

**University of Southern Queensland**

**Exploring the intentions behind the inclusion of the  
cross-curriculum priority ‘Aboriginal and Torres  
Strait Islander histories and cultures’ in the  
*Australian Curriculum***

**A Dissertation submitted by**

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## ABSTRACT

The authors of the *Australian Curriculum* have been required to simultaneously work toward the realisation of economic and reputational goals that are in the national interest whilst also appearing to cater for groups who have traditionally been disenfranchised by such interests. This study explores the explicit and implicit intentions behind the inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority in the curriculum, and ways in which those intentions are interpreted. Final year pre-service teachers surveyed and interviewed as part of the study shared a widespread belief that the cross-curriculum priority was developed as the result of converging interests, with those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples appearing to converge with those of the broader community. Numerous documentary data sources were collected and analysed according to a *bricolage* approach, in order to study apparent intentions and uncover those that were less evident in the *Australian Curriculum* when read in isolation. Finally, a racial realist interpretation of Critical Race Theory principles was deployed to synthesise the answers to three major questions.



# CERTIFICATION PAGE

## CERTIFICATION OF DISSERTATION

I certify that the ideas, experimental work, results, analyses, software and conclusions reported in this dissertation are entirely my own effort, except where otherwise acknowledged. I also certify that the work is original and has not been previously submitted for any other award, except where otherwise acknowledged.

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Signature of Candidate

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Date

## ENDORSEMENT

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Signature of Supervisor

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Date

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Signature of Supervisor

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Date



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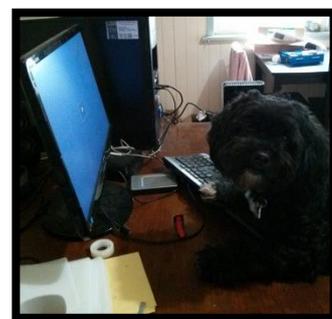
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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
APY	Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara
C2C	Curriculum into the Classroom
CAF	Council for the Australian Federation
COAG	Council of Australian Governments
CRT	Critical Race Theory
EAL/D	English as an Additional Language or Dialect
EQ	Education Queensland
ESA	Education Services Australia
F-10	Foundation to Year 10
FOI	Freedom of Information
IECB	Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies
KLA	Key Learning Area
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs
NAIDOC	National Aboriginal and Islander Day Observance Committee
NAPLAN	National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy
NCB	National Curriculum Board
NCP	National Competition Policy
NMA	National Museum of Australia
NRA	National Reform Agenda
NRI	National Reform Initiative
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PD	Professional Development
PISA	Programme for International Student Assessment
SAE	Standard Australian English

# Chapter 1: Introduction to the study

## 1.1 Overview

Australian education policy aims to enhance the nation's competitiveness in globalised education and trade while increasing equity among the country's citizens (Commonwealth of Australia. House of Representatives, 2008; Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs [MCEETYA], 2008). Such a goal requires that policy attends to national interests whilst also appearing to cater for groups who have traditionally been disenfranchised by such interests (Bell, 2004; Lingard, 2009). The authors of the *Australian Curriculum*, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment, and Reporting Authority (ACARA), have been required to work within such a framework by simultaneously moving toward the realisation of the national education agenda outlined in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (hereafter, the *Melbourne Declaration*; MCEETYA, 2008), while addressing the various demands of diverse stakeholders (ACARA, 2011c; Henderson, 2012; Reid, 2009; Taylor, 2011). Little research into the principles that have guided the *Australian Curriculum* authors throughout this contested process is present in the literature. This thesis explores the intentions behind the introduction of a *cross-curriculum priority* to the recently developed *Australian Curriculum* with a view to contributing a multifaceted, critical interpretation of the goals underpinning the curriculum, and the ways various competing demands ultimately shaped the cross-curriculum priority.

