



## **Re-examining the Curriculum Development Centre: Coordinative Federalism and Kingdon's Agenda-Setting (1975-87)**

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During period 1975 through to 1987 the Commonwealth ventured into curriculum development, hitherto an activity for states and territories. Unlike the ACARA Curriculum of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd governments, there was nothing mandatory about the CDC's curriculum development activities. Here, the dominant influence was coordinative federalism. This paper advances a thesis that Kingdon's Agendas is a useful lens in examining the historical circumstances bringing this educational policy into being, principally because it requires an examination of the political circumstances of the time, in this case including the politics of the administration of the CDC.

### **Introduction**

The creation of the Australian federation in 1901 ensured school education would be a state prerogative. The enactment of the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), however, legitimated the concept of national curriculum development, and the principle of cooperative and coordinative federalism—the states, territories and the Commonwealth working cooperatively and in a coordinated manner. A major step was taken towards national curriculum development for school education (Piper, 1987). Skilbeck (2015a) stresses it 'was established in 1975 under the last legislation that passed through Federal Parliament before the dismissal of the Whitlam Government' (n.p.). Clearly, the CDC was created during

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volatile political times, yet it survived through to the Hawke Government.

Drawing on the research by Christie (1985), Kennedy (1990) identified three distinct phases in national curriculum development associated with the CDC, and all a part of the general process of legitimatization of a national curriculum body within the context of the Commonwealth activities in school education. First, there was the ‘committee phase’ in the early- to late-1970s when the National Committee on Social Science Teaching, the Asian Studies Coordinating Committee and the National Committee on English Teaching, acted as ‘coordinating mechanisms’ for joint curriculum activities between the Commonwealth, states and territories—a process of the states and territories working cooperatively with the Commonwealth Department of Education. Skilbeck (2015b) shows how ‘all three [curriculum committees] were absorbed—not without protest—into the CDC’ (n.p.).

The creation of the CDC as a Commonwealth statutory authority marked the second phase and manifesting a more coordinated and expansive Commonwealth effort in the curriculum area. The Review of Commonwealth Functions (RCF) Committee—more commonly known as the ‘Razor Gang’, chaired by Phillip Lynch—terminated this phase in 1981. There had been an earlier Razor Gang, established by Prime Minister Malcolm Fraser in 1976, and also chaired by Lynch.

Constituting the third phase, conceived in its broadest meaning, now the curriculum function was considerably reduced and moved into the Commonwealth Department of Education from where it operated for several years through until resurrected in another form by the Hawke Government as the Curriculum Corporation (CC).

Why did the CDC sustain such a lengthy history during a time what may have been hostile political circumstances? What was the contribution of the CDC to the notion of national curriculum? How

was its legislation made possible? First, there is a need for a brief survey of the operative form of federalism at the time.

### **Coordinative federalism**

Sometimes called collaborative or cooperative federalism, this form of federalism is best exemplified during the Whitlam and the following Fraser governments. Using research by Cameron and Simeon (2002), the John Curtin Institute of Public Policy (JCIPP) defines this form of federalism as the process by which ‘national goals are achieved, not by the federal government acting alone or by the federal government shaping provincial [or State and Territory] behaviour through the exercise of its spending power, but by some or all of the 11 [Canadian] governments and the territories acting collectively (Collaborative/Cooperative Federalism, n.d., n.p.)

With the newly established Australian Schools Commission (ASC) and the Whitlam and Fraser governments it is important to note there was no agreed position upon just how the respective governments should collaborate. However, following Saunders’ (2002) Australian-focused research, the JCIPP research (n.d.) contends it is possible to discern some of the characteristics of collaborative federalism in the Australian context:

- coordination, involving collective action to address such problems as drought/water management that cross state borders. States are also invited to participate in negotiations of international treaties in cases where State interests will be particularly affected;
- harmonisation, efforts are made to ensure that State and Commonwealth legislation do not clash and, possibly, force the Commonwealth to challenge the State’s legislation under s.109 of the Australian Constitution, which states that when Commonwealth and State legislation conflict ‘the Commonwealth shall prevail’;

- financial assistance, specifically the use of specific purpose payments, can be used to further collaboration between the States, Territories and Commonwealth on issues of mutual concern or be exploited by the Commonwealth to further its own policy agenda;
- ministerial councils, constitute collaborative arrangements between the States, Territories and Commonwealth to exchange information, discuss policy formulation and coordination, and establish protocols and regulatory frameworks in different policy areas; and
- inter-governmental agreements, which formalise arrangements between the Commonwealth and State ministers and set out the objectives, duration and procedures (Collaborative/Cooperative Federalism, n.d., n.p.).

Labor Prime Minister Whitlam's centralist 'new federalism' attempted to extend Commonwealth influence to new areas. By contrast, conservative Prime Minister Fraser's new federalism emphasised 'state rights' (Gillespie, 1994). Changes to the nature of coordinative federalism under the Fraser Government following the Whitlam sacking of 1975 were significant. With the Conservative-dominated states and territories resenting what they perceived to be their loss of authority, Fraser put into effect a new policy of coordinative federalism. The outcome was an agreement between the Commonwealth and the states and territories in which both levels of government agreed to a system of co-operative planning and decision-making (Hinz, 2011, n.p.).

