The teaching internship and outcomes-based education:

Time to consider a career change?

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The Teaching Internship (also known as the Assistant Teacher Program) ought to be seen as the zenith of one’s training as a teacher. It is the final and qualifying teaching practicum after which one may be considered a fully autonomous teacher. Or is it? It is a time when an understanding of all of the planning documentation comes together in symphonic harmony. Or does it? It is a time when the desperate desire to impart important knowledge to students can be satisfied. Or can it? Jane found that the joy of teaching was overshadowed by convoluted planning requirements; disjointed planning documentation; and little guidance in the documentation regarding any mandatory content which needed to be imparted. Her story in her words is presented as a modified sonata-form case study.

PROLOGUE

The sonata-form is an innovative technique for interpreting data-rich case study material. The methodology has received considerable attention in the literature as a means of better understanding primary source narrative data (Dibble & Rosiek, 2005; Rosiek, 2004). The method sees some aspect of the subject matter (often provided by a practitioner) – in this case the application of an Outcomes-Based Curriculum (OBC) – as being a primary theme. A secondary theme (often provided by a university researcher), consists of interpreting the cultural context of the interchange – in this case, the practitioner’s response to the process. As in a musical sonata, the two themes are interwoven in a way which endeavours to produce overall thematic harmony. To facilitate the process, case-studies are written in the first person.
In terms of data presentation, the current study adopts a modified sonata-form case study approach in which the practitioner (Jane) narrates her experiences with Western Australian (WA) Outcomes-Based planning documentation. This is the primary theme. The university researcher (Richard) then intermittently attempts to inform the dialogue by exploring the more general parameters of an OBC approach as it seems to be unfolding in the WA context. This is the secondary theme. In this fashion, the dialogue attempts to create ‘harmonic resonance’ between the two themes. Material is presented in two columns as this not only allows for thematic division into primary and secondary categories, but also provides a way of facilitating the overall dialectical process. The project commenced with Jane being invited to reflect and comment on the planning aspects of her recently completed Internship experience.

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<th>Jane’s Story</th>
<th>Richard’s Observations</th>
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<td>My mid-life crisis involved enrolment in a Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary). I worked full-time teaching at tertiary level and was a full-time mum to three teenagers, so my study was part-time. I thoroughly enjoyed the classes, the theory, the research, the writing – I was renewed and embarrassingly enthusiastic about these studies. And the Internship was soon upon me. The first week of the Internship was a settling-in period – getting to know other teachers, the student’s names, the general, physical layout of the school and the content of the classes I was to be taking. I was assigned a year 8 English class, a year 8 S&amp;E class, a year 10 S&amp;E class and a year 11 P&amp;L class; this was going to be great! I was majoring in Society and Environment (S&amp;E), Political and Legal Studies (P&amp;L) with the eventual aim of teaching years 11 and 12. I had my own teenagers, and I taught – amongst others – first year students at University. How difficult could the Internship be? I sat down to prepare the paperwork and the lesson content for the first classes, and had set aside time for preparing each lesson. Classes at University had prepared me for detailed and</td>
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<td>Research by Joerger (2001) from the University of Minnesota indicates that beginning teachers typically pass through five stages during their first year of teaching – anticipation, survival, rejuvenation, reflection and anticipation. The same nomenclature may apply to students preparing planning documentation during their final (qualifying) teaching practice. At this point Jane appears to be at stage one – enthusiastically embracing the experience which lay before her. There is no doubting that Jane is a high-quality teacher. Her Internship performance clearly indicates this (Distinction), as do her academic results (88% of her unit grades were Distinctions or High Distinctions). There is no doubting that she really does want to teach secondary school students, committing to teacher education as a mature-age student and working toward the realisation of a long-held dream.</td>
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Jane's Story continued...

accurate lesson plans incorporating the principles of Outcomes Based Education (OBE). I had thoroughly enjoyed and understood (as far as one can!) the unit dedicated to OBE, and achieved a grade of High Distinction – this wouldn’t take long at all and I could move quickly on to the real substance, the lesson content.

