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Introduction

Knowledge occupies a precarious position in 21st century education. Educational policy and curricula reform in many nations has shifted towards prioritising critical thinking skills and *learning how to learn* ahead of knowledge *per se.* While there is an underlying assumption in the design of competency and outcomes focussed curricula that knowledge will underpin the implementation of these understated curricular objectives, in practice there is the potential for the marginalisation of knowledge. Where curricula offer teachers and learners opportunities to exercise considerable autonomy over their curricula choices this freedom is also often tempered by a top-down approach to monitoring outcomes. In New Zealand the ways in which assessment of senior secondary school students has constrained teachers' curricular choices, shifted their conceptions of knowledge and impacted upon the range and breadth of the knowledge taught to students, can be attributed to the forces of accountability which drive performativity. This chapter focusses upon subjects within the social sciences and humanities and illustrates how knowledge can be fragmented and reduced when decisions are made according to what best suits maximising assessment outcomes.

Relative Autonomy

The New Zealand Curriculum (2007) identifies knowledge requirements through *achievement objectives.* In this chapter the focus is on senior secondary level where, for example, Level 1 History (15-16 years of age) and Level 1 Social Studies each have just two achievement objectives which teachers must address. Teachers are therefore guided in the *Curriculum* by a total of 38 words for History at Level 1 and 27 words for Social Studies at Level 1. The brevity of the *Curriculum* achievement objectives and the absence of some subjects from *The New Zealand Curriculum* (e.g. Classical Studies) means that 'assessment' has become the key driver for what teachers do. Assessment is, in practical terms the default curriculum. However, while there are elements which guide the selection of knowledge in the *achievement standards* for the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* [NCEA] qualification, they are commonly, as with the *Curriculum*, not specific about what knowledge should be taught. Instead, in the humanities subjects, the *achievement standards* commonly identify the core skills, for example the use of primary sources of evidence in classical studies, or specific disciplinary concepts, for example understanding different perspectives in the study of history.

The expert teacher then determines what subject content is relevant to address the *achievement standards*.

Input and output controls

The tensions between control over outputs (for example, through moderation, monitoring of results, setting the examinations for the NCEA qualification) alongside a less regulatory approach to inputs (that is, the broad *Curriculum* and relative autonomy to determine what knowledge is taught) is a well-recognised pattern in contemporary education (Nieveen and Kuiper, 2012; Erss, 2018; Biesta, 2004; 2009; Priestley & Philippou, 2018). In the case of New Zealand, we see a combination of centrally set outcomes and school responsibility for finding the means to achieve the outcomes. Karlsen (2000) calls this 'decentralised centralism' where decentralisation is linked to the marketisation of education to meet the needs of local consumers while central authorities oversee implementation and monitoring of national education policy. Such an approach allows governments to monitor schools and, by inference, teachers' performance. As Bernstein (2000) points out 'the market may have greater autonomy, but the devices of symbolic control are increasingly state regulated and monitored through the new techniques of de-centred centralisation' (p. xxvi). However, while performativity and output control influences teachers' actions across the globe and are evident both in heavily prescribed and in more autonomous curricula circumstances, the ways it impacts upon knowledge varies dependent on the context. Teachers often complain that the prescription they have to teach is too large which can lead to transmission-mode delivery in order to get through the required *quantity* of content. On the other hand, in New Zealand where the extent of coverage can be largely self-determined, a culture of accountability in schools and nationally has gradually shifted teachers' practices towards a reduced and segmented knowledge – knowledge which neatly fits the requirements of the achievement standards and rewards focused yet limited knowledge encounters. Teachers have learned over time to play the NCEA game better and better, but it often comes at the cost of breadth and cohesion of knowledge. A balance needs to be struck to avoid the pitfalls and extremes of either an excessive amount of prescription or a minimal curriculum which provides little guidance or surety over what is to be learned.

