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**Abstract**

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**Introduction**

In recent years, globalised curriculum discourses have expanded to include young children aged from birth to five years. These discourses have in turn, given rise to a plethora of localised curriculum texts that include, amongst many others: in England, a *Statutory Framework* (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008b) and *Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage* (Department for Children Schools and Families, 2008a); in Ontario, Canada, the draft *Full-Day Early Learning – Kindergarten Program* (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2010-11); and in Australia, *Belonging, Being & Becoming: The Early Years Learning Framework* (Australian Government Department of Education Employment and Workplace
Relations, 2009). There has also been a slew of revised curricula - for example, the Guide to Pre-Primary Curriculum in Hong Kong (Curriculum Development Council, 2006) and ongoing curriculum development in Caribbean Community countries (Williams & Charles, 2008). Although the purpose, focus, and prescriptiveness of these curricula vary, all convey and produce particularised imaginings and narratives, as well as hopes for, and expectations of, children. The introduction to the Australian Early Years Framework (‘the Framework’), for instance, states that it “will contribute to realising the Council of Australian Governments’ vision that: ‘All children have the best start in life to create a better future for themselves and for the nation’” (p. 5). Evident in this statement, and in equivalent statements in many other early years curricula, is an optimism that curriculum interventions provide a means of creating better childhoods for young children in the present, that in turn lead to better individual and collective futures. In this sense, curriculum can be considered a reflection of what a society values for children, as well as more generally, a vision of what it wants to become (Reid, 2008).

For the purposes of this article, and following Pinar (2012), we see the development and interpretation of curriculum as a process of ‘complicated conversations’ about what educational experiences a society wants for its children and about how, through investments in children, society can be “produced, maintained, repaired and transformed” (Carey, 1992, cited in Pinar, 2012, p. 1). In this article, we begin to map the diversity, and politics, of imaginings, narratives, hopes and expectations concerning young children reflected in the development of, and responses to, the Australian Framework. We also seek to identify possible ‘lines of flight’ and to speculate about how they might ‘re-territorialise’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) curriculum as a force in the betterment of children’s lives and futures. We see this endeavour as a philosophical-empirical enquiry. Philosophical, in that we draw on utopian studies and Deleuzeguattarian concepts; empirical in that we incorporate data from three sources: policy documents from the Rudd-Gillard Labor Government’s reform agenda; Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation’s coverage of the Framework and responses to that coverage; and published scholarly analysis and critique of the Framework.
We begin by outlining the Australian political and policy context in which the Framework was developed. Next, concepts from utopian studies and the notion of the Framework as an assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) are introduced. In the remainder of the article, these concepts are used to inform a preliminary and partial rhizomatic mapping of utopian visions of what constitutes better childhoods and futures for young children from the perspective of various actors (policymakers, News Corporation, the public, politicians, academics, practitioners) who, amongst others, shaped the development of the Framework. We conclude that the Framework, although a temporary settlement (Woodrow & Brennan, 1999), may nevertheless keep alive transformative possibilities for bettering children’s lives.

The Australian Political and Policy Context
The Framework was developed at a particular, and arguably somewhat utopian, moment in Australian politics following the landslide election of the Labor Government in November 2007. Incoming Prime Minister Rudd’s extraordinarily high popularity amongst the electorate was attributed in large part to the appeal of his visionary rhetoric (Manne, 2008a). His vision centred on Labor’s plans to re-invigorate the Council of Australian Governments (comprising the federal government and the eight state and territory governments) to secure cooperation around a national, all encompassing reform agenda. Given the endemic cross-jurisdictional fragmentation, rivalry and tensions that have long characterised the Australian political and policy context (Moon & Sharman, 2003), this was an ambitious goal. Yet the almost unprecedented situation of Labor concurrently in power federally and in all states and territories generated optimism that significant economic, social, health and educational reform would indeed be possible (Marr, 2010).

Within the national Reform Agenda, reforms to early childhood education and care were ‘fast-tracked’, in part, because of their perceived redemptive appeal (Sumsion et al., 2009). Shortly after taking office, Rudd had made a long-awaited, historic and highly symbolic Apology to Australia’s Indigenous peoples (Rudd, 2008). The early childhood reforms were promoted as a tangible commitment to follow up action towards improving the lives and futures of young
Indigenous children (Council of Australian Governments, 2009). In some respects, they also signalled a shift away from the heavy reliance on marketised provision of early childhood under the former, conservative Howard government [1996-2007] towards what many hoped would be a more social democratic policy emphasis, eloquently outlined by Rudd (2006a, 2006b) prior to his election. In the wake of the spectacular rise, market domination, and later collapse of the highly controversial childcare corporation ABC Learning (Sumsion, 2012), and the decline in Australia’s once high international reputation for the provision of young children (see, for e.g., UNICEF, 2008), this anticipated shift was widely welcomed as heralding a potential transformation in educational provision for young children in Australia.

