

THE AUSTRALIAN NATIONAL CURRICULUM:  
PERSPECTIVES OF TEACHERS AND SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS ON ISSUES AND  
CONCERNS SURROUNDING IMPLEMENTATION

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## Abstract

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The creation and implementation of the Australian National Curriculum placed Australia as the first federation in the world to implement a national curriculum. Thus it was a major and significant curriculum reform and provided the impetus for this study. As such it was deemed important to investigate teachers' perspectives on the ways in which the reform would influence their professional practices.

It was considered that unless data were captured, analysed and reviewed during the introduction of the Australian Curriculum a significant opportunity for analysis and review would have been lost to Australian education. Thus, working from the assumption that it was imperative that researchers capture the essence of the newly released Australian Curriculum from a schools' and teachers' perspective, this thesis critiques the implementation of the Australian Curriculum, in particular, the four Phase 1 subjects of English, Mathematics, Science and History. Further, teachers were asked as to whether they felt well prepared to implement a new Australian curriculum. Such a perspective, it is argued, should ensure that any required curriculum renewal in higher education teacher education programs are aligned with the reform and are authentic and reliable.

The study begins with an examination of the curriculum conceptualisations on which the current Australian Curriculum is founded. In the absence of any official theoretical model of the curriculum reform, a model is presented which argues that the Australian Curriculum is a hybrid curriculum predominately reflecting a duality of a Reconstructionist curriculum conceptualisation along with a Third Way political ideological influence in its underlying philosophy, but with a reflection of essentialism in its design and development. The model proposed is thus presented as a complementary pluralistic model. The development of the model provides a conceptual framing of the study.

Past attempts at national curricula collaboration in Australia are then reviewed including an examination of the backgrounds to these attempts; followed by an examination of the justifications and processes surrounding the current initiative. Using a survey (N=235) to gather data from teachers in Independent Schools throughout Australia perspectives, issues and teacher concerns surrounding the implementation of the Australian Curriculum were



determined. Five major interrelated propositions emerged from the analysis of the data. The first was that teachers of History and Science in Independent Schools in Australia in the main are not confident that their training enables them to integrate the literacy and numeracy capabilities of the Australian Curriculum into their teaching to the level required by the Australian Curriculum. Secondly, the inadequate preparation of teachers in Independent Schools in Australia for the inclusion of each of the three cross-curriculum priorities into their disciplines was identified by teachers as problematic. Thirdly, that teachers in Independent Schools in Australia rate the knowledge and associated pedagogy they received in their Pre-Service Education much lower for the Phase 1 subjects of History (in particular) and Science than they did for Mathematics and English. The lack of alignment between teachers' perceived needs and the Pre-Service Education in History methodology has been noted and discussed. Fourthly, that teachers in Independent Schools in Australia overwhelmingly endorsed inquiry learning as the optimal pedagogy for implementation of the reformed Australian Curriculum. The final proposition was that teachers indicated, that while the ability to teach differentially is being addressed to some degree in on-going professional development and through post graduate studies, it is not being addressed to the same extent in pre-service education courses.

In the closing sections of the thesis recommendations are presented. These included those related to the minimum standards for teachers of History; a review of pre-service programs in Science; the need for an explicit focus on pedagogy to support differentiated teaching; the application of numeracy, literacy and ICT capabilities across all subject areas; and the support required to implement the Asia cross curriculum priority successfully.

## Declaration

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I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Date: 12<sup>th</sup> November, 2015

John Robert Rose

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To the survey participants from Independent Schools around Australia I offer my thanks. I am exceedingly grateful to the hundreds of school-based personnel who willingly participated in the research and gave up their time to do so. Teachers and school administrators are often flooded with requests for survey participation and I am grateful to those busy, professional people who responded and provided solid and unreserved evidence for this thesis. Coupled with this, the constructive and encouraging feedback from my colleagues has been invaluable.

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## Glossary of Acronyms and Abbreviations

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<b>AAMT</b>	Australian Association of Mathematics Teachers
<b>AATE</b>	Australian Association for the Teaching of English
<b>ABS</b>	Australian Bureau of Statistics
<b>ACARA</b>	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
<b>ACC</b>	Australian Curriculum Coalition
<b>ACCI</b>	Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry
<b>ACE</b>	Australian Certificate of Education Australian College of Educators
<b>ACER</b>	Australian Council for Educational Research
<b>ACSA</b>	Australian Curriculum Studies Association
<b>ACT</b>	Australian Capital Territory
<b>ACTHTA</b>	Australian Capital Territory History Teachers' Association
<b>AEC</b>	Australian Education Council
<b>AEF</b>	Asia Education Foundation
<b>AEU</b>	Australian Education Union
<b>AITSL</b>	Australian Institute of Teaching and School Leadership
<b>ALP</b>	Australian Labor Party
<b>ASEP</b>	Australian Science Education Project
<b>CDC</b>	Curriculum Development Centre
<b>COAG</b>	Council of Australian Governments
<b>CSCNEPA</b>	Curriculum Standing Committee of National Education Professional Associations
<b>EAL/D</b>	English as an Additional Language or Dialect

<b>ESA</b>	Education Services Australia
<b>EU</b>	European Union
<b>FAQ</b>	Frequently Asked Questions
<b>GDP</b>	Gross Domestic Product
<b>HEI</b>	Higher Education Institution
<b>HTAA</b>	History Teachers' Association of Australia
<b>HTANSW</b>	History Teachers' Association of New South Wales
<b>HTASA</b>	History Teachers' Association of South Australia
<b>HTAV</b>	History Teachers' Association of Victoria
<b>HTAWA</b>	History Teachers' Association of Western Australia
<b>IDEAS</b>	Innovative Designs for Enhancing Achievements in Schools
<b>ICT</b>	Information and Communications Technology
<b>JSSP</b>	Junior Secondary Science Project
<b>LDP</b>	Language Development Project
<b>MCEECDYA</b>	Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs
<b>MCEETYA</b>	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
<b>MCVTE</b>	Ministerial Council for Vocational & Technical Education
<b>NAPLAN</b>	National Assessment Program Literacy and Numeracy
<b>NCB</b>	National Curriculum Board
<b>NCET</b>	National Committee on English Teaching
<b>NPDP</b>	National Professional Development Program
<b>NSW</b>	New South Wales
<b>NT</b>	Northern Territory
<b>OECD</b>	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
<b>PISA</b>	Program for International Student Assessment
<b>QHTA</b>	Queensland History Teachers' Association

<b>QLD</b>	Queensland
<b>QSA</b>	Queensland Studies Authority
<b>SA</b>	South Australia
<b>SCSEEC</b>	Standing Committee on School Education and Early Childhood
<b>SEMP</b>	Social Education Materials Project
<b>SES</b>	Socio Economic Status
<b>SOSE</b>	Study of Society and the Environment
<b>SPSS</b>	Statistical Package for Social Sciences
<b>THTA</b>	Tasmanian History Teachers' Association
<b>TIMSS</b>	Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study
<b>UbD</b>	Understanding by Design
<b>UK</b>	United Kingdom
<b>UNESCO</b>	United National Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
<b>USA</b>	United States of America
<b>VCAA</b>	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
<b>VIC</b>	Victoria
<b>WA</b>	Western Australia

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## Publications arising from the Thesis

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Rose, J. (2015). Consultation and the Australian Curriculum. *Professional Educator*, 14(1), 25-26.

Rose, J., & Aspland, T. (2015). The Australian Curriculum and Third Way Ideology: Is there a nexus? *Curriculum Perspectives*, 35(1), 39-48.