Policy direction in New Zealand and elsewhere is also influenced by international comparative benchmarking of educational outcomes in tests such as the *Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS) and the *Programme for International Student*

Assessment (PISA). A government treasury paper entitled *'Treasury's Advice on Lifting Student Achievement in New Zealand: Evidence Brief'* (The Treasury, 2012) is one such example where PISA results are cited as a basis for considering reforms. To improve international rankings in these evaluations governments seek ways to raise student achievement through curricula reform and through imposing greater accountability for student outcomes.

The focus upon measuring outcomes and steering the types of educational achievement which are regarded as beneficial, is also associated with neo-liberalist governance and new managerialism (Lynch, 2014, Robertson & Sorenson, 2017). In New Zealand school performance is evaluated through audits and through data on student achievement. The data is gathered and compared at national level and published annually (*New Zealand Qualifications Authority Annual Reports on NCEA and New Zealand Scholarship Data and Statistics)*. With education increasingly being moulded to serve the perceived needs of the economic well-being of countries, and marketisation of education developed out of the neo-liberal belief that competition maximises the performance of schools, each school board seeks to outperform their neighbouring school and attain or exceed government targets; for example the Ministry of Education's 85% target rate for NCEA Level 2 to be achieved by 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2014). While the long-held belief in the desirability of equity in education for all New Zealand children advanced since the first Education Act in 1877 is being upheld in the discourse of raising achievement for all, this discourse is challenged by competitive forces. League tables which publicise the NCEA results and compare schools, influence consumer choice of schools leading to some schools becoming 'over-subscribed and 'sink' schools struggle to maintain their numbers' (Lynch, 2014, p. 7). Schools are encouraged to place a premium on results in national assessment, but this is sometimes at the expense of equitable access to important academic knowledge. In New Zealand 'credits' for the NCEA qualification can be made up of any combination of academic, vocational or alternative courses so the competitive agenda can persuade schools and students to select pathways which, while providing sufficient credits, may be a 'disruption to an epistemically coherent' learning experience (Rata & Taylor, 2015, p. 225) and hence reduce access to 'powerful knowledge' (*see Introduction*).

The link between the marketability of schools and success in national qualifications can therefore have a significant influence over what is offered and taught. As Crawshaw (2000) notes:

> As is the case with secondary schools, it is a natural tendency of schools … to structure teaching more directly to improve the students' success in examinations, rather than teaching in order to meet their real needs. Assessment of learning through quantifiable forms of examination not only approximates the analysis of real knowledge, it also changes and abstracts the focus of teaching. In order for schools to attract students, they will, by necessity, have to devise strategies that ensure that students have their chances of exam success maximised (p. 12).

While the form of assessment has changed since the time this view was advanced to include school-based assessments alongside external examinations for the NCEA, the high priority placed on assessment results as a means of measuring school performance has become even more pronounced over the past two decades. Emerging from this is that performativity is now a significant factor in contributing to the changes in the way knowledge is conceived by teachers and experienced by students. The impacts upon knowledge have largely been unintended consequences of policies and decisions concerning assessment which have been aimed at improving the reliability and validity of the assessment system, rather than a deliberate means to downgrade knowledge. Nevertheless teachers in New Zealand have responded to these accountability drivers since the inception of the NCEA in 2002 in ways which have fundamentally altered the design of their programmes and the ways in which knowledge is regarded and delivered.

Shifts in Teaching Knowledge

With performativity and accountability (Biesta, 2009; Singh, Heimans & Glasswell, 2014, Ball, 2003) at the heart of teachers' decisions, the manner in which the achievement standards are assessed heavily influences the form and extent of the knowledge being taught. For many social sciences and humanities subjects the most prominent outcomes of assessment-led decisions is first, that knowledge is commonly selected on the basis of, or reduced to, only the knowledge required to address the assessable features of the achievement standards. Secondly that learning is reduced to fewer 'bites' of knowledge in yearly programmes and minimised through non-engagement with some of the achievement standards. Thirdly that knowledge of important ideas, concepts or skills is often limited to being addressed at just one point in a year's programme. Once the concept or skill has been assessed it is not revisited.

