played in promoting discourses of human capital formation fitting of the neoliberal agenda; and secondly, by outlining how national governments readily utilise these discourses to implement top-down education reforms.

### 3.3.1. Theorising globalisation

Contemporary education policies are deeply implicated in the processes and discourses of globalisation. However, defining exactly *how* they are implicated is complex given the sheer scale and magnitude of 'globalisation'. Undoubtedly globalisation is a multidimensional phenomenon which has caused a "widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnectedness in all aspects of contemporary social life" (Held, et al., 1999, p. 2). This global interconnectedness has engendered a cognitive shift, expressed through both a public awareness that distant events can impact the local (e.g. September 11 or the recent Black Lives

Matter movement), as well as public perceptions of a shrinking time and space (e.g. through the internet permitting instantaneous global communication and trade) (Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 4). Yet despite its seemingly obvious manifestations, the notion of globalisation remains highly contested.

Theories of globalisation vary according to several key features, including how it is framed chronologically (e.g. as natural to the human condition, or as an essential component of the ‘modernity’ project, or a late 20th-century phenomena), what its main characteristics are (e.g. cultural, political, economic, technological, ideological, or a combination of some/all of these elements), and whether its impact on human life has been good or bad (Jackson, 2016, p. 13). These features of globalisation are heavily contested primarily on account of globalisation impacting the local in variegated and vernacular ways (Appadurai, 1996, p. 17). So whilst there has been a surge in worldwide interconnectedness, this interconnectedness is experienced and thus interpreted differently by individuals, communities, and countries across various spatio-temporalities. Globalisation therefore cannot be viewed as a generalised or uniform phenomenon, but instead needs to be viewed as a dynamic and contextualised phenomenon which is expressed through particular histories and political configurations (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. x; Griva & Chryssochoou, 2015, p. 880).

Despite the processes of globalisation impacting the local in variegated ways, there are features of the current epoch which can be seen as common globally. For instance, thanks to substantial advancements in transport and information and communications technology (ICT), there has been an acceleration of *global flows* — consisting of people, money, media, and ideas — all of which take increasingly non-isomorphic paths at a speed, scale, and volume never seen before in human history (Appadurai, 1990, p. 301; Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 4; Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 4). There are three prominent and interrelated arguments about the effects these global flows have had on the nation-state.

The first can be categorised as the *cultural effect* of globalisation, whereby due to the increased flows of people through such means as employment, education, tourism, or exile, ‘deterritorialization’ has become a defining feature of the modern world (Appadurai, 1990, p. 301). The increased flow of people, in conjunction with an increased flow of ideas (e.g. through media and the internet), is thought to have “destabilized the fixity of ourselves and others”

(Gupta & Ferguson, 1992, p. 20) in relation to national identity, leading to the emergence of what Appadurai (1996, p. 21) terms, “post-national identity.” This has produced a range of contradictory responses, from a heightened sense of ‘global citizenship’ that extends beyond the nation-state (Vulliamy, 2010, p. 4), to an increase in xenophobia (Appadurai, 1990, p. 306). In particular, the past decade has witnessed a surge in ethno-nationalist sentiments around the world (e.g. Trumpism in the United States) (Rizvi, 2019, p. 315). Overall, the nation, as a representation of collective identity and common purpose, has been unsettled.

The second argument relates to the *political effect* global flows have had on the nation-state. In the context of globalisation, the assumption of sovereign policy formation as territorially bound within nation-states has been challenged (Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 17; Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 489). Today, national policy content and production processes are considered to be simultaneously located within a “global system” (Ball, 2012, p. 9). This global system is comprised of a broad range of actors who work beyond the scope of the nation-state, including: supra and intergovernmental organisations (e.g. OECD, World Bank, International Monetary Fund [IMF]), non-government organisations, sub-national groups, policy networks, transnational corporations, think tanks and various other business interests. Each of these actors carry their own ideologies and each has a varying level of influence in different contexts; for example, the World Bank and IMF are more prevalent in Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America than they are in the OECD-dominated Anglo-American sphere (Harber, 2014, p. 76). It is widely believed that the transition from national government to global governance has weakened the state as the dominant political jurisdiction and thus diminished national steering of policy (Ball, 1998, p. 120; Carnoy, 2016, p. 27; Seddon, 2001, p. 307). For instance, Ball (2012, p. 15) proclaims that increased global governance, particularly from the private sector, has led to the “denationalization of the state,” where the state is no longer seen as the sole determiner of what values it allocates through policy. However, whilst the state is no longer the “static and closed container of sociopolitical relations” (Piattoeva, 2010, p. 9) it once was, it still remains the domain for which policies are formed. Ultimately, the state still maintains considerable control over how it reacts to global forces (Carnoy, 2016, p. 40; Coulby & Zambeta, 2005, p. 8).

Intersecting with the cultural and political effects is the argument that globalisation has led to a convergence of the norms and values in which policies allocate (Carnoy, 2016, p. 29). This has

particularly been the case in regards to *economic globalisation*, which has placed new pressures on the sovereignty of national governments. With rapid advancements in ICT and transport, the increased flows of trade and capital have heightened the integration of national economies and led to the creation of ‘a globalised economy’ (Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 4; Vulliamy, 2010, p. 3). At the centre of economic globalisation has been transnational corporations (TNCs), which today account for a significant portion of the world's capital and are the single most powerful force in creating global shifts in economic activity (Coulby & Zambeta, 2005, p. 8; Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 26; Vulliamy, 2010, p. 3). TNCs have maintained strong influence over national economies through their geographic flexibility and decentralised operations, which has enabled them to seek comparative advantage and in turn dictate the nature of the global market (Harvey, 2007, p. 100). Often supported by favourable international trade policies (e.g. GATS), TNCs have circumnavigated the globe in pursuit of maximal profit, often by shifting their operations to places of tax privileges, cheap labour, and low regulations (Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 27; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 28).

It is widely thought that the power of TNCs within the globalised economy has forced a restructuring of national economic forms and structures so that, in order to assure its legitimacy, the state needs to make itself attractive for the mass of hypermobile capital that moves globally choosing ‘winners’ over ‘losers’ (Carnoy 2016, p. 27). Rizvi and Lingard (2010, p. 28) and Olssen, Codd and O’Neill (2004, p. 10) state that the global dominance of TNCs has enabled the spread of a global political-economic ideology which stresses such notions as: a diminished role for the state, free trade, marketization, limited regulation, and privatization. Bundled together, these ideas constitute what is referred to as *neoliberalism*.

### 3.3.2. Globalisation in the neoliberal imaginary

Many authors contend that economic globalisation as experienced over the past 30 years has been shaped by neoliberal ideology (Apple, 1993; 2006; Ball, 1998; 2012; Carpenter, et al., 2014; Coulby & Zambetta, 2005; Connell, 2013; Giroux, 2008; Harvey, 2007; Hill & Kumar, 2009; Humphrys, 2018; Olssen, et al., 2004; Rizvi, 2017; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Sahlberg, 2011). The notion of ‘neoliberalism’ has been widely conceived and diversely deployed within the social sciences — ranging from a doctrine and set of ideas regarding economic policies, to a

political project and governing rationality (Humphreys, 2018, p. 52). Despite conceptual diversity, there are ideological commonalities which underpin neoliberalism.

The ideological assumptions associated with neoliberalism centre around its fundamental principle, *market rationality*, where the market (a supposed ‘apolitical force’) is valued above all else and should be used as the guiding light behind all political, social, and economic decisions (Giroux, 2008, p. 2; Harvey, 2007, p. 2). The valorisation of the market is thought to have reconstituted the state’s primary role to “manager of the national economy” (Rizvi & Lingard, 2000, p. 423), whereby in order to ensure its competitiveness, the (neoliberal) state transitions from provision of services and welfare to ensuring the integrity of money (i.e. manage inflation), the protection of property rights, and the establishment of new markets where none previously existed; for instance, in healthcare, education, water supply, agriculture, etc. (Harvey, 2007, p. 3). Outside of this, the state should (theoretically) not intervene. This is in part due to neoliberalism’s philosophical belief that society is constituted by self-maximising individuals whose behaviour is based on competitive, economic self-interest, and that human well-being is best advanced through fostering individual liberty, which in turn will encourage personal responsibility (Esposito & Perez, 2014, p. 418). State intervention, therefore, is seen as inimical to the interests of the individual (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 138; Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 174).

The discourses associated with neoliberalism are derived from market rationality and have the overall aim of improving economic efficiency through advocating for small(er) government, low(er) taxation, free(r) trade, a more flexible labour market, deregulation, privatisation, increased competition, consumer choice, and individualism (Connell, 2013, p. 99; Harvey, 2007, p. 5; Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 3; Humphrys, 2018, p. 2). Drawing from Canadian philosopher, Charles Taylor, Rizvi (2017, p. 5) and Ball (2012, p. 7) both make the argument that these discourses are so widespread, and are so implicit within our collective consciousness, that neoliberalism has become the dominant ‘social imaginary’ of globalisation. In short, the notion of ‘social imaginary’ draws parallel to the Gramscian concept of hegemony which was introduced earlier in this chapter, as although globalisation is an all-encompassing phenomenon consisting of a wide-variety of intersecting and overlapping elements, neoliberal ideology frames it as fundamentally economic by portraying the world as one big, interconnected, and



competitive marketplace. This ideology is based on a presumed logic that economic globalisation is desirable for all and is an inevitable outcome of historical processes which nobody is in charge of (Rizvi, 2017, p. 6; Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 177). These are normative claims however, and overlook the fact that implementing the neoliberal imaginary required significant political, economic and social transformation (Humphrys, 2018, p. 1).

There was no single process that resulted in neoliberalism becoming the hegemonic understanding of globalisation; rather, it occurred through a range of historically interrelated processes (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 42). Firstly, it emerged as a response to prolonged economic crises in the Anglo-American sphere during the late-1960's and early-1970's. In the Australian context, this would notably manifest into the Australian economy experiencing five recessions between 1973 and 1983 (Graham, et al., 2015, p. 237; Humphreys, 2018, p. 4). To counteract economic turbulence, the then Australian Government's began their transition away from Keynesianism welfarism (Connell, 2013, p. 100; Humphreys, 2018, pp. 70-76). Most pertinently, this transition came in the form of tariff cuts and the deregulation of protection for local manufacturing, a move that would effectively lead to the collapse of the Australian manufacturing industry as it was unable to compete with the emerging industrialising economies of Japan, Taiwan, and Korea (Graham, et al., 2015, p. 237; Connell, 2013, p. 104). Unintendedly, this would contribute to the already high levels of unemployment and inflation within Australia: a combined economic phenomenon known as 'stagflation' which was mirrored within the capitalist-West. Ultimately, these events paved the way for the dismantling of the Keynesian welfare state in Australia, and the all-but-universal dismantling of Keynesianism globally.

Neoliberal ideology presented itself as a viable economic alternative and was on hand to fill the ideological void left by Keynesianism, first becoming established as economic orthodoxy in the United Kingdom (UK) under Margeret Thatcher, and in the United States (US) under Ronald Reagan in the late-1970's and early-1980's (Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 174; Harvey, 2007, p. 5). From these epicentres, neoliberal ideology would soon spread throughout the Anglo-American sphere, with countries such as Ireland (Cahill, 2015, p. 301), New Zealand (Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 11) and Australia (Humphreys, 2018, p. 2) all adopting the ideology, albeit in vernacularized forms and to varying levels of intensity. Interestingly, once achieved, neoliberal ideology would achieve hegemony by becoming the guiding doctrine across all major



political parties, irrespective of which side of the political spectrum they sat (Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 14; Humphreys, 2018, p. 2).

Thatcher and Reagan both revelled in a scepticism towards government and a distrust of the public sector in general (Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. xi). This was reflected in their negative discourses about the inefficiency of the public sphere, as well as their advocacy for increasing competition through the deregulation and privatisation of previously state-owned industries (Slater, 2015, p. 4). To overcome what was seen as an inefficient public sector, Thatcher and Reagan looked to import the language and management style of business into the public sector (Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 20). Business-borrowed language and strategies, such as increased accountability, standard setting, quantification, and decentralisation, all became commonplace within the public sector as a means of improving efficiency (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 97). In total, this language and reforms came to be known as *New Public Management* (Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 174).

Neoliberalism was transformed from an Anglo-American ideology into the dominant social imaginary of globalisation following the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 (Harvey, 2007, p. 29; Rizvi, 2017, p. 3). This symbolic event, which marked the end of the Cold War and the triumph of capitalism over communism, transformed the global ideological landscape by redefining dominant modes of thinking about economic, political and cultural exchange in market terms (Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 4; Rizvi, 2017, p. 3). Olssen et al. (2004, p. 11) suggested that, with only one global superpower remaining, the US was effectively able to “set the rules to the game.” The implication of this statement is that neoliberal ideology was able to be established as the global hegemonic economic structure. Harvey (2007, p. 29), Connell (2013, p. 100), and Hursh and Henderson (2011, p. 118) all echo this sentiment, recounting how the spread of neoliberal ideology was enabled by US-dominated post-war international institutions such as WTO, IMF, World Bank, and OECD. In particular, the imposition of neoliberal policies on emerging economies by the WTO and IMF under the guise of ‘structural adjustments’ (policies which used the ideal of ‘free trade’ to open markets to TNCs) would further enable the spread of neoliberal ideology (Harber, 2014, p. 119; Harvey, 2007, p. 31).

However, whilst neoliberal ideology has maintained similar material and discursive elements in policy formation globally, there is a need for analysing how states have been reshaped by it. For

example, although neoliberal ideology has achieved dominance, even in contemporary socialist countries like China and Vietnam ('market socialism'), it is distinct and maintains vernacularized variations according to the histories, cultures, and political structures in which it is implemented (Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 7). This is true even in the supposedly more homogenous Anglo-American sphere, with vernacularized forms being visible in Australia, New Zealand, the US, and UK.

Before going forward, I will provide a brief recap on what has been theorised above. I have argued that increasing global flows have had profound effects on the nation-state culturally, politically, and economically. With increased mobility of people and their cultural identities, the state tries to recapture ideas of 'nationhood'. This is made difficult given the state's partial loss of political sovereignty over its allocation of values, particularly in the wake of increased economic globalisation, where state policy intervention has been sidelined in favour of greater reliance on the market (Rizvi, 2017, p. 4). Whilst the state remains important, it has been reconstituted with the primary aim of ensuring national economic competitiveness in the global economy (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 492). This is globalisation within the neoliberal imaginary, where nation-states seek to gain and maintain a competitive advantage over competing nation-states. However, gaining and maintaining this advantage can be a challenge. Frequently, as a consequence of wanting to attract and retain TNCs within its territorial borders, the state resorts to a reduction or elimination of tax, and/or the deregulation of health and safety and environmental requirements in order to create favourable conditions for business to thrive (Held & McGrew, 2002, p. 20; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 43). Aside from the detrimental effects this has had on labour conditions and the environment (Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 172; Harvey, 2007, p. 76), the result of lower taxation entails a reduction in welfare and public spending (i.e. on public infrastructure, health, and education) (Carnoy, 2016, p. 29; Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 6; Vulliamy, 2010, p. 3). As a consequence, the way education policy is negotiated, formulated, and implemented has been reconfigured, which, in turn, has affected how we view the purposes of education and schooling.

### 3.3.3. The neoliberal imaginary and the allocation of values in education policy

The neoliberal imaginary of globalisation holds a definite view of education and schooling's purposes, recasting them narrowly in economist terms with purposes of human capital formation and supporting individual self-interests in an increasingly competitive society (Connell, 2013, 105; Rizvi, 2017, p. 3). This is reflected in the way a great deal of contemporary national and supranational education policies allocate values, with neoliberal discourses focused on market-derived concepts, such as efficiency, competition, choice, standards, and accountability, being dominant (Ball, 1998, p. 122; Carpenter, et al., 2014, p. 1113; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 91). Yet despite contemporary global dominance, education in the neoliberal imaginary is not the sole way for education and schooling to be structured. For instance, Labcree (2003, as cited in Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, pp. 77-79) outlines three distinct (but not mutually exclusive) ways education policies allocate values. These can be categorised as the *Social democratic* approach; the *Social mobility* approach; and the *Social efficiency* approach. Whilst this categorisation is far from comprehensive, it does provide a useful typology for distinguishing policy alternatives and ways to frame education.

The social democratic approach was the dominant way to position educational values up until the mid-to-late 1970's when the Keynesian welfare state lost favour (Ørskov, 2019, p. 87; Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 7). Here, the values of equity and community are interwoven with a philosophy of education as a public (or social) good (Carpenter, et al., 2014, p. 1113). Within this framing, accessible and equitable education for all is highly valued. Whilst this approach is still present rhetorically (e.g. 'Education for All'), and can be seen as actualised in countries like Finland and (some parts of) Canada, it has generally been replaced by neoliberal interpretations. The second approach, social mobility, contrasts with the social democratic approach by viewing education primarily as a private (or individual) good. Here the value of liberty is held in high regard, with education being viewed as predominantly a means for individual gain (e.g. economically). But within the neoliberal imaginary, it is the third approach, social efficiency, which has become the dominant value positioning for education policy globally.

Broadly speaking, the aim of making one's education system efficient is to maximise output while avoiding 'wastage' of input (i.e. investment) (Hanushek & Ettema, 2017, p. 166). Whilst there is no clear-cut or universal way to determine what constitutes input-output measurements,

the general consensus, contemporarily, is that the paramount output for education and schooling is to produce the requisite quantity and quality of ‘human capital’ needed to promote the economic competitiveness of the nation-state within the globalised economy (Apple, 1993, p. 4; Brewer, et al., 2010, p. 3; Carpenter, et al., 2014, p. 1114; ; Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 11; Lingard, 2010, p. 136; Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 11). This approach rests on two assumptions: the first assumption supposes that schools are responsible for the production of human capital; the second assumption, attached to the first, is that schools fail at producing adequate human capital unless national governments intervene (Apple, 2006, p. 23). Both of these assumptions will be explored below.

### 3.3.4. Human Capital Theory and the rise of the OECD

The first assumption is built upon Human Capital Theory (HCT), which has today become one of the most powerful underpinnings of education policy discourses worldwide. HCT views human labour as no different to any other capital commodity and promotes the idea of education as an ‘investment’ which will yield returns to both the individual (e.g. in terms of pay, prestige, qualifications, etc.) and to the state (i.e. increased economic productivity) (Gillies, 2017, p. 1). Although it had already been developed in the 1960’s, HCT would be strengthened by increasing economic globalisation in the 1980’s, where it’s framing of education as an investment acted to close the gap between economics and education. This framing of education, in conjunction with neoliberal ideology, helped to spawn “an educational arms race” (Plank & Davis, 2010, p. 300) with countries jostling for advantageous positions in the competitive global economy.