### **Kingdon's model for agenda-setting**

First published in 1984 and developed through many case studies, Kingdon's *Agenda* has been influential in the study of agenda-setting in public policy. In his Foreword to Kingdon's (2003) *Agendas*, James A. Thurber writes of the manner in which

legislation usually is developed: ‘students often think policy making is random behaviour and that chaos theory best describes what happens in the agenda-setting process. Kingdon’s model plays well into these initial biases, introducing the reader to “organised anarchy” as an explanation of how the policy process works’ (p. ix). Here Thurber’s Foreword to the second edition of *Agendas* underscores the presence of contestation of the politics of policy development and implementation. Kingdon’s model of agenda-setting and policy implementation has gained the attention of theorists for at least three decades since it first appeared. Indeed, Kingdon received the Aaron Wildavsky Award for *Agendas*, cited as ‘“an enduring contribution to the study of public policy” ’ (Thurber, 2003, p. x).

Consider Kingdon’s statements concerning the political drivers of policy agendas. As he argues, ‘the opposition of a powerful phalanx of interest groups makes it difficult—not impossible, but difficult—to contemplate some initiatives’ (Kingdon, 2003, p. 199). Kingdon (2003) maintains consensus is the binding force of disparate opposing forces and it ‘is built in the political stream by bargaining more than by persuasion’ (p. 199). As he states ‘the combination of national mood and elections is a more potent agenda setter than organized interests’ (Kingdon, 2003, p. 199). It is because of what Kingdon (2003) states about ‘national mood’, when explaining the educational policy development and enactment of certain epochs in Australian history, evokes a brief description and analysis of the prevailing *zeitgeist* and political dynamic.

This paper makes several references to *zeitgeist*, and a brief statement of its meaning is appropriate here. The word is a German noun meaning ‘the spirit of the time; general trend of thought or feeling characteristic of a particular period of time’ (Random House Dictionary, 2015). It is an important component of Kingdon’s agenda-setting model. To bear out the above point made by Kingdon (2003) in respect to ‘national mood’ or *zeitgeist*, we need only look to the way in which Peter Garrett, Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, in the second Gillard

Government (September 2010-27 June 2013), was forced to negotiate with the many hostile state and territory Coalition governments concerning Gonski funding (E. Griffiths, 2013).

Instead of looking at how particular programs are put in place, or how political decisions are made, Kingdon (2003) focuses on how issues come to the attention of government in the first place, and eventually become policy. Why do some issues get on the agenda on others not? He provides a theory that includes three separate, but loosely coupled streams—problem, policy, and political. The problem stream is where particular problems get identified due to focusing events, changes in indicators, or pressure groups. Witness how Skilbeck (2015a) explains below how the CDC emerged in late 1975 in Australia. Academics, researchers, bureaucrats and others that look into the details of various issues dominate the policy stream. Possible specific alternatives for programs are developed in the policy stream. In Australia, the federal government dominate the political stream. Here, the Prime Minister and Cabinet, the chief bureaucrats and are the visible people in government. They help to identify the major issues of political importance, but not the detailed alternatives. Political issues are linked to the national mood—the *zeitgeist*, the party in power, and the political dynamics of the particular epoch. Issues get on the decision agenda when all three of these streams come together, usually because a policy entrepreneur has recognized a window of opportunity and brought them together. This is the Kingdon model of agenda setting with its inflows of politics and policy mix. The outflow is the policy.

At any given time the particular items on the agenda are a function of the mix of inflows of the model. Consisting of three separate ‘streams’: problems, solutions, and politics come together. Issues get on the agenda when ‘a problem is recognized, a solution is available, and the political climate makes the time right for change ’ (Kingdon, 2003, p. 93). Political will comes from both predictable elements such as post-elections and unpredictable ones, such as the 1996 Port Arthur shooting massacre, a disaster nationally felt which was instrumental with a change in national firearms law. To harness

an available solution to solve an existing problem the three flux must encounter in order gain political attention. For the necessary legislation establishing the CDC, this was coming together, albeit under troubling times during the last weeks of the Whitlam Government in 1975. The storm clouds generated by a confident Fraser-led Opposition were gathering thick and fast during these weeks. Could the CDC survive the political turbulence?

Mucciaroni (1992) further explains the Kingdon (2003) model:

A problem becomes salient when a crisis or ‘focusing event’ attracts attention to it, or when widely respected social indicators signal a change. Solutions refer to ‘the gradual accumulation of knowledge and perspectives among specialists in any given area’ and the generation and diffusion of policy proposals by them. Moreover, the political environment is constantly undergoing change, which facilitates or blocks problems and solutions from getting on the agenda. ‘Swings of national mood, vagaries of public opinion, election results, changes of administration turn over in Congress’ [or parliament] may be relevant, as well as other kinds of political change (Kingdon, 1984, p. 93, as cited in Mucciaroni, 1992, p. 460).

Consider the flux of educational policy during the Hawke-Keating years (1983-1996). Briefly and simplistically according to Kingdon’s model, the progressivist philosophy of the CDC here encountered ‘a brick wall’ when confronting the economic rationalism and globalism of education policy during the Hawke-Keating years. It could survive a hostile political climate, but not a changing *zeitgeist*.

Critical to Kingdon’s theory is what could be termed the Goldilocks effect, when conditions are just right for the policy to proceed from an idea to an agenda item on the table. For Kingdon (2003), these

‘policy windows’ which often are open only for a short time when conditions are right, is the precondition for getting a matter on the agenda. The three streams of problems, solutions, and politics must come together under suitable and conducive conditions. According to Mucciaroni (1992), ‘because change in each stream takes place largely independent from changes in the others, what gets on the agenda depends upon fortuitous timing’ (p. 460). Thus, ‘if the problem is not salient, and/or a solution is not available, and/or political conditions are inhospitable, it will not get on the agenda’ (p. 460).