Just enough knowledge for assessment purposes

As with *The New Zealand Curriculum* the *achievement standards* are broad and appear to offer opportunities for teachers to select content which has the potential to be 'powerful knowledge' - knowledge which facilitates broad conceptual understandings and enables students to make connections with other related bodies of knowledge. However despite a high level of autonomy in which teachers select the contexts for addressing the standards, the predominant response has been to narrow the field of knowledge in order to focus on a portion of content that is just sufficient to meet assessment requirements. Knowledge has commonly been reduced to discrete portions of what might have formerly (when knowledge was prescribed) been a broader recognisable 'topic' (see Ormond, 2017). The focus on a well-defined but limited construct of knowledge is beneficial from a performance standpoint because students can learn greater depth and pre-prepare answers to address examinations and in doing so, have greater opportunities to gain the highest grades, known as *Excellence* grades. For example in addressing the achievement standard AS91438 *Analyse the causes and consequences of a significant historical event* for Level 3 History (for students aged 17-18 years) a teacher choosing to teach about the New Zealand Land Wars can narrow the study to a more specific aspect such as the Waikato Wars, or to a specific battle, such as the Battle at Rangiriri within the Waikato Wars. Therefore, rather than teaching about the range of issues and circumstances which played out in the various theatres of war – the Northern War, Wellington, Whanganui, disputes in Taranaki, other sites of battle in the Waikato, Tauranga etc., the focus on a single event narrows the learning. In this example, aside from giving a brief overview of the Land Wars for contextual purposes, the teaching is likely to concentrate on enabling students to display immense depth of knowledge about the Waikato Wars or the Battle of Rangiriri. While there are undoubtedly benefits to in-depth learning, in New Zealand the consistency with which this comes at the expense of breadth, rather than achieving a balance between breadth and depth, is a hallmark feature resulting from the particulars of the standards-based NCEA assessment (see Ormond, 2019).

One example of the 'depth' is students writing lengthy, but largely pre-prepared, answers in response to examination questions for History. The questions, which are based very closely on the achievement standard criteria, are formulaic generic questions because, in an environment where teachers have autonomy over topic choice, students have to be able to answer using any choice of historical topic.

> The essay has got so big and unwieldy in the current generic structure (that) I'm not surprised students are choosing to abandon it altogether and go for 15 credits from the internally assessed standards (Comment 9, p. 10, New Zealand History Teachers' Association 2016).

> They are writing over 3,000 words in an essay and then of course because they do write long essays, they end up hammering their way to Excellence in the end. But it is not elegant. They are kind of like, they have pounded you to death really (Research participant, 2017).

The incentives to narrow the range of knowledge learned in favour of depth and practicing for perfection are also evident in other subjects, particularly where there is a high level of predictability in the examinations. In Classical Studies the relatively recent abandonment of text extracts of Classical literature and images of Classical art works in the examinations and their replacement with themes has similarly led to a reduction in knowledge. A leading Classical Studies teacher commented that

> The content coverage of each topic has reduced significantly. Some teachers only do about four art works for the art standard, focusing entirely on the ones which they predict will give the greatest scope for answering a generic exam question. Likewise, the amount of text studied in the *Odyssey* for example, can also be reduced significantly to focus simply on the themes in the assessment specifications. I abhor these tendencies because I think *it compromises a student's all-round classical knowledge and education*. But I know that it is widespread practice. Many Classics courses are extremely 'light-weight' as a result. I suspect that there is a lot of time spent practicing the perfect answer. The fault lies in the new achievement standards and the examinations (e-mail from an Auckland teacher, *anonymity protected*, 13 April 2018).

The genericism of some of the examination papers also motivates teachers to provide intensive preparation of students. In a survey a history teacher argued that 'At the moment the students getting Excellence are a select bunch who have either prepared exactly what the question asked for or have prepared a cloned essay from their teacher' (Comment 48, p. 23, New Zealand History Teachers' Association, 2014b).

Another respondent commented that

> The questions need to be more varied each year! Having the same question for years in a row is NOT an appropriate way to assess learning. Schools are teaching their students to rote learn essays which in some cases the teacher has written. This is not a fair assessment for those schools who encourage independent thought (Comment 21, p. 57, New Zealand History Teachers' Association, 2014a).