Within the early childhood reform agenda, priority was given to the development of the Framework, Australia’s first national curriculum for children aged from birth to five years. Indeed, as the first national curriculum for any educational sector in Australia, its development was of historic and symbolic significance. The Framework, in turn, was to become an integral component of a new National Quality Standard that early childhood services would be required to meet to be eligible for government funding. As co-leader (Author 1) and member (Author 2) of the consortium of academics, consultants, peak bodies, employer organisations and practitioners (‘the Consortium’) awarded the tender to work with the Council of Australian Governments to write the Framework, we were embroiled in intense negotiations throughout the scant nine months (September 2008 to May 2009) of its development (Sumsion et al., 2009).

These negotiations took place in a climate of considerable political urgency, given growing concerns in the electorate about the Rudd government’s capacity to translate visions into policy (Manne, 2008b). The policy context, too, was precarious for approval was needed from all nine (federal, state, territory) governments. These challenges were exacerbated by political nervousness about how the Framework would be received, especially in light of the widely perceived anti-Labor stance of News Corporation and its allegedly longstanding, powerful influence on policy decisions (see, for e.g., Manne, 2011).
Twice during the Framework’s development a draft was released for public comment. The response from the early childhood sector, for the most part, was markedly positive. However, each draft also belatedly attracted negative commentary from News Corporation’s Australia-wide newspapers and its other media outlets. In turn, that coverage generated strong emotional responses in ‘Letters to the Editors’ of those newspapers and on their associated online blogs, in some cases prompting swift responses by key politicians aimed at ‘damage control’ and resulting in the incorporation of significant changes into the final version of the Framework (Millei & Sumsion, 2011). As we go on to discuss, much of the consternation arose from contested visions concerning, in broad terms, children’s relations with others, from relationships with peers to contributions to their communities and wider society. To underpin our exploration of how these contested visions played a key part in the development of the Framework, we turn now to ideas from utopianism and politics.

**Utopianism and Politics**

‘Utopianism’ encompasses a constellation of ideas, concepts, forms of expression and functions broadly concerned with ‘social dreaming’ (Sargent, 1994) – imagining a different future, a conjuring of what could be (Buchanan, 2006). At least in part an indictment of the present, and a sketching of ways out of it, utopianism is concerned with transformation, and with the visions, processes, and structures that may make transformation possible (McNeill, 2006). Expressions of desire for better ways of living, a better world and a better future can take a vast variety of forms (Bloch, 1986, cited in Levitas, 2007) including, as we argue here, curriculum.

Utopianism and politics are closely interconnected, if politics is seen as the discussion, debate and negotiation of contested ideas and issues (Sargisson, 2007) with the intent of obtaining “practical acceptance of certain parameters of action” (Massumi, 1992, p. 125). Both utopianism and politics are concerned with the degree to which we should aim to imagine a radically different system to that which we have currently and how we might go about creating such a system (Jameson, 2005). Indeed, Sargisson (2007, p. 43) argues that their relationship is mutually dependent: utopianism gives politics a sense of direction while politics grounds
utopianism in material understandings of political change, for example, concerning how “subtle machinations” of power relations might be harnessed and/or combated.

We are interested in curriculum as politics and as a form of utopian vision and expression, and see the Framework as a political and pedagogical intervention aimed at creating better childhoods and better futures for children, for communities and for society. We are especially interested in the differing visions of various actors who shaped its development, and the degree to which they saw it as an opportunity to pursue radical change and transformation or, conversely, inevitably constrained by political palatability, power relations and other material considerations. Moylan (2008, p. 97) refers to “the ‘gap’ between the ideological limits of the present moment and the figuration of the not-yet-possible”. In exploring the nature of that gap with respect to the Framework, we have found it helpful to work with the closely related Deleuzeguattarian concepts of assemblage, rhizomes, and lines.

The Framework Assemblage
Although Deleuze and Guattari (1984) are dismissive of versions of utopianism that claim to offer a blueprint, they offer new ways of thinking that make it possible to see and experience the world differently (Buchanan, 2000). In this section, we explain how we see the Framework as an assemblage that operates rhizomatically and introduce the notion of mapping as the study of lines.