I gathered around me the Curriculum Framework, Standards & Outcomes Framework, Curriculum Guides and the outlines that the schools had provided, including layer pointers. I had the blank Lesson Plan sheet, the Daily Workpad sheet and the Forward Planning Document sheet at the ready for completion.

I decided to start with year 10 S&E, a class on ‘Citizenship and Leadership in our Community’. It was to encompass contemporary Australian culture (multicultural) and leadership figures within that culture. I had to consider this ‘unit’ in its entirety, to clearly identify where I was going with it, in order to know how to start.

I started planning for a three week period. So far so good.

My starting place was, naturally, the Curriculum Framework. Which outcomes and what assessment, keeping in mind the objectives of assessment being valid, educative, explicit, fair and comprehensive?

I knew that the purpose of the Framework was for any one lesson to encompass one or several Overarching Learning Outcomes (OLOs) so the starting point was to look at all 13.

OLO 8 was an excellent base ‘students understand their cultural, geographic and historical contexts and have the knowledge, skills and values necessary for active participation in life in Australia’.

Richard’s Observations

I have grappled with and documented my concerns with OBE elsewhere and refer the interested reader there (Berlach, 2004). For the purpose of this paper, I will simply reiterate one of the major tenants of OBE, namely that, following its chief architect and proponent William Spady (1982, 1996), an OBE approach seems to be less concerned with the acquisition of sequenced knowledge and more preoccupied with the attainment of outcomes. In short, it focuses on outputs rather than inputs, with the attainment of predetermined outcomes taking precedence over how those outcomes are themselves attained.

In much of what follows, Jane begins to grapple with State-mandated OBE-based planning materials. It slowly dawns upon her that:

a. knowing OBE theory and interpreting it for practice are two very different things;
**Jane's Story continued...**

OLO 9 would cover the multicultural aspects as would OLO 10 – ‘students interact with people and cultures other than their own and are equipped to contribute to the global community’ and ‘students participate in creative activity of their own and understand and engage with the artistic, cultural and intellectual work of others’, respectively.

Any lesson concerning citizenship would have to consider OLO 13 – ‘students recognize that everyone has the right to feel valued and safe, and, in this regard, understand their rights and obligations and behave responsibly’.

But I couldn’t overlook the OLOs that related to assessment. OLO 12 was relevant to assessment procedures – ‘students are self motivated and confident in their approach to learning and are able to work individually and collaboratively’.

OLO 3 looked relevant - ‘Students recognize when and what information is needed, locate and obtain it from a range of sources and evaluate, use and share it with others’.

Depending on the direction that the lessons take in practice, OLO 11 may also need to be considered – ‘students value and implement practices that promote personal growth and well being’.

Having identified seven of the OLOs I considered I was using the *Curriculum Framework* well. The next step was to take each OLO individually and consider the Outcome Strands.

For OLO 8 the following Strands seemed appropriate:

1. Culture
2. Investigation, Communication and Participation

**Richard's Observations**

b. There is an inordinate number of outcomes which need to be catered for. I have pointed out the complexities of this in a previous paper (Berlach, 2004)⁴
Jane’s Story continued...

3. Natural and Social Systems
4. Active Citizenship.

From here I needed to consider each heading in the Student Outcome Statements (SOS):

1. Culture

The S&E Learning Area Statement (LAS),

‘Students understand that people form groups because of shared understandings of the world, and, in turn, they are influenced by the particular culture so formed’.

This strand had ‘direct links to Overarching Learning Outcomes 1,4,7,8,9’ – I’d missed a few of these so needed to go back and see how they could fit in and add them to the list to be considered before I started planning the lesson content.

The S&E SOS was identical to the LAS, as almost all of them seem to be.

2. Investigation, Communication and Participation

The S&E LAS and SOS,

‘students investigate the ways in which people interact with each other and with their environments in order to make informed decisions and implement relevant social action’.

This strand had ‘direct links to Overarching Learning Outcomes 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,10,12’ - well, here were more OLOs that I hadn’t considered so the list was becoming larger!