The *Australian Curriculum* contains three cross-curriculum priorities: *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures*; *Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia*; and *Sustainability*. These priorities are to be incorporated into all school subjects where teachers deem them to be appropriate, and have been developed in an attempt to make the curriculum

“relevant to the lives of students and address the contemporary issues they face” (ACARA, 2011c, para. 2). One of these cross-curriculum priorities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, has the stated aim of enabling Australian students to benefit from the knowledge of “the world’s oldest continuous living cultures” in order to “enrich their ability to participate positively in the ongoing development of Australia” (ACARA, 2011a, para. 3). Critical Race Theorists<sup>1</sup> maintain that mainstream education initiatives in countries such as Australia are developed within colonial, racist, white-supremacist systems, thus precluding the achievement of equity objectives (Bell, 1976, 1991, 1992, 2004; Delgado, 1994; Delgado & Stefancic, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 1998, 2009; Moreton-Robinson, 2007a). The capacity of schools to contribute to the betterment of society is, however, a long-standing belief that continues to be widely supported by theorists, governments, and members of the public (Counts, 1932; Du Bois, 1935; Freire, 1993; MCEETYA, 2008). The data presented in this thesis challenge the reliance on incremental or piecemeal curriculum initiatives to achieve broad social, economic or academic goals, particularly initiatives expected to lead to the eventual elimination of racism.

This study explores the explicit and implicit intentions behind the inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority in the *Australian Curriculum*. Numerous documentary data sources were collected and analysed according to various methods in order to uncover these intentions. In addition, the ways in which final year pre-service teachers interpreted the intentions underpinning the curriculum were collected from survey responses and interviews. Finally, a racial realist (Bell, 1992b; Bell, 2004) interpretation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) principles was deployed to synthesise the answers to three research questions.

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<sup>1</sup> Critical Race Theory and associated terms (such as ‘theorists’) are generally treated as proper nouns throughout this thesis. Consequently, they are capitalised in order to distinguish them from theories and scholars working in race critical fields (Curry, 2009).

## 1.2 Background to the research

### 1.2.1 Multiculturalism in Australian schooling

Prior to the emergence of multicultural education policies in Australia in the 1970s, xenophobia and linguistic insularity were characteristic features of Australian schooling. Cultural assimilation was official government policy. Only elite schools offered lessons in languages other than English, usually only French or German (Ozolins, 1993), and migrant children and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were required to speak English and assimilate to the dominant culture, a “settler societ[y] of Anglo Celtic origin...deeply embedded in [its] colonial heritage as a British colony” (Jayasuria, 2003, p. 2). The languages, histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were largely excluded from schools or misconstrued to the point of fictionalisation (Nakata, 2007; Sharp, 2010).

In the early 1970s, multicultural education policies were developed alongside the dismantling of the ‘White Australia policy’: restrictive race-based immigration legislation explicitly designed to exclude members of particular nations and races from Australia (Burnett & McArdle, 2011). The *Immigration Restriction Act* of 1901 was not only developed to maintain ‘racial purity’, but to protect the financial security and prosperity of Australia by preventing foreign workers from sending their wages back to their home countries. Just as the Act was introduced to achieve economic as well as social outcomes, its repeal served to address multiple interests related to Australia-Asia trade opportunities likely to result from the abandonment of the policy (Whitlam, 1985).

Education was the first site of multicultural change; with calls for the introduction of multilingual programs for migrant children whose first language was not English (Collins & Reid, 1994). Early multicultural curricula involved lessons about various ethnic groups (read,

‘exotic’, non-white *Others*, including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) as well as introductory lessons in languages other than English. At the time, numerous resources were developed in order to support teachers and students in this new curriculum area. Attempting to counteract the previous narrative of Anglo-superiority, authors of new curriculum materials were seen to descend into “patronising niceness”, which critics feared would contribute to the oversimplification of *culture* and the promotion of stereotypes (Cope, 1987 as cited in Hill & Allan, 2001, p. 158). Superficial treatment of *culture* in schools served to allay the fears of a largely xenophobic public (Cahill, 2001). By focussing on commonalities between cultures, the viability of social cohesion within a multicultural society could be reinforced without challenging or threatening the status quo.

