



Data, damned data and copyright

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), which manages the controversial My School website, had another controversy on its hands in February when it called on the Australia School Ranking website, a commercial website run by Stephen James that reports data on '8,000 Australia schools ranked from top to bottom,' to withdraw its report, claiming it breached copyright.

The following day the site ran with this: 'We have legally been given the green light that the contents of the report and its availability are well within all Australian law.' James may have a case. In her judgement in February, Federal Court Judge Michelle Gordon in *Telstra Corporation Limited v Phone Directories Company* ruled that Telstra does not own copyright over the information in its Yellowpages and Whitepages phone directories because there is no clear authorship and no originality. That decision puts into doubt the copyright protection for any database.

Australian Education Union Federal President Angelo Gavrielatos said ACARA needed to make it clear on the website that any unauthorised reproduction of the results was a breach of copyright, but such a warning may not be legally enforceable. Gavrielatos called for 'a permanent solution' to stop the use of My School data for the publication of league tables.

What's in a number?

THAT WHICH WE CALL A ROSE BY ANY OTHER NAME WOULD SMELL AS SWEET, BUT THIS ROSE IS CALLED XV900752-429.

STEVE HOLDEN ASKS WHAT'S WITH UNIQUE STUDENT IDENTIFIERS, ALL OF A SUDDEN?

The Commonwealth Minister for Education and Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard announced at the National Press Club in February that the Rudd Government will introduce a unique student identifier – aka an identification number – across Australia 'as soon as possible, so that the most rigorous measures of school improvement and valued added are developed.'

The predictable big-brother issue was privacy, an issue for which Minister Gillard was well prepared. As she told Leon Byner on Adelaide's Radio 5AA, 'Kids, of course, are going to have names and, you know, (are) going to be called by their names in school and treated as an individual. What we're talking about is not labelling the child with a number; we're talking about the child's records at school.'

That buried the more significant educational issue about tracking student progress. 'With the cooperation of education authorities, and without identifying individual students,' Gillard explained at the National Press Club, 'it should be possible to link national testing records' – that is, National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) data – 'so that student progress can be identified from year to year once the 2010 national test tests have

been taken.' That seems to imply that it's not currently possible to use NAPLAN data to track student progress from year to year.

Keep in mind, NAPLAN data can't yet be used for comparative purposes on a broad scale because students in Years 5, 7 and 9 haven't yet taken their 2010 tests that follow up on their 2008 tests when they were in Years 3, 5 and 7. That'll only be possible when students in the 2008 cohort take their biennial next test in May. Comparison of the NAPLAN data will then be possible whether they have a unique student identifier or not.

Individual schools already and quite properly have been making diagnostic use of 2008 and 2009 NAPLAN test data for students in Years 3, 5, 7 and 9, plus their own test data for the same students in Years 4, 6, 8 and 10 the following year, to monitor student progress and modify programs.

Commonwealth, state and territory Ministers of Education meeting as the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs as long ago as 2006 agreed to create a national system for the transfer of student information between schools when children move from one state to another, called the interstate student data transfer note.

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cross section of key learning areas and support the curriculum.



The national curriculum

THE NEW DRAFT AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM IS ON FIRM GROUND WITH MATHS AND SCIENCE, LESS SO WITH ENGLISH AND HISTORY. **STEVE HOLDEN** REPORTS.

The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) last month released the draft Kindergarten to Year 10 Australian Curriculum for English, mathematics, science and history for national consultation.

As ACARA Chair Barry McGaw explained, ACARA expected it would collate and analyse feedback from that national consultation, and then make 'adjustments and refinements' to the draft, prior to final publication later this year.

'It is now time to engage the education and broader community across Australia in a conversation about what it is we want young people to learn in these four areas,' McGaw said.

'We are confident that the draft curriculum reflects the overall aim of the curriculum development process, which is to produce a 21st-century Australian curriculum; however, I emphasise that these materials are only in draft form and will be refined, based on the feedback we receive.'

ACARA's consultation period runs until 23 May, with the final curriculum expected to be available to be taught in Australian schools from 2011.

Discussing the draft curriculum at Redbank State School in Ipswich, Queensland, Prime Minister Kevin Rudd used the word 'basics' 9 times; in his Canberra press conference he used it 23 times.

Exactly how back-to-basics is this thing? Look at the English curriculum 'content descriptions' for 'language' and you'll find 'phonics,' 'spelling and pronunciation rules' and 'grammar,' but not all the 'content elaborations' that follow can be called prescriptive. 'Particularly for those (Year 8) students studying another language,' for example, 'it might be useful to use terms such as "present progressive...," "past progressive...," "present perfect...," and "past perfect..." There are many other combinations...which all students should be able to comprehend and employ when necessary, but *which need not be named or studied in any detail.*'

While much of the political and media attention was on content, educators were more concerned about the implementation timeline and the need for the development of resources to support teaching.

The second phase of curriculum development for 2011 involves geography, languages and the arts. And the third phase involving information and communication technology, design and technology, health and physical education, economics, business, and civics and citizenship? According to the ACARA website, 'Timelines and processes for this future work have yet to be discussed and agreed by education ministers, (while) learning areas currently not included in Australian Curriculum develop-

ment will continue to be the responsibility of state and territory education authorities.'

The draft maths curriculum addresses number and algebra, statistics and probability, and measurement and geometry, underpinned by 'proficiency strands' to do with understanding, fluency, problem solving and reasoning. The draft science curriculum is organised in terms of science understanding and inquiry skills, plus 'science as a human endeavour,' which appears to be an attempt to improve student engagement and interest in science.

Much of the draft curriculum for maths and science shares content in common with existing state and territory documents; the history and English drafts are where things get interesting. Australian Association for the Teaching of English President Guy Bayly-Jones questioned the draft curriculum's overall coherence, but on the positive side, said English teachers are likely to see the achievement standards as clear and reasonable.

History Teachers' Association of Australia President Paul Kiem noted that the success of the 'ambitious' draft curriculum would depend on qualified and well-supported teachers.

Visit the consultation portal that hosts the draft curriculum at www.australiancurriculum.edu.au

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