Officially every one of the 13 OLOs were now directly relevant to this three week unit; are they all relevant to each class? The generality with

Richard’s Observations

In systematically following the required procedure, Jane shows that she possesses a sound knowledge of both OBE theory and required planning documentation. That is, she does not have a lack of understanding regarding how things are supposed to work.
### Jane's Story continued...

which they were worded probably meant they were.

All this and I had only considered the first two strands!

### 3. Natural and Social Systems

The S&E LAS,

'students understand that systems provide order to the dynamic natural and social relationships occurring in the world'.

This strand had 'direct links to Overarching Learning Outcomes 5,7,8'. Well, they were already covered!

The S&E SOS was, again, identical.

### 4. Active Citizenship

The S&E LAS,

'Students demonstrate active citizenship through their behaviours and practices in the school environment, in accordance with the principles and values associated with democratic process, social justice and ecological sustainability'.

This strand had 'direct links to Overarching Learning Outcomes 5,6,7,8,9,11,12,13'.

The S&E SOS stated 'when making judgments about student achievement in Active Citizenship, teachers should refer to the three part monitoring framework included in this document on pages 133 – 135.'

This was something else that I had to read and incorporate into my planning; I made a note to consider it later as I wanted to finish with the SOS documents first, but the monitoring framework clearly couldn't be ignored.

### Richard's Observations

c. That the deeper one goes, the more work-intensive the whole planning process becomes.
### Jane's Story continued...

To this point, I could glean all the SOS and LAS from page 6 of the S&E SOS book (I had a separate book for English). Now I needed to consider, for each of the four headings, the pointers – the level at which these would need to be pitched. Shouldn't I be looking at multiple levels as there will be learners of different levels within a class?

I had struggled throughout my study with this concept of levels. If we expect students to achieve an outcome, how could they all achieve the same level of that outcome? History and practical experience tell us that not all people are equal – how can we expect students to be? The Curriculum Framework was silent, offering no guidance to me, just an expectation that my students would achieve the outcomes – was I a failure if they didn't?

A quick glance of the book revealed not only sub-strands for each of the four headings I had chosen, but pointers with levels between 1 and 8. For the heading of Culture alone, these were under sub-headings of a) Beliefs and Culture, b) Cohesion and Diversity, and c) Personal, Group and Cultural Identity.

The next few hours were spent sifting through the various and copious documents relating to Outcomes, and completing these details in the Planning Documents. I of course had to have a look at the *Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting: Policy and Guidelines* document and consult the relevant section of the Using the Curriculum Framework: Teachers Reference File.

Having finally plotted all relevant strands, sub-strands and pointers, I then turned to the back inside cover of the Curriculum Framework to look at the Values upon which the Framework rests – which of these were to be considered in this unit content?

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### Richard's Observations

d. That the outcomes are sufficiently vague to allow all classes of activities with almost minimal effort to be subsumed under one or more outcome statements. This mirrors what practicing teachers have been repeatedly reporting to both The Department of Education, WA (DETWA, 2003) and the media (Hiatt, Sept/Nov, 2005).

e. That a good deal of convoluted overlap exists between the various planning documents;

f. That despite the abundance of planning document-ation, answers to the more epistemic problems had not been provided.

g. That although values are mentioned, they are not well developed, and how they are to be incorporated is not specified.
### Jane’s Story continued...

I sat back and considered the overall unit topic of ‘Citizenship and Leadership in our Community’. All of the five values were directly relevant, but each one had its own individual sub sections, so which should I include in lesson preparation? What is the point of having values if they are not incorporated into the teaching curriculum and students can’t realize what values are being included in the lesson? I settled on including 1.1; 1.3; 1.5; 1.6 and 1.7 within the *pursuit of Knowledge and a commitment to achievement of potential value.*

Of course, the understanding of these values would need to be pitched to the differing levels within the class, just as for the SOS; more time needed to be set aside to clearly define how I would incorporate these values, in differing levels, within each class.

I then considered each of the 4 remaining values.

I was beginning to feel incredibly overwhelmed – there was so much to consider. I had been working for the best part of the day and was no closer to commencing preparation of the lesson content than I had been at the beginning. Where was I actually going to teach in all of this? Where was the content?