As Deleuze and Guattari (1987) make clear, an assemblage is not a static collection of entities but “contingent arrangements” (Currier, 2003, p. 333) of various “particles, intensities, forces and flows of components [that] meet with and link with the forces and flows of the other components” (p. 325). In the processes of connecting, these heterogeneous particles and intensities, and forces and flows enter continually into different arrangements and relationships forming an assemblage that is always localised, functional and transitory. The Framework assemblage, therefore, encompasses far more than the words, images, discourses, structures, and silences of the actual Framework document itself.
Its human components include the members of the Consortium awarded the contract to develop the Framework and the policy-makers with whom they worked; the Ministers of the numerous government departments whose approval was required for the Framework to become the legislated national curriculum; the practitioners who trialled the Framework and those who are currently interpreting and implementing it; and the children and families who are experiencing the Framework in practice. Human components also include the journalists, academics, and practitioners who produce commentaries about it and the regulators who assess whether the Framework is being adhered to in ways that conform to the requirements of the National Quality Standard. We, too, are part of the assemblage.

Non human components of the Framework assemblage, amongst many others, include the National Reform Agenda and within it, the Early Childhood Reform Agenda; the many kinds of texts produced about the Framework document and the work done by those texts; and the power relations circulating amongst the assemblage’s various components, arrangements and processes (Currier, 2003). Crucially, no part of the assemblage is more important than others. Moreover, because these components, arrangements and processes are continually shifting, the Framework assemblage, unlike the Framework document itself, has no central organising structure.

Our interest lies in how the Framework assemblage functions rhizomatically to produce diverse visions of better childhoods and better futures for young children. Propelled by productive forces, rhizomes ceaselessly establish connections in every direction, for example, through chains of thoughts, signs, circumstances and events. They have no fixed “points or positions” (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 9) and offer multiple entry points. If a rhizome breaks or shatters at a particular place, “it will start up again on one of its old lines, or on new lines” (p. 10). Because rhizomes are in a state of continual becoming – not on a specific trajectory to a projected or pre-determined endpoint, but rather becoming other than what currently is – they leave open possibilities for “new and radically transformed futures” (Currier, 2003, p. 337). In mapping how the Framework assemblage rhizomatically connects different utopian visions, we focused on lines and their effects (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987).
Mapping Utopian Visions: A Methodological Note

As Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 268) emphasise, mapping is not a linear, uni-dimensional process: “You can start in a thousand different ways; you will always find something that comes too late or too early, forcing you to ... rearrange.... An infinite undertaking”. Accordingly, we worked non-sequentially, iteratively and rhizomatically, moving between and across different ideas and processes. We were guided by several researchers (Leander & Wells, 2006; Mac Naughton, 2005; Masny & Cole, 2012) who have used Deleuzeguattarian concepts in their own rhizoanalyses (mapping), and especially Honan (2004, 2007) who, like us, is interested in how curriculum works rhizomatically through “scattering thoughts, scrambling terms, concepts and practices, forging linkages, becoming a form of action” (Grosz, 1995, p. 126, quoted in Honan, 2004, p. 269). These researchers emphasise that rhizoanalysis is not so much concerned with mapping what an assemblage contains, but rather its interconnections, and the effects these create. As assemblages are constantly shifting configurations of continual and divergent movements, they cannot be fully ‘captured’ (Leander & Wells, 2006). Hence, there is no one correct pathway to take when mapping, nor a stable or singularly correct reading (Honan, 2004). Accordingly, we have used multiple entry points into and taken multiple pathways through the Framework assemblage, focusing on movement, interconnections, and their effects.

To make these ideas more concrete, we have kept in mind visual images of rhizomes such as the map of the internet portrayed in Figure 1 (The OPTE Project, n.d.). What strikes us about this image are the intense concentrations of activity and the multiplicity of connections between these concentrations. Consequently, we ask, what concentrations and interconnections of intense energies and desires concerning better childhoods and children’s futures are evident in the Framework assemblage?

PLEASE INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE
We also ‘plugged into’ (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987) our mapping of the Framework assemblage, Lee’s (2001) mapping of historical and contemporary constructions of childhood. To Lee (p. 115), childhood itself is an assemblage that, “through further encounters and possibilities, ... change[s] and become[s] something rather different, changing the characteristics and power of its elements as it goes”. He maps changing constructions of children as ‘beings’ in the present and as future ‘becomings, for example, as well as couplings, de-couplings, and re-couplings of the interests of children and the state, and differing views about children’s capabilities and vulnerabilities, adult authority and children’s rights. He has helped us to consider how the politics of different views about what constitutes better childhoods and futures for children play out in the Framework assemblage, prompting us to ask, for example: What visions for children have been staked out? What desires underpin them? What binaries have been established? How do different entities with an investment in the Framework exercise power, and with what effects?