For Skilbeck (2015b), ‘suitable and conducive conditions’ are ‘especially pertinent to the establishment of the CDC’ (n.p.). He mentions two of them—there are of course others:

When I asked [Kim] Beazley senior, then Minister of Education, how the Whitlam government had managed to achieve so quickly in practical action such a substantial policy agenda, his reply was that in the many years in opposition he—and others—had made an intensive and wide-ranging study of education and come to office prepared with knowledge and understanding (n.p.).

For Skilbeck (2015b), this personal factor needs to be sufficiently imbedded in the Kingdon’s agenda-setting model.

*Apropos*, his first point, Skilbeck (2015b) adds:

A key policy agent was...Alan, who as First Assistant Secretary in the Education Department was Australia’s representative on the Education Committee and the Board of the Centre for Educational Research and Innovation of the OECD. As a consultant...I recall meeting him in Paris and reflecting that, in that capacity he would have been well informed about international development in curriculum policy. He must have played a significant part in preparing the legislation and laying out directions for CDC (n.p.).



Skilbeck (2015b) stresses the at-times importance of individuals in the agenda-setting process. Anderson was a high-achieving public servant in the Westminster tradition (Australian Adam Smith Club, n.d.).

### **Challenges to Kingdon's model: 'post-Kingdon'**

During late September 2014 the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy at the National University of Singapore hosted the 'Future of the Multiple Streams Framework: moving policy theory forward' workshop. This was a search by international scholars to advance Kingdon's model of public policy development and enactment. As one participant argued, since 1984 Kingdon's Multiple Streams Analysis 'remains a key reference point in the public policy literature. It has helped produce a literature of its own and inspired aspects of more prominent approaches such as punctuated equilibrium and complexity theory' (p. 1). Yet, for Cairney (2014), 'it is often unclear how Kingdon's work remains influential: does it provide a set of ideas or tools to guide research directly, or simply encourage scholars to pay attention to certain aspects of the policy process, such as uncertainty, ambiguity, lurches of attention?' (p. 1).

In a vein very close to the central elements of this article, Rüb (2014) argued,

agenda-setting and policy-making are fundamentally shaped by the *temporal rhythms of politics*. The sphere of politics has its *own time*, which arises due to the institutional, coordinative and cognitive requirements of democratic decision-making. Agenda-setting, coupling and decision-making as central activities of the policy entrepreneur and other political agency must be translatable into a temporal progression. Policy-making requires time ... (p. 3).

Rüb's (2014) thesis supports the one founded in this paper, stressing the necessity of conceiving educational policy development and

enactment in terms of the dominant form of Australian federalism, shaped as it is by the dominant politics, and the overriding *zeitgeist* of the time. Generally, historical analysis is important in our understanding of educational policy.

### **Kingdon's agenda-setting model and educational policy**

Kingdon's agenda-setting model increasingly is being used in educational policy analysis. In research close to the purpose of this article, Hinz (2010) examined influence of federalism on school funding and policymaking using Kingdon's *Agendas*. This research is based on a detailed study of the Victorian government's 'Schools of the Future' (SOTF) initiatives (1992-1999), which devolved ninety-three per cent of the state government's public education budget to individual schools, effectively allowing schools to govern themselves within a state accountability framework. Hinz (2010) researched the policy-making process with reference to Commonwealth and intergovernmental influences. The research challenged recurrent critiques of Australian federalism, finding that SOTF best corresponds with the coordinative view of federalism, more reminiscent of the Whitlam and Fraser years. Hinz's (2010) research was based upon original data and documents from government and non-government bodies, complemented by interviews with key policy makers, triangulated against secondary literature, and analysed qualitatively in conceptual frame drawing upon variants of institutionalism and Kingdon's policy streams framework, a research methodology adopted in this paper.

Skilbeck (2015b) stresses the importance of a historical perspective in policy analysis. In relation to Hinz's (2010) findings in regards to devolution of decision-making in school education, he adds:

Devolution was well under way in Victoria in the 70s: such processes in my experience are often long drawn out. For example, in the mid-1930s the London County Council introduced comprehensive schooling. It was not until the 1960s—under Sec. of Education Crossland—that local education authorities were enjoined to adopt it. Now [in the UK] there is considerable backsliding by

Labour as well as Conservatives. Such processes may be consolidated or hastened—or hindered—by particular events and statements, but can seldom be pinned down to singularities my reference to Beazley indicated, he should not be treated as the be-all and end-all of policy—and politics—in the early 70s, eg., the national committees preceded CDC in ‘legitimizing federal action’, to say nothing of the earlier [Commonwealth] funding of school libraries and science (n.p.).

Moreover, again at a state level Rodwell (2011) illustrates the relevance and veracity of Kingdon’s *Agendas* in explaining contested policies in Tasmanian post-secondary education during the period 2007-2010. Skilbeck (2015b), however, adds, ‘indeed, Tasmanian education is rich in examples of not just contestation but muddle! Political back-flips, not the least of them’ (n.p.).

***Zeitgeist: ‘he wasn’t just part of a zeitgeist,  
he was the zeitgeist’.***

In the national outpouring of grief, praise and passion for Edward Gough Whitlam during the days following his death on 21 October 2014, Sean Barry wrote in *Alochonaa (Dialogue)*:

So to young Australians, he widened the horizons of young people from poor backgrounds. He made them see the possibilities of their life and how they could make Australia a better place. He made them and others see what it was like to be a proud Australian. That in the end is his greatest contribution to this country. *He wasn’t just part of a zeitgeist, he was the zeitgeist.* After all, no other Australian politician is referred to and recognised by their given name alone. I fear that Whitlam was a ‘once off’ and we will not see his like again. Vale Edward Gough Whitlam (my emphasis) (n.p.).