When it came to writing up the Forward Planning Document (FPD) - in order to provide a guide and framework to approach each lesson within the topic, I decided that I couldn’t use every OLO – the document would be too large, losing its ability to be a guide. I studied the OLO’s again and chose three that I thought were really significant to the lessons I wanted to teach (to which I still hadn’t been able to give much detailed thought!), and what it was that I really wanted students to accomplish by the end of the unit topic.

### Richard’s Observations

In fact, the values are so vague had it not been for Federal Education Minister Nelson’s insistence on minimum values (albeit controversial in their makeup, Haywood, 2005), it is unlikely that values-related specific content would have received much attention from DETWA.

Jane here seems to be entering Joeger’s (2001) second stage – survival. She is beginning to wonder how she is ever going to cope with all the OBE demands. A sense of despondency appears to be setting in.
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<td>I then went to the LAO’s and did the same again – okay, there were many aspects that were relevant, but realistically should they all be included? I could see myself getting lost in words – and if I was lost before classes commenced, there was little chance of the students finding clarity. I thought that my role as teacher included being a guide in their learning experience, encouraging self learning and realization of individual potential. I was beginning to feel a failure before I had stepped into my own classroom.</td>
<td>h. That planning requirements are disproportionate when compared with actual up-front teaching time.</td>
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<td>Moving on to the timetabling in the FPD reignited my interest in what I was doing – and my purpose. Here I was able to consider the content – what was I going to teach?</td>
<td>Jane seems to be alluding to aspects of Joerger's (2001) third phase – rejuvenation – achieved via anticipating the content to be taught. Such anticipation, however, was short-lived.</td>
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<td>With the FPD complete, I moved on to the Daily Workpad (DWP). This is what my study had trained me for – what was I actually going to do with the students to engage them and impart the knowledge that they needed? The Internship was designed to put the teaching theories into practice. I wanted to focus on what knowledge I was going to give to students to take with them from the lessons.</td>
<td>i. That even after all of this planning had been completed, the content to be taught had not been identified, possibly suggesting that content/ knowledge is to be made subservient to the planning process.</td>
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<td>So far I felt that I had only been considering what they had to accomplish or complete in terms of an outcome. What I was really interested in was 'what substance was I going to give them to enable them to accomplish that outcome' – where was the knowledge in all this planning? It seemed to be taking a backseat to the outcome.</td>
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<td>OBE principles didn’t really look at what came before, just what should be there at the end. Wasn’t the content just as important? I didn’t seem to have addressed that yet, at all.</td>
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### Jane’s Story continued...

I acknowledge that to have a clear focus there has to be a clear end in sight. What I began to realize was that OBE had the end in sight, but forgot the details of how to get there. It was almost like having a road map with only my present position and the desired destination marked, with the rest of the map missing.

The first column of the DWP entailed identification of specific outcomes – how many to identify? I had only used three in the FPD and that document was my framework. I considered specifics of all three but again I was beginning to feel that the paperwork involving outcomes was actually detracting from the planning. I had to be able to use this document. As a new teacher I wanted to have it in class with me, so the information in it had to be accessible; it wouldn’t be if the pages were dominated with outcomes rather than content and strategy.

I settled on one or two specific outcomes for each lesson. In class, it was extremely workable. Though the same specific outcomes would be relevant for several classes, each daily lesson required a reference back to the OLO’s, the LAO’s, the Progress Maps, the layer pointers and the values, to ensure correct identification of the specific outcome/s for each daily lesson.

I had now spent more than a day getting to the first lesson ready for this year 10 class. I had four more subjects and year groups to consider – I hadn’t completed preparation for day 1!!

One of my first tasks with the year 8 English class was to consider basic forms of poetry – limericks and Haiku. Would these simple literary forms of less than ten lines require all this paperwork and preparation?