Our data came from four sources: key policy documents and policy translation documents concerning the Framework; News Corporation coverage of the Framework and responses to that coverage; and published academic analysis and critique. The policy and policy translation documents were selected from the Australian Government Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations website. The News Corporation coverage, from 2009-2011, and responses to it by the public, politicians, academics and practitioners, came from a media monitoring service used by the federal government, supplemented by an additional search. Academic analysis and critique was identified through a literature search that yielded 13 peer reviewed journal articles and conference proceedings, including several of our own articles and two by practitioners. Closer attention to practitioner perspectives will be a future focus of our ongoing mapping.

In moving from our data corpus to a manageable data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006), we followed Masny and Cole’s (2012) advice to work with vignettes, or data excerpts that reflect entities and forces within the assemblage that have considerable capacity to affect / effect other
components of the assemblage. To select key excerpts, we immersed ourselves in our data corpus, focusing on how the data functioned and the effects produced. We looked especially for concentrations of heightened energies, sustained intensity and strong emotionality, often signalled by contradictory and contestable visions, discourses and readings of what constitutes better childhood and futures for children.

**Children’s Relations with Others**

Because of space constraints, we focus here on only one concentration of heightened energies, and emotions, broadly focusing on visions of children’s relations with others. For ease of discussion, we have numbered in loose chronological order the following excerpts that comprise the primary data set for our mapping, although at times we draw as well on the broader data corpus. Except 1 is from a national Discussion Paper prepared by the Council of Australian Government’s working group of policymakers responsible for overseeing the Framework’s development. The Discussion Paper provided the basis of the policymakers’ brief to the Consortium. Excerpts 2 to 7 are representative of the tone and focus of News Corporation Press Coverage of the second publicly released draft of the Framework, and of the diversity of responses generated by that coverage. Excerpt 8 is an undated ‘Fact Sheet’ about the Framework that appears to have been released in the year following the Discussion Paper. Excerpts 9 - 11 are from articles in peer reviewed journals.

**Excerpt 1:**

*Productivity Agenda Working Group (2008)* [the bureaucrats with whom the Consortium contracted to write the Framework worked]

*Discussion Paper p.39*

*This paper considers the proposed values to underpin the Early Years Learning Framework. ... These include:*
  - the international rights of children
  - respect, compassion and empathy for all
  - promoting social inclusion
  - recognising Indigenous cultures and identities*
the agency of children (which acknowledges the voices of children as active members of society), and

a strong partnership between parents, professionals, families and communities.

Excerpt 2:
**Herald Sun**
General news April 14, 2009, p. 20.
Susie O’Brien, reporter

**Playing at politicking**
Kindergarten pupils may soon be urged to “challenge bias and discrimination” as part of new teaching guidelines. You have to be kidding! Political correctness is coming to a kindergarten near you. The “three Rs” are now reconciliation, race and restitution. Eradicating outdated golliwog dolls 20 years ago was one thing. But current attempts to force the pre-school to become political are out of control. … While I welcome an emphasis on equity, reconciliation, diversity and discrimination in early learning, things are clearly going too far.

Excerpt 3:
**Parliamentary Press Release**
Maxine McKew, Member of Parliament (MP) [1], then Parliamentary Secretary for Early Childhood Education and Care, April 14, 2009

**Transcript of 2UE (Sydney, Australia) radio interview [2] [as reported in the press release]**
John Stanley [radio host]: What about when … [the Framework] talks about using persona dolls or social inclusion puppets with children? Now that to many people, would sound quite bizarre.

Maxine McKew: … There is nothing remarkable about this, John, nothing remarkable at all. We are living in a culturally diverse world and the language in the document goes to that, talks about just kids being able to get along with other kids. Now, isn’t that what we all want?

Excerpt 4:
**West Australian**
April 15, 2009, p. 13
Andrew Tillett, reporter

**Pre-school PC guide draws teachers’ fire**
Federal Opposition childcare spokeswoman Sophie Mirabella said the Government should “keep its politically correct hands off our kids”

Excerpt 5:
Adelaide Advertiser
Letters, April 17, 2009, p. 17
Young activists
So Maxine McKew wants preschoolers to be trained to be political activists. Will she recommend their day begin with readings from the Red Book or perhaps a few passages from Marx?”

Excerpt 6:
The Weekend Australian
April 18, 2009, p. 26
David Penberthy, columnist
PC pedagogues imperil preschools
... This is a really weird document that drifts way too far from what should be its core brief of making kids sociable, friendly and caring, and equipping them with a basic ability to read, write and count. Some of what they suggest could not only be confusing but upsetting for kids aged one to five. It is neither banal nor reactionary to argue that little kids should be allowed to remain in a state of innocence rather than forcing them to grapple with more grown-up issues that would never have crossed their tiny minds. I find it insulting as a parent that, at their most rabid, these narks accuse you of racism should you question the logic of enlisting toddlers who are still being toilet-trained to their own private, adult crusade for social equity.