Efforts to enhance cultural pluralism in schools were eclipsed at this time by concerns about the achievement of assessable outcomes within traditional discipline areas. As the socio-political and economic climate of Australia shifted, the “first generation strategy” to promote multiculturalism was compromised in order to convince the broader populace of their utility “as an effective means of dealing with ethnic affairs and ethnic relations” (Jayasuriya, 1990, p. 152). While early policies were based on culturally conservative values and a desire to ensure societal cohesion, multiculturalism needed to evolve to enable all people to have equitable access to civic life (Jayasuriya, 1990). From the mid-1970s to early 1980s, a period of *liberal multiculturalism* facilitated improved access to schooling by migrant students. This was followed by *managerial multiculturalism* during the terms of Hawke-Keating (1983-1996) and Howard (1996-2007) Governments (Jayasuriya, 2003). Burnett and McArdle (2011) assert that the managerial approach, which shifted focus from migrant children to *all Australians*, was spurred in part by “reactionary complaints around ‘special treatment’ and the politics of envy and resentment which saw ‘ordinary Australians’ short changed by the allocation of resources to the Other” (pp. 6, 7).

While multiculturalism policies have been both lauded and criticised for their perceived cultural and social implications (Burnett & McArdle, 2011; Grande, 2008; Hill & Allan, 2001; Resnik, 2009) some argue that the impetus behind decisions about multicultural programs has been the country's economic interests (Crozet, 2008; Jayasuriya, 2003). Crozet (2008), for example, has linked increased government support for the teaching of Asian languages in the 1970s with the significant reduction in Australian exports to Britain after the latter joined the European Economic Community. In the 1980s and 1990s, when Australia was in the grip of financial crises, the economic benefits of multiculturalism and immigration were emphasised (Hill & Allan, 2001). Proponents of multiculturalism adopted a similar strategy in the late 1990s in order to counteract the policy's plummeting support during the rise of *One Nation*<sup>2</sup>. Immigration and multiculturalism, *One Nation* members and supporters warned, would result in special privileges for Indigenous peoples and an invasion by foreign workers (mainly from Asia) who would each take the job of a 'real Australian' (Burnett & McArdle, 2011; Hill & Allan, 2001). *One Nation*'s policies addressed both the social and economic concerns of its constituency in a way that other parties had not.

Multicultural policies have developed alongside shifting notions of Otherness; ostensibly balancing the rights of non-white immigrants and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to their own cultures while trying to ignore elements that undermine societal cohesion (Cahill, 2001). Australian policy in this area is developed according to competing discourses of multiculturalism and ethnocentrism (Hickling-Hudson, 2003). Multiple scholars have asserted that this paradoxical approach lies at the heart of Australian multicultural policies, with particular implications for those policies related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait

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<sup>2</sup> Pauline Hanson's One Nation party was founded in 1997 and won a significant victory in the 1998 Queensland State Election, winning over a quarter of the votes. The party put forward a policy platform of zero net immigration, rejection of multiculturalism and reconciliation between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, and a raft of other policies designed to restore the balance for white Australians after the policies of the major Australian parties had "swung too far" in favour of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and Asian immigrants (Leser, 1996).

Islander peoples (e.g. Hage, 1998; Jayasuria, 2003; Thompson, 1994). Such policies are seemingly *shoehorned* into broader, mainstream policy goals in such a way that they give the appearance of genuine, humanitarian change, while keeping those in the cultural (and numerical) majority satisfied.