Indeed, Whitlam's ideas and the changes he was able to manage made him the *zeitgeist* of his time. Progressive reform, social justice and equity were at every turn in Australian society. This was a perception by some; others may contend it was retrograde anarchy.

How much can this be attributed to Whitlam alone? Skilbeck (2015b) counters by stating 'as my [above] reference to [Kim] Beazley [Snr] indicated, he [Whitlam] should not be treated as the be-all and end-all of policy—and politics—in the early 70s' (n.p.).

While The Dismissal was a very sobering experience for many Australians, the *zeitgeist* of the earlier Whitlam period tended to be sustained in Whitlam's absence, although by 1981 it tended to be a fading memory as many Australians looked to further change. During the last years of the Fraser Government the CDC underwent some change.

### **Political dynamics: the Whitlam and Fraser years**

The Whitlam Government had the great misfortune to be in office during a time of international crises, similar in many ways in which the Rudd Government had to deal with the GFC. During the Whitlam years, rampant inflation and international oil price spiralled out of control, while many agricultural and pastoral products nose-dived.

Griffith (1997) writes how Liberal Party politics stiffened during the latter years of the Whitlam Government. John Hyde, the then Liberal MHR for Moore in Western Australia had confessed:

a new breed of more politically ruthless individuals organised a strong power base by stacking branches in key electorates, believing that the older Party hands such as himself, Chaney, Freeth, Withers and Lathby were either selling out to Canberra or not sufficiently ruthless to oppose Canberra's 'centralism'.

Could the CDC survive such political circumstances? Indeed, it was the centralism of the Whitlam Government—the very same centripetal forces about which Menzies (1967) had so much to say—that so riled many Australian conservatives. And the Whitlam Government's initiatives with school education reflected centralism.

Davies (2007) draws attention to Sir Robert Menzies' (1967) *Central Power in the Australian Commonwealth*. Here, Menzies adopted labels coined by James Bryce, 1st Viscount Bryce, (1838-1922) British academic, jurist, historian and Liberal politician who had described the two forces operating in a federation—centripetal and the centrifugal forces (Bryce, 1888). Both Bryce and Menzies may have been motivated to use these terms because of the ostensible impression which they convey of a certainty normally associated with the physical sciences. Centripetal forces draw power to the centre—the Commonwealth—while centrifugal forces attract towards the states and territories.

Davies (2007) shows how Menzies (1967, p. 2) 'contended these forces are constantly competing against each other, and that the balance between them is never static. Not surprisingly, his view in 1967 was that the centripetal forces had well and truly predominated during the previous 66 years of Federation' (p. 2). As Davies (2007) states, Menzies' conclusions forty years later seems even more obvious. However, Davies (2007) goes on to demonstrate in a federation these centripetal and centrifugal forces are at tension at three different levels: the legal, financial and political.

When The Right Hon. Sir Paul Hasluck delivered the Governor-General's speech to the Australian Parliament in 27 February 1973 many Australians may have stood aghast at the centripetal intent of the incoming Whitlam Labor Government. Hasluck announced breakthrough Commonwealth interventions into state and territory school education:

My Government will ... give preeminent importance to the reform of Australian education and the care of Australian children. In this, my advisers will seek the closest co-operation with the State Governments and authorities representing the non-government schools. An interim committee has already been appointed to inquire into and report upon the urgent needs of all schools and to recommend appropriate means of providing for those needs. Legislation will be introduced to establish a Schools Commission and a Pre-School Commission. Discussions will be held with the States to enable the Australian Government to assume responsibility for fully financing tertiary education, including post-graduate study and research. Fees at tertiary institutions will be abolished from the beginning of 1974. The great objective which my Government has set for itself is to ensure genuine equality of opportunity for all children now embarking upon their education (CofA, 1973, No. 9, p. 13).

It is worth noting how Whitlam through the Governor-General's speech stressed the need for the collaboration of the public and private educational authorities in the states and territories. This was in tune with the dominant federalism of the epoch. Would this change under a Fraser Coalition Government following 11 November 1975? While no doubt, Fraser came under considerable political pressure from various quarters in the conservative Coalition to withstand any centralist legislation or possible repeal some of the Whitlam centralist legislation, he was closer to much of the Whitlam reform agenda than was exposed to the general public during these years.

Skilbeck (2015b) argues at this point in this research paper recognition should be made to the Schools Commission (ASC): it was 'a key instrument of education policy at the school level' (n.p.), as indeed, the Australian College of Education (ACER) in 1998 recognized. This was the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Karmel

Report (1973), the founding document of the ASC. Accordingly, the ACER organised a national conference in October 1998 first to honour Professor Peter Karmel in his concluding year as Chair of the ACER Council and Board of Directors, and secondly to assess developments since 1973. With Whitlam attending and speaking at the conference dinner, some of Australia's leading academics and researchers were in attendance. The conference noted with the establishment of the ASC, 'the Commonwealth Government became involved with school education in Australia in a new and major way with the establishment of the Australian Schools Commission in 1973' (ACER Conference, Abstract).

Skilbeck (2015b) reminds us:

It was strongly held by some members including its chairman, that the CDC should not have been separately established, but incorporated in the Commission. Some saw the Commission as a dominating—or domineering—federal force and the CDC as more cooperative, under Fraser. I believe from many discussions with him—reporting meetings—that Education Minister Senator John Carrick saw the CDC in this light (n.p.).

Perhaps, this is another call to recognise the role of strong individuals in sustaining educational policy.