Helping to cement HCT as the dominant framing of education globally has been the OECD, an intergovernmental organisation whose primary mandate is economic policy. Through a post-colonial lens, the OECD can be seen as both a bearer of, and response to, neoliberal globalisation (Couldry & Meijas, 2019, p. 2; Lingard & Seller, 2016, p. 358; Ørskov, 2019, p. 103). Although originally envisaged as the economic counterpart for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) to help spread US-influence during the Cold War (Centeno, 2019, p. 63; Elfert, 2019, p. 40), the OECD has transformed itself into a dominant actor in the field of education policy. Today, in the post-Cold War context, the OECD is an important global center for the production of statistics for policy-making, especially international comparative data, which it uses to promote a global vision of education as a source for developing the human

capital “needed to address social challenges and improve the economies of nation-states” (Ydesen, 2019a, p. 4). Whilst laudable, Acosta (2019, p. 178) and Ydesen (2019b, p. 297) term this vision as, “Educationalization,” referring to the widespread perception that improvement of human resources through education and schooling are the remedies to all sorts of social and economic problems. Nonetheless, the discourses articulated by the OECD are appealing to national policymakers who are interested in ‘modernising’ their education systems, as well as making them more economically efficient.

The OECD emerged as a global powerhouse in education throughout the 1990’s and early-2000’s thanks in large part to the creation of education policy discourses and the success of PISA (Lingard & Sellar, 2016, p. 358). Some of the OECD’s most prominent policy discourses include notions such as ‘21st century skills’ and ‘lifelong learning’. Whilst it is possible to interpret these discourses in a number of ways, some critical scholars, such as Ball, have argued that they are linked to neoliberal conceptions that “serve and symbolise the increasing colonisation of education policy by economic policy imperatives” (Ball, 1998, p. 122) Another interpretation comes from Rizvi (2007, p. 114), who examines how the construction of lifelong learning fits well with the neoliberal narrative of society as being constituted of self-maximising individuals. He (ibid., p. 114) highlights that the role for contemporary national education systems is to develop mobile, flexible, and life-long learners and workers capable of adapting to a rapidly changing world.

Underpinning these discourses, however, is arguably the OECD’s most influential discourse: ‘the knowledge economy’, which portrays education as a central component of economic growth (Ball, 1998, p. 122; Gillies, 2017, p. 1). In *The Knowledge-based Economy* (OECD, 1996, p. 3), the OECD claimed that, “Knowledge is now recognised as the driver of productivity and economic growth;” ergo, economies should increasingly strive to base themselves on knowledge and information. In addition to driving education reform in Australia (Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 493), the constructed notion of knowledge economy would help to pave the way for a new model of global educational governance, where comparative testing would be used to evaluate effectiveness of schooling systems (Gable & Lingard, 2013, p. 10).

PISA — or as Piattoeva (2010, p. 26) refers to as, the “cross-national Olympics” — evaluates educational systems every three years by measuring 15-year-old school students’ performance in

mathematics, science, and reading. Since 2000, an increasing number of countries have participated in PISA. In addition to the OECD's 38 member countries, non-member countries as diverse as Saudi Arabia, Albania, El Salvador, and Uzbekistan have all participated. These non-member countries are motivated to participate in PISA for a wide variety of reasons, such as: to strengthen their political ties with OECD member countries, state legitimation, technical capacity building, and pedagogical innovation, to name a few (Acosta, 2019, p. 188). Lingard and Rawolle (2011, p. 489) argue that PISA has constituted the globe as a commensurate space of measurement, and has hence enabled the creation of a global educational policy field. As a result, regardless of their cultural diversity, political structure, educational philosophy, or economic resources, countries are rendered comparable and internationally benchmarked through standardisation and the use of common performance indicators (Gorur, et al., 2019, p. 302).

PISA assesses and ranks national school system's according to their quality (i.e. student performance) and equity (i.e. the spread of the scores and strength of the effect of socioeconomic background on performance) (Lingard & Sellar, 2016, p. 364). These results are then produced in global league tables for international comparison and frequently, and perhaps crudely, interpreted as likely measures of future economic prosperity (Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 1). In addition to allowing the OECD to exert soft power over nation-states (e.g. through mutual surveillance and peer pressure) — and in the process, legitimise itself as an institution (Ydesen & Andreasen, 2020, p. 150) — the accrual of large quantities of data through these two educational measurement indicators has empowered the OECD to produce educational norms that determine the benchmark for successful education systems, confirming that the best education systems globally are those that combine the quality with equity (OECD, 2012a, p. 37).

Whilst the OECD has in recent times adopted a clear equity, social justice, and environmental agenda, its foremost concern remains economic (Lingard & Sellar, 2016, p. 361). Through an economist framing, notions such as equity take on a different form, rearticulated as a measurement of student outcomes in comparative assessments like PISA (Savage, et al., 2013, p. 164), and as an essential central component of achieving national economic efficiency. For the latter, the OECD is unambiguous in outlining the economic incentives of an equitable education: "Investing in equity in education has high returns ... it represents one of the best strategies governments and societies can adopt" (OECD, 2012a, p. 38). These 'high returns' include:

minimising the high social and economic costs of school failure (i.e. individuals who do not complete school are more likely to become reliant on public welfare). Comparatively, those individuals who successfully complete school are thought to be more likely to lead healthier lives, gain better employment, and pay higher taxes (ibid., p. 40). The implication of this belief is that in order for nation-states to maximise efficiency, there needs to be no waste in human capital.

In total, the OECD has been successful in promoting “a one-dimensional perception of education” (Ydesen, 2019b, p. 295) interconnected with economic growth and the provision of equality of opportunity to all students. Through its “statistics on ‘output’ and results-oriented policies” (Elfert, 2019, p. 53), the OECD has been able to gain “epistemic influence” (Lingard & Sellar, 2016, p. 358) over policy-makers through the provision of ‘evidence-based’ solutions. This is not to say that the OECD holds unmediated power over education policy-making in national contexts; only that its simplistic model of education–economic causality provides a captivating model for the neoliberal governance of education (Ydesen, 2019a, p. 4). Interestingly, Ørskov (2019, p. 103) makes the argument that by providing a clear, linear path to economic prosperity, the OECD has helped to reinforce the role of the nation-state in the global economy by advocating that it gain greater control. From this, I now turn to exploring the second assumption of the social efficiency approach to education policy.

### 3.3.5. Policy convergence or divergence?

The assumption that schools fail at producing the requisite quantity and quality of human capital unless governments intervene derives from the crisis of capitalism and the rise of youth unemployment in the late-1960’s and early-1970’s (Ørskov, 2019, p. 87; Savage & O’Connor, 2014, p. 612). It was during this period that the dilemmas faced by the economy were translated into dilemmas about education and schooling (Apple, 1993, p. 5; Slater, 2015, p. 3). The pressure of economic globalisation and subsequent abandonment of Keynesian economic orthodoxy meant that governments sought to strengthen the effectiveness of their educational systems in order to improve their human capital (Verger, et al., 2018, p. 1); but with less money to spend on education, had to do so at less expense (Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 6). Perceiving that they were being confronted with similar problems and priorities, many national governments began adopting similar policy solutions (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 97). In the Anglo-American sphere,



connected through a shared ideological agenda, market mechanisms derived from neoliberal logic were seen as the most appropriate remedies for problems confronting educational systems. Broadly speaking, this elicited two policy responses from the Anglo-American governments: 1) a move towards privatisation and marketisation; and 2) increasing competitiveness (Ball, 1998, p. 123; Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 6). Both of these policy responses gravitated around the neoliberal idea that the public sector was less efficient than the private sector (Fuller & Stevenson, 2019, p. 2; Lingard & Rawolle, 2011, p. 491).

The trend towards the privatisation and marketisation of education and schooling began in the Anglo-American sphere during the 1980's when many national governments sought cost efficiencies through the new forms of user payments and other sources of private finance (Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 6). Musset (2012, p. 6) illustrates that since the 1990's, more than two-thirds of OECD countries have increased school choice opportunities for parents. This finding is applicable in the Australian context, where the principles of market-based competition and consumer choice began taking hold in the 1980's, but were amplified under the Howard Government in the 1990's (Bonnor & Shepard, 2016, p. 7). In addition to minimising the costs to the state, proponents of privatisation argued that greater competition and choice between schools would empower the consumer (i.e. parents and families), which in turn would foster innovation and improve the quality of schooling and overall system efficiency (Belfield & Levin, p. 309). Furthermore, the expansion of school choice opportunities through market mechanisms, proponents argued, would "allow all students – including disadvantaged ones and the ones attending low performing schools – to change to schools more aligned with their needs" (Musset, 2012, p. 6). The flipside of this argument, however, is that only those with the means to choose (i.e. could afford the fees), would choose, resulting in inequality and segregation by income, race, and ethnicity (Belfield & Levin, 2010, p. 307).

Paradoxically, whilst the first policy response aimed to reduce state spending through increased privatisation and marketisation, giving the appearance of a 'hands-off approach', the second policy response sought to attain greater control. Stemming from the belief that "standardised curriculum goals were needed to raise standards and to hold schools accountable for lack of achievement" (Apple, 1993, p. 5), many national governments acted to centralise control over their education systems in order to increase their competitiveness in the global economy (Savage



& O'Connor, 2014, p. 610). Principally, this was achieved via the importation of business borrowed language and New Public Management strategies that enhanced the top-down surveillance over systems (Apple, 2006, p. 23; Fuller & Stevenson, 2019, p. 1; Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 10). Again, whilst this policy response had originated in the Anglo-American sphere, it would soon spread to become the new educational orthodoxy globally (Fuller & Stevenson, 2019, 2). For this reason, Finnish educator, Pasi Sahlberg (2011, p. 100), named the phenomenon, the *Global Education Reform Movement* — or simply, GERM.

GERM is a useful metaphor to indicate how most educational reforms adopted globally since the 1990's have followed very similar policy rationales (Verger, et al., 2018, p. 1). These policy rationales, as Sahlberg (2016, pp. 133-137) outlines, often contain five common features: i) an increase in competition between schools for enrolment; ii) the standardisation of teaching and learning; iii) an emphasis on 'core subjects', such as reading literacy, mathematics, and science; iv) the importation of corporate management approaches; and v) the adoption of test-based accountabilities that hold teachers and schools accountable for students' achievement in schools. Extending Sahlberg's work, Verger, Parcerisa, and Fontdevila (2018, p. 5) categorise these five rationales into three main policy principles: standardisation, accountability, and decentralisation. Briefly, and generally speaking, the main policy instrument of standardisation has been the implementation of national curriculums and the establishment of national quality standards. For accountability, the main policy instrument has been the establishment of national large-scale assessments which allow national governments to test whether national standards are being met. And thirdly, for decentralisation, the main policy instrument involves devolving state responsibility by transferring authority downwards, so that lower administrative levels (e.g. the school jurisdiction, or even the school itself) are held accountable for their performances (i.e. on standardised tests). Collectively, these policy principles serve as governing technologies that allow the state to retain its power whilst 'steering at a distance' (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 100).

Within the neoliberal imaginary, education policies reflect one another through the values they allocate and discourses they employ. This has seemingly led to a global convergence. Undoubtedly, the rise of the global education policy field has helped to create this perception by aiding in the spread of Sahlberg's concept, GERM. Through GERM we are able to see the link and convergence between education policies globally. However, Fuller and Stevenson (2019, p.

2) caution that there is a risk of hiding the nuance and complexity of the neoliberal restructuring of education systems when suggesting that reforms are uniform globally. Each nation-state negotiates and manoeuvres around globalised education policy discourses in unique ways, hence effects vary according to context (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 80). For instance, although low-income and/or financially dependent nation-states frequently experience greater pressure to adopt the policies of intergovernmental organisations, such as the OECD and World Bank, the way that these reforms are enacted is dependent upon contextual factors, including their political architecture, strength of their economy, and cultural history (Acosta, 2019, p. 175; Ball, 2012, p. 10; Gorur, et al., 2019, p. 302; Mundy & Verger, 2016, p. 335). This remains true even in the apparently more homogenous Anglo-American sphere, where despite shared global drivers and broad ideological similarities, education policy reforms remain locally negotiated. Ozga (2005, p. 120) illustrates this by pointing out that, even though the UK defines its education agenda in relation to competitiveness and the discourse of the market, the way this agenda is received and inflected varies in England, Scotland and Wales. Similarly, Savage and O'Connor (2014, p. 609) point out that although there were many similarities between the move towards centralising control over curriculum in Australia and the US, including a mirroring of political discourse and shared federal political structure, the responses were very much distinct.

This brings us full circle to the start of this section. In the same way that 'globalisation' cannot be generalised, neither can the influence of globalised education policy discourses. Ultimately, they must confront the conditions of national education systems, their histories and cultures, as well as the national economic and political structures that govern them (Carnoy, 2016, p. 39). To summarise, education is firmly rooted in national and local cultures. As such, globalised education policy discourses will always appear within national education policies in vernacularized ways (Mundy, et al., 2016, p. 7; Ozga, 2005, p. 117; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 79; Savage & O'Connor, 2016, p. 60). Ergo, whilst there is convergence (i.e. global unifying forces that shape education policy globally), there is also divergence (i.e. locally enacted differences). Policy analysis requires an acute awareness and appreciation of this.

### **3.4. A national curriculum in a globalised world**

Thus far I have sought to analyse, understand, and explain the motivations behind the Australian Curriculum. As I outlined in Chapter 2, a national curriculum has had a long and contentious

history in Australia. For nearly four decades, varying political discourses were employed by each of the Australian Governments, each correlating to the political leaders and party who were in charge, who were in turn framed by specific economic, political, and social contexts. In this chapter I have situated the national context within a broader global context by first theorising that the processes of globalisation have reconfigured the state and its authority in developing policies, with the primary effect being that national and local policies are inextricably linked to globalised policy discourses. In the contemporary era, this largely takes place within a neoliberal imaginary, where the primary aim of the state is reconfigured to improve its competitiveness in the global economy. Within this imaginary, education has chiefly been recast in economist terms, underpinned by notions of human capital formation with concerns of producing a skilled workforce for the global economy. This view of education is propagated by international organisations such as the OECD, whose policy discourses are inscribed into national education policies globally. To ensure the development of their human capital, national governments have moved to centralise control over education and schooling through stronger top-down measures, manifesting into three main policy principles: standardisation, accountability, and decentralisation. These principles have become dominant amongst OECD countries, but are especially prevalent in the Anglo-American sphere. However, as I demonstrated at the conclusion of the previous section, rather than homogenising systems, these globalised education policy discourses are always mediated by local and national histories, cultures, and political structures, so that they become ‘vernacularized’ within specific contexts. With all of this in mind, I now return to my first research question: What were the motivations behind the Australian Government’s move towards a national curriculum?

As per my starting assumption, the motivations to move towards a national curriculum did vary according to the varying agendas of the different Australian Governments. This was reflected in the discursive shifts, ranging from national consistency under Hawke–Keating, to national cohesion under Howard, and national competitiveness under Rudd–Gillard. However, when placed within a broader spatio-temporal frame, these discourses were invariably set against a backdrop of increasing globalisation. This finding is in alignment with previous work by prominent Australian scholars, such as Kennedy (2009, p. 3), Brennan (2011, p. 260), Ditchburn (2012, p. 352), Roberts (2014, p. 57), Lingard (2018, p. 56), and Reid (2019, p. 198), all of whom argue that the move towards a national curriculum was driven by, and a response to,

increasing globalisation — which, in Australia over the past forty years, has taken place inside a neoliberal imaginary.

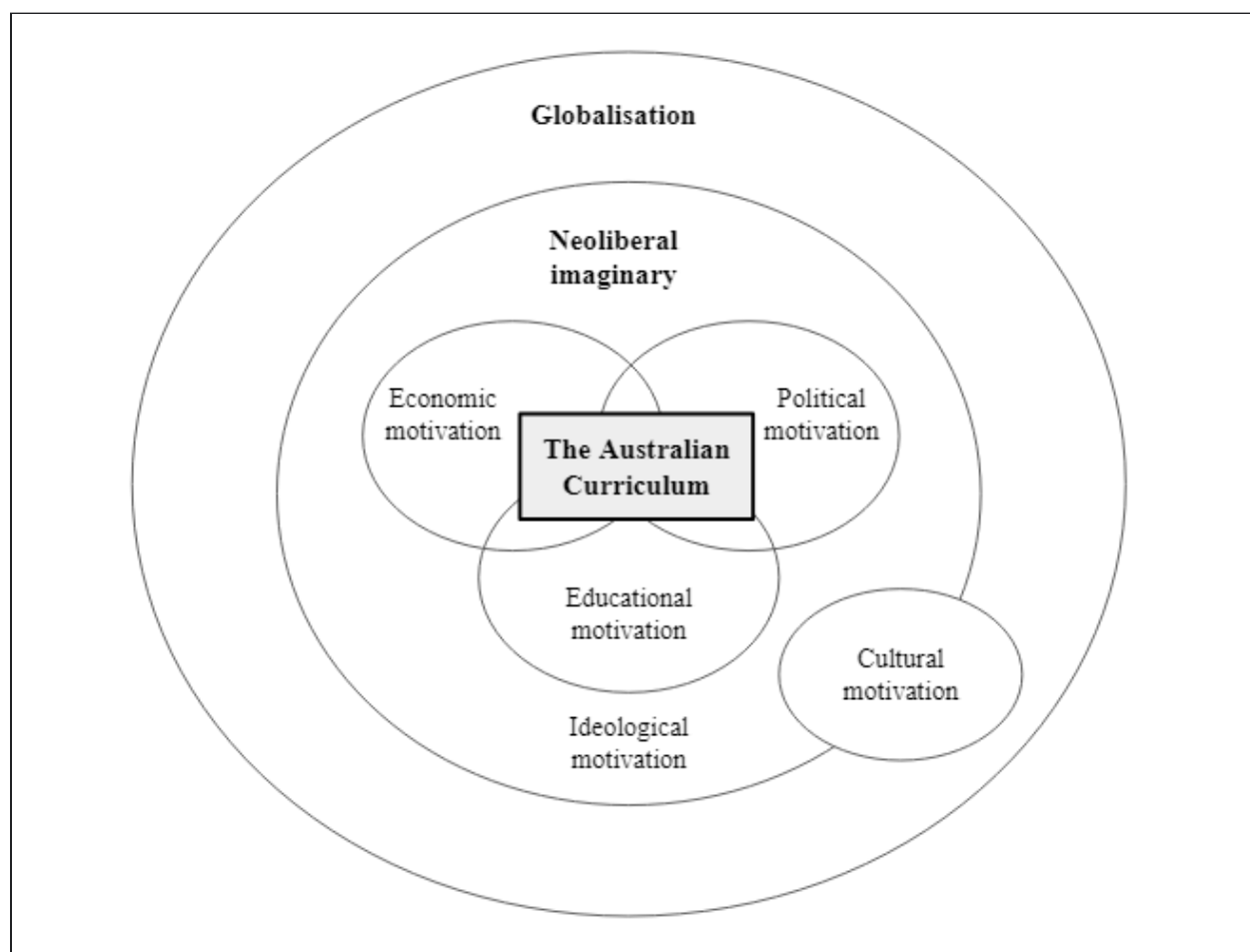
Although I draw a similar conclusion, believing that the overarching motivation of the Australian Governments' was to centralise control over curriculum and schooling was driven by a neoliberal political–economic agenda of 1) enhancing overall system efficiency (i.e. national standardisation) and 2) to ensure the adequate formation of human capital necessary for the nation-state to compete in the global economy, I find it difficult to attribute the motivation solely to 'as a response to globalisation' or to neoliberal hegemony. What I found was that the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum was an intricate mix of nuanced manifestations globalisation in the neoliberal imaginary has had within the Australian context. In other words, the motivation to move towards a national curriculum was the Australian vernacularization of globalisation.