### **1.2.2 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in Australian education**

Until at least 1950, “enlightenment” was the remit for most schools teaching Aboriginal<sup>3</sup> students and the promotion of White/European/Western supremacy was the goal for all schools (Christie, 1995; Harris, 1978). The first school established specifically for Aboriginal children was Governor Macquarie’s Native Institution at Parramatta, New South Wales. It opened in 1814 with a curriculum based around agriculture and mechanical skills for boys and domestic work for girls; Aboriginal cultures and histories were not part of the curriculum (Brook & Kohen, 1991). The inclusion of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander content, pedagogies or languages was extremely rare in early Australian schools and varied greatly depending on geographical, temporal and demographic context (Watson, 1835). Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders were largely positioned as belonging to a savage or romantic pre-historic time and requiring significant spiritual, intellectual and cultural enlightenment in order to survive the rigours of colonial life (Dunn, 2001; Nakata, 2007; Sharp, 2010).

It took until the 1970s before a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education increased in Australia. The shift was as a result of ongoing advocacy and activism by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, increasing critiques of the ways in which

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<sup>3</sup> Christie and Harris’ articles focussed on Aboriginal people to the exclusion of Torres Strait Islander people so I have reflected this by only referring to Aboriginal people. This convention continues throughout the thesis, with the adjectives *Aboriginal* or *Torres Strait Islander* used to the exclusion of the other term to reflect another author’s or interviewee’s deployment of the terms. Otherwise, *Aboriginal* and *Torres Strait Islander*, or *Indigenous*, are used.

anthropologists and historians (mis)represented Indigenous cultures, and the election of a sympathetic Labor Government that was determined to bolster Australia's reputation in the Asia-Pacific region (Morgan & Slade, 1998; Whitlam, 1985; Williamson, 1997). In 1975 an Aboriginal Consultative Group was formed and marked the first time Aboriginal people had been officially consulted by governments about education (Beresford, 2003; Partington, 1998). The Group's contribution to the *Schools Commission Report* asserted that student achievement could be improved if school staff "turn[ed] to educational advantage, the Aboriginal cultural heritage and traditional ways of viewing the world" (Schools Commission, 1975, p. 4). This point was strongly reinforced by the Group's proposal that some of the foundations of mainstream educational institutions should be overhauled, and then restructured around core values from Aboriginal societies (Schools Commission, 1975). The report signalled an acknowledgement of the need for governments and schools to make significant epistemological changes in order to achieve socially just outcomes.

Calls to implement curricula with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content continued through the 1980s and 1990s (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1989; Johnston, 1991). The Torres Strait Islands had an essentially mono-cultural, Eurocentric curriculum from the 19<sup>th</sup> century until the early 1980s when the complex concept of Torres Strait cultures gained a foothold in school curricula (Nakata, 2007). However, as noted by Nakata (2007), these were insufficiently explored or critiqued. *Aboriginal cultures* were also being 'included' in most mainland schools as a "collection of reified cultural objects, separated from their cultural context and their legitimate owners" (Morgan & Slade, 1998, p. 9), while attempts at more holistic education were being made as part of the movement (Blanchard, 1987). The presence of Aboriginal teachers in some schools was leading to an increase in Aboriginal pedagogies (Christie, 1995). However, non-Indigenous stakeholders continued to dominate policy development with the result that even the policy of

*Aboriginalisation* of education was “normally interpreted as something which needs to happen to Aborigines rather than to white educators and white structures within education” (Christie, 1995, p. 9). Calls were being made to recognise the need to rebuild the country’s education system (from early years to tertiary settings) on more holistic and inclusive philosophical foundations (Morgan & Slade, 1998; Sykes, 1986) and to promote anti-racist education (Macnaughton, 2001). Morgan and Slade (1998, p.10) have asserted that a sharp disparity between Aboriginal and European cultures exists, which has resulted in a “cultural paradox” and an inability of Australian educational institutions to sufficiently incorporate the former in a manner that would lead to improved educational experiences and outcomes for Aboriginal students. Nakata (2007) and Yunkaporta (2009) suggest that such a distinction between cultures is too simplistic, and that an interface exists at which productive work can be undertaken.