Excerpt 7:
Sunday Mail Adelaide,
Letters, April 19, 2009 p. 82
Lessons for tots
A fabulous idea. Instilling a social conscience in young people is all part of laying the foundation stones for a fair and just society in the future. Well done Maxine McKew. Vision is what your portfolio requires. Anything that can be done which infuses warmth, empathy and consideration for others ... is a very positive step indeed.

Excerpt 8:
Early Years Learning Framework Fact Sheet (DEEWR, n.d.)

The Early Years Learning Framework ... has a strong emphasis on play-based learning as play is the best vehicle for young children’s learning providing the most stimulus for brain development. The Framework also recognises the importance of communication and language (including early literacy and numeracy) and social and emotional development.

Excerpt 9:
Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood
Millei and Imre (2009, p. 288)

Citizenship of any kind is a political practice... We think the question still remains as to whether or not, and through what avenues, children can be part of this everyday political practice, and there is much work to be done in this area.

Excerpt 10:
European Education
Millei (2011, p. 33)

This article examines the role of state ideology in the formation of kindergarten curriculum documents in socialist Hungary during the 1970s and in contemporary neoliberal Australia ... [It] illustrates some of the ways curriculum documents written for the early years regulate children. Sometimes, such as in socialist curriculum, this occurs in explicit and ideologically explicit ways; at other times, such as in the neoliberal curriculum, a more covert and seemingly “apolitical” regulation takes place that is nonetheless equally powerful.

Excerpt 11:
Contemporary Issues in Early Childhood
Giugni (2011, p. 18)

It was important for someone else [other than me] at the table to raise the issue and it was a two and-a-half-year-old girl. SuXia successfully intercepted the conversation between Samantha, Jobi and me, and took it in a new direction. ... Following SuXia’s comment, Samantha and Jobi launched into a knowledge-sharing session of what they knew about lesbian and gay people and culture. Samantha said: ‘Two girls kiss, you know, they can’; and Jobi said: ‘And two mums kiss, too.’ Critically, Samantha added: ‘Yeah, but
they can’t get married.’ There was a silence. And then I asked: ‘Why?’ ‘Not in Australia,’ Samantha said. ‘That not fair [sic],’ Jobi replied. And SuXia sat sculpting her earthly clay into ‘two mums’ and nodding her head: ‘Not fair,’ she said. This conversation ... indicated to me that the girls had some knowledge about the lack of Australian policies about same-sex marriage ... [and] revealed to me that they had a strong sense of what was, and was not, fair in this particular political context.

These excepts provide a glimpse into the diversity of strongly held views concerning children’s relations with others, especially in relation to the desirability and legitimacy, or otherwise, of envisioning children as active contributors to their communities and agentic participants in social, cultural and political change. They also reflect diverse expectations about how the Framework might contribute to better childhoods and better futures. Variously emphasising preservation, protection, security, salvation, compensation, critique and change, they give weight to the notion of curriculum as a microcosm of broader contemporary debates (Pinar, 2012). To understand how these views and underpinning visions function in the Framework assemblage, we return to the notion of lines as the “basic components of things and events” (Deleuze, 1995, p. 33). We focus on rigid lines (that territorialise or segment), supple lines (that begin to unsettle segmentations) and lines of flight (that de-territorialise, undo, or escape segmentations) (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006).

**Rigid lines**
Rigid lines are evident in the dichotomies and binary couplings in the different constructions of children, childhood, early childhood education and curriculum within and across the data excerpts. For example, they set up and reinforce sharp distinctions between:

- adult / child;
- children as naive / socially aware; incapable / capable;
- protection / participation
- early childhood education as a site for fostering social and cognitive development / democratic active citizenship;
- curriculum as content knowledge / ideology; and
- politics as indoctrination / vision.