Therefore, the learning emerging from the process may not be powerful knowledge where key understandings are then able to be reflected on and applied as transferrable knowledge to go beyond the limits of that knowledge and make connections with new knowledge. Sadler (2007) argues that this focus on 'short-term objectives' and 'accumulation of credits like grains of sand' (is) 'a long call from the production of truly integrated knowledge and skill' and is 'insufficient evidence that a student is capable' (p. 392).

The type of knowledge teachers select is also impacted in this high-trust model where teachers' decisions are conditioned by accountability. In a recent study of English teachers' choices of texts, it was found that NCEA assessments played a key role in determining text selection. Hughson (2020) asked the question 'what kinds of texts (do) NCEA assessments incentivise – are they encouraging the teaching of complex, interesting, powerful texts?' (p. 69). While some teachers in Hughson's study suggested that students were better off with complex texts to provide the depth needed to gain an *Excellence* grade (p. 71), five of Hughson's eight participants indicated that they avoided complex texts, one citing her decision to not continue teaching Othello because it made it difficult for the students to succeed in NCEA. She felt that a simpler, more accessible text was better suited to success (p. 70). This finding is supported by Rozas Gómez (2020) who records that an external reviewer, who was brought into an English Department to review the school's programme, advocated that the school 'abandon Shakespeare and instead focus on texts that were simpler. … Magazines were suggested as a better alternative' (p. 107). However Rozas Gómez's research also revealed instances where teachers actively resisted the 'accountability culture and its effects in narrowing curriculum content' (p. 107). These teachers were concerned that student success in assessment came with the corollary that they had to 'shut down some of their students' critical thinking' (p. 107). Furthermore Wilson, Madjar and McNaughton (2016) examined

participation rates for two achievement standards assessing disciplinary literacy and found that opportunities to read complex written texts were much lower in schools serving lower socio-economic communities than in those of mid or higher ranking. Students' opportunities to learn are therefore impacted through inequities in access to the types of knowledge required to progress to more advanced levels. While differences in approach are evident among English teachers this nevertheless points to the influence of assessment on what knowledge students are being taught.

Limited range of knowledge

Performativity plays its part in determining which achievement standards and how many achievement standards are undertaken each year. The perception is that higher grades can be achieved if students engage with fewer standards since teachers and students can then put more time into the selected standards. Each *achievement standard* is individually assessable through either an examination or a school-based assignment, and not all the achievement standards for each subject need to be addressed so in the past decade the trend has been for schools to reduce the number of standards they enter students in. A history teacher observed that 'now that students are doing less papers they have more time to write 'super essays' (Comment 9, p. 14, New Zealand History Teachers' Association, 2016). Teachers however, do not see this as desirable. Furthermore the decision at the time when the NCEA was introduced in 2002 to hold three-hour examinations regardless of how many standards are attempted by a student in that time means that students have more time to provide in-depth answers if they address a limited number of standards in that timeframe. In social sciences and humanities this is normally one or two of the achievement standards assessed through examination. For example for history at Levels 1 and 2 (Years 11 and 12) the standard which assesses '*how a significant historical event affected New Zealand society'* is the most frequently dropped standard. In 2019 only 23% of Level 1 students and 22% of Level 2 students sat this standard. Similarly while the examination of the skill of interpreting sources, has much higher numbers than the aforementioned, approximately 30 percent of students did not sit this examination (NZQA, 2020). This means that core disciplinary skills or critical knowledge may get little or no attention.

A system of *endorsement* for the *National Certificate of Educational Achievement* gives impetus to the reductive effect. Students can receive for their overall year's achievement an

endorsement of their certificate, or can gain endorsement for an individual subject, at either Excellence or Merit level. To achieve these endorsements it is better to do fewer standards but do them well. Endorsement therefore disincentivises students from applying themselves to a full complement of standards and rewards reduced knowledge.