Labor Prime Minister Whitlam's centralist 'new federalism' attempted to extend Commonwealth influence to new areas. By contrast, conservative Prime Minister Fraser's new federalism, with Carrick as his Minister for Education, emphasised 'state rights' (Gillespie, 1994). Changes to the nature of coordinative federalism under the Fraser Governments following the Whitlam sacking of 1975 were significant. With the conservative-dominated states and territories resenting what they perceived to be their loss of authority, Fraser put into effect a new policy of coordinative federalism. The outcome was an agreement between the Commonwealth and the states and territories in which both levels of government agreed to

a system of co-operative planning and decision-making (Hinz, 2011, n.p.).

### **Working with John Carrick and his ilk: the CDC**

A reading of the *CDC Act 1975 (CDC Act, 1975)* testifies to its prescribed function (Aust Gov. ComLaw, n.d.).

5. (1) The functions of the Centre are:

(a) to devise and develop, and to promote and assist in the devising and development of, school curricula and school educational materials;

(b) to undertake, promote and assist in research into matters related to school curricula and school educational materials;

(c) to make available or supply school curricula and school educational materials;

(d) to collect, assess and disseminate, and to promote and assist in the collection, assessment and dissemination of, information relating to school curricula and school educational materials;

(e) to advise the Minister in relation to making payments under section 7 or 8; and

(f) to do anything incidental or conducive to the performance of any of the foregoing functions.

(2) The Centre shall perform its functions in accordance with any directions given by the Minister and shall furnish the Minister with such reports as he requires (n.p.).

Skilbeck (2015a) stresses that ‘the CDC was the last of a raft of measures to strengthen the role of national government in education. Prior to enactment, the CDC had been established with an interim council in 1973 and operated under an acting director until later 1975 (n.p.). Moreover, for Skilbeck (2015a) ‘the establishment of the CDC was part of a growing interest especially in the UK and the US, but also in western European countries



generally—Germany and Scandinavian countries especially—in curriculum reform and renewal’ (n.p.).

In this respect, especially in sciences and the social sciences, developments in the UK with the Nuffield Foundation were important. Important also were science and social sciences curricular developments in the US utilising learning theories being advanced by theorists such as Robert Gagnè and Jerome Bruner, often backed by private support. The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) gave active support to countries where efforts to rethink school curriculum were from the late 1960s underway or felt to be needed.

Indeed, when comparing the role of the CDC and that of Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority’s (ACARA) National Curriculum, it is like comparing chalk and cheese. In tune with the ethos of coordinative federalism of the period, the CDC strictly played a supportive, consultative and coordinative role, producing syllabus material that might in particular support school-based curriculum development (SBCD) and generally enrich curriculum defined in its broader context. Skilbeck (2015b) stresses the importance of recognising that ‘the CDC operated on a quite different understanding of “curriculum” and on the kind of authority appropriate to extra-school bodies’ (n.p.).

Piper (1987) assessed the significance of the CDC as being of key importance as it institutionalised the Commonwealth’s entry into the curriculum area. It raised the level of public debate and public awareness of curriculum issues in Australia and stimulated the dissemination of ideas across state borders. It created ‘for the first time in any sustained sense a genuinely national presence in curriculum development and reform in Australian schools’ (p. 3).

Kennedy (1990) argues ‘over a fifteen year period ... the Commonwealth ... sought ... a role in relation to the curriculum of schools. The concept of a national curriculum agency working

cooperatively with the States and the Commonwealth [had] won support from both sides of the political spectrum. Yet in operational terms, it could not deliver exactly what policy-makers wanted' (p. 1). Skilbeck (2015b) notes 'I wonder whether they knew "exactly" what they wanted. On the process thesis there was no static occasion of policy equilibrium. Understandings and expectations were then—as now—evolving' (n.p.).

Kennedy (1990) goes on to note the CDC was a Commonwealth body 'rather than being truly national in character' (p.1), a point contested below by Skilbeck (2015a). 5. (1) While in the 'the functions of the Centre' the CDC was authorised to enter into national curriculum development (Aust Gov. ComLaw, n.d.). Skilbeck (2015a) agrees and adds as 'founding Director ... I have a very clear understanding of the purposes and nature of the CDC as it was initially established' (n.p.).

The author of this article recalls in 1976 being interviewed for a position as a state curriculum person in Tasmania for the CDC. Skilbeck chaired the interview panel. I recall the main role of this state-based CDC curriculum person was to discuss with the state curriculum people their needs and the needs of Tasmanian schools so the CDC might meet the state at their various points of needs. Under budgetary measure by the Fraser Government the position never materialised. However, in respect to Tasmania's involvement in the CDC, Skilbeck (2015b) points to the need to 'pay tribute to Athol Gough [then Tasmanian Director-General of Education] who, as a representative of the states/territories on CDCs board was a most active supporter and exponent in his own office and person of the federalism [at which this paper is directed] (n.p.). Indeed, another pointer to the role of individuals in sustaining educational policy.

Skilbeck (2015a), however, is at odds with Kennedy's (1990) assertion of the CDC being Commonwealth-focussed, rather than purely national in character. Skilbeck (2015) contends 'to state that the CDC was a Commonwealth body, 'rather than truly national in

character’ is to beg the question of what the term ‘national’ might connote (n.p.). For Skilbeck (2015a), readers need to be aware of any dichotomies in the uses of the words ‘commonwealth’ and ‘national’ (n.p.). While the CDC was a ‘Commonwealth body’, Skilbeck (2015a) observes it was ‘of course true inasmuch as it was established as a statutory authority under Commonwealth legislation and that its Council and Director were accordingly accountable to the Commonwealth, not the states’ (n.p.). Core funding came from the Commonwealth government and staff with the exception for the director—a statutory officer—were Commonwealth public servants. And there were people seconded from the states. On the other hand, Skilbeck (2015a) reminds us ‘its stated purposes, policies and programmes and operation of the CDC were national’ (n.p.). Indeed, for Skilbeck (2015a) ‘with very few exceptions our work was nationwide in scope and effect, the production of educational strategies and materials resulted from national agreements and detailed collaboration. The overall resources available to the CDC, in cash and kind included substantial state and territory investments’ (n.p.). Indeed, Skilbeck (2015a) reported how ‘in collective and individual meetings with Directors-General and Catholic and Independent School authorities, on behalf of the Governing Council of the CDC I was frequently commended for the national, collaborative style of our operations’ (n.p.).