Particularly prominent in excerpts from News Corporation coverage and public responses are the lines dichotomising children and adults. These lines trace out meta-narratives and cultural tropes that position children within enclosed worlds of home, play, and the early childhood setting. They construct children as innocent, vulnerable, lacking comprehension of wider social contexts or the capacity to formulate and contribute views about debates in those contexts: “... little kids should be allowed to remain in a state of innocence rather than forcing them to grapple with more grown-up issues that would never have crossed their tiny minds” (Excerpt 6). In contrast, they construct adults as having the capacities and responsibilities for preserving children’s innocence by protecting them from intrusions from the outside world (a responsibility that some adults, including the developers of the Framework, reprehensibly shun): “... at their most rabid, these narks accuse you of racism should you question the logic of enlisting toddlers who are still being toilet-trained to their own private, adult crusade for social equity” (Excerpt 6). Juxtaposed in what some might see as a utopian-dystopian mirror image, are visions of better childhoods centred on the preservation of children’s innocence within a romanticised status quo, and visions of young children debating complex social issues, exemplified in practitioner Miriam Giugni’s welcoming of the discussion of same sex marriage by children aged two and three years (Excerpt 11). As James, Curtis and Burch (2008), who draw on Douglas (1966), remind us, breaching boundaries often incites fear and repulsion. Perceived violations of boundaries safeguarding the supposed sanctity of childhood from the dangers of the adult world might explain, at least in part, the vitriolic responses from News Corporation and many of its readers.

Rigid lines also divide the politically acceptable / unacceptable. To News Corporation and many of the public who responded to News Corporation reports, a traditional, content-based and somewhat instrumental curriculum is acceptable – “equipping them with a basic ability to read,
write and count” (Excerpt 6). A broader focus on encouraging active and participatory citizenship is not: “...current attempts to force the pre-school to become political are out of control” (Excerpt 2); “the Government should ‘keep its politically correct hands off our kids’” (Excerpt 4). Parliamentary Secretary McKew endeavoured to placate such vociferous and visceral antagonism while reaffirming an inclusive stance – “We are living in a culturally diverse world ... just kids being able to get along with other kids. Now isn’t that what we all want?” (Excerpt 3). She attracted some public support: “A fabulous idea. Instilling a social conscience ... is all part of laying the foundation stones for a fair and just society ...” (Excerpt 7). Nevertheless, there is a marked shift from the progressive tone of much of the initial Discussion Paper which acknowledges children “… as active members of society ...” (Excerpt 1) to the investment in human capital focus of the Fact Sheet, with its concern for “providing the most stimulus for brain development” (Excerpt 8) that positions children above all as learners. The shift could suggest capitulation to negative response from News Corporation and from some members of the public, and a retreat to the politically palatable side of an acutely-felt dividing line.

Alternatively, policymakers may have indeed been sympathetic to transformative visions of better childhoods and futures grounded in socially progressive policies, while ultimately deciding that “a threshold crossed too quickly, an intensity ... [became] dangerous because it could not be tolerated” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006, p. 104). From this perspective, the Fact Sheet’s focus on children’s learning and development (Excerpt 8) – on becoming rather than being (Lee, 2001) and on young children as ‘learner-citizens’ (Millei, 2011) – could possibly reflect a strategic decision to pursue transformation within familiar, existing structures and dominant global discourses, rather than by pitting “a strength of vision against the grain” (Williams, 1978, p. 208). In contrast, despite the constraints within in which they were obligated to operate, Consortium members contracted to develop the Framework continued to openly pursue transformative visions grounded in critiques of existing structures, a strong commitment to social justice, and hopes for more radical change than envisaged by policymakers in the initial Discussion Paper (Excerpt 1), (Sumsion et al., 2009).
For the purposes of this article, it would be convenient to argue that across the differing visions, values, priorities and strategies of the various groups with a stake in the development of the Framework was a discernible and, in some respects, shared desire for a “Utopian leap” from the present to better imagined futures (Jameson, 2006, p. 20). We are mindful, however, of Gough’s (1990) conclusion that much that passes for discussion of futures in Australia is characterised by rhetorical (and we would add political) tokenism and thinly disguised derivations from unquestioned assumptions. A more circumspect, critical, and possibly advisable reading would acknowledge that such desires could merely be rhetorical cover for longstanding beliefs and commitments [3]. We suspect that may be so particularly, but not only, in the case of News Corporation. Nevertheless, we maintain that attending only to rigid lines of segmentation can obscure less than readily evident commonalities in otherwise seemingly adversarial views.

**Supple lines**

In contrast to rigid lines, supple lines, mark “the connections, the attractions and repulsions” (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006i p. 92) that operate beneath segmentations. They create “little modifications“ (p. 93) and almost imperceptible micro cracks (not visible in Figure 1), enabling leakages, movements and flows through, beneath, and around the dichotomies constructed by rigid lines, sometimes eventually shattering them. Leaking through many data excerpts, for example, are concerns about power relations between adults and children. Sometimes they are framed in terms of overt indoctrination, as in the New Corporation reporter’s declaration that “The ‘three Rs’ are now reconciliation, race and restitution” (Excerpt 2) and the scathing reference to “readings from …[Mao Tse-Tung’s] Red Book or perhaps a few passages from Marx” in a letter to the Editor (Excerpt 5). At other times, following Rose (1999), they are couched as concerns about governmentality, interpreted here as young children monitoring their own conduct and conformity to prevailing norms specified by influential adults. For instance, in her comparison of the Framework and kindergarten curriculum in socialist Hungary (as if engaging with the letter writer’s presumably sarcastic reference to Marx), Millei (2011) concludes that the Framework enables “a more covert and seemingly “apolitical” regulation ... that is
nonetheless equally powerful” (Excerpt 10). There may be an ambiguous reference to governmentality, too, in Giugni’s observation, as a practitioner, that “It was important for someone else [other than me] at the table to raise the issue” (about same sex relationships) (Except 11).