> Students are opting to do one paper, at each level, as the best chance for Excellence endorsement. Does this really reflect a whole year's learning programme? Grade harvesting has become a game for teachers and students. Teachers who once enrolled students for three standards, now accept them sitting two or even one NCEA external (NZHTA Exam Survey Report, 2020, p. 3).

This endorsement mechanism pulls teachers in a direction which may run counter to their professional judgements of what students in their discipline should experience. It also shifts teachers' and students' conceptions of knowledge towards equating learning with what counts for assessment.

> Course endorsement has forced another shift in thinking towards manipulating the internal and external standards in order to get a higher percentage of endorsements hence not doing resource interpretation *[i.e. not doing the history achievement standard which assesses source interpretation]* (Karen, history teacher and research participant, 2017).

> It is difficult for a student aiming for a merit or excellence endorsement to write on all three of the external standards. I have thus found students choosing to do two essays (but) I think the preparation for the resource papers is useful for students going on to tertiary education (Comment 30, p. 22, New Zealand History Teachers' Association, 2014b).

Therefore while a complete set of standards in any subject may provide for a valuable range of disciplinary knowledge, the non-engagement with standards can result in piecemeal knowledge where critical learning in a subject is left out of yearly programmes. The reduction in standards can mean that core disciplinary skills, concepts or substantive knowledge are left out of

programmes entirely, or that fewer topics are addressed. Teachers and/or students decide which standards they will complete.

> At the end of the day I think what the school is looking for is for those high grades - merits and excellences. I'm seeing a more significant weight being put on internal assessment in order to get them across to that line… It wouldn't be so bad perhaps if you were going to be offering all your standards in one form or another so it was a more cohesive programme, but instead what we are looking at now is reducing those standards in order to get the best academic record for their students… I think it has shifted the balance the wrong way (Research participant, 2017).

Comparing how many topics are commonly taught in a years' programme for history, classical studies and art history provides some evidence of the reduction in knowledge over time (see Table 1). Art History provides a clear example of this reduction. In the early 1990s for Year 13 students, four art periods needed to be studied from a prescribed set of twelve topics so students might learn about *The High Renaissance and Mannerism*, *The Renaissance in Northern Europe*, *American Art Since 1945,* and *Aspects of Modern New Zealand Art*. From 2012 only one topic has been required to address the examination so teachers might, for example, choose the *Late Renaissance* and students can spend the entire year looking at that topic. While many teachers use a different topic for students to undertake research for the internally assessed standards, the reduction overall is significant and it means that students are likely to leave school with in-depth knowledge of one period of art but very little knowledge of the history of art beyond that period. At the present time art history differs from other similar subjects such as history, classical studies, social studies, and English in that topics are still prescribed for the standards which are assessed by examination. There are six topics available.

	Year Programmes – Reduction in Knowledge		
	Pre-NCEA	**2002-4 Early NCEA**	**2020**
History Year 11 Level 1 NCEA	6 exam topics + 1 or more internally assessed assignments = **7**	3 exam topics + 1 internally assessed standard = **4**	1 or 2 exam topics + 2 internally assessed = **3 or 4**
Classical Studies Year 12 Level 2 NCEA	5 exam topics = **5**	3 exam topics + 1 internally assessed = **4**	1 or 2 exam topics + 1 internally assessed = **2 or 3**
Art History Year 13 Level 3 NCEA	4 exam topics + 2 or more internally assessed assignments = **5 or 6**	2 exam topics + 2 internally assessed = **4**	1 exam topic + 1 or 2 internally assessed = **3**
Note: The number of 'topics' does not equate to the number of achievement standards undertaken as students can use the same topic for more than one standard e.g. History Year 11 – most teachers use the same topic for AS91001 *Carry out an investigation of an historical event, or place, of significance to New Zealanders* and AS91002 *Demonstrate understanding of an historical event, or place, of significance to New Zealanders*.			

Table 1 *Year Programmes – Reduction in Knowledge.* Number of topics typically studied in a year programme for history, classical studies and art history in the period prior to the introduction of the NCEA (Pre 2002) to 2020.