In respect to governance, for Skilbeck (2015a) the CDC sought to work within the framework of coordinative federalism:

The Governing Council of the CDC was representative of relevant interests, not only of the state, territories and Commonwealth, but also parents and teacher unions, universities and colleges. The Governing Council never, during my term of office, divided over state-Commonwealth lines and worked harmoniously and productively, at least as I observed and participated in its business. A high level official from the Queensland Department of Education was a most active, supportive Council member through the period when the Social

*Re-examining the Curriculum Development Centre*

Education Materials Project [SEMP, and described below] ban was effected (n.p).

In response to the overall impact of the CDC, Skilbeck (2015a) asks readers to consider ‘the CDC publications during its first five years or so of its operations’ (n.p.), showing ‘the extent and range of its work in creating and developing not only curriculum materials in a narrow sense, but its adoption of an approach whereby ideas about teaching, learning and education more generally were discussed and assessed’ (n.p.). Moreover,

The CDC, together with its state, Catholic and independent school partners, with university, college and school associations, parent groups, unions and other associates and partners designed, developed and published a large array of educational resources. These included in addition to classroom resources for learning, guidelines for teachers, discussion papers, and ideas for example on multiculturalism, arts education, language teaching and learning, evaluation, Aboriginal education, R&D strategies and many others. Notably among them was the publication *A Core Curriculum for Australian Schools* produced from the work of a committee we established under the chairmanship of distinguished physicist Sir Marcus Oliphant (Skilbeck, 2015a).

Skilbeck (2015b) adds ‘further examples of the extent to which the CDC was prepared to extend the scope of its understanding of its remit were the publication of a text on the inservice education of teachers and of the notable work of Australian education scholarship’ (n.p.). Skilbeck looks to the CDC’s publication of W.F. Connell’s (1980) *A History of Education in the Twentieth Century World*. This work was concurrently published by Teachers’ College Press, Columbia University, New York. Skilbeck (2015b) notes ‘the latter volume engendered considerable discussion before gaining the Board’s approval’ (n.p.). The author of this paper particularly is

thankful for the decision. For several decades he used the text as a standard work in his history of education courses.

This is an important instance in the CDC's notion of curriculum. Skilbeck (2015b) notes:

Since the CDC Act defined school curriculum to include 'methods and procedures for use in connection with teaching and learning in schools' we felt that we were not exceeding our statutory responsibilities. Our concept of teaching was that it is or should be moving towards a learned profession as that term is understood in the scholarly community. Moreover we saw reformed teacher education as absolutely fundamental to the success of the school based curriculum development we favoured—as against centralist syllabus imposition (n.p.).

For Skilbeck (2015a), 'publications show the result of our awareness of the need to think of curriculum in terms of the diverse and diffuse nature of the experience of learning' (n.p.). Also, Skilbeck (2015a) stresses 'materials, whether created or only disseminated are a means but they certainly did not exhaust the Centre's understanding of "curriculum" under my directorship or, I think, of my successors' (n.p.). Further advancing the CDC's expansive use of the term 'curriculum', Skilbeck (2015a) contends 'reviews of the programmes and reports of a number of national conferences organised by the CDC together with the reports prepared for and following them are indicative of this broader use of the term 'curriculum' (n.p.).

### **The CDC and coordinative federalism: relationships with the states and territories**

Under Skilbeck's leadership, how did the CDC operate in relation to the dominant mode of federalism at the time—coordinative federalism?

Writing in 1990, Macpherson (1990) describes a general dissatisfaction in some quarters with the CDC:

Some [i.e., people interviewed] remembered the CDC practice first initiated in the early 1980s of meeting regularly with Directors of Curriculum from Education Departments. These meetings were, ironically, reputed by some to sustain the problems they were intended to resolve. According to various legends, CDC personnel tended to be ‘offensively innovative’ while directors tended to be very determined and ‘protectionist’ people leading large curriculum development ‘empires of their own’. Some recalled how the CDC materials had been used to serve parochial political ends. Other outcomes were reported to include bitter boundary problems, damaging inter-state comparisons, and resistance myths such as ‘the states know best’ (p. 212).

In reporting on the responses to his interviews, Macpherson (1990) writes there were negative responses to the work of the CDC. Clearly, in some states and territories there were some degree of discontent with the CDC. Perhaps these were the larger states which were ‘comfortable’ in their own curriculum efforts in traditional curriculum and policy development. Here there were entrenched and conservative ideas concerning what students in schools should be taught, and the extent of Commonwealth leverage. With another twenty-five years of Commonwealth leverage perhaps these states and territories would be singing to another songsheet. If some complained about unnecessary Commonwealth political influence on the curriculum, twenty-five years later these influences assumed new dimensions under the ACARA National Curriculum and another *zeitgeist* and form of globalism and economic rationalism, accompanied by a changing federalism (Bourke, 2014, n.p.).