Unambiguous, however, are the desires — or, following Gough (1990), tokenistic rhetoric - for better childhoods and futures grounded in positive interpersonal relation others that clearly run across different political stances. They are evident, for example, in the initial Discussion paper’s reference to “respect, compassion and empathy for all” as a value underpinning the Framework (Excerpt 1): the arguably grudging support of the otherwise critical News Corporation reporter for the “… core brief of making kids sociable, friendly and caring” (Excerpt 6); and in one of the few reported public responses challenging News Corporation’s criticism of the Framework: “Anything that … infuses warmth, empathy and consideration for others … is a very positive step indeed” (Excerpt 7). The terrain, or in Deleuzeguattarian terms, territories in which positive interpersonal relations should be developed, however, is strongly disputed.

Especially hotly contested, and hence conceptualised as a site of intense activity in Figure 1, is the (in)appropriateness of conceptualising young children as active citizen-participants. The importance of children’s contribution to the building of a better society view is implicit in the initial Discussion Paper released by policy makers (Excerpt 1) and was strongly advocated by the Consortium. News Corporation reporters, while claiming to “welcome an emphasis on equity, reconciliation, diversity and discrimination in early learning”, scoff that young children “may soon be urged to ‘challenge bias and discrimination’ … You have to be kidding!” and protest that “things are clearly going too far” (Excerpt 2). Expectations of active participation, they argue, are “really weird” and, returning to the trope of young children as innocent and vulnerable, “could not only be confusing but upsetting” (Excerpt 5).

Yet their concerns are not the preserve of a conservative press or public. Grounded in different and more nuanced arguments, there is also growing scholarly critique of and disquiet about
assumptions concerning young children and active citizenship. In Excerpt 9, for example, Millei and Imre (2009) express deep ambivalence about conceptualising young children as citizens, presumably as in the Discussion Paper’s reference to valuing “the agency …” and “voices of children” (Excerpt 1). As Millei and Imre (2009) elaborate, visions of children as citizens can be dangerous, tokenistic, and discriminative, seeking to normalise children’s conduct and to invest unrealistic responsibilities in them. Their arguments resonate with those of other critical commentators who point out that “uncomfortable dimensions” of children’s agency are often overlooked, particularly asymmetrical relations of power between young children and adults, and between young children themselves (Valentine, 2011, p. 354). Moreover, participatory structures and process that favour children from middle-class, mainstream, advantaged backgrounds can reproduce rather than challenge social hierarchies (Pacini-Ketchabaw & Viruru, 2010).

These examples illustrate that supple lines can reveal interconnected possibilities, limits and dangers across seemingly antagonistic utopian visions. It is these interconnections (or movements and leakages), we contend, that enable temporary, negotiated settlements (Woodrow & Brennan, 1999) while leaving open scope for lines of flight.

**Lines of flight**

Deleuze and Guattari (1987, p. 238) famously declare that “a society is defined by its lines of flight”. We maintain that the same could be said about curriculum. Lines of flight disrupt binaries and segmentations, sweeping us away across familiar thresholds towards unknown, unforeseen destinations (Deleuze & Parnet, 2006). Although political constraints limited what was possible to include in the Framework itself (Sumson et al, 2009; Millei & Sumson, 2011), the excerpts, and the wider data corpus from which they are drawn, provide glimpses of several possible lines of flight. For example, we read into Parliamentary Secretary McKew’s comment that an emphasis on children’s involvement in fostering social inclusion is unremarkable (Excerpt 3), an opportunity to pursue more radical visions of social justice than the Framework might seem to imply, on the proviso they appear commonplace. The Consortium pursued that line of flight, endeavouring to:
deliberately weave in words that can cross borders and divides, resonate with
diverse audiences, and be taken up differently within different discourses and
narratives. Wherever possible, we used words that we thought would appear
innocuous to political risk detectors, while speaking powerfully ‘in code’ to
practitioners seeking legitimate ways to push boundaries of what might currently
be considered possible (Sumsion et al., 2009, p. 8).