The chart illustrates the reduction in knowledge encounters with about half the number of topics being taught in these humanities subjects today when compared with the pre-NCEA period. It should be noted however, that the table is indicative only as there is variability across schools and the depth and breadth of the knowledge is not easily conveyed in numerical terms. This phenomenon is common across all subjects and over the years of senior schooling, so when added up there has been a concerning reduction in students' access to wide knowledge. When coupled with the fragmentation that standards can produce, this has had a major overall effect on the range of knowledge in programmes.

While the specifics of endorsement, ability to pick up or drop standards and the combination of internal and external assessment are not necessarily a feature of systems in other jurisdictions, the New Zealand example illustrates how critical it is for every piece of the curriculum and assessment package to be thought through so the system does not encourage behaviours which are detrimental to knowledge. Sadler begins his article '*Perils in the meticulous specification of goals and assessment criteria*' with the statement 'The implementation of assessment policies can sometimes achieve almost the reverse of what was originally intended' (2007, p. 387) and this is evident in New Zealand. The open-ended curriculum and leaving *knowledge* unstated in the achievement standards was designed to enable teachers to provide rich opportunities for learning appropriate for the particular students they were teaching in any year, but the unexpected evolution of the NCEA system to include mechanisms such as endorsement, statistical measures to control the allocation of grades in order to retain consistency from year to year for examinations (*Profiles of Expected Performance*), and the decision to provide a three-hour examination regardless of how many standards are attempted in that time, are examples of the many features of the NCEA which have been introduced and led teachers and students to select fewer standards and narrow their content in favour of depth. Teachers have learned to 'play the game' in their attempts to provide students with opportunities to gain Excellence awards.

> You are trying to play that game to help your students as much as possible and give them advantages. You are trying to like also deal with all the other stuff - the strategizing, the getting your kids their subject endorsement or their endorsement or dealing with a heavy Level 2 programme you are weighing up all of those other factors and all of those other factors are not actually really very good factors in terms of deciding your programme really, you know, in terms of what is it history teachers should be teaching their students. So it is a dilemma (Research participant, 2017).

A review of the NCEA is currently underway and in an initial document produced by the Ministry of Education there was some recognition of the problems.

> *NCEA's current structure can be a barrier to rich learning.*
> By breaking learning up into standards, NCEA can fragment teaching and learning. This discourages coherence and linking learning across courses. Support is focused on

standards rather than the curriculum, so teachers often have to resort to building courses starting with assessment, which means rich learning can be lost (Ministry of Education, 2018b, p. 11).

Building knowledge

A focus upon particular outcomes rather than curriculum has a further downside. It is difficult to build knowledge and capability if, through the fragmentation of a subject into assessable standards (or outcomes), students are only required to engage with particular knowledge, concepts, or skills just once in a year's programme. Having 'achieved' the relevant standard the student moves on to the next bite of knowledge or disciplinary skill. 'The ability of students to see the essay as "done and dusted" when they have prepared ahead of time is problematic' (Comment 1, p. 13, New Zealand History Teachers' Association, 2016). While this comment refers to history essays, the practice is widespread so for example in Art History students might successfully demonstrate their knowledge of the effects created by impasto paint application in Impressionist art works for an assignment addressing the internally assessed standard AS91183 *Examine how media are used to create effects in art works* but that knowledge will not necessarily be built upon through giving consideration to the effects of media in other art movements as their year progresses, despite this being an aspect at the heart of all art historical study. Instead teachers and students are encouraged to shift their focus to concentrate on a different bite of knowledge to address other standards, such as the meanings of art works e.g. AS 91181 *Examine the meanings conveyed by art works*, or the contexts of art works e.g. AS91182 *Examine the influence of context(s) on art works* (NZQA n.d.).

There is little encouragement in a standards-based assessment system for students to take notice of relationships between aspects of knowledge or for students to consider similarities and differences to gain a 'big picture' understanding. Only the knowledge and relationships necessary for internal consistency in the knowledge being assessed for a particular single standard, is considered to be worthy. Therefore to build knowledge over an extensive period or to make links between knowledge learned at various points in the year, can be difficult for a teacher to manage and encourage when knowledge is equated with achievement of standards.