In answering my first research question, I determined that there were at least five motivations behind the Australian Curriculum, each playing their role towards achieving the overall goal of enhancing the efficiency of Australia's school system and ensuring the necessary development of human capital. These were:

1. A shared ideological agenda;
2. To control 'legitimate knowledge';
3. For political gain;
4. Developing a stronger sense of national identity and cohesion; and
5. Standardising the context in order to marketise the schooling system.

Each of these five motivations can be seen as a manifested response to globalisation in the neoliberal imaginary, and each contains various ideological, economic, political, cultural, and educational elements. This is represented in the Venn diagram below (Figure 3). At the centre is the Australian Curriculum. The largest circle is representative of the all-encompassing phenomenon of globalisation. Inside this is the neoliberal imaginary, which forms the hegemonic view of globalisation and also serves as the ideological motivation of the Australian Government. The Neoliberal imaginary/Ideological motivation then frames the interconnected political, economic, and educational motivations. My idea here is that the ideological motivation

precedes the economic, political, and educational motivations, as it is the ideology of neoliberalism, in conjunction with HCT, which links these three motivations together (i.e. the state has been reconfigured to maximise the efficiency of the economy, with education repurposed as servant of the economy). All aside from the cultural motivation (which can be also seen as a response to the broader cultural effects of globalisation), exist within the neoliberal imaginary. Each motivation possesses some degree of each element, with some containing more or less than others (e.g. ‘A shared ideological agenda’ contains primarily ideological elements whilst still containing political, economic, and educational elements; whereas ‘Developing a stronger sense of national identity and cohesion’ is foremost a cultural motivation with political and economic motivations as subsidiary).



**Figure 3: Motivations behind the Australian Curriculum**

Below I will describe each of the motivations. Although I present them individually, they do not stand alone. Instead, each motivation is seen as necessarily interlocking and reinforcing of the others. Whilst I have reached these conclusions, I do not present them as definitive. I recognise that ascertaining the motivations of anyone (not least an entity as complex and multifaceted as the state) is somewhat, by nature, speculative. Yet, in light of my theoretical framework and the literature and policies that I have engaged with, the conclusions that I have reached are plausible.

#### 3.4.1. Motivation 1: A shared ideological agenda

Although the Australian federation was achieved 80 years prior, a national curriculum had never entered the Australian Government's agenda. It was not until a prolonged economic crisis that was exacerbated by the increasing pressure of economic globalisation during the 1970's and early-1980's that the Australian Government sought to influence schooling through curriculum. This trend began in 1980 through the Common Core, but continued throughout the subsequent Australian Governments until the Australian Curriculum was officially endorsed in 2015.

The motivation behind the Australian Curriculum and, more broadly, the national schooling agenda, was framed by the shared ideological agenda of the successive Australian Governments. As outlined earlier in this chapter, ideologies form the basis of a group's identity, and it is through discourses that ideologies can be actualised. Discourses have the potential of becoming hegemonic when those with power in society control the discourse so that it suits their preferences over a long period of time. In Australia, like many other countries globally, neoliberalism has achieved hegemony by becoming the guiding ideology of both major political parties (Connell, 2013, p. 107; Humphreys, 2018, p. 4). In the context of economic crisis, high youth unemployment, and the abandonment of Keynesianism, neoliberal discourses appeared as a rational and unified alternative. Beginning with the Hawke–Keating Governments in the 1980's, schooling was reimagined as the best means for producing a skilled workforce capable of competing in the new globalised economy. This imagining remained constant throughout the successive Australian Governments, albeit enacted through differing means (i.e. Howard's coercion tactics versus Rudd's desire for federal cooperation), rationales (i.e. building a stronger sense of national identity or to improve equity) and discourses (i.e. national consistency, national cohesion, and national competitiveness). Despite these differences, the end goal of system

efficiency and human capital production to enhance national competitiveness in the global economy was always the same. As such, it did not matter whether the ALP or the LNC formed the Australian Government.

When set against global developments, the shared ideological agenda becomes even clearer. Although it was argued that the Australian national schooling agenda was locally produced, there is substantial evidence of policy sharing/learning when comparing the Australian Government's national schooling agenda with reforms in other Anglo-American countries (Lingard, 2010, p. 137; Savage & O'Connor, 2014, p. 609; Fuller & Stevenson, 2019, p. 2; Sahlberg, 2016, p. 140). For example, it is hard to overlook the resemblance between calls for national education reforms in Australia, the US, and UK from the 1980's–onwards. In the US, a document written in 1983, titled, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Education Reform*, framed the US as falling behind global standards (Slater, 2015, p. 3). It gave an account of poorly performing schools, linking their poor performance to the US being unable to compete with emerging economies, and thus being unable to maintain global dominance, and hence calling for stronger national intervention (Savage & O'Connor, 2014, p. 612). This was then followed up in 2001 with the *No Child Left Behind* reforms which, as Apple (2005, p. 13) argues, allowed the US Federal Government to gain greater central control over important decisions by promoting the idea of a 'failing' school system. Concomitantly, similar discourse of a failing school system was taking place in the UK, eventually manifesting into Thatcher's 1988 Education Reform Act (Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 16). In addition to mandating that England have a national curriculum (Taylor, 1995, p. 161), the Education Reform Act would introduce a suite of market-based reforms which would soon become commonplace in education policy discourse globally (i.e. standards, accountability, school choice and competition) (Sahlberg, 2016, p. 131).

Much like its ideological counterparts, the use of political discourse was an integral part of the Australian Government being able to enact its national schooling agenda. From Dawkins onwards, discourses articulating the view that the development of human capital through education and schooling was the best means to achieve economic prosperity, and that government intervention through the incorporation of private sector strategies into the public sector in order to ensure this development, have been dominant. However, the Australian Government's intervention into schooling could not have been done without first overcoming its



constitutional limitations. Utilising a combination of discourses that disparaged the school system (e.g. linking economic failure to schooling failure) and a fiscal imbalance of power (i.e. withholding federal funding unless states comply with the federal agenda), the Australian Government was able to manufacture the consent of the State and Territory Governments that allowed it to intervene into schooling. And whilst the Australian Constitution cannot be completely circumvented, this consent laid the platform for the establishment of a number of national bodies (such as ACARA) who promote the national agenda and have considerable influence on schooling.

#### 3.4.2. Motivation 2: To control legitimate knowledge

Reiterating what was stated in the introduction, national curriculums act as powerful governing technologies of the state because of the way they frame what knowledge, skills, values, and dispositions are deemed important for the nation's younger generation to possess. Tersely, national governments may seek to centralise control over curriculum to see to it that their goals are realised. Based on this logic, the Australian Government's motivation to move towards a national curriculum can be seen as a mechanism to gain control over what is considered legitimate knowledge. But what is this 'legitimate knowledge'?

The centrality of COAG, who first agreed on a national curriculum and who played a pivotal role in determining Australia's national schooling agenda, gives a strong indication that the knowledge which is considered legitimate is that which is most "macro-economically beneficial" (Apple, 2004, p. 44) in terms of what it brings to the state (Yates and Grumet, 2011, p. 28). Education was the cornerstone of Rudd's micro-economic reforms, placed within the productivity agenda of the Australian Government, and framed as the key that "will position Australia as a competitive, innovative, knowledge-based economy that can compete and win in global markets" (Rudd & Smith, 2007, p. 4). Evidently, the Education Revolution was not so much a revolution for education, but rather a revolution for the Australian economy, where education — and curriculum in particular — "carried the weight of national realignment to global economic imperatives" (Ditchburn, 2012, p. 351).



### 3.4.3. Motivation 3: For political gain

In the context of neoliberal globalisation, politics and economics are inextricably linked, whereby the primary aim of the state is to ensure its competitiveness in the global economy. And with education repurposed as a servant of the economy, the three form a tripartite relationship. As such, the political motivation of the Australian Government can be seen as an extension of Motivation 2 — as a way to centralise control over curriculum to see to it that the national economic agenda could be realised. But given the political complexity of Australian federalism, where each State and Territory maintains constitutional sovereignty over its economy and education system, this was a challenge. Parallel to the UK (Ozga, 2005, p. 119; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 104) and US (Savage & O’Connor, 2014, p. 612), the Australian Government sought to shift political authority from the local/state level to the national level driven by the belief that the creation of one economic unit instead of nine was an essential component of Australia being able to compete in the global marketplace. Here the prioritisation of the national economy at the expense of the domestic economy was seen as necessary.

Returning to Ørskov’s (2019, p. 103) argument, the OECD played a key role in transferring policy-making authority from the state level toward the federal level by simultaneously strengthening and undermining national policy-making in Australia. An example of this can be found just a few years prior to Nelson framing Australia as at risk of lagging behind the rest of the world when the OECD released a review of Australia’s transition from education to working life (OECD, 1997). One of the review’s main conclusions was that in order for Australian youths to make a successful transition into post-school employment and further education, Australia needed to strengthen “the collaborative arrangements between the Commonwealth and the States for schools ... and more directly involving industry in setting common national standards” (OECD, 1997, p. 30). In this instance, the OECD explicated the policy problem (i.e. the adverse effects of unsuccessful school–life transition) and proposed a corresponding policy solution (i.e. developing a national framework).

To what extent this review (and others) played in shifting authority from the state level to the national level is debatable. However, although the OECD is not an ‘all powerful entity’, it is powerful in the sense that policy-makers will readily use OECD discourses and data to inform policy choices. By producing, analysing, and disseminating education discourses and data, the

OECD, as well as the suite of other intergovernmental organisations operating within the global educational policy field, have been able to construct discursive frameworks within which solutions are thought (Ball, 1998, p. 123; Lingard & Sellar, 2016, p. 364). As Piattoeva (2010, p. 26) reasons, these solutions are appealing to policy-makers seeking political gains as they are able to demonstrate to their constituents that they are ‘making the right moves’ and that their education system is following a ‘modern’ trajectory. Indeed, the formula is compelling: taking stronger control over your education system will enhance the economic competitiveness of your nation-state. Furthermore, Verger, Parcerisa, and Fontdevila (2018, p. 5) outline several political incentives of implementing national governing technologies (i.e. GERM policy principles), namely that they create the perception that governments are interested and concerned with education, whilst at the same time removing pressure from themselves by placing the onus on systems, schools, teachers, and students.

#### 3.4.4. Motivation 4: Developing a stronger sense of national identity and cohesion

Developing a sense of national identity and cohesion through the national curriculum is most closely aligned with the Australian Government’s cultural motivation. Returning to Figure 3, you can see that, unlike the other motivations which are framed solely by the neoliberal imaginary, the cultural motivation has been placed at the juncture of globalisation and the neoliberal imaginary. In ascertaining this, I theorise that cultural motivation for a national curriculum can be seen in light of both the broader cultural effects of globalisation, and as a specific response to globalisation in the neoliberal imaginary. Firstly, as I have already stated, the national imaginary has been destabilised due to the increased flows of people and ideas across territorial borders (Appadurai, 1996, p. 20). This leads into the question frequently asked by cultural theorists of globalisation: in a globalised world where culture transcends state lines (e.g. mobility of people, digitally), what does ‘national culture’ and ‘national identity’ mean?

Providing an answer to this question becomes more difficult when considering a country as heterogeneous as Australia, where nearly half of the population were either born, or had one or both of their parents born, overseas. Lingard (2018, p. 56), however, provides some insight, illustrating that national curriculums help “to create the national in the context of globalization, and also temporally linking the past through the present with an imagined and desired future.” In

this light, the cultural motivation behind the national curriculum can be seen as a tool for nation-building; to organise and provide the nation with a shared sense of national and cultural identity. This motivation appeared to have been most overt during the LNC years. In contrast to the ALP (under Hawke–Keating, and later Rudd–Gillard), who consistently demonstrated a greater orientation towards ‘globalisation’ and the world beyond Australia’s territorial borders, the LNC were more fixated on the national front. This, of course, is understandable, given that the LNC is Australia’s traditionally more conservative party (i.e. they *conserve* tradition and cultural values).

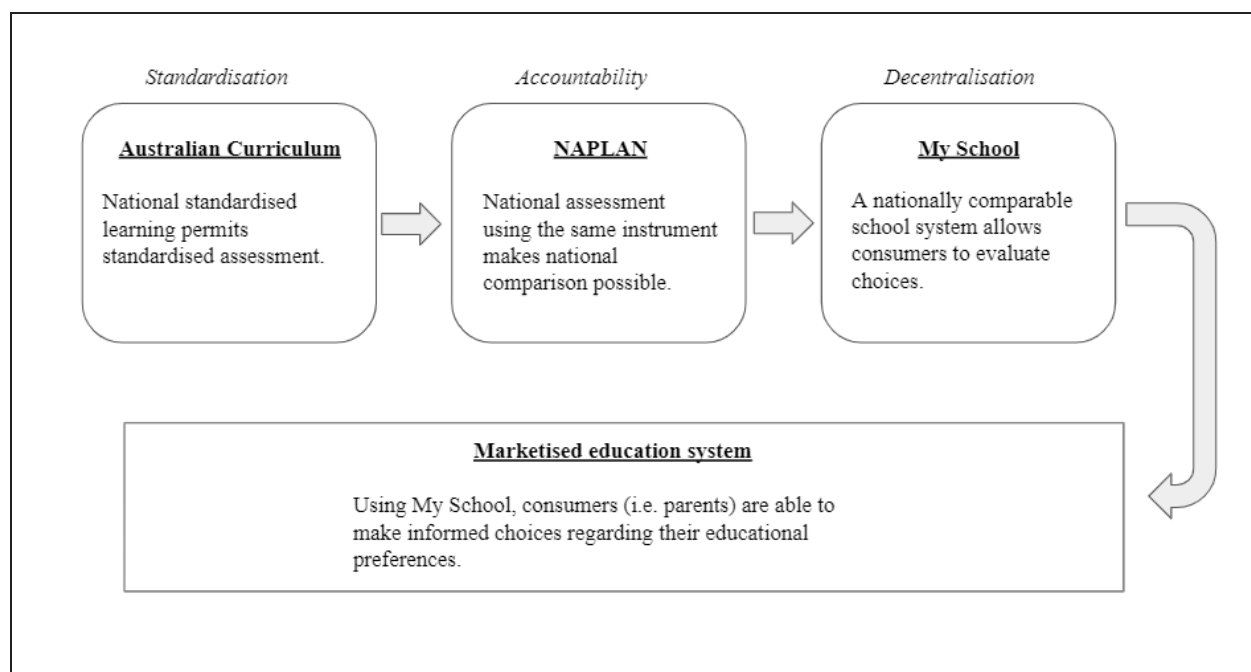
But again, there is an economic incentive shaped by the neoliberal imaginary that cannot be overlooked. Here it is worth quoting Yates and Grumet at some length, who discuss the complexities of forging the nation in the context of economic globalization:

“... as nations work to forge these international connections, they also struggle to retain national identity; for just as they desire students to develop the skills that will permit them to participate in an economic culture that spans the globe, they also desire students to develop a sense of loyalty and membership in the national community.” (Yates & Grumet, 2011, p. 200)

In the context of neoliberal globalisation, the cultural motivation behind a national curriculum can be also seen as a means of developing a sense of national identity in order to develop a workforce loyal to the nation-state. Appadurai (2006 as cited in Lingard, 2018, p. 56) argues this point, that as nation-states lose economic sovereignty (i.e. free trade, free markets), they try to reassert their cultural sovereignty. Reiterating a similar point — albeit from different theoretical perspectives and in different contexts — are Harvey (2007, p. 84) and Apple (2006, p. 22), who both make the argument that, despite neoliberalism theoretically advocating for a weak state (i.e. limited/no intervention), in practice it necessitates a strong state (e.g. moral values are built on cultural nationalism) on the basis that the nation-state remains the dominant structure in the global economy.

### 3.4.5. Motivation 5: Standardising the context to marketise the system

Finally, the motivation to adopt a national curriculum cannot be seen in isolation, but as a constitutive part of the Australian Government's broader national schooling agenda. This agenda centred around the three policy principles of GERM (standardisation, accountability, and decentralisation), vernacularized within the Australian context as the Australian Curriculum, NAPLAN, and My School. As I have theorised above, these three policy principles were a core part of the neoliberal agenda to increase economic competitiveness, serving as governing technologies that would help to ensure the adequate formation of human capital. However, there is a compelling argument made by several scholars that these three policy principles also work in collaboration to support the privatisation and marketisation of schooling. The relationship between the three, and the way they support marketisation of schooling, is illustrated below (Figure 4).



**Figure 4: The GERM in Australia**

Based on Gorur's (2013, p. 218) argument, in order for education to function as a market, products first require a level of unification and comparable characteristics. This uniformity, subsequently, enables evaluations, comparisons, and choice of preferences (ibid., p. 218). Ergo, the educational motivation behind the Australian Curriculum can be seen as a necessary first step

for establishing national standards and that can be assessed (i.e. accountabilities) and used by parents (i.e. consumers) to evaluate and choose their schooling preference (Apple, 1993, p. 7). In recent times, the evaluation of Anglo-American schools has largely been based on their performance on standardised tests (Verger, et al., 2018, p. 11). In the Australian context, NAPLAN has become pivotal in monitoring the delivery of standardised curricula in areas of literacy and numeracy. Results of NAPLAN are not only used to hold students, teachers, principals, and schools to account, but are also used as the main data source for My School, which informs school choice and promotes school competition (Connell, 2013, p. 104). Since the implementation of NAPLAN in 2009, a suite of other standardised tests have been developed and implemented, today dominating Australia's educational landscape at both the state and national level.

In the same way that PISA has constituted the globe as internationally comparable, NAPLAN and My School have constituted Australia as nationally comparable (Lingard, 2010, p. 131). Whereas previously comparison of schools was confined to the local, or potentially even the state level, today Australian schools are rendered comparable across the nation. In the same way that Gorur, Sorenson, and Maddox (Gorur, et al., 2019, p. 302) question the ethics of PISA in not only standardising the context which permits comparative international assessment, but standardising the 'typical' 15-year-olds (i.e. assuming that a 15-year-old in Australia is the same as a 15-year old in Cambodia), I question whether the same logic can be applied within the Australian context: is a 15-year-old in north Sydney the same as a 15-year-old in regional NSW or in Far North Queensland?

Having theorised on the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum, and with this question in mind, I now seek to determine how equity is positioned within the Australian Curriculum.