### Richard’s Observations

Jane alludes to a problem bigger than the mere vacuousness of OBE. She is beginning to question the validity of OBE per se as a paradigm for interpreting the very enterprise of education. The Federal Minister for Education, Science and Training, Brendan Nelson (2005), seemed to be asking a similar question when he endorsed a recently released report entitled:

*Where do we Stand? The Intended Primary School Curricula Within an International Context.* When the performance of Australian students was compared with their Japanese counterparts, the report presented the following damming indictment:

> “In examining the mathematics syllabus documents of countries like Japan and Singapore, the report noted that they ‘leave no doubt about what needs to be taught at each year level, and what children are expected to understand and be able to do’ (page 8). In comparison, the report concluded that Australian curricula have largely been influenced by an outcomes based education approach, leading to curriculum documents that are vague, lack academic content, offer limited guidance to teachers about what to teach, and work against the acquisition of essential knowledge”. 
### Jane's Story continued...

It then dawned on me that in addition to this preparatory paperwork done for each lesson each day, I also had to do the paperwork required for assessment recording in preparation for reporting to students and their parents. Would there ever be enough time to spend with the students?

As a university student I had enthusiastically embraced the concept of OBE. I had also received sound instruction in how to approach learning in an OBE fashion. It had all sounded so easy and ideologically sound in class, on paper, why was it so impractical to apply? The more I read and planned the more I began to see that I was dealing with a lot of ‘techno-babble’ – it sounded so impressive yet was proving to be so unworkable.

Through my own experience in preparing for this Internship, came the gnawing realization that OBE was great – in theory. In practice it was a headache, a nightmare. Where in all of this paperwork was I able to impart knowledge to the students? The major focus of my planning time had been on the outcomes, not the content required to achieve those outcomes.

I had presumed that the central focus of the vocation of teaching was to teach, with all that means in its widest sense (see Hansen, 1995).

Preparation of classes using OBE principles and the Curriculum Framework was a distraction from what I, as a new teacher, had so badly wanted to do – **just teach**. Not spend my time on never-ending planning gobbledygook so that I’m so tired next day that the kids become almost a necessary evil which permits me to engage in the next planning round the following night! **I want to teach. I want to impart knowledge. I want to**

### Richard's Observations

Jane clearly indicates how planning for the teaching of a relatively simple Year 10 *Citizenship and Leadership in our Community* lesson necessitated many hours of scouring through planning documentation which, in the end, fails to provide any lesson content anyway. She complains about being required to spend a great deal of time decrypting documentation rather than focusing directly on what she is going to teach her students and how she was going to spend her time with them.

Although in a different learning area, Jane is experiencing what Lisa Paris (2005), PhD candidate at Edith Cowan University and a visual arts teacher with some 20 years experience wrote recently in her doctoral proposal:

‘These outcomes [3 & 4 of the Arts Learning Area] often present as problematic to even the most experienced visual arts teacher … Over time it became clearly apparent to me that a significant aspect of the problem [teaching visual arts] was a deficit in these beginning teachers’ AIS/ARS [Art Criticism/Arts Responses & Art History/Arts in Society, respectively]**
**Jane’s Story continued...**

spend my time as a teacher in a way which I perceive as being valuable, meaningful uncluttered....and professionally rewarding.

So, was I going to teach in a secondary school? I had another career that I could easily return to; teaching was a dream that had niggled at me for twenty years of legal practice, and undertaking the Graduate Diploma in Secondary Education was the realization of that dream. I was currently teaching Law at tertiary level and I had to decide whether to continue with that or register with the Western Australian College of Teaching and prepare my job applications for secondary school teaching. It wasn’t an easy decision but I felt that my experience in the Internship meant that I would be spending more time preparing unnecessary documentation rather than actually teaching students. I wanted to love the teaching experience and feared that the documentation requirements would sour that love. I was tired even before I’d started.

I applied for Associate membership with the Western Australian College of Teaching and submitted no applications for teaching positions in secondary schools.

**Richard’s Observations**

pedagogical content knowledge – they simply did not know what to teach...’ (p. 9-10 passim).

Jane new engages in professional reflection, Joerger’s (2001) fourth stage, essentially asking the question ‘is it all worth it’?

