

Expert warns not to let assessment dominate curriculum thinking

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The current focus on assessment means the public debate is overlooking how schools are engaging young people and preparing them for the future, according to Lyn Yates, Professor of Curriculum in the University of Melbourne's Graduate School of Education.

Professor Yates said we need to consider what knowledge young people need beyond the basics, so they can succeed in our rapidly changing world.

“As we work on a new national curriculum and see the public reporting of school test data become the norm, we need to make sure the assessment tail doesn't end up wagging the curriculum dog,” she warned.

“Literacy and numeracy are important, but there are other big questions about how we are filling up 13 years of schooling. What does it mean to be Australian in a globalized world? What kinds of knowledge are foundations for understanding the world? What nurtures creativity beyond school? What does schooling do to create views of ‘us’ and ‘them’?” she said.

Professor Yates has co-edited two new books on curriculum, both of which will be launched today (4 April). One book's study of curriculum policies in Australian states shows how varied their approaches to these issues have been, with unpopular curriculum development even leading to the demise of some state governments. “ACARA has a significant challenge in producing an Australian curriculum that builds successfully

on previous state differences” she said.

Professor Yates said the rise of competency and capability based testing, driven in part by the international comparative testing conducted by the OECD, has led to a focus on areas such as ‘problem solving’ and ‘communication’, with the actual substance of what young people are learning less visible than the numbers and graphs produced to show achievement.

She said the development of the new Australian [curriculum](#) was proceeding well, but Australia needed to consider the experiences of other countries like the US and the UK to ensure this hard work was not undermined by the standards agenda.

“Recent accounts from the USA, the UK, Norway and Singapore raise concerns about what is happening to schools and their students as the emphasis on testing and benchmarking has taken hold. It is easy for the audit culture to dominate everything else schools do. Now is the time to make sure this doesn’t happen in Australia.” she said.

Provided by University of Melbourne

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