## 4. Methodology

The empirical part of this study is realised as a Critical Policy Analysis (CPA) of the two policy documents that constitute the Australian Curriculum, *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) and *The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Version 4.0* (ACARA, 2012b). These two policy documents — commonly referred to as The Melbourne Declaration and The Shape — guided the development and implementation of the Australian Curriculum and serve as my data. It is acknowledged that these documents have been in place for some time and have thus been analysed from a variety of angles. However, rather than being seen as a limitation of this study, I see the historical and contextual nature of these documents, and my relational position to them, as important elements in my analysis. I believe that my interpretations, shaped by my ontological and epistemological position, will be able to garner new insights that will contribute to existing analyses. For this reason, I chose to limit my engagement with prior analyses until after I had conducted my own analysis.

The structure of this chapter is as follows. In the first section I describe the Australian Curriculum policy framework in greater depth. In section two I outline my chosen research methodology of Critical Policy Analysis. Here I provide a brief overview of CPA, why it was suitable for this research, and how I intend to use it. Following this, I detail the methods that I used in data collection and analysis, as well as my analytic process. Finally, in the fourth section, I present my interpretations of the Australian Curriculum policy framework, and in doing so, answer my second research question.

### 4.1. The Australian Curriculum policy framework as data

#### 4.1.1. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians

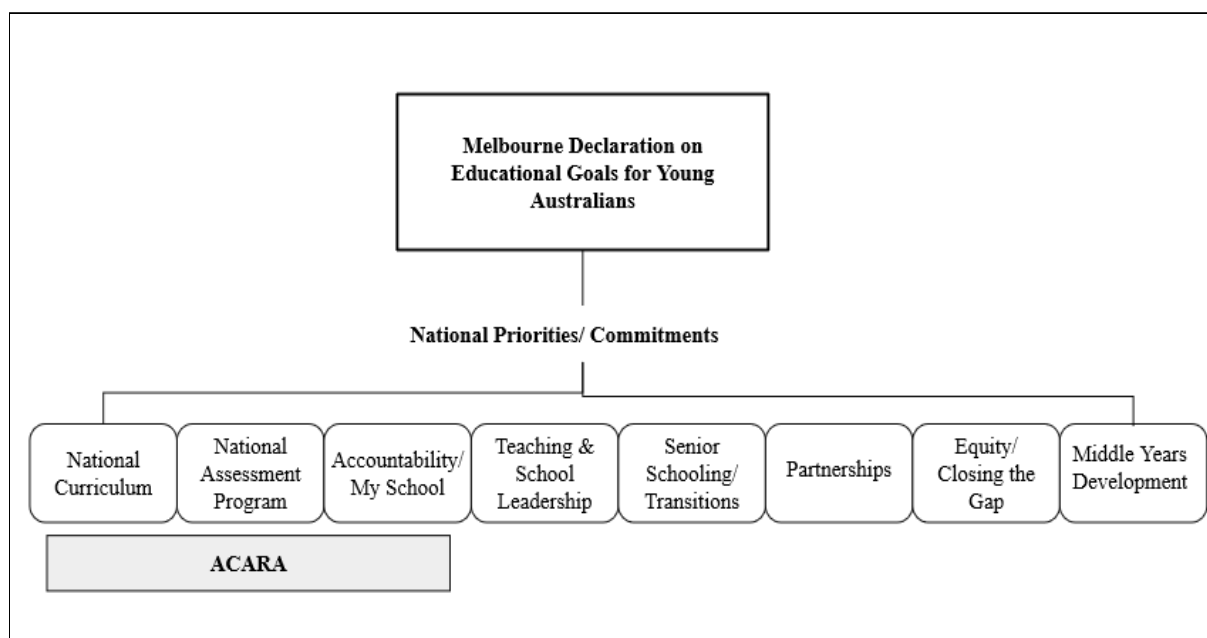
The Australian Curriculum policy framework is constituted by two policy documents. The first policy document, *The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008), was written by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) and was ratified in December, 2008. The Melbourne Declaration represents the third manifestation of intergovernmental collaboration between all Australian Education Ministers. Building on the two preceding declarations (The Hobart Declaration

[MCEECDYA, 1989] and The Adelaide Declaration [MCEETYA, 1999]), the Melbourne Declaration sets the agenda for Australian schooling by outlining two goals:

Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence

Goal 2: All young Australians become: successful learners, confident and creative individuals, and active and informed citizens. (MCEETYA, 2008, pp. 7-8)

To achieve these two goals, the Melbourne Declaration lays out eight interrelated ‘National Priorities’ that all nine Australian Governments commit to. These priorities arise from the Melbourne Declaration’s “Commitment to Action” (ibid., p. 10) and together comprise Australia's national schooling agenda. They can be seen in the diagram below (Figure 4).



**Figure 4: National Priorities in the Melbourne Declaration**

Amongst the priorities of developing a National Assessment Program (i.e. NAPLAN), strengthening Accountability (i.e. My School), and improving Equity/Closing the Gap was a commitment to develop a national curriculum. Here the second Australian Curriculum policy document is introduced.

#### 4.1.2. The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Version 4.0

*The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Version 4.0* (ACARA, 2012b) is the fourth and final amendment of the original policy document. The Shape of the Australian Curriculum: Version 1.0 was first approved by the interim National Curriculum Board in May 2009 and guided the development of the initial phase of the Australian Curriculum. Soon after *The Shape* (v1.0), the National Curriculum Board was superseded by ACARA, an independent statutory body that was established via an act of Federal Parliament (The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia, 2008). ACARA, who authored the three subsequent Shape documents, is jointly funded by all Australian Governments and is overseen by MCEECDYA. ACARA is responsible for the development and management of the Australian Curriculum, in addition to administering the national assessment program (NAPLAN), and the collection and reporting of data on Australian schools (My School).

The Shape reflects the educational goals of the Melbourne Declaration and provides the background to the development of the Australian Curriculum, as well as its purpose, rationale, scope, dimensions, content, and quality assurance. In *The Shape*, it is stated that “[t]he rationale for introducing an Australian Curriculum centres on improving the quality, equity and transparency of the Australian education system” (ibid., p. 5). Ergo, if the Melbourne Declaration defines equity as the first goal of Australian schooling, then *The Shape* defines how equity will be achieved through the Australian Curriculum.

It should be noted that my selection of The Melbourne Declaration at the expense of the *Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration* (2019) — the document which superseded it — was done on the basis that I perceived there to be very little variation between the two documents. This perception is supported on the ACARA website (n.d.), where it is stated that:

“The Alice Springs (Mparntwe) Education Declaration (Education Council, 2019) affirms the goals of the Melbourne Declaration (2008). The Melbourne Declaration’s goals provide the policy framework for the Australian Curriculum, to promote excellence and equity and enable successful learning opportunities for all students.”

Similarly, the Australian Education Union had (condescendingly) labelled the Alice Springs Declaration as “Groundhog Day” (Zaglas, 2019, n.p.), referring to the fact that it maintains the



same orientation as the Melbourne Declaration. Therefore, despite being in place for over a decade, the Melbourne Declaration remains the bedrock of the Australian Curriculum and the Australian Government's national agenda for schooling.

#### **4.2. Critical Policy Analysis as methodology**

“Critical policy analysis is grounded in the belief that it is absolutely crucial to understand the complex connections between education and the relations of dominance and subordination in the larger society.” (Apple, 2019, p. 1)

To analyse the Australian Curriculum policy framework I utilised the methodology of Critical Policy Analysis. CPA was determined to be the most suitable methodology for achieving my research aims as it facilitates the exploration of broader themes related to education policy, such as the growing disparities between educational subpopulations, the centralisation of power and influence of national governments in education policy-making, and global educational policy trends (Diem, et al., 2014, p. 1076). This is made possible by CPA's starting assumption that policy documents are not produced inside institutional vacuums, but are instead situated and shaped within certain historic cultural contexts and power relations. Hence, rather than being accepted at face value, policy documents are something to be critiqued. This methodology fit with the purpose of my analysis, which was to critique how equity — one of the five values thought to be articulated in liberal democratic education policies — is positioned within the Australian Curriculum policy framework.

Traditional educational policy analysis has generally functioned within a positivist paradigm (Young & Diem, 2014, p. 80). Within this paradigm, linear, rational, and scientific models are employed to provide solutions to clearly defined problems. This “theoretically narrow” (Diem, et al., 2014, p. 1068) approach, however, began to lose favour in the 1980's at the same time positivism was being challenged in the social sciences for failing to produce the reliable and generalisable results it had promised (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 2). Coinciding with this paradigm shift were global developments which disrupted the state as a closed political jurisdiction. In light of these global developments, policy analysts began adopting critical frameworks which emphasised the contextual and relational nature of policy text production (Diem, et al., 2014, p. 1072). Here CPA departed from traditional approaches by recognising the

complexities of policy contexts and the “subjective, complex, value-laden, and messy” (ibid., p. 1076) nature of the policies themselves.

A further point of departure between traditional policy analysis and CPA was the necessity for analysts to place themselves in relation to the policy they are analysing, rather than as objective observers. As Fairclough (2001, p. 25) contends, the perspectives brought to policy analysis are of equal importance to the policies themselves. Policy texts do not typically sprout ideology; instead they position the interpreter, so that she/he brings ideologies to the interpretation of texts (ibid., p. 88). Thus, utilising CPA implies a certain ethics which entails *critical reflexivity* on behalf of the policy analyst, as well as an implicit understanding that the act of policy analysis is a deeply political and value-laden endeavour.

A constituent part of this critical reflexivity is an acute awareness of one’s own theoretical perspectives. Whilst CPA offers the potential of being combined with a wide range of theoretical choices, there is “no ‘one best way’ of doing CPA” (Young & Diem, 2014, p. 84), with the approach adopted being affected by several variables, such as: i) the nature of the policy being analysed; ii) the policy production context (i.e. when and where the text was produced); iii) the positionality of the researcher; and iv) the purposes of policy analysis (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 50). In this sense, there is a normative and imaginative component in CPA, where the outcome of analysis is dependent on both the positionality of the analyst, the theoretical framework(s) they adopt, and the aim(s) of their analysis.

Based on my theoretical framework and research aims, I opted for a discursive approach to CPA. This fitted with my conceptualisation of policy as the official discourse of the state (Taylor, 1997, p. 26), which constructs the parameters for which we, as subjects, are framed within. For Bacchie (2000, p. 48), the starting point for policy analysts invoking a discursive approach is to seek out ‘problematizations’, wherein emphasis is placed upon challenging the “discursive constraints” (Ball, 1998, p. 128) of policy. This involves drawing attention to the meaning-making processes of policy production, as well as seeking out possible taken for granted assumptions, framings, and omissions which may (un)intentionally (re)produce social inequalities. CPA when employed in this manner is akin to the methodology of Critical Discourse Analysis with both maintaining that the meanings of policy are not waiting to be ‘discovered’ or rendered ‘visible’ within the policy itself, but in the relationship between the

policy and the broader social structure (Apple, 2019, p. 8; Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 4; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 53; Taylor, 1997, p. 33). Two studies which informed my choice were: Carpenter, Young, and Diem (2014), and Cahill (2015), both of whom, despite adopting differing theoretical frameworks, utilise a discursive approach in order to highlight and demystify ideologies and hidden power relations within policy processes. Similarly, I intend to utilise a discursive approach in order to draw attention to power relations and ideologies within policy-making processes which may (un)intentionally (re)produce social inequalities in Australian schooling. Before producing my interpretations, I will first outline how I intend to apply CPA on the Australian Curriculum policy framework by briefly describing my data collection and analysis methods and steps.

### **4.3. Critical Policy Analysis of the Australian Curriculum policy framework**

#### **4.3.1. Data collection and analysis methods**

The methods that I used to collect and analyse my data were a fusion of Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step guide to thematic analysis, which provided me with a systematic process for collecting my data, and Stephan Ball's (1993) toolbox for policy, which provided me with a discursive analytic framework. Firstly, thematic analysis "involves finding repeated meanings [i.e. themes] across a data set, which is crucial to the interpretation of phenomena" (Xu & Zimmet, 2020, p. 2). Whilst it has frequently been overlooked as a method in its own right, many scholars argue that thematic analysis is foundational for virtually all qualitative data analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 80; Xu & Zimmet, 2020, p. 2). Braun and Clarke's six-step guide is a popular qualitative research tool which has the potential for providing a rich and detailed, yet complex account of data; and given its accessible and theoretically-flexible approach, it can be easily combined with other analytic methods, including discourse analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). In this study, it proved helpful in identifying, organising, and reporting patterns within my data, as well as allowing me to draw out the major themes within the policy framework. However, as it is not possible to reduce CPA to atheoretical coding, nor the data to only its 'semantic themes' (those explicit within the text), I required the discursive analytic framework provided by Ball.

Ball's toolbox for policy, in conjunction with my theoretical framework, allowed me to "dig deeper into the data" (Xu & Zimmet, 2020, p. 3) and draw out the policy frameworks 'latent themes', defined "as the underlying ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations, and ideologies that shape and inform the semantic content of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 86). In Ball's analytic toolbox, policy is seen as: *text*, *discourse*, and *effects*. Whilst the latter refers to the way in which policy is implemented and interpreted varying to different contexts (i.e. policy divergence), the former two refer to the way in which policy is constructed. Through Ball's dual conceptualisation of policy as text and as discourse, it becomes possible to simultaneously produce meaning on two levels. Policy analysis at the level of text places emphasis on content, i.e. the literal words in policy. At this level, policy documents are recognised as contested and negotiated within the arena of politics, encoded with the multiple (and sometimes competing) values of policy-makers. Meaning can be produced at the level of text through an analysis of linguistic nuances, shape, and statement, and this is traditionally how policy analysis has been conducted (Ball, 1993, p. 11; Cahill, 2015, p. 302). However, by only concentrating on what the policy says may overlook what *is not* said, as well as neglecting how those statements were formed and made possible in the first place. Here is where policy as discourse becomes useful. Policy analysis at the level of discourse places emphasis on context. This is the realisation that, although discourses may not be present within the policy text, they provide the conditions for which certain statements are formed and made to be considered 'knowledge' and 'truth' (Ball, 2006, p. 48). At this level, meaning is produced by placing the text within its broader discursive context, with the analyst seeking out constant repetition of statements, recurring contents, symbols, and strategies which may lead to the emergence and solidification of knowledge (Jäger & Maier, 2009, p. 38).

#### 4.3.2. Analytic process

My process for analysing the data is summarised below:

- |                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------|--|
| Data collection<br>(policy as text) | 1. Familiarising myself with the Australian Curriculum policy framework, |
|                                     | 2. Generating initial codes using a hybrid approach,                     |
| Data analysis                       | 3. Searching for themes pertaining to equity,                            |

(policy as  
discourse)

4. Reviewing themes,
5. Defining and naming themes and sub-themes, and
6. Producing my interpretation of the data.

By using this systematic process for analysing my data, I hope to enable transparency and retrodution in my findings, and hence enhance the quality and reliability of the research. It should be kept in mind, however, that although this process appears to be linear, in practice it was far more recursive. Accordingly, I did not move from ‘step-to-step’ as the above may suggest; rather — and particularly in the analytic phases — I moved iteratively and reflexively between phases. This involved reanalysing the data, returning to my theoretical framework and the literature, and constant critical reflexivity.

I began by formulating an overall impression of the two documents. This was done by first reading through the entire data set prior to engaging in any coding. As the Melbourne Declaration was at the heart of my teacher training, it was already quite familiar to me. Conversely, The Shape was unfamiliar, and was akin to a more ‘traditional’ policy document. Before progressing to the coding phase, I made two decisions that would ultimately influence the rest of my analysis. The first decision was to keep my analysis and interpretation of each policy document separate. Plainly, my logic behind this was on account of the texts being written at different times and by different authors (i.e. in different contexts). So, although the Melbourne Declaration and The Shape work in tandem to constitute the Australian Curriculum policy framework, and together constitute my data set, I thought it would be best to analyse and interpret each document separately so as to avoid conflating my findings.

The second decision that I made was regarding what type of analysis that I was going to conduct. Rather than trying to provide a rich thematic description of the entire policy framework, I decided that I would provide a more detailed and nuanced account by focusing on a particular theme: equity. This, of course, was seen as most relevant to answering my second research question. By using ‘equity’ as my focal point, I was able to determine which sections of each policy document were relevant to the study. In the Melbourne Declaration, these were: the *Preamble* (pp. 4-5), *Goal 1: Australian schooling promotes equity and excellence* (p. 7), and

three out of the eight national priorities: *Promoting world-class curriculum and assessment* (pp. 13-14); *Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged young Australians* (p. 15); and *Strengthening accountability and transparency* (pp. 16-17). In addition to being the most detailed, these three priorities gave insight into how the Australian curriculum was envisaged as a means to achieve the stated rationale of improving the quality, equity, and transparency of the Australian education system.

As *The Shape* is a document which reaffirms and builds upon the goals of the Melbourne Declaration, there is understandably a lot of overlap. Consequently, this overlap aided me in deciding which sections of *The Shape* to focus my analysis on. These were: the *Rationale* (pp. 5-8); *Propositions shaping the Australian Curriculum* (p. 10); the *Scope* (pp. 13-15) and *Dimensions of the Australian Curriculum* (pp. 15-18); the *Quality assurance* (p. 26) and guide for *Teaching, assessing, and reporting* (p. 27); and the summary, titled *Towards a world-class Australian Curriculum* (p. 28). In total, these sections provided a thorough overview of the policy framework as well as insight into how equity is positioned as a policy priority.

Once I had narrowed my analysis and felt that I was familiarised with the data, I began to generate an initial list of codes. Broadly speaking, there are two camps for qualitative coding: inductive (i.e. independent of theory) and deductive (i.e. tied to/stemming from a theoretical or epistemological position). Whilst I initially wanted themes to ‘emerge’ from the data (i.e. inductive), it dawned on me this would not have been possible given the amount of literature that I had already engaged with prior to conducting my analysis. Furthermore, had I attempted to give an implicit account of how the themes emerged from the data would have denied the active role that I played in identifying, selecting, and reporting codes, and would not have been in alignment with neither my constructivist epistemology nor CPA’s disposition of critical reflexivity. Hence, feeling that it would have been impossible to free myself from my “theoretical and epistemological commitments” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 84) and render myself as ‘value-neutral’, I decided to employ a hybrid approach, in that both theory- and data-driven codes were used.

I began coding inductively, working my way systematically through the Melbourne Declaration before moving on to *The Shape*. Here I was looking at the policy framework at the level of text by focusing on what the text says. I started by noting things of interest in the data, including

keywords, the use of language, the phrasing of sentences, and potential themes and patterns which may constitute a discourse. Inductive coding involved manually writing notes on the two policy documents, as well as using different coloured pens to indicate and sort potential patterns and themes. Following this, I re-coded the policy framework deductively. Here I moved from the level of text to the level of discourse in order to identify hidden meaning in the data.