Jane describes her OBE frustrations with the preparation of a relatively simple year 10 S&E lesson. Her ultimate goal, however, was to teach political and legal studies to secondary school years 11 and 12. Her background would have made her an ideal candidate for teaching in this learning area, a discipline incidentally, in which there exists a shortage of teachers. Sadly, there would be no fifth Joergersonian stage – anticipation – for Jane.

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**EPILOGUE**

By way of summary, it is fair to say that Jane’s Internship planning experience crystallised the following in her mind:

i) OBE sounds doable in theory but proves to be impracticable in practice;

ii) There are so many outcomes that’s it difficult to know which ones to focus upon

iii) Planning ‘intensity’ increases the deeper one drills through the documentation;

iv) Many outcomes are too vague and omni-encompassing to be of any real value;

v) There is convolution within and overlap between the various planning documents;

vi) There are epistemic problems which tend to hamper the task of interpretation;
vii) The vagueness of the values outcomes makes it difficult to know precisely what to incorporate into a lesson;

viii) As so much documentation needs to be coordinated, planning a lesson takes a great deal longer than actually teaching it;

ix) Content vacuum leaves teachers (especially inexperienced ones) wondering what precisely it is that they are supposed to teach.

Jane’s less-than-satisfying experience with OBE-type planning is by no means unique. Anecdotal evidence that I hear from my students on a regular basis supports Jane’s story. Students returning from their ten week practicum are invariably stunned by the amount of planning that is required to teach even a simple lesson. Most are not convinced that the OBE planning requirements are in any way responsible for facilitating a better end product, namely learning.

It is interesting to note that half a century of robust evidence has consistently indicated that the student-teacher relationship is the most powerful factor influencing learning (e.g. Barry & King, 1998; Brophy & Good, 1974; Dunkin & Biddle, 1974; Turney, 1981). Ironically, the OBE emphasis on hyper-planning leaves less time for the very quality which does enhance learning – the development of meaningful student-teacher relationships.

The issues surrounding OBE’s ideological framework and attendant theory of teaching and learning have divided the educational community and destabilised education in Western Australia for well over a decade. On the whole, management and bureaucracy seem to embrace the OBE agenda while classroom teachers anathemise it. Disturbingly, a front page article in the West Australian (Hiatt, November 2005) reported a survey conducted by the State School Teachers’ Union which found that:

Of the respondents [n = 807], 61 per cent said they were considering a career change or retiring and 16 per cent had already decided to do so. Nearly 70 per cent said they now found teaching less rewarding and 53 per cent were unable to complete existing work schedules. About 20 per cent had taken personal time off work this year and 11 per cent had taken sick leave because of the stress of implementing OBE (p. 1).

If experienced teachers are being overwhelmed by the OBE reform agenda, what survival prospects do beginning teachers have? Jane never had a chance to find out. She had determined toward the end of her teacher education course that the aggravation generated by OBE requirements was simply not worth doing what she had always wanted to do – ‘just teach’.

At a time of national teacher shortage (Canavan, 2004; Nelson, 2003), one wonders how many more potential (as well as actual) teaching careers need to be placed upon the sacrificial altar of OBE for the paradigm to be reconsidered. My hope is that such reconsideration will occur sooner rather than later.
NOTES

1 Jane Power, a lawyer by profession, completed her Graduate Diploma of Education (Secondary) in 2004.

2 Richard G. Berlach is an Assoc. Prof. in the School of Education

3 All the documents referred to in this section may be found in the References.

4 “The primary school area is the most problematic in terms of planning. If one considers that, theoretically, OBE offers each student individual learning opportunities, then teachers could be forgiven for gasping at the prospect of being called upon to cover 8 learning areas with a total of 54 Aspects, which equates to 432 outcomes. Of course, children in any chronologically arranged year group are unlikely to be working across more than 3 levels, which still equates to 168 outcomes (8 Learning Areas x 3 Levels x 7 Aspects). By comparison, secondary school teachers are fortunate, having to only cater for 70 outcomes (2 Learning Areas x potentially 5 years of secondary school = 5 Levels x 7 Aspects)” p 13.

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   San Diego, USA.
   Curriculum Council of Western Australia.
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