Within the bounds of coordinative federalism, the national curricular activity, however, was not plain sailing for Skilbeck and the CDC. Skilbeck (2015a) alerts us of the often-fragile relations between some states and territories and the Commonwealth. The

larger states such as New South Wales with its powerful and well-resourced Board of Studies at times objected to their perceived intrusion of the CDC into their traditional territory. Skilbeck (2015a) writes,

Federal-state cooperation during the years of the Whitlam government and thereafter under Fraser was often fragile. New South Wales, for example, strongly resisted what it regarded as Commonwealth intrusion into areas of state responsibility and the Schools Commission was openly criticised during the years I was in Canberra (1975-81), for using its financial muscle to shape or impact upon state policies, programmes and practices (n.p.).

That particular line of objection, however, was likely to have been more at a territorial, professional level, other objections came from politicians. Skilbeck (2015a) notes, 'co-operative federalism' [or coordinative federalism] was a slogan often observed in the breach. [For example] the Queensland Government, under Premier Bjelke-Peterson, was frequently in dispute with the Commonwealth and banned use of the CDC's SEMP material in that state's schools' (n.p.).

Skilbeck (2015a) recalls that the Queensland ban 'was the result of intense lobbying by Christian fundamentalist groups and Mrs Rona Joyner in particular' (n.p.). For many Queensland teachers, however, Joyner herself and her ideology were perceived as being the problem ('Remembering the bad old days', 2006).

Generally, however, for Skilbeck (2015a),

In this environment, during the first five years when I was Director, the CDC strove to work in full practical cooperation not only with the states and territory governments but also with Catholic and Independent school authorities. It was not just the overall approach of the Commonwealth required effective collaboration, I have remained a strong federalist in the sense of the full

exercise of state rights and responsibilities in education. Apart from the Queensland ban...relations were close, cordial and productive. There were, of course, differences over specific matters and there will be various views as to how important these were (n.p.).

### **A change of direction for the CDC: An assessment of its achievements**

By 1981 the CDC was refocussing its initiatives towards national goals, and perhaps already coming under some influence of economic rationalism and globalism. The *zeitgeist* of the Whitlam-Fraser years was merging into something new, and would be manifest in a new federalism that some such as Lingard (1991) would label corporate federalism. This view was evidenced by David Francis, Skilbeck's successor, at the CDC, who stated in his Triennial Report:

[The CDC's] role will become focused increasingly in what might be termed matters of national significance. These include its program in school-based curriculum development and core curriculum, needs and priorities in relation to major national initiatives, such as multiculturalism and the educational requirements of work and leisure, and more broadly the nation building role in which schools have a significant if often poorly defined part to play (CDC, 1981, p.viii).

What would the following decade hold for the national curriculum body? But first, there is a need for an analysis of the work of the CDC in respect to federalist paradigms.

Using Reid's (2005) research, and in attempting to assess the period 1968-1988 in respect to federal-state-territory relations in school curriculum, Drabsch (2013) argues the period was one of 'indirect influence', wherein the 'approach to national curriculum development during this twenty-year period was one that sought to influence the official curricula of the States without challenging



their curriculum authority' (Drabsch, 2013, n.p.). In 2013 in response to the Abbott Coalition Government, the New South Wales Parliament was preparing legislation for the state to accommodate the ACARA Curriculum. According to Drabsch (2013) attempts by the Commonwealth to introduce a national curriculum between 1968 and 1988 failed because:

- i. the sensitivity to the curriculum autonomy of the States resulted in many of the projects being organised on a federal model where key aspects of projects were located in State-based teams. It diluted a national perspective and allowed the States to maintain their control of the official curriculum.
  
- ii. The project-based focus of the national collaboration meant that curriculum change was piecemeal and open to shifting political whims (Reid, 2005, c. pp. 150-175, cited in Drabsch, 2013, n.p.).

Skilbeck (2015b) challenged Drabsch (2013) by arguing, there were in my view global as well as national and local forces at work whereby the ideas of the CDC era were almost inevitably translated into what is emerging as a consolidated national model for school curriculum. These forces—in no sense narrowly political at least in any party political sense—are much more complex and deeply rooted than 'shifting political whims'. Moreover, the 'project-based focus' is in the line of ascent—or descent as I may think!—with the national-level approach which has 'projected' the new syllabuses (n.p.).

Moreover, this is an assessment consistent with the author of this paper's experiences provided by his 1976 interview by Skilbeck for the Tasmanian-based CDC position referred to above. The dominant mode of federalism during the Whitlam and Fraser governments allowed for little else. In respect to the 'political whims' to which Drabsch (2013) refers, under successive twenty-first century federal governments of both persuasions the influence

of ‘political whims’ would take on vastly new dimensions—at a time when Drabasch (2013) wrote her paper.

Moran (1980) shows the greater part of the work of the CDC was involved in coordinating projects such as the SEMP, and the Language Development Project (LDP) during the period between 1973 and 1981. In Tasmania LDP and SEMP had teams of curriculum people, usually teachers who had shown high classroom effectiveness and focus. Here, attached to the Tasmanian Department of Education’s Curriculum Branch, there were six teachers employed with Commonwealth funds for a three-year period, developing materials (Brewer, 2008, cited in Rodwell, 2009).

Political constraints and funding restrictions during the tailend of the second Fraser government checked the success of this initial period, forcing the CDC to close between 1981 and 1984. Hughes and Kennedy (1987) reported the CDC, when reactivated as one of four divisions of the Commonwealth Schools Commission, was required to collaborate more extensively with state education departments and other educational organisations on projects of curriculum development. As Skilbeck (2015b) notes this was what some Commonwealth policy people wanted back in 1973 when the ASC was formed.