The deductive codes that I used were derived from my starting assumption that national education policy is shaped by globalised education policy discourses. By placing the Australian Curriculum policy framework in light of my theoretical framework, I sought out if, where, and how the discourses associated with globalisation (e.g. global integration, global citizenship), the neoliberal imaginary and governance of education (i.e. standards, decentralisation, accountability, choice, competition, HCT, etc.), and the OECD (i.e. '21st-century skills', 'lifelong learning', and 'global knowledge economy') were present. Again, coding was done manually; albeit this time I re-coded using different coloured highlighters to indicate the presence of different discourses. Through deductive coding, I was able to locate a number of the aforementioned discourses within the two policies, which, when placed in conjunction with my inductive codes, provided me with insight into the meaning-making process behind the policy framework, specifically how certain statements were given the conditions to be formed and made to be considered 'knowledge' and 'truth'.

Having collected a large amount of data through hybrid coding, I moved on to analysing, collating, and sorting my codes into potential themes. To start this process, I wrote the inductive and deductive coded data extracts from each policy document on coloured post-it notes and placed them on a large, A2-size cardboard. The creation of my thematic map helped me to organise and think about the relationship between my codes, which in turn allowed me to sort them into potential themes. Then, after devising a set of candidate themes, I considered how these themes may be combined, and whether or not they formed an overarching theme within each respective policy document.

From here I moved on to the reviewing phase of my analysis. This was an iterative process which involved some degree of trial-and-error, but the aim of which was to refine my themes so that they formed a coherent analytic story. This was a two-step process. First, I needed to ensure that each of my themes captured the essence of the coded data and whether my data extracts



formed a coherent theme. Following this, I needed to ascertain whether my themes were accurate representations of the data as a whole. In this phase, I was able to determine, define, and name the overarching theme and sub-themes in each policy document, which in turn helped answer my second research question.

In the upcoming section I produce my interpretations of the data, and in the process answer the question: How is equity positioned in the Australian Curriculum policy framework? In producing my interpretations, I place my analysis into a detailed theoretical conversation with pertinent literature, discussing, comparing and juxtaposing my interpretations against them. I acknowledge that my interpretations of the data are framed by my theoretical framework, which naturally carries with it a number of assumptions about the nature of the data. Hence, I reiterate that I make no attempts at value-neutrality and strive towards critical reflexivity at each stage in my analysis.

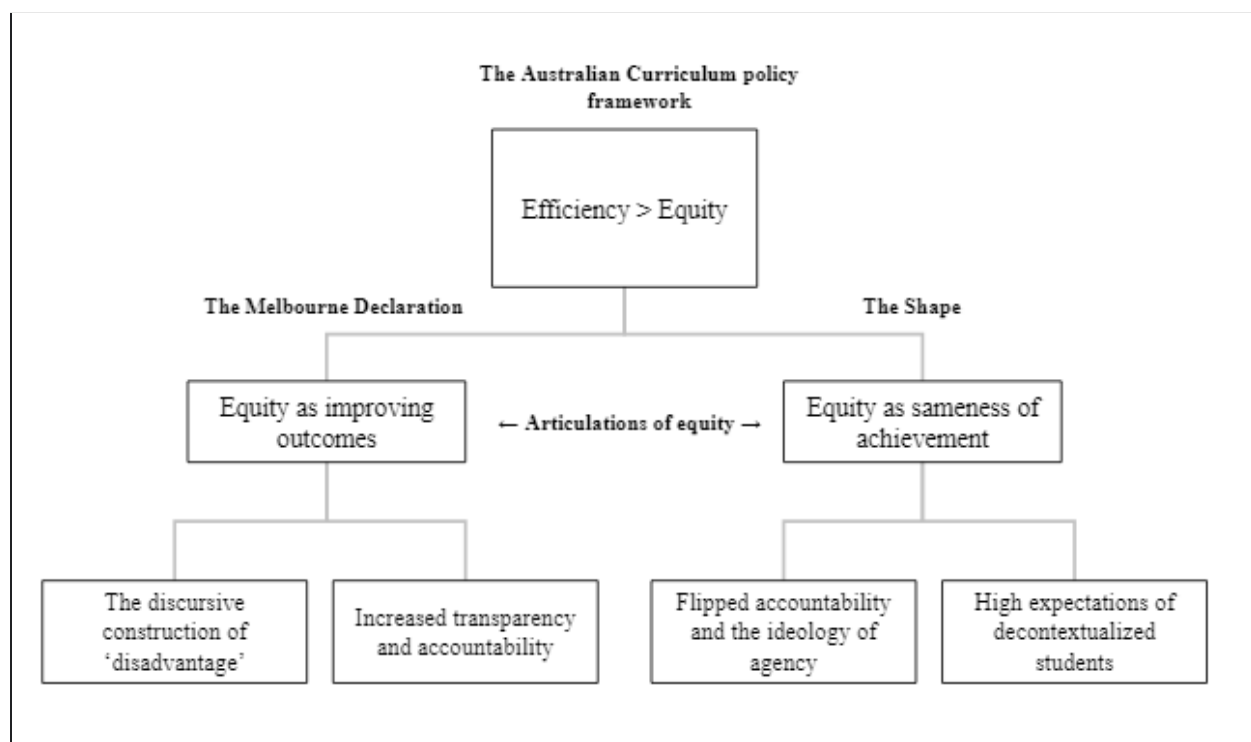
#### **4.4. Equity in the Australian Curriculum policy framework**

In answering my second research question I found that equity in the Australian Curriculum policy framework is simultaneously positioned as secondary to efficiency (i.e. efficiency takes precedence over equity as a policy priority) and within efficiency, whereby improving equity is a means for enhancing efficiency. These findings will be elaborated below, but are based on my CPA where I determined that both the Melbourne Declaration and The Shape are policy documents framed by, and imbued with, globalised education policy discourses. Ergo, despite the value of equity being at the forefront of the policy framework — stated to be the first goal of Australian schooling and the rationale for introducing the Australian Curriculum — the inscription of these discourses has created new parameters for the way it is articulated.

In Figure 6 I have outlined my findings. Beginning at the top of the diagram, the value of efficiency is shown to take precedence over equity within the Australian Curriculum policy framework. Evidence of this was found when analysing each of its constituent policy documents: the Melbourne Declaration, which articulates equity as ‘improving outcomes’, and The Shape, which articulates equity as ‘sameness of achievement’. In regards to the former, the notion of equity comprises a core part of the Australian Government’s national economic and social agenda. This articulation of equity is commonly associated with the OECD, wherein improving the outcomes of all young people (or human capital stocks) is essential to the nation’s economic



and social prosperity. Concomitantly, whilst the Melbourne Declaration directly couples education with the state's agenda, the second articulation seemingly aims to decouple the state from its responsibility for achieving this agenda by giving students, teachers, and schools primary accountability for meeting the same national standard of achievement. The influence of New Public Management and GERM policy principles are stark here. All-in-all, when placed in light of research question one, these findings further support my argument that the Australian Government's motivation to adopt the Australian Curriculum was driven by a neoliberal political-economic agenda of enhancing overall system efficiency and human capital formation.



**Figure 6: Positioning equity in the Australian Curriculum policy framework**

In addition to the two articulations of equity — which form the overarching theme of their respective policy document — each document contains two sub-themes. These sub-themes emerged through an analysis of discourse, which allowed me to draw attention to the meaning-making involved in the Australian Curriculum's policy production, as well as to consider the possible omissions and inherent assumptions within the two documents. By doing this, I was able to locate a number of problematizations within each document, including: the discursive construction of 'equity' as a policy focus; the distance between political rhetoric (i.e. what the policy says) and the reality of Australian schooling; the discursive construction of

‘disadvantaged groups’ in Australian schooling; the power relationships involved in policy-making; and how the two policies, regardless of intent but as a consequence of these problematizations, may lead to the (re)production of stratified social relations and inequality in Australian schooling. These will be discussed throughout.

#### 4.4.1. Equity as improving outcomes

The Melbourne Declaration is a policy document responding to, and framed against a backdrop of, increasing globalisation. The document opens by outlining the major developments which had impacted Australian schooling in the 20 years since the Hobart Declaration, including: heightened global integration and international mobility; the rise and growing influence of Asia and the need for young Australians to become ‘Asia literate’; and technological change and advances in information communications technology, which, in conjunction with increased environmental, social, and economic pressures, places greater demands on, but at the same time creating greater opportunities for, young people (MCEETYA, 2008, pp. 4-5). Within the Melbourne Declaration, young people are framed in a world of vast uncertainty, but are called upon to maintain a sense of optimism “to face the challenges of this era with confidence” (ibid., p. 4). Rizvi and Lingard, (2010, p. xii) attest that this positioning is commonplace in contemporary education policy, which often “sits at the intersection of the past, present, and future, with the latter often expressed in policy texts as an imagined desired future.” This desired future, according to the Melbourne Declaration, is an economically prosperous and socially cohesive Australia (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). But in order to achieve this idealised future, “Improving the educational outcomes of all young Australians” (ibid., p. 4) becomes vital.

Linking the improvement of educational outcomes with the social and economic agenda of the state is a central trope of the Melbourne Declaration. Schooling is identified for the essential role it plays, not only in promoting the holistic development and wellbeing of young Australians, but in “ensuring the nation’s ongoing economic prosperity and social cohesion” (ibid., p. 4). By eliciting the argument that improving educational outcomes brings benefits to the individual, society, and the state, the Melbourne Declaration gives a clear indication that it is a document underpinned by HCT. There are, however, several inherent assumptions within this framing that require closer examination, namely: a) the linking of ‘social cohesion’ with ‘economic prosperity’; and b) the causal relationship between educational outcomes and the economy.

Regarding the first point, despite a reduction in absolute poverty, the trend over the past 30 years has been a concentration of wealth, rather than a fair distribution (Coulby & Zambetta, 2005, p. 3). Hence, by inherently assuming that social and economic wellbeing are synchronized (i.e. the more wealth a country generates the more socially cohesive it becomes), the Melbourne Declaration overlooks the staggering rise of wealth inequality, both between and within nation-states (Harvey, 2007, p. 35; Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. xii; Hursh & Henderson, 2011, p. 176), which has without question been a catalyst for social discontents globally. However, the culprit here is not 'globalisation' or integrated economies, as much as it is the neoliberal imaginary of globalisation (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 143). In contrast to Keynesianism, which advocated for a strong state in the provision of welfare and the embedding of markets within the regulatory frameworks of the state, neoliberalism calls for a 'weak' state by reducing the state's function in regards to welfare provision and by necessitating it place greater reliance on the market (i.e. deregulation). Whilst enabling the growth and spread of TNCs, the ramifications for social cohesion have been severe. The combination of rising wealth inequality, the withdrawal of the state, and the power of TNCs is thought to have created the perfect breeding ground for ethnic-nationalist volatility which has served to erode rather than cohere society (Appadurai, 1990, p. 299; Held & McGrew, 2003, p. 17; Lingard, 2018, p. 56; Rizvi, 2019, p. 317). Furthermore, as Yates and Grumet (2011, p. 201) elucidate, there is a seeming contradiction between wanting to prepare students to develop a commitment to one another, whilst at the same time preparing them to compete in the neoliberal imaginary of competitive individualism.

The second assumption is built upon the linkage between educational outcomes and the economy. This is the simplistic and straightforward formula based on HCT, wherein improving educational outcomes equals increased national competitiveness in the global economy. In recent times, however, the simplicity of this formula has come into question. Gillies (2017, p. 5), for instance, outlines some of the pitfalls of HCT, such as: the limited success it has had in emerging economies (e.g. human capital flight); the fact that qualifications rarely tell the full picture, such as the work ethic or values of an individual; and the potential for disregarding the development of the whole individual when curriculum narrowly concentrates on 'skills for work'. Savage, Sellar, and Gorur (2013, p. 164) cast further doubt on HCT by drawing attention to the fact that, despite more people finishing school than ever, youth unemployment has risen in most developed countries, including Australia. Nonetheless, the Melbourne Declaration is forward

thinking in anticipating the changing nature of work, and explicit in outlining the knowledge (which includes a strong focus on literacy and numeracy as the cornerstones of curriculum) and skills which are essential for 21st century occupations (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 13).

The linking of educational outcomes with the economic and social wellbeing of the nation-state is a prime example of what Appadurai (1990, p. 303) has theorised to be a disjuncture in the relationship between nation and state. Whilst the nation attempts to steer the state (i.e. by calling for provision of social welfare, public services, infrastructure, etc.), the modern state also seeks to steer the nation, with each becoming the project of the other (ibid., p. 303). This can be seen in the opening sentence of the preamble, where it states that: “In the 21st century, the capacity to provide high quality of life for all will depend on the ability to compete in the global economy on knowledge and innovation” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4). When framed by discourses of HCT and neoliberal competitiveness, the notion of equity becomes rearticulated. In the same way that educational performance is deemed critical to economic productivity and the realisation of national goals, ‘underperformance’ is deemed to be an economic cost that cannot be tolerated (Savage, et al., 2013, p. 166). As such, the value of equity is positioned as a means to improve efficiency, where all students, regardless of their backgrounds, need to develop the certified knowledge and skills that are necessary to boost the competitiveness of the nation-state in the global economy. In this regard, efficiency serves as *meta-value*, as improving educational outcomes is the key to improving equity, and improving equity is the key to improving efficiency. Here the Melbourne Declaration is explicit in outlining whose outcomes are in most need of improving.

#### *4.4.1.1. The discursive construction of ‘disadvantage’*

The Melbourne Declaration affirms the significant role education plays “in building a democratic, equitable and just society — a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 4). To achieve this society, all of the Australian Governments and school sectors commit to collaboration in order to improve “the educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds” (ibid., p. 16). Although there is recognition of Australia’s failure to improve educational outcomes for many Indigenous Australians and students from low

socioeconomic backgrounds (ibid., p. 5), the Melbourne Declaration notably omits *why* a discrepancy of outcomes exists.

To reiterate an earlier point, policy discourses are powerful in defining which problems or issues are deemed worthy of attention. They do not necessarily reflect social reality, more so than they construct reality through the mobilisation of truth claims (Ball, 2015, p. 307). Policy-makers are in a unique position to mobilise these truth claims through the creation of policy discourses, which not only construct the possibilities for thought, but also construct the parameters for which we, as subjects, are framed within. In this regard, as Apple (2019, p. 8) and Bacchi (2000, p. 54) explain, there needs to be a recognition of the role discursive politics play in framing ‘ingroups’ (i.e. those framed within the discourse whose voices are recognised) from ‘outgroups’ (i.e. those framed outside of discourse and who are often spoken for), as well as the way language is used to bring people under the leadership of dominant groups. Deconstructing and unveiling the power relations and ideologies behind these truth claims thus becomes a central aspect of analysing policy, particularly when claims are made about ‘disadvantaged’ groups without addressing the underlying reasons for the disadvantage (Bacchi, 2000, p. 54).

Improving the outcomes of Indigenous students was a core part of the Australian Government’s equity agenda for schooling. More broadly, achieving equitable educational outcomes existed under the umbrella of Rudd’s ‘Close the Gap’ initiative, launched in 2009, which committed to making an annual report to Parliament on the progress towards achieving equality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians in regards to quality of life outcomes (life expectancy, employment, child mortality, to name a few). Although the Melbourne Declaration affirms its role in helping to Close the Gap by promoting “high expectations for the learning outcomes of Indigenous students” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7), there is a perception that it simultaneously manages to slip into a discourse of ‘deficit’. For example, under the priority ‘Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians’ (ibid, p. 16), it is claimed: “Educational outcomes for Indigenous Australians are substantially behind those of other students in key areas of enrolment, attendance, participation, literacy, numeracy, retention and completion” (ibid., p. 15). Again, emphasis is placed on outcomes — which can be seen as a preassigned standard, measured in key areas of participation, attendance, literacy, etc., as determined by MCEETYA — and comparison, wherein Indigenous students are

measured against ‘other students’ (assumedly referring to non-Indigenous students). If we were to fast forward to *Closing the Gap Report 2020*, we can see that “School attendance rates for Indigenous students have not improved over the past five years” (Commonwealth of Australia, 2020, p. 39). Whilst the extent of this finding varied across Australia, it was notably more pronounced for Indigenous secondary students living in remote and very remote areas (ibid., p. 41). It goes without saying, improving educational outcomes for Indigenous students is a difficult task when students are not attending school in the first place. Therefore, based on this report, there is a critical question that needs to be asked: why are students not attending school?

Morgan (2018, p. 7) provides a relatively straightforward answer: Schooling is not culturally appropriate for many Indigenous students. He uses the notion of “Guest Paradigm,” (ibid., p. 1) to refer to the marginalisation of Indigenous students’ cultural values, traditions, and knowledge systems within Australia’s Eurocentric education system and policy (ibid., p. 1). This claim is supported by Parkinson and Jones (2018, p. 92), who argue that there is a disconnection between curriculum discourse and the aspirations of many Aboriginal people, particularly in remote and very remote communities. Here it is worth drawing attention to Ball (1993, p. 14), who proclaims that recognition needs to be given to the way policy discourses redistribute ‘voice’, meaning that it does not matter what some people say or think, only certain voices can be heard as meaningful. Critically, one could make the argument that the policy discourse of the Melbourne Declaration speaks on behalf of Indigenous Australians, rather than allowing them their own voice. This may also be the case for other ‘disadvantaged’ groups.

Educational disadvantage in Australia is a complex and multifarious issue. The Melbourne Declaration partially recognises this by outlining disadvantaged students include those from low socioeconomic backgrounds, remote areas, refugees, homeless young people, and those with disabilities (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). In particular, attention is drawn to students from low socioeconomic backgrounds who, “by comparison with the world’s highest performing school systems ... are under-represented among high-achievers and over-represented among low-achievers” (ibid., p. 5). The Melbourne Declaration therefore commits to ensuring that socioeconomic status ceases to be a determinant of educational outcomes (ibid., p. 5). However, one study by Graham, Van Bergen, and Sweller (2015, p. 251) found that the emphasis on the ‘knowledge economy’ in the national curriculum has had an alienating impact on non-academic

young people, particularly those from low socioeconomic backgrounds who prefer ‘hands-on’ practical subjects. They (ibid., 2015, 251) argue that the quest towards a national curriculum — constructed on the economic needs of the nation in the global economy — has served to reinforce inequality and compound social stratification by creating a ‘terminal track’ for youths interested in non-academic pathways. Whilst this is only one example, the point is widely applicable: national curriculums embody economic, cultural, ideological, and political interests that reflect the identity and interests of those that determine it. The adverse effects of an irrelevant curriculum that fails to engage certain socioeconomic and cultural groups are potentially severe and far-reaching. As Morgan (2018, p. 16) argues, not only will it fail to engage students, but ultimately it may lead to poor self-esteem, poor learning outcomes, and a social reproduction of inequality.

