The Colloquium: Base National Curriculum held in Sao Paulo Brazil on 23 May was organised as a part of a larger four-day Expo run by the British group BETT (formerly known as British Education Training and Technology Show) for Brazil. The Expo brought together education and technology companies, and educators – an event organised on a massive scale, just like Sao Paulo (which has the same population as Australia).

All the big players were there at the Expo, including various global and multinational educational resource and IT companies, with a special guest appearance made by Pele.

The organisers of the Colloquium is a group (called Lemann) of like-minded bureaucrats, academics and government officials who are driving for national standards. Lemann receives its funding from a very wealthy Brazilian (Jorge Paulo Lemann, whose wealth was estimated recently at $26 billion), who is backing the effort.

ACARA was invited to provide a keynote presentation at the Colloquium on the development, outcomes, benefits and issues in national curriculum development and to play a key role in assisting with Brazil’s deliberations regarding the development of proposed national curriculum.

The Colloquium was attended by the secretaries (directors-general) from the 27 states of Brazil, key bureaucrats, including two from the Ministry of Education, members of different education boards from the country, and academics. There were three speakers in the morning, aimed at generating questions and the basis for the afternoon debate/discussion.

Following the introductions, Australia was given first opportunity to present – I gave the ‘Why? What? How?’ of national curriculum development in Australia, essentially outlining the drivers, context, structure, processes, challenges and benefits.

I was followed by David Peck, CEO of the Curriculum Foundation, an independent UK group working in a number of developing countries on national curriculum development. David spoke about his observations siting various countries and gave high praise to what Australia had achieved.

The third speaker was the President of the State Board of Education, Sao Paulo, Guiomar Namo de Mello, who was also very positive about our curriculum, highlighting various aspects that impressed her from her analysis of the website and in response to my talk.

The afternoon was then a panel session with comments from the floor, questions to the panel members and some across the floor debates. Overall, the mood was very positive, good questions, and from the perspective of the organisers a major step in efforts to develop a national curriculum for Brazil.

The work undertaken in Australia was seen as a model not only in relation to the curriculum construct but also the consultative processes undertaken in its development and the underpinning principles. Brazil has a highly complex arrangement with 27 state curricula guidelines as well as 500 municipal curricula adding to the mix. It was clear to me that the participants knew what they wanted and what they didn’t want.
Overall, the Australian Curriculum, with the traditional subjects, general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities provides a model Brazil wants to follow. They have undertaken a scan of what is on offer in the world and see that we have all the qualities of a curriculum that is rigorous, contemporary and sufficiently flexible to meet local needs and address important issues.

Some quotable remarks following my presentation:

‘What you have achieved in Oz is so impressive.’ David Peck, CEO of the Curriculum Foundation

‘Your presentation confirmed my previous view that the work you are doing in Australia is the most complete in the world.’ Guiomar Namo de Mello, President of the State Board of Education, Sao Paulo

‘I loved your presentation and I am a little jealous because your country already has a common core.’ Carmen Moreira de Castro Neves, Ministry of Education, Brazil