### **The CDC merges to the Curriculum Corporation (CC)**

There is no more apt example of the onset of corporate federalism as portrayed by Lingard (1991) on school education than the fate of the CDC and its merging into to the CC. Although for different political purpose, the fate of the ASC was repeated with the CDC, illustrating again the relevance of Kingdon’s agenda-setting model as a lens to understand change in the history of school education policy. Change was underpinned by a quest for political power and a general shift in the *zeitgeist*, occurring when there was political opportunity. During the early years of the Hawke Government, education under Susan Ryan’s leadership there was an obvious

tussle between the economic rationalists and the non-believers, the old Whitlamites, such as Ryan herself.

Kennedy (1990) observed:

A fundamental difference, however, between the vision of Skilbeck and Francis and that of later protagonists is that the former were (and are) professional educators. They were driven by progressivist and humanistic educational ideals and values. The latter were (and are) instrumentalists—keen to ensure that investment in education pays off with economic returns to the nation. While this is a significant difference, it should not be allowed to mask the fact that even for educators in the progressivist mould there was some attraction in the notion of a more nationally consistent approach to curriculum, especially if it could be driven by the progressivist ideals underpinning *Core Curriculum for Australian Schools* (p. 5).

Kennedy (1990) is only partly correct. Perhaps he was writing too close to the massive changes occurring at the time. His paper does not mention the words federalism, economic rationalism or globalism. Nevertheless, clearly these were the forces impacting on Australia's national curriculum body at the time, and the CDC was responding to these. As Skilbeck (2015b) notes, for example, *Core Curriculum for Australian Schools* was integral to the school-based curriculum development strategies, so dominant at the time in Australian schools.

In the light of the developments described in the above section of this article, the Commonwealth and the states and territories often saw the Australian Education Council (AEC) as being the most appropriate forum for national curriculum issues. In 1986 it accepted for the first time a role in the facilitation of national collaboration in curriculum. During its last years, the AEC was used as the most significant forum, especially in terms of the agenda the third and fourth Hawke governments pursued. The AEC, however,

soon replaced the CDC as the forum for achieving national curriculum policy objectives (Kennedy, 1990).

In 1987 with the accession of the third Hawke government, the AEC was abolished and CDC was incorporated into the newly formed Department of Employment, Education and Training (DEET). On 1 July 1989 the reactivated CDC itself was abolished and replaced within a Curriculum Policy Unit—subsequently retitled the Gender Equity and DEET by Curriculum Policy Unit—a section within the Schools and Curriculum Policy Branch. The materials development function itself was transferred to the incipient Curriculum Corporation (CC), a jointly owned company of the Commonwealth and state ministers for education, excluding the New South Wales Minister, Terry Metherell (Kennedy, (1990).

### **Analysis and conclusions**

In 1975 the Commonwealth legislated for the CDC, a definite attempt to develop forms of curricular, defined in its broadest terms, to participate in an important aspect of school education. Legislated for during a period of one of the most extremely hostile periods in Australia's political history, the CDC survived twelve years and three governments—Whitlam, Fraser and Hawke. This paper, however, seeks to argue it was not wholly political circumstances which brought the CDC to an end, but a changing *zeitgeist*—from the progressivist Whitlam *zeitgeist* to the economic rationalism, bound up with globalist influences occurring at the time of the Hawke-Keating years. What contributed to its success?

Kingdon's *Agendas* encourages policy researchers and others interested in the history of educational policy to examine closely the influence of the *zeitgeist* and political circumstances. Also, this paper because it is a narrative of the relationship between the Commonwealth, the states and territories, looked to the operative form of federalism. Under Skilbeck's leadership, the CDC while being nationalist in outlook was managed in a coordinative relationship with the states and territories. While there were

instances of politicians and educational bureaucrats objecting to what they perceived as interference in state and territory responsibilities, these perceptions were often motivated by political and professional territorial factors.

Kingdon's *Agendas* encourages researchers to look to political circumstances surrounding policy development, which need to be 'just right' for the legislation to pass. In the hurly burley of the last weeks of the Whitlam government the CDC came into being. Some readers may be surprised it survived the tough politics of the Fraser Government years, but it did so because it was at one with the dominant *zeitgeist* of progressivism. Generally, the output of the CDC was well received by teachers, curriculum professionals and other bureaucrats, and it may have been a political challenge to close it down. This is another pointer to the wisdom of the choice of Skilbeck as director.

Skilbeck (2015b) however challenges the use of the term 'wisdom' of his appointment. While conceding that 'statutory authorities sometimes arouse bureaucratic territorial jealousies' he writes:

I'm not sure about the 'wisdom' of my appointment. I think you might consider the role of heads of statutory bodies (and departments) in finding ways to maintain their organisations and certain ideals that underlie their functions in the cross-currents of politics. Witness the present head of the Human Rights Commission [and the challenges its Chair, Professor Gillian Triggs is facing with the Abbott Government]. In the case of the CDC I think the positive relations I established with Senator Carrick (who had a strong interest in educational creativity and innovation) were important. For this, one critic called me 'a running dog of the Liberal Party'! Little did she know. More important was the high productivity of the Centre spread across a diversity of modes and values. The triad, of core curriculum, non-mandatory, broad subject areas and thematic projects, and school-based curriculum development. were central

strategic thrusts. And there were as well issues papers, conferences etc. We targeted wide, influential audiences (n.p.).

While some state and territory education bureaucrats may have found the CDC tended to be ‘offensively innovative’, in a historical perspective, perhaps these can now be viewed as recalcitrants, and themselves out of touch with the progressivism of the times, and a general international movement towards national developments in curricular, broadly defined.

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