#### *4.4.1.2. Increasing transparency and accountability*

The Melbourne Declaration aims to improve equity within Australian schooling through an increase in the provision of data, which will serve individual students and their schools, parents and families, the broader community, and governments (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 16). It is argued that schools require “Good quality data” as it is schools who “have the primary accountability for improving student outcomes” (ibid., p. 16). Subsequently, this will not only help to improve the educational outcomes for students, but will also provide parents and families with “Information about the performance of individuals, schools and systems” so that they “can make informed choices and engage with their children’s education and school community [i.e. My School]” (ibid., p. 16). In addition to providing parents and families with data on student outcomes so that they can assess a schools performance overall, information about a school’s enrollment profile (i.e. their ICSEA value, which includes its make-up of Indigenous students, students from English as an additional language/dialect background, etc.) is also provided. For the broader community, it is argued that “access to information enables an understanding of the decisions taken by governments ... [and] ensures schools are accountable for the results they achieve with the public funds they receive, and governments are accountable for the decisions they make” (ibid., p. 17). Finally, it is argued that good quality data is needed by governments to analyse school performance, so that they can identify schools with particular needs and allocate resources



appropriately, as well as enabling them to conduct national and international comparisons to seek out best practice (ibid., p. 17).

The rationale of improving equity through increasing datafication can be seen as a direct reflection of the Rudd–Gillard transparency agenda, which itself can be seen as an outcome of the reconfigured state under New Public Management. Contemporarily, market-based principles derived from economist logic — specifically transparency, accountability, and choice — dominate education policy and practice (Savage, et al., 2013, p. 164). The increase of surveillance and self-monitoring are part-and parcel of the audit culture within neoliberal imaginary, which, as Apple (2005, p. 14) highlights, “requires the constant production of evidence that you are doing things ‘efficiently’ and in the ‘correct’ way.” However, there are limitations of placing too much emphasis on accumulating data and only measuring “what is easy to measure” (Lingard, 2010, p. 131). Sahlberg (2016, p. 129), for one, cautions that although data is helpful in the sense that they can provide policy-makers with some insights regarding student and school performance, they can be harmful when too much importance is given to them in defining educational success. For instance, by only measuring students’ performance on standardised tests, such as PISA or NAPLAN, and then ascertaining that the school is either successful or unsuccessful based on these metrics, may overlook the plethora of other positive things within the school community.

Data is identified for the important role it plays in helping parents to make informed educational choices. Here we can see that the Melbourne Declaration aims to improve equity whilst simultaneously reaffirming its commitment to efficiency and competition via school choice. When seen at the level of discourse, these competing values are rendered visible and the gap between political rhetoric and practice becomes transparent. In their aspiration to achieve their equity goal, all of the Australian Governments commit to providing “all students with access to high-quality schooling, free from discrimination based on gender, culture, ethnicity, religion, socioeconomic background or geographic location” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). This claim presents a tension between what the text says and the reality of Australian schooling.

The Australian school system is widely characterised as a “quasi-market” (Bonnor & Shepard, 2016, p. 7; Gable & Lingard, 2013, p. 7; Gorur, 2013, p. 217), comprising a mixture of government (public) and non-government (Catholic or independent) schools who each receive a



mixture of Federal, State, and private (i.e. household) funding, and who each operate under different conditions and serve different populations. Funding for schools has been described as “complex, confusing, opaque and inconsistent among jurisdictions” (Gonski, et al., 2011, p. 48) and is often pinpointed as a significant contributing factor for inequity within the Australian schooling system. But funding is only one piece of the puzzle. The larger issue, arguably, is the structure of the school system itself. The way schools are structured in Australia is derived from neoliberal ideology’s fundamental principle of market rationality, whereby empowering parents to choose where they send their children will create greater competition and accountability amongst the schools, and hence, enhance efficiency within the system (Musset, 2012, p. 6). As it pertains to equity, this rationality is justified on the claim that all parents — irrespective of their socioeconomic and cultural backgrounds, religion, migration status, etc. — are able to seek out their educational preferences for their children (Savage, et al., 2013, p. 162). Hence, the claim is that school choice is a way of making the school system more equitable. Taylor (1997, p. 126) frames it aptly: “educational democracy is redefined as consumer democracy in the educational marketplace.”

Despite this claim, there is a wealth of data and literature that indicates that greater parental choice leads to an increase in stratification and segregation of students by ability and socioeconomic background (Montt, 2012, p. 65; Musset, 2012, p. 40; OECD, 2012, p. 10). In the UK and US, Hill and Kumar (2009, p. 15) show that increasing school choice has exacerbated inequality and racialized hierarchies. This same finding is applicable in Australia, where the trend has been that parents from higher socioeconomic groups are more likely to choose already advantaged private schools than parents from lower socioeconomic background (Musset, 2012, p. 37). Utilising data from the My School website, Bonner and Shepard (2016, p. 8) highlight how parents seek out schools with higher achieving students. More often than not, these schools have barriers to admission, such as entrance exams or fees (ibid., p. 8), so that it is not so much ‘parental choice’ as it is “the ‘schools’ choice of the most desirable parents and children — and rejection of the least desirable” (Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 15). Polarization is not only down socioeconomic or academic ability lines, however. Ho (2019, pp. 4-5) similarly utilises My School data to show how Australian schools are increasingly becoming stratified along ethnic lines, with the overwhelming majority of students from language backgrounds other than English

being concentrated in the more socioeconomically disadvantaged parts of western and south-western Sydney.

The reality of Australian schooling is that it takes place in dramatically different contexts, stratified by socioeconomic, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, religious, gender, and geographic lines. This is problematic on a number of fronts. For one, it reduces the unique opportunity schools have in building social cohesion, working contrary to the commitment of the Australian Governments, which was to “ensure that schooling contributes to a socially cohesive society that respects and appreciates cultural, social and religious diversity” (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7). Secondly, the evidence is clear: “Schools with higher proportions of disadvantaged students are at greater risk of challenges that can result in low performance, affecting education systems as a whole” (OECD, 2012, p. 10). For many years it has been known that socioeconomic diversity is important for shaping achievement equality (Montt, 2011, p. 64). The inverse of this is also true, where the greater the segregation in socioeconomic school composition, the greater the achievement inequality (*ibid.*, p. 64). And finally, as Bonner and Shepard (2016, p. 8) argue, by maintaining a quasi-market in Australian schools, we have created an uneven playing field that benefits a portion of the community more than it does the remainder. This is worrying when considering that students are expected to meet the same national standard.

#### 4.4.2. Equity as sameness of achievement

The second articulation of equity is ‘as sameness of achievement’, found when analysing *The Shape*. *The Shape* is the fourth iteration of the original document, amended “to include information ... and additional advice on how the Australian Curriculum meets the needs of the diverse range of students in Australian schools” (ACARA, 2012b, p. 1). Immediately there is an acknowledgement of the diversity of students within the Australian school context. However, the document seemingly contradicts itself by suggesting that, despite the diverse range of students, all students should learn the same and at the same standard. This point is illuminated through the two rationales for introducing the Australian Curriculum. The first rationale is to improve the quality of the Australian education system, where it states that “an Australian Curriculum will contribute to the provision of a world-class education in Australia by setting out the knowledge, understanding and skills needed for life and work in the 21st century and by setting common high standards of achievement across the country” (ACARA, 2012b, p. 5) The second rationale

is to improve the equity, where it is stated that “an Australian Curriculum will provide a clear, shared understanding of what young people should be taught and the quality of learning expected of them, regardless of their circumstances, the type of school that they attend or the location of their school (ibid., p. 5). The implication of this statement is that all Australian students, regardless of their circumstances — which may include poverty, geographic remoteness, or linguistic and/or cultural differences — are expected to meet the same national standard of achievement.

Whilst *The Shape* is evidently a document that has been influenced by the OECD — most obviously through its rationales of quality and equity — there is a subtle yet significant distinction between *The Shape*’s articulation of equity and the articulation proffered by the OECD. For the OECD, equity is not seen as sameness of achievement, but rather, as ‘sameness of treatment’. This is a view of equity as equality of opportunity, where the personal or social circumstances of students do not hinder them from achieving their educational potential (OECD, 2012a, p. 9). In *The Shape*, however, equity is articulated as equality of outcome, where students are expected to attain the same knowledge, and to the same standard, in spite of their personal or social circumstances. This is a problematic feature of the document when considering *whose knowledge* is being taught, and *whose standards* have been set, as what some consider to be “neutral descriptors” others may regard as “elitist conceptions that empower some groups whilst disempowering others” (Apple, 1993, p. 1). Furthermore, this articulation of equity is based upon an assumption of meritocracy, wherein each Australian student is on a level playing field to achieve the ‘national standard’. This assumption overlooks the fact that schooling in Australia takes place in significantly different contexts, as outlined previously.

#### *4.4.2.1. Flipped accountability and the ideology of agency*

Whereas the Melbourne Declaration was a shared enterprise by MCEETYA, *The Shape* is a document written by ACARA, an independent statutory body which frames itself as an “outcome of many years of national collaboration in education” (ACARA, 2012b, p. 5). It is telling that ACARA is the ‘authority’ for curriculum, assessment, and reporting, as language use in *The Shape* is more akin to what Bourdieu and Passerson (1990, p. 47) call, “magisterial discourse:” language which is unidirectional, used to command and instruct. Magisterial discourse is a preeminent feature of *The Shape*. For example, in addition to the rationale, it is stated that the

Australian Curriculum is important for setting out “what students need to learn” and the “expected quality of that learning” a total of 9 times (Articles 8, 12, 16b, 16f, 25, 27, 53, 55, 57). Similarly, The Shape is explicit in laying out its expectations for teachers — who are “The primary audience for the Australian Curriculum” (ACARA, 2012b, p. 11) — by making it clear what is to be taught across the years of schooling (Articles 10, 25, 53, and 65).

The use of top-down, authoritative language for the standardisation of teaching and learning goals gives a clear indication that The Shape is a text framed by discourses of New Public Management and the policy principles of GERM. Yet whilst it is explicit in outlining what each student is to learn and what each teacher is to teach, ACARA is also careful in distancing itself from being responsible for the achievement of these goals. For schools, it is stated that: “Decisions relating to the organisation and delivery of the Australian Curriculum ... rest with education authorities and schools,” and that the “schools are best able to decide how to deliver the curriculum” (ACARA, 2012b, p. 26). Similarly for teachers, it is claimed that “the design of the Australian Curriculum ... provides teachers with flexibility to cater for the diverse needs of students across Australia and to personalise their learning” (ACARA, 2012b, p. 20). Here is where The Shape conveys both “the ideology of agency” (Ball, 1993, p. 11) and ‘flipped accountability’. These two concepts gravitate around the policy principles of GERM and have become commonplace in the contemporary paradigm of educational governance.

The ideology of agency helps to create the illusion of ‘school flexibility’ and ‘teacher autonomy’ in delivering curriculum. However, as Roberts (2017, p. 57) expostulates, it really serves as a means for gaining greater control over students, teachers, and schools whilst shifting the blame away from ACARA and onto “the ‘incompetent teacher’ and ‘failing school’” (Ball, 1998, p. 125). In a similar vein, Apple (2005, p. 16) argues that although the policy principle decentralisation is used rhetorically, it really acts as recentralisation; what Du Gay (1996 as cited in Ball, 1998, p. 123) calls “controlled de-control.” This is the idea of ‘flipped accountability’, where students, teachers, school leaders, and schools are held accountable to those who decide the policy (Netolicky, et al., 2018, p. 2). In the contemporary paradigm, national-level high-stakes testing is used as the major steering mechanism of schools and systems globally (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 140; Verger, et al., 2018, p. 5). GERM reforms have resulted in performance becoming synonymous with accountability, wherein nationally established

standards are measured through high-stakes testing and used as the proxy for ‘educational success’ (Brennan, 2011, p. 260; Ydesen & Andreasen, 2020, p. 150). Although NAPLAN was not stated to be high-stakes, as it was in the US and UK, it nonetheless contains all the hallmarks of high-stakes assessment and accountability due to the impact it has had on schools and school systems (Lingard, 2010, p. 137; Thompson, 2013, p. 64).

NAPLAN is high-stakes in the sense that results are published online on My School, argued to be used as a means of improving school performance (i.e. naming and shaming) and to help inform school choice and resource allocation. In spite of these arguments, there is evidence to suggest that the use of high-stakes standardised testing has not only failed to improve student performance in Australia, but has also widened the achievement gap between high- and low-achievers (Gonski, et al., 2018, p. 6). Additionally, Thompson (2013, pp. 82-83) found that teachers perceived NAPLAN to be having a negative effect on teaching and learning by: narrowing the curriculum by teaching to the test (see also Connell, 2013, p. 107; Lingard, 2010, p. 137), increasing student and teacher anxiety (OECD, 2017, p. 11), decreasing motivation, deprofessionalisation and a loss of teacher trust, and the creation of classroom environments that are less, not more, inclusive. The emphasis on high-stakes testing has been shown to have a particularly deleterious effect in already educationally disadvantaged communities in Australia, the US, and UK, with teacher and school agency to deliver a curriculum which is culturally and contextually relevant being confined by the need to perform in standardised narrow metrics (e.g. literacy and numeracy results) which are used to determine school success (Lingard, 2010, p. 137; Hill & Kumar, 2009, p. 8).

#### *4.4.2.2. High expectations of decontextualised students*

The aspiration of the Australian Curriculum is “to provide a world-class education for all young Australians” (ACARA, 2012b, p. 7). As such, the Australian Curriculum “sets challenging standards for each student” (ibid., 28) and has been written to take account of “the diverse needs of the student population, and the knowledge, understanding and skills that all young Australians are entitled to learn” (ibid., p. 13). However, the diverse needs students are only very superficially touched upon, categorised into three groups: gifted and talented students (i.e. those achieving above ‘the standard’); English as an additional language/dialect; and students with a disability. Whilst it would be unrealistic to expect the Shape to provide a comprehensive

overview of the diverse student groups in Australian schools, the fact that only three are identified is worrying, especially when considering the level of heterogeneity in Australia.

Education policies are textual interventions into practice, contextualised into certain spaces, places, and time. More often than not, they are constructed on the idea that they will be implemented into ‘ideal conditions’ (Herbert, 2020, p. 64), despite teachers and students rarely (if ever) residing in the idealised conditions (Ball, 1993, p. 13). It would be fair to say that the larger the policy, the more standardised and devoid of context it is (e.g. a policy at an intergovernmental or national-level is less contextualised than one administered at the local level). Top-down policies from large governing bodies, such as the OECD and ACARA, are unable to acknowledge the historical, geographical, political, and sociocultural contexts within which their policy and policy advice is targeting. Subsequently, policies are presented and interpreted as ‘decontextualised’ from the day-to-day practices of students, teachers, and schools.

The Australian Curriculum establishes the ‘national standard’ by explicitly outlining the expectations for teaching and learning across the country. But given the heterogeneity of Australia and the fact that schooling takes place in vastly different contexts, it would be unfair to expect the same standard of learning for all students, as Apple (1993, p. 7) argues:

“A common curriculum, in a heterogeneous society, is not a recipe for ‘cohesion’, but for resistance and the renewal of divisions. Since it always rests on cultural foundations of its own, it will put pupils in their places, not according to ‘ability’, but according to how their cultural communities rank along the criteria taken as the ‘standard’. A curriculum which does not ‘explain itself’, is not ironical or self-critical, will always have this effect.”

Yet, without question, The Shape is clear in maintaining that each Australian student meets the same national standard. The former General Manager of ACARA who led the development of the Australian Curriculum, Phil Lambert (2016, p. 471), once reflected:

“[W]herever a student is located in Australia they have access to the same high quality curriculum, their achievements and progress can be judged and monitored against levels expected of other Australian students, and their teachers are required to meet the same high quality standards expected of other teachers in Australia. As a result of the reforms, Australia’s highly regarded education system has been made stronger and better.”

The validity of Lambert's claims are susceptible to further interrogation in the upcoming discussion chapter. But for now, it is worth exploring the power relations involved in determining whose standards have been set, and what knowledge is considered legitimate for the nation.

Within the contemporary paradigm, there is a general belief by policy-makers that by setting common high-standards will improve outcomes (Sahlberg, 2011, p. 100). Often, however, reflecting where these standards and knowledge goes unchecked. Findings from Australia (Connell, 2013, p. 107), the UK (Ball, 2006, p. 49), and Ireland (2015, p. 311) all found that national education policy subjectifies from a middle-class viewpoint, wherein 'the ideal student' is he/she who comes from middle-class practices of living, middle-class parents, and middle-class values, and hence disproportionately disadvantage those outside this norm. This has been shown to have a disenfranchising effect, particularly on those students from working-class backgrounds, as Kincheloe (2005, p. 15) outlines: "When competitive, top-down curriculum standards are employed, non-white and working-class students do not generally do well - their performance is interpreted as a manifestation of slowness, of inferior inability." There is a risk, that by creating a national standard of what each student is expected to learn, there will be a widening achievement gap between those that meet benchmarks and those who do not (Brennan, 2011, p. 274; Parkinson, 2015, p. 75).

Before concluding this thesis by offering my critique of whether or not the Australian Government's motivations to adopt a national curriculum correspond with its stated equity agenda in, Discussion: Australian schooling at a crossroads, I will first briefly discuss some of the ethical considerations and limitations of this study.

## 5. Ethics and Limitations

Qualitative research has historically been subject to criticism for a lack of ‘scientific rigour’. This is in large part due to concepts which are common within quantitative works, such as objectivity, reliability, and validity, not translating well into the qualitative research landscape (Wahyuni, 2012, p. 70). Despite the fact that qualitative research cannot be subjected to the same criteria as quantitative research, it nonetheless provides criteria for conducting high quality, rigorous, and trustworthy research (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 96). Furthermore, there are strengths of qualitative research which, in my opinion, match or even exceed the possibilities offered by quantitative research.

I have maintained from the start that, rather than trying to derive definitive answers or present generalisable results, the purpose of my critique was to question taken-for-granted assumptions, to open up complexities, and to show connections which may otherwise be hidden. At times this was challenging, particularly in the early-stages of this study. Opening up policy-making processes and linkages between the national- and global-level led to a seemingly never-ending sprawl of elaborate policy networks. Somewhat at a loss, I was fortunate to have stumbled across a paper written by Rhadika Gorur, who, in a personal account of her experience with conducting policy research, addresses the “awkwardness,” “instability,” and “partiality” of conducting policy research (Gorur, 2011, p. 620). Using the notion of “Policy assemblage” (ibid., p. 618), Gorur advocates for an anti-essentialist and anti-totalitarian way of thinking; one that helps us to understand the limitations of conducting an analysis of policy, as well as generating an awareness that our theoretical allegiances affect the realities we assemble. Whilst I was already conscious of the fact that policy analysis is an inherently political activity, and hence never value-neutral (Rizvi & Lingard, 2010, p. 52), Gorur's notion of policy assemblage helped me to be mindful of the complexities, contradictions, and effects of policy, whilst simultaneously allowing me to feel unapologetic about my theoretical perspectives and political commitments.

Contrary to traditional policy analysis, utilising CPA necessitates that the analyst places themselves in relation to the policy they are analysing, as it is *they* who bring ideologies to the interpretation of texts. However, as Wodak and Meyer (2009, p. 7) declare, there are certain ethical standards which need to be abided by when utilising critical methodologies and naming oneself ‘critical’.



Chiefly, this involves the researcher making their positionality, research interests, values, and ontological and epistemological assumptions as explicit and transparent as possible. Although I have already spent some time addressing these at various stages, it is worth briefly revisiting.