As a result of the intense focus at particular times during a school programme on a specific aspect of a discipline, or a specific skill, some teachers' conceptions of what critical knowledge is has also changed incrementally over time so that depth is favoured over breadth, and disciplinary skills are given higher prominence than substantive knowledge. Sadler argues that 'So well accepted has the accumulation of fragments become that the collection provides the functional definition of knowledge, skill or competence … (This is) self-reinforcing, self-legitimating and perceived as quite unproblematic' (2007, p. 390).

Powerful Knowledge

The concept of *powerful knowledge* is an assertion that some forms of knowledge have greater potential than others to enable abstracted, extended and meaningful thinking. The value of p*owerful knowledge* is its concerted focus 'on the knowledge itself, its structure, what it can do and how it is organised for both the production of new knowledge and the acquisition of existing knowledge which is new to the student' (Young, 2010b). Powerful knowledge in the humanities and social sciences is knowledge which is examined in sufficient depth and breadth for students to be able to understand its significance and relevance (Ormond, 2014).

A case can also be made for big picture overviews or frameworks of knowledge (Shemilt & Howson 2017, Gibson 2018, Rogers 2016) which provide students with overarching schema of key ideas, concepts and core knowledge upon which to hang newly acquired knowledge. This knowledge helps students ascertain the significance of what they are learning. However when such frameworks are directly assessed they may be seen as peripheral, by either the teacher or student. The stronger forces of time pressures and accountability may in these circumstances mean that building frameworks of knowledge take a backseat. Students undertaking the NCEA qualification in New Zealand frequently ask their teachers to justify what is taught asking "Sir is this for credits". 'Students become very focused on only what is required for the exam' (Comment 13, p. 38, New Zealand History Teachers' Association, 2015). If the teacher responds that it is valuable learning but will not be in an assessment, then it is likely to be quickly disregarded. This is common for both circumstances where knowledge is localized and for more prescribed circumstances when performativity is emphasized. For example in New Zealand where art history topics are prescribed, knowing that certain artists are listed as required knowledge for an examination means that students are likely to attend to

those artists, while learning about other closely associated artists who are not directly examinable, is likely to be ignored.

Bernstein's (2000) theories on recontextualization are relevant to the discussion of powerful knowledge too since any evaluation of whether particular knowledge is powerful, is impacted by the ways in which academic knowledge, deriving from an environment of robust testing and critique, is then recontextualised for use in school classrooms. The additional weight of accountability further constrains the ways teachers recontextualize knowledge, and it is argued here that for assessment purposes the recontextualization takes a more narrowed form of knowledge for assessment purposes. This narrowing of knowledge places the attainment of *powerful knowledge* in a precarious position.

Conclusion – walking the tightrope

While the phenomenon of accountability in education is well-known its effects differ in relation to the educational context. In some countries the push for higher and higher grades has led to limitations on the range of pedagogies used as teachers shift into transmission mode in order to get through over-burdensome prescriptions. In New Zealand, the effects have been to drastically reduce the amount of knowledge taught in order to give time for an in-depth study of narrowly confined knowledge which is perceived to have a better chance of success.

Positioning skills, learning to learn and generic competencies at the forefront of curricula design has also led to marginalisation of knowledge in both policy and practice over the past decade in New Zealand. While a parallel development of greater teacher autonomy and flexibility has come to the fore and has the potential to address students' immediate needs and address diversity in school communities, it is by no means certain that equities of access to powerful knowledge for students has been achieved through this approach. Walking the tightrope between curricula freedom and performativity is difficult and can create uncertainties and inequities in opportunities to engage with powerful knowledge. In New Zealand, when factoring in the accountability imperatives in a high-stakes assessment and competitive school environment, the result, albeit uneven across subjects, has been an overall reduction of students' access to knowledge and teachers' attention to knowledge.

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