Similarly, Giugni (2011, p. 12) also portrays a line of flight in elaborating, in the article from
which Excerpt 11 is drawn, on how as a practitioner, she found subtle invitations in the
Framework to pursue “the politics and complexity” of her everyday practice. Taking up
opportunities afforded by the Framework to engage with her choice of theorists, particularly
Donna Haraway, Giugni theorises her work with young children in terms of ‘becoming worldly
with’:

‘Becoming worldly with’ is a practice of ‘grappling with’, looking for and creating
leakages; colouring outside the lines; pushing ourselves to be, think and do beyond
what we consider knowable and comfortable. For me, ‘becoming worldly with’ is an
activist practice; an ethical practice; a manifesto for change; an openness to
contradiction, struggle and difference; a critique of existing early childhood
practices; and an opportunity for hope. (Giugni, 2011, p. 26).

In describing her conversation with the children aged two and three years referred to in
Excerpt 11, and in other conversations described in the article from which the excerpt is taken,
Giugni appears to reach a ‘plane of encounter’ with young children; one of “participatory
discussion, based on trusted relationships” and imbued with a deep awareness of the
interconnectedness of children and adults (Cockburn, 1998, p. 109). That sense of
interconnectedness is missing from many discussions of children’s citizenship (James et al.
2008). Giugni’s article conveys a sense of how it might be possible, in this case through intra-
activity between human and non-human (the children, practitioner and the clay they were
moulding at the time of the discussion) to transcend the adult-child dichotomies marked out by
the rigid lines. It provides insights, as well, into how it might be possible to re-imagine ways of working with the tensions highlighted by the supple lines that connect concerns — identified in the media, by members of the public and in research literature — about how we might think of children’s participation and citizenship.

We would like to think that such lines of flight become defining features of the Framework, although we acknowledge, following De Landa (2006), that all three kinds of lines are important in enabling the Framework to function as both a stabilising and destabilising force. Early indications from analyses and commentary to date, by academics (e.g., Grieshaber, 2010; Krieg, 2011; Millei & Sumsion, 2011) and practitioners (e.g., Salamon, 2011) [4], appear to warrant some optimism about the Framework’s capacity to generate lines of flight. Our future mapping will endeavour to gauge the trajectories and effects of these lines of flight and ways in which the Framework might be de-territorialising (undoing) and re-territorialising (re-making) thinking about better childhoods and futures.

Conclusion
As has been evident from the outset of its development, the Framework does not reflect consensus concerning “what might be and what might be done to get there” (Moylan, 2008, p. 82) with respect to what constitutes better childhoods and futures. Instead, and we believe, more importantly, it invites questions about what new aspirations, desires and dreams a curriculum might make possible. We anticipate that the Framework may also invigorate discussion and debate about alternative visions and courses of action and offer ways of exploring spaces between the possible and not (yet) possible. In this way, it potentially provides a powerful “dialectical tool” (Buchanan, 1998, p.18) that may be able to shift thinking beyond conformity to traditional / progressive divides, token rhetoric, and uncritical adherence to unexamined assumptions and commitments. In our view, it might be in these ways that the Framework makes its strongest pedagogical, political and utopian contribution, for it is those discussions and debates that are most likely to “energize and compel us to action” (Jameson, 2005, p. xiv).
Conceptualising curriculum as a Deleuzeguattarian assemblage and endeavouring to map it rhizomatically opens up alternatives to the well-rehearsed dichotomies that so often characterise and confine curriculum politics and debates. Similarly, rigid dividing lines, supple lines that leak across and between these divides, and lines of flight with their unknown trajectories, offer much needed ways of articulating how curriculum is in a constant state of flux. Flux keeps alive possibilities of transgressing limits, for example, between what is considered possible and what is not; as well as possibilities for working the spaces between limits and the leakages from them; and for opening up previously unimagined spaces for curriculum as a means of pursuing visions of better childhoods and futures.

Endnotes

[1] In the 2007 Federal election, Maxine McKew, previously a highly regarded journalist for the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) ran a successful campaign against former Prime Minister John Howard in the electorate he had held for many years. There was speculation that McKew was subsequently targeted by News Corporation as a reflection of its widely perceived animosity to the Labor Government (see, for e.g., Manne, 2011).

[2] The Sydney-based 2UE radio station is owned by Fairfax media, News Corporation’s main, but much smaller Australian competitor. In contrast to this excerpt, in general, Fairfax’s reporting of the Framework was either positive or neutral in tone.

[3] We thank anonymous reviewers for reminding us of Noel Gough’s work on futures, and for this point in particular.


References


Figure 1