There have been several instances throughout where I have attempted to differentiate my worldview from the positivist worldview. This was done on the basis that I did not find it helpful to ‘objectivate’ or remove myself from this study. Instead, I wholly saw myself as a part of it. As Silverman (2015, p. 37) argues: “by thinking of ourselves as more technicians’ disconnects us from why we are researching the topic.” Within the critical constructivist paradigm, I maintained that my epistemological assumption is that our knowledge of the world is constructed in a dialectical process between the knower and the known. Knowers, as I have previously discussed, are bound to their context, which is shaped by certain historic, sociocultural, political, and economic elements. The implication of this statement is that I, as the researcher, am bound to my context. It is within this context that my perception of the world and the values that I hold have been shaped. I recognise that this, in turn, has substantially influenced how I conducted my research. Ergo, acknowledging my positionality and theoretical and political allegiances marked a crucial first step in me beginning this research. This acknowledgement, however, was not a one-off event. In each stage of the research process, from choosing methods and literature, to conducting my analysis, I strove towards critical reflexivity and a consideration of ethical issues. A constituent part of this reflexivity is an understanding of the limitations involved when conducting such analysis.

The first limitation to be addressed is risk inherent in all interpretative work: (ideological) over-interpretation. This is the idea that the personal biases, preconceptions, and ideological affiliations that the researcher carries into their research skews their interpretation of the data. As much as possible, I have tried to be explicit and transparent about my ontological and epistemological assumptions and positionality, however, I also acknowledge my many potential blindspots. Framed another way, I am conscious of what I am unconscious of. My previous experiences working in both high and low socioeconomic status schools and communities was pivotal in shaping my perception of the equity issue in Australian education. Whilst these experiences afforded me valuable insights and the privilege of gaining an ‘insider’s perspective’,

they also had the potential for impeding my research process by narrowing the literature that I chose to engage with and, of course, how I analysed and interpreted the policy framework.

A second limitation of this study relates to the partiality of policy analysis, whereby focusing only on one policy document or one policy ensemble, dismisses the interlinkages between policies and how they often work in unison to reinforce one another. For example, the Melbourne Declaration laid out eight National Priorities, of which the national curriculum was only one. Building on this is a third limitation which this study did not address, but is important all-the-same: the implementation and effect of policy. As Ball (1993, p. 16) outlines, policies can have significant effects that vary between contexts. In Australia, as I have argued, context is significant. Schools and communities vary remarkably, so that what is unsuccessful in one community might be successful in another (Herbert, 2020, p. 65). As schools interpret and enact policies in ways which are confined by the limitations and possibilities of their context, generalising the effect of policy (especially those at the national-level) is impossible, as any attempt at generalisation will not encompass the experience of all schools in all situations (*ibid.*, p. 65).

And finally, tying back into the ethical considerations of this research, is a limitation that I have labelled ‘determinism’. In this study, there were several occasions where I needed to be mindful of sounding overly deterministic. Primarily, this was in regards to what Bacchi (2000, p. 54) forewarned as an overemphasis on the power of discourse and the tendency to concentrate on the ability of some groups over others in constructing discourse. In this study, particular attention was given to policy-makers for their unique position in shaping public discourse. Whilst I affirm that policy-makers’ use of discourse within the political domain is inherently ideological, I recognise that the link between ideology and discourse is not always ideologically transparent (Van Dijk, 2006, p. 116). Additionally, as I have already spent time discussing early in Chapter 3, just because they are in a unique position to shape discourse, does not mean that they own the power over it. By extension, I also acknowledge the ethical implications and need for caution when framing some groups as outside of, disempowered by, or unable to access discourse. I recognise that by outlining those marginalised by discourse and macro-level structures can further act to marginalise, as well as that my analysis of discourse is itself a discourse, *ad infinitum*. Again, I reiterate my viewpoint that power is relational: “[it] is not a substance, nor a

mysterious property, but a certain type of relation between individuals, and the source of the constitution of their subjectivity (Olssen, et al., 2004, p. 24). Power coexists with freedom; hence by only concentrating on how individuals and groups are oppressed, may overlook their resistance to this oppression.

Having outlined some of the ethics and limitations of this study, I will now conclude this thesis by addressing my second research aim.

## 6. Discussion: Australian schooling at a crossroads

So far I have answered my two research questions and achieved my first research aim. I began by first theorising that the motivations behind the Australian Government's move towards a national curriculum stemmed from an ideological belief that education was to serve the globalised economy. Then, through conducting a CPA of the Australian Curriculum policy framework, I ascertained that the value of efficiency takes precedence over equity. I now turn to my second research aim: to critique whether the Australian Government's motivations to adopt a national curriculum have corresponded with the stated rationale of improving the quality and equity of the Australian schooling system.

But before doing so, I want to momentarily draw attention to the title of this chapter. The idea of Australian schooling being at a crossroads has been in my mind since 2016, the final year of my teacher training. It was around this time that I began to pay attention to the various actors outside of education who were so vocal about its shortcomings, specifically a handful of renowned politicians and the media. I can vividly recall Australian schooling being framed as 'at a crossroads', referring to Australia's declining performance in international and national assessments. More often than not, the scapegoats for this decline were the schools, teachers, and even the students themselves. Needless to say, this was disconcerting for me as a pre-service teacher on the verge of entering the teaching profession.

After embarking on this research journey, I have come to agree with the claims that Australian schooling is at a crossroads, albeit a different — but undoubtedly connected — crossroad to the one outlined above. For 40 years equity has been a priority in Australian education policy. For at least 20 years we have had data which shows the extent of the equity divide. The first three instances of PISA made it starkly clear that whilst Australia was a high-achiever, there was a persistent gap between the most and least advantaged. For 10 years, we have had the recommendations of the *Gonski Review of Funding for Schooling* (Gonski, et al., 2011), a landmark report which addressed a range of interrelated issues affecting equity in Australian schooling, including:

- The inequitable allocation of resources;
- The lack of transparency, rationale, and consistency in school funding;

- The imbalances of funding between government and non-government schools, including the quality of school infrastructure and facilities;
- How to define and measure student outcomes;
- The access all students have to a high quality of education; and
- The increasing concentration of disadvantaged students in certain schools, to name a few.

In the 10 years since Gonski, a number of other reports have emerged, highlighting a worrying trend that indicates equity has not improved, and is in fact worsening (e.g. Bonnor & Shepard, 2016; Gonski, et al., 2018; Ho, 2019).

To me, the issue of equity marks the true crossroad in Australian schooling. The question that has lingered with me, and driven me, throughout this study is that, in a country as economically prosperous and socioculturally rich, how and why are issues of equity persistent? This question I carry forth into my critique.

I maintain my original position that there is nothing inherently inequitable about a national curriculum. Many countries around the world have a national curriculum and enjoy both high levels of quality and equity. Finland, often heralded as a world leader for equitable education, is one such example (Sahlberg, 2019, p. 150). The issue that I see with the Australian Curriculum lies in the motivations to adopt it in the first place. These motivations can be traced back to the 1980's when the Australian Government first sought to control the discourse around education and schooling by exporting the crisis of the economy into the schools. In recent times, the Australian Government's ability to control the discourse has been progressively strengthened by explicitly linking Australia's declining performance on international and national large-scale assessments with Australia's future inability to compete in the globalised economy. As a consequence of gaining control over the discourse, the Australian Government has been able to circumvent its constitutional limitations and intervene into schooling. In turn, it has been successful in determining what the very nature and purposes of schooling are, as well as marginalising alternative discourses of what they could be.

Political discourses are powerful in assisting groups to attain and maintain positions of influence (Bacchi, 2000, p. 55; Van Dijk, 2006, p. 116). By controlling the discourse, groups are able to

actualise their ideological preferences to see to it that their goals are realised (Fairclough, 2001, p. 30). By controlling the discourse, the Australian Government was able to harmonise schooling with its ideological preferences; that being the pursuit of a neoliberal political-economic agenda focused on the prioritisation of efficiency and the production of human capital in order to aid the nation-state in meeting the competitive demands of the global economy. Centralising control over curriculum was an integral part of this pursuit, but was only one aspect in a broader national schooling agenda. This agenda emphasised and promoted the value of efficiency through standardisation, accountability, decentralisation, datafication, competition, comparison, and choice. By enacting reforms consistent with its ideology, the Australian Government has been able to construct a discursive parameter for how schooling is envisaged in Australia. In addition to making it difficult for “thinking otherwise” (Ball, 1993, p. 13) in regards to what the nature and purposes of schooling could be, this discursive parameter has had significant and potentially severe implications for notions of equity in Australian schooling.

Although equity has featured prominently as a priority in Australian education policy for the past 40-years, it has been framed within a neoliberal imaginary. This is not to say that equity has been abandoned necessarily — only that it has been significantly reshaped by economic rationalities and market logic. As Fairclough (2001, p. 90) puts it, alternative discourses are often contained within dominant discourses, so that they do not disappear entirely, as much as they become framed and reframed, stitched together, refracted, and rearticulated. In many respects, this makes critiquing the motivations of the Australian Government a difficult task, as the notion of equity has been ambiguously redefined into neoliberal terms. However, even if I were to base my critique on how I interpreted equity to be articulated in the Australian Curriculum policy framework — i.e. in the performative terms of improving outcomes and sameness of achievement — then I would still find that the motivation to adopt the national curriculum does not correspond with the stated rationale of improving the equity and quality of the Australian schooling system. Another report led by Gonski (2018, p. 6), titled *Through growth to achievement*, highlights the decline of Australian student performance in the international and national standardised tests which the Australian Government supposedly values. This report’s findings indicate that the slippage in performance is national, across all school sectors, and occurring across all socioeconomic groups (ibid., p. 6).

Under no circumstance do I see the motivations to adopt the national curriculum have improved equity, regardless of how 'equity' is defined. For example, if I were to base my critique off Fraser's (1998) definition of equity, where, in addition to a fair redistribution of resources, there needs to be a recognition of cultural and social differences, then the motivations certainly do not correspond as the Australian Curriculum emphasises standardisation and is dismissive of context. Similarly, the motivations would not correspond if I used the OECD's (2012a, p. 9) definition, which defines equity in terms of 'equality of opportunity', where schools and education systems aim to ensure that personal or social circumstances are not obstacles to achieving educational potential. Whilst the Melbourne Declaration (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 7) adopts this definition rhetorically, in practice it is far removed from Australia's highly stratified quasi-market school structure means that the personal and social circumstances outlined by the OECD are significant determining factors in the learning outcomes of students.

My critique is therefore blunt and straightforward: equity cannot exist within a neoliberal imaginary, as neoliberal ideology is diametrically opposed to equity. Market rationality is contrary to a fair and equitable education for all. The fundamental flaw of neoliberal market ideology is that it rests on the assumption that increasing competition will encourage individuals to work harder, which itself is built on the assumption that everyone is on a level-playing field to compete in the first place. It has been shown time and time again, market rationality persistently increases inequalities in education. For Australia to ever achieve its equity goal, concerted efforts must be made to think of a new imaginary. Hursh and Hendersen (2011, p. 182) outline that this needs to take place on three levels: 1) the discursive, 2) the political, and 3) the pedagogical. The adverse effects of continuing to prioritise global competitiveness in the economy over education are potentially severe, such as a disintegration of social cohesiveness (Brennan, 2011, p. 276). Fortunately, the inverse of this statement is also true, where the promotion of an equitable education system will bring benefits that extend beyond the classroom. However, the first step is challenging and rethinking what is possible beyond the neoliberal imaginary. This is essential if Australia is to achieve equity within its school system. To conclude, I have outlined five policy proposals that will help remedy Australian schooling:

1. Rearticulating what equity means
2. Smarter policy borrowing and learning

3. Local autonomy/flexibility to deliver curriculum
4. Redressing school choice and markets in education
5. Greater voice in policy-making processes



## 7. References

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2020). National, state and territory population. Retrieved from <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/national-state-and-territory-population/sep-2020#key-statistics>

ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) (2021, March 3). Regional population: Statistics about the population and components of change (births, deaths, migration) for Australia's capital cities and regions. Retrieved from: <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/population/regional-population/latest-release>

ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) (n.d.) Student diversity [Resource]. Retrieved from <https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/resources/student-diversity/>

ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) (2012a). Curriculum development process: Version 6. Retrieved from <https://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/history-of-the-australian-curriculum/development-of-australian-curriculum>

ACARA (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) (2012b). The shape of the Australian curriculum: Version 4.0. Retrieved from [https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/The\\_Shape\\_of\\_the\\_Australian\\_Curriculum\\_v4.pdf](https://docs.acara.edu.au/resources/The_Shape_of_the_Australian_Curriculum_v4.pdf)

Acosta, F. (2019). OECD, PISA and the educationalization of the world: The case of the southern cone countries. In Ydesen, C. (Ed.). *The OECD's historical rise in education: The formation of a global governing complex* (pp. 175-196). doi:10.1007/978-3-030-33799-5

Anderson, G. & Parkin, A. (2010). Federalism: a fork in the road? In Aulich, C & Evans, M. (Eds.) *The Rudd Government: Australian Commonwealth Administration 2007-2010* (pp. 87-117). Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press

Appadurai, A. (1990). Disjuncture and Difference in the Global Cultural Economy. *Theory, Culture & Society*, 7(2-3), 295-310. doi:10.1177/026327690007002017

Appadurai, A. (1996). *Modernity at large: Cultural dimensions of globalisation*. Minneapolis: The University of Minnesota Press.

Apple, M. W. (1993). The politics of official knowledge: Does a national curriculum make sense? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 14(1), 1-16. doi: 10.1080/0159630930140101

Apple, M. W. (2004). *Curriculum and ideology* (3rd ed.). New York and London: Routledge Falmer.

Apple, M. W. (2005). Education, markets, and an audit culture. *Critical Quarterly*, 47(1-2), 11-29, doi:10.1111/j.0011-1562.2005.00611.x

Apple, M. W. (2006). Understanding and interrupting neoliberalism and neoconservatism in education. *Pedagogies: An International Journal* 1(1), 21–26,

Apple, M. W. (2019). On doing critical policy analysis. *Educational Policy*, 1–12, doi: 10.1177/0895904818807307

Arribas-Ayllon, M. & Walkerdine, V. (2011). Foucauldian discourse analysis. In Willig, C. & Stainton-Rogers, W. (Eds.). *The SAGE handbook of qualitative research in psychology* (pp. 91-108). London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Bacchi, C. (2000). Policy as discourse: What does it mean? Where does it get us? *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 21(1), 45-57. doi: 10.1080/01596300050005493

Ball, S. J. (1993). What is policy? Texts, trajectories, and toolboxes. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 13(2), 10-17. doi:10.1080/0159630930130203

Ball, S. J. (1998). Ball policies/small world: An introduction to international perspectives in education policy. *Comparative Education*, 34(2), 119-130, doi: 10.1080/030500698282225

Ball, S. J. (2006). *Education policy and social class: The selected works of Stephen J. Ball*. London, UK: Routledge.

Ball, S. J. (2012). *Global education inc.: New policy networks and the neo-liberal imaginary*. London, UK: Routledge.

Ball, S. J. (2013). *Foucault, power, and education*. New York and London: Routledge.

Ball, S. J. (2015). What is policy? 21 years later: Reflections on the possibilities of policy research. *Discourse Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 36(3), 306-313, doi:10.1080/01596306.2015.1015279

Belfield, C. & H. M. Levin (2010). Educational privatization. In Brewer, D.J. & McEwan, P.J. (Eds.) *Economics of Education* (306-310). Oxford: Academic Press.

Bonner, C. & Shepard, B. (2016). *Uneven playing field: The state of Australia's schools*. Centre for Policy Development.

Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. (1990). *Reproduction in Education, society and culture* (2nd ed.). London: Sage.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101, doi: 10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Brennan, M. (2011). National curriculum: A political-educational tangle. *Australian Journal of Education*, 55(3), 259–280. doi:10.1177/000494411 10550030

Brewer, D. J., Hentschke, G.C. & Eide, E. R. (2010) Theoretical concepts in the economics of education. In Brewer, D. J. & McEwan, P. J. (Eds.) *Economics of Education*. Oxford, UK: Academic Press.

Cahill, K. (2015). Seeing the wood from the trees: A critical policy analysis of intersection between social class inequality and education in twenty-first century Ireland. *International Electronic Journal of Elementary Education*, 8(2), 301-316

Carnoy, M. (2016). Educational policies in the face of globalisation: Whither the nation state? In Mundy, K., Green, A., Lingard, B., & Verger, A. (Eds.). *The handbook of global education policy* (pp. 27-42). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Carpenter, B. W., Diem S. & Young, M. D. (2014) The influence of values and policy

vocabularies on understandings of leadership effectiveness. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 27(9), 1110-1133, doi: 10.1080/09518398.2014.916008

Centeno, V. G. (2019). The birth of the OECD's education policy area. In Ydesen, C. (Ed.). *The OECD's historical rise in education: The formation of a global governing complex* (pp. 63-82). doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-33799-5

Commonwealth of Australia (2020). Closing the Gap Report 2020. Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. Retrieved from <https://www.niaa.gov.au>

Connell, R. (2013). The neoliberal cascade and education: An essay on the market agenda and its consequences. *Critical Studies in Education*, 54(2), 99–112, doi:10.1080/17508487.2013.776990

Coulby, D. & Zambeta, E. (2005). Introduction: trends in globalization. In Coulby, D. & Zambeta, E. (Eds.) *Globalization and nationalism in education* (pp. 1-21). USA & Canada: RoutledgeFalmer

Couldry, N. & Meijas, U. (2019). Making data colonialism liveable: How might data's social order be regulated? *Journal on Internet regulation*, 8(2), 1-16, doi: 10.14763/2019.2.1411

Davidson, P., Saunders, P., Bradbury, B. & Wong, M. (2020), Poverty in Australia 2020: Part 1, Overview. ACOSS/UNSW Poverty and Inequality Partnership Report No. 3, Sydney, Australia: ACOSS

Dawkins, J. (1988). Strengthening Australia's schools: A consideration of the focus and content of Australia's schools. Canberra, Australia: Australian Government Publishing Services.

Diem, S., Young, M. D., Welton, A. D., Mansfield, K. C., & Lee, P.-L. (2014). The intellectual landscape of critical policy analysis. *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education*, 27(9), 1068-1090, doi:10.1080/09518398.2014.916007

Ditchburn, D. M. (2012). The Australian curriculum: Finding the hidden narrative? *Critical Studies in Education*, 53(3), 347-360, doi:10.1080/17508487.2012.703137

Elfert, M. (2019). The OECD, American power and the rise of the “economics of education” in the 1960s. In Ydesen, C. (ed.), *The OECD’s Historical Rise in Education, Global Histories of Education* (pp. 39-62). doi:10.1007/978-3-030-33799-5\_1

Esposito, L. & Perez, F. M. (2014). Neoliberalism and the commodification of mental health. *Humanity & Society*, 38(4), 414–442, doi:10.1177/ 0160597614544958

Fairclough, N. (1992). *Discourse and social change*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press.

Fairclough, N. (1995). *Critical discourse analysis: The critical study of language*. London, UK: Longman.

Fairclough, N. (2001). *Language and power* (2nd ed.). Essex, England: Pearson Education Ltd.

Foucault, M. (1980). *Power/Knowledge: Selected interviews and other writings, 1972-1977*. New York: Pantheon.

Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The Birth of the prison* (2nd ed.). New York: Vintage Books.

Fraser, N. (1998). Social justice in the age of identity politics: redistribution, recognition, participation. In Ray, L. & Sayer, A. (Eds). *Culture and Economy after the Cultural Turn*. doi: 10.4135/9781446218112

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. London, UK: The Continuum Publishing Company

Fuller, K. & Stevenson, H. (2019). Global education reform: understanding the movement. *Educational Review*, 71(1), 1-4, doi: 10.1080/00131911.2019.1532718

Furlong, P. & Marsh, D. (2010). A skin not a sweater: Ontology and epistemology in political science. *Theory and Methods in Political Science*, 184–211. doi:10.1007/978-0-230-36664-0\_10

Gable, A. & Lingard, B. (2013). NAPLAN and the performance regime in Australian schooling: A review of the policy context. UQ Social Policy Unit, Research Paper No. 5

Gillies D. (2017). Human Capital Theory in Education. In Peters M.A. (Ed.). *Encyclopaedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory* (pp. 1-5). Singapore: Springer

Giroux, H. A. (2008). Beyond the biopolitics of disposability: Rethinking neoliberalism in the new gilded age. *Social Identities*, 14(5), 587–620, doi:10.1080/13504630802343432

Gonski, D., Arcus, T., Boston, K., Gould, V., Johnson, W., O'Brien, L., Perry, L-A., & Roberts, M. (2018). Through growth to achievement: Report of the review to achieve educational excellence in Australian schools. Australia: Australian Government

Gorur, R. (2011). Policy as assemblage. *European Educational Research Journal*, 10(4), 611-622, doi:10.2304/eej.2011.10.4.611.

Gorur, R. (2013). My School, my market. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(2), 214-230, doi:10.1080/01596306.2013.770248

Gorur, R., Sørensen, E. & Maddox, B. (2019). Standardizing the context and contextualizing the standard: Translating PISA into PISA-D. In Prutsch, M. J. (Ed.) *Science, Numbers and Politics* (pp. 301–329). Cham, Switzerland: Springer International Publishing. doi:10.1007/978-3-030-11208-0\_14.

Graham, L. J., Van Bergen, P. & Sweller, S. (2015). ‘To educate you to be smart’: Disaffected students and the purpose of school in the (not so clever) ‘lucky country’. *Journal of Education Policy*, 30(2), 237-257, doi:10.1080/02680939.2014.953596

Griva, A. M. & Chrysochoou, X. (2015). Debating globalisation: Perceptions of the phenomenon based on political positioning and on ideological understandings of economy, culture, and the nation-state. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 45, 880–895. doi:10.1002/ejsp.2163

Gupta, A. and Ferguson, J. (1992). Beyond “culture”: Space, identity, and the politics of difference. *Cultural Anthropology*, 7(1), 6-23, doi:doi/10.1525/can.1992.7.1.02a00020

Hanushek, E. & Ettema, E. (2017). Defining productivity in education: Issues and illustrations. *The American Economist*, 62(2) 165–183, doi:10.1177/ 0569434516688207

Harber, C. (2014). *Education and international development: Theory, practice, issues*. London, UK: Symposium Books Ltd.

Harris-Hart, C. (2010). National curriculum and Federalism: The Australian experience. *Journal of Educational Administration and History*, 42(3), 295–313. doi: 10.1080/00220620.2010.492965.

Harvey, D. (2007). *A brief history of neoliberalism*. New York: Oxford University Press

Held, D., McGrew, A., Goldblatt, D. & Perraton, J. (1999). *Global transformations: Politics, economics and culture*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Held, D. & McGrew, A. (2002). *Globalisation/anti-globalisation*. Cambridge, UK: Polity Press

Held, D. & McGrew, A. (Eds.) (2003). *The global transformations reader: An introduction to the globalisation debate* (2nd ed.). Cambridge, UK: Polity Press

Herbert, A. (2020). Contextualising policy enactment in regional, rural and remote Australian schools: A review of the literature. *Australian and International Journal of Rural Education*, 30(1), 64-81.

Hickling-Hudson, A. (1998) When Marxist and postmodern theories won't do: The potential of postcolonial theory for educational analysis. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 19(3), 327-339, DOI:10.1080/0159630980190306

Hill, D. & Kumar, R. (2009). *Global neoliberalism and education and its consequences*. New York: Routledge

Ho, C. (2019). *Ethnic divides in schooling: In a class of their own* (Discussion paper). Centre for Policy Development.

Humphreys, E. (2018). *How labour built neoliberalism: Australia's Accord, the labour movement and the neoliberal project*. Boston: Brill

Hursh, D. W. & Henderson, J. A. (2011). Contesting global neoliberalism and creating alternative futures. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 32(2), 171-185.

Jackson, L. (2016). Globalisation and education. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Education*. doi:10.1093/acrefore/9780190264093.013.52

Jäger, S. & Maier, F. (2009). Theoretical and methodological aspects of Foucauldian critical discourse analysis and dispositive analysis. In Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (Eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 34-61). London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Kapoor, I. (2002). Capitalism, culture, agency: Dependency versus postcolonial theory. *Third World Quarterly*, 23(4), 647-664. doi:10.1080/0143659022000005319

Kayrooz, C. & Parker, S. (2010). The education revolutionary road: Paved with good intentions. In Aulich, C & Evans, M. (Eds.) *The Rudd Government: Australian Commonwealth Administration 2007-2010* (pp. 161-179). Canberra, Australia: ANU E Press

Kendall, G. & Wickham, G. (2011). Using Foucault's methods. London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd

Kennedy, K. (2009). The idea of a national curriculum in Australia: What do Susan Ryan, John Dawkins and Julia Gillard have in common? *Curriculum Perspectives* 29(1), 1-9, doi: 10.1007/s41297-019-00081-5

Kincheloe, J. L. (2005). *Critical constructivism: Primer*. New York: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc.

Lakes, R. D., & Carter, P. A. (2011). Neoliberalism and education: An introduction. *Educational Studies*, 47(2), 107-110.

Lambert, P. (2016). Educational standards and Australia: A changed landscape. *Rev. bras. Estud. pedagog. (on-line), Brasília*, 97(247), 463-471, doi:10.1590/S2176-6681/291437381

Lingard, L. (2010). Policy borrowing, policy learning: Testing times in Australian schooling. *Critical Studies in Education*, 51(2), 129-147, doi:10.1080/17508481003731026

Lingard, B. (2018). The Australian curriculum: A critical interrogation of why, what and where to? *Curriculum Perspectives*, 38(55–65), doi:10.1007/s41297-017-0033-7



Lingard, B. & Rawolle, S. (2011). New scalar politics: Implications for education policy. *Comparative Education*, 47(4), 489-502, doi:10.1080/03050068.2011.555941

Lingard, B. & Sellar, S. (2016). The changing organizational and global significance of the OECD's education work. In Mundy, K., Green, A., Lingard, B., & Verger, A. (Eds.). *The handbook of global education policy* (pp. 357-373). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Lingard, B., Sellar, S. & Savage, G. C. (2014). Rearticulating social justice as equity in schooling policy: The effects of testing and data infrastructures. *British Journal of Sociology in Education*, 3, 710–730, doi:10.1080/01425692.2014.919846.

Lingard, B., Porter, P., Bartlett, L. & Knight, J. (1995). Federal/State mediations in the Australian national education agenda: From the AEC to MCEETYA 1987-1993. *Australian Journal of Education*, 39(1), 41-66, doi:10.1177/000494419503900104.

MCEECDYA (Ministerial Council for Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs) (1989). The Hobart declaration on schooling. Retrieved from [www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/hobart\\_declaration,11577.html](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/mceecdya/hobart_declaration,11577.html)

MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs) (1999). The Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-first Century. Retrieved from [www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/featurearticlesbytitle/A0C19C769B9B284BCA2569DE002539EE?OpenDocument](http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/featurearticlesbytitle/A0C19C769B9B284BCA2569DE002539EE?OpenDocument)

MCEETYA (Ministerial Council on Education Employment Training and Youth Affairs) (2008). Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians. Retrieved from [www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/\\_resources/national\\_declaration\\_on\\_the\\_educational\\_goals\\_for\\_young\\_australians.pdf](http://www.mceecdya.edu.au/verve/_resources/national_declaration_on_the_educational_goals_for_young_australians.pdf)

Montt, G. (2011). Cross-national differences in educational achievement inequality. *Sociology of Education*, 84(1), 49–68. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0038040710392717>

Morgan B. (2018). Beyond the guest paradigm: Eurocentric education and aboriginal peoples in NSW. In McKinley E. & Smith L. (Eds.) *Handbook of Indigenous education* (pp. 1-18). Singapore: Springer, doi:10.1007/978-981-10-1839-8\_60-1

Mundy, K. & Verger, A. (2016). The World Bank and the global governance of education in a changing world order In Mundy, K., Green, A., Lingard, B., & Verger, A. (Eds.). *The handbook of global education policy* (pp. 335-357). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Mundy, K., Green, A., Lingard, B. & Verger, A. (2016). Introduction: The globalization of education policy – Key approaches and debates. In Mundy, K., Green, A., Lingard, B., & Verger, A. (Eds.). *The handbook of global education policy* (pp. 1-16). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Musset, P. (2012). School choice and equity: Current policies in OECD countries and a literature review. OECD Education Working Papers, No. 66, OECD Publishing, Paris. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/5k9fq23507vc-en>

Niesche, R. (2018). Improving educational equity in Australia. Sydney, Australia: Gonski Institute for Education

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (1996). The knowledge-based economy. Paris: OECD.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (1997). Thematic review of the transition from initial education to working life: Australia.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2004a). Education at a glance: OECD indicators 2004. Paris: OECD.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2004b). What makes school systems perform? Seeing school systems through the prism of PISA. Paris: OECD

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2012a). Equity and quality in education: Supporting disadvantaged students and schools. Paris: OECD Publishing, doi:10.1787/9789264130852-e

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2012b). Policy background. In *Delivering School Transparency in Australia: National Reporting through My School*. Paris: OECD, doi:10.1787/9789264175884-3-en.

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2017). PISA 2015 results (volume III): Students' well-being. Paris: PISA, OECD Publishing, doi.org/10.1787/9789264273856-en

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2018). Equity in education: Breaking down barriers to social mobility. Paris: PISA, OECD Publishing, doi:10.1787/9789264073234-en

OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2020). Education at a glance: OECD indicators. Paris: OECD Publishing. doi:10.1787/69096873-en

Olssen, M., J. Codd, & A. O'Neill. (2004). Education policy: globalisation, citizenship and democracy. London, UK: SAGE.

Ørskov, F. F. (2019). Australian education joins the OECD: Federalism, regionalization, and the role of education in a time of transition. In Ydesen, C. (Ed.). *The OECD's historical rise in education: The formation of a global governing complex*. (pp. 85-108). doi:10.1007/978-3-030-33799-5\_1

Ozga, J. (2005). Travelling and embedded policy: The case of post-devolution Scotland within the UK. In Coulby, D. & Zambeta, E. (Eds.) *Globalization and nationalism in education* (pp. 117-127). USA & Canada: RoutledgeFalmer

Parkinson, C. (2015). Australian curriculum implementation in a remote aboriginal school: A curriculum leader's search for a transformational compromise (pp. 94-105). *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 14(3), 94-105.

Parkinson, C. & Jones, T. (2018). Aboriginal people's aspirations and the Australian curriculum: A critical analysis. *Journal Educational Research for Policy and Practice*, 18, 75-97, doi:10.1007/s10671-018-9228-4

Plank, D. N. & Davis, T. E. (2010). The economic role of the state in education. In Brewer, D.J. & McEwan, P.J. (Eds.) *Economics of Education* (299-305). Oxford: Academic Press.

The Parliament of the Commonwealth of Australia (2008). Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority Act 2008. Retrieved from <https://www.legislation.gov.au/Details/C2011C00725>

Piattoeva, N. (2010). Comparative education in global times. In Järvelä, M. L., Ritola, L. & Sitomaniemi-San, J. (Eds.). *Education, ethics and diversity: A publication in honour of Professor Rauni Räsänen* (pp. 9-26). Oulu, Finland: University of Oulu

Pyne, C. (2014, January 10). Review of the national curriculum to put students first [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://ministers.dese.gov.au/pyne/review-national-curriculum-put-students-first>

Reid, A. (2005). Rethinking national curriculum collaboration: Towards an Australian curriculum. Canberra, Australia: Australian Government.

Reid, A. (2019). National curriculum: An Australian perspective. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 39, 199–203, doi:10.1007/s41297-019-00077-1

Rizvi F. (2007) Lifelong learning: Beyond neo-liberal imaginary. In Aspin D.N. (Ed.) *Philosophical Perspectives on Lifelong Learning* (pp. 114-130). Lifelong Learning Book Series, vol 11. Dordrecht, NL: Springer. doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4020-6193-6\_7

Rizvi, F. (2017). Globalization and the neoliberal imaginary of educational reform. *Education Research and Foresight Series*, 20, 1-13. Paris, France: UNESCO.

Rizvi, F. (2019). Global interconnectivity and its ethical challenges in education. *Asia Pacific Education Review* 20, 315–326, doi:10.1007/s12564-019-09596-y

Rizvi, F. & Lingard, B. (2010). Globalizing education policy. London, UK: Routledge

Roberts, P. (2014). A curriculum for the country: The absence of the rural in a national curriculum. *Curriculum Perspectives*, 34(1), 51-60.

Roberts, P. (2017). A curriculum for whom? Rereading ‘implementing the Australian curriculum in rural, regional, remote and distance-education schools’ from a rural standpoint. *Australian and International Journal of Rural education*, 27(1), 56-70.

Rudd, K. & Smith, S. (2007). The Australian economy needs an education revolution: New Directions Paper on the critical link between long term prosperity, productivity growth and human capital investment. Barton, ACT: Australian Labor Party

Sahlberg, P. (2011). Finnish lessons: What can the world learn from educational change in Finland? New York: Teachers College Press

Sahlberg, P. (2016). The global educational reform movement and its impact on schooling. In Mundy, K., Green, A., Lingard, B., & Verger, A. (Eds.). *The handbook of global education policy* (pp. 128-144). West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, Ltd.

Sahlberg, P. (2019). Equitable education in Australia: Empowering schools to lead the way. In Netolicky, D. M., Andrews, J. & Paterson, C. (Eds.) (2019). *Flip the system Australia: What matters in education*. Abingdon, UK: Routledge

Savage, G. C., S. Sellar, & R. Gorur. (2013). Equity and marketization: Emerging policies and practices in Australian education. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 34(2), 161–169, doi:10.1080/01596306.2013.770244

Savage, G. C., & O’Connor, K. (2014). National agendas in global times: Curriculum reforms in Australia and the USA since the 1980s. *Journal of Education Policy*, 30(5), 609–630, doi:10.1080/02680939.2014. 969321

Seddon, T. (2001). National curriculum in Australia? A matter of politics, powerful knowledge and the regulation of learning. *Pedagogy, Culture and Society*, 9(3), 307-331, doi:10.1080/14681360100200127

Silverman, D. (2015). Interpreting qualitative data (5th ed.). London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Skillbeck, M. (1980). Core curriculum for Australian schooling: What it is and why we need one. Canberra, Australia: Curriculum Development Centre

Slater, G. B. (2015). Education as recovery: Neoliberalism, school reform, and the politics of crisis. *Journal of Education Policy*, 30(1), 1–20, doi:10.1080/02680939.2014.904930

Sternberg, R. (2007). Culture, instruction, and assessment. *Comparative Education*, 43(1), 5-22, doi:10.1080/03050060601162370

Taylor, T. (1995). Movers and shakers: High politics and the origins of the national curriculum. *The Curriculum Journal*, 6(2), 161-184.

Taylor, S. (1997). Critical policy analysis: exploring contexts, texts and consequences. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 18(1), 23-35, doi: 10.1080/0159630970180102

Thompson, G. (2013). NAPLAN, MySchool and accountability: Teacher perceptions of the effects of testing. *The International Education Journal: Comparative Perspectives*, 12(2), 62–84.

Van Dijk, T. A. (1993). Principles of critical discourse analysis. *Discourse & Society*, 4, 249-283.

Van Dijk, T. A. (2006). Ideology and discourse analysis. *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 11(2), 115-140.

Verger, A., Parcerisa, L. & Fontdevila, C. (2018). The growth and spread of large-scale assessments and test-based accountabilities: A political sociology of global education reforms. *Educational Review*, 71(6), 1-26, doi: 10.1080/00131911.2019.1522045

Vulliamy, G. (2010). Educational reform in a globalised age: What is globalisation and how is it affecting Education world-wide? doi:10.6471/JECEC.201010.0001

Wahyuni, D. (2012). The research design maze: Understanding paradigms, cases, methods and methodologies. *Journal of Applied Management Accounting Research*, 10(1), 69-80.

Wallace, D. F. (2009). This is water: Some thoughts, delivered on a significant occasion, about living a compassionate life. Boston: Little, Brown and Company

Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (2009). Critical discourse analysis: History, agenda, theory and methodology. In Wodak, R. & Meyer, M. (Eds.) *Methods of critical discourse analysis* (pp. 1-33). London: SAGE Publications Ltd

Whetton, C. (2009). A brief history of a testing time: National curriculum assessment in England 1989-2008. *Educational Research* 51,(2), 137–159, doi:10.1080/00131880902891222

Xu, W. & Zimmet, K. (2020). Applying thematic analysis to education: A hybrid approach to interpreting data in practitioner research. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1–9, doi: 10.1177/1609406920918810

Yates, L. & Grumet, M. (2011). Curriculum in today's world: Configuring knowledge, identities, work and politics. Abingdon, UK: Routledge

Ydesen, C (2019a). Introduction: What can we learn about global education from historical and global policy studies of the OECD? In Ydesen, C. (Ed.). *The OECD's historical rise in education: The formation of a global governing complex*. (pp. 1-15). doi:10.1007/978-3-030-33799-5

Ydesen, C. (2019b). The formation and workings of a global education governing complex. In Ydesen, C. (Ed.). *The OECD's historical rise in education: The formation of a global governing complex* (pp. 291-302). doi:10.1007/978-3-030-33799-5

Ydesen, C. & Andreasen, K. E. (2020). Historical Roots of the Global Testing Culture in Education. *Nordic Studies in Education*, 40(2), 149–166, doi:10.23865/nse.v40.2229

Yorke, A. (2004). Refusing Brendan Nelson's national curriculum. Unpublished paper, College of Fine Arts, University of New South Wales.

Zaglas, W. (2019, December 13). AEU dismisses COAG reform agenda as 'groundhog day'. *Education Review*. Retrieved <https://www.educationreview.com.au/2019/12/aeu-dismisses-coag-reform-agenda-as-groundhog-day/>