### **1.2.3 Drivers of curriculum development in Australia**

Until the 1970s, curriculum development in Australia was conducted according to the notion that schooling was mainly to be undertaken in preparation for adulthood, and curricula were designed with a view to developing skills and knowledge required for employment (Nakata, 2007). Although the social movements of the 1960s were beginning to influence practices in schools, the changes were “more or less cosmetic”, with little concern for the cultural and philosophical foundations of education (Green, 2003, p. 128). The modicum of curriculum-specific research that was occurring in Australia focussed on discipline, efficacy of assessment, and teaching methods (Green, 2003). The 1970s saw the emergence of a sociology of curriculum in Australia and a consequent increase in critical inquiry into the purpose, practice and potential of education policies (Bartlett, 1992; Green, 2003; Musgrave, 1970).

By the 1970s, social, political and economic changes in the broader community were influencing both curriculum research and schooling at a policy level. The decade saw a move away from centralised schooling and towards school-based curriculum and assessment (Bartlett, 1992; Green, 2003; Musgrave, 1970). Widespread concerns for the nation's economic wellbeing during the 1980s resulted in attempts to develop national curriculum systems in order to “maximise scant curriculum development resources and to minimise unnecessary differences in curriculums across the states” (Bartlett, 1992, p. 221). While concerted efforts to nationalise the curriculum were continued by Federal Governments in the following decade, State Governments were reluctant to relinquish responsibility for, and control of, school education bestowed upon them by the *Australian Constitution* (Commonwealth of Australian Constitution Act, 1900). During the 1990s, curricula were framed by Federal Governments and international agencies (such as the Organization for Economic Co-Operation and Development [OECD]) as a means to ensure national prosperity via investment in *human capital* (Bartlett, 1992). These views on, and approaches to, curriculum design permeated the new century (McAllan, 2011).

It is within this context that the current *Australian Curriculum* emerged. Seeking to provide a common curriculum framework, relevant to all schools and students across Australia, the designers of the *Australian Curriculum* attempted to create a replacement for the nation's disparate state curricula. My analysis of the development of the cross-curriculum priority, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, is consequently situated against this historical backdrop. The significance of this specific aspect of the curriculum – the cross curriculum priority – is its role within a curriculum developed according to competing demands. How these various demands impacted upon the development of the priority will be the focus of this thesis.

### **1.3 Research problem**

Although research into the new curriculum is emerging, there is a lack of critical, multidisciplinary interrogation of its key elements. Existing literature addresses concerns about the quality or quantity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content or pedagogy in schools and the actual or potential effect of multicultural education initiatives on student learning, sense of identity, and general wellbeing (Burgess, 2009; Hickling-Hudson, 2003; McAllan, 2011). However, there is little that critiques the intentions behind these initiatives.

From this initial provocation for research, the following research questions provided specific guidance for the project on which this thesis reports:

1. What intentions do future educators believe underpin the cross-curriculum priority *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures*?
2. What are the explicit and implicit intentions underpinning the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority in the *Australian Curriculum*?
3. Why are the intentions underpinning this curriculum initiative significant?

### **1.4 Rationale for the study**

Although the documents that shape education in this country have become centralised with the introduction of the *Australian Curriculum*, it remains that the translation of those documents for consumption by students is the job of teachers and other school staff.

Descriptions of some elements of the curriculum, such as the cross-curriculum priorities, are brief and vague, thus requiring significant acts of interpretation by educators. Although the curriculum has been developed in conjunction with a range of interest groups, curriculum specialists, teachers, parents and caregivers, and other interested parties, the opportunities for

educators and curriculum authors to engage in dialogue about their respective intentions and interpretations of the curriculum have been limited. Consequently, there is a significant likelihood that the cross-curriculum priorities may not be interpreted or deployed as intended (Ball, Maguire & Braun, 2011; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010; Trimmer, 2011).

A stated reason for the inclusion of the three cross-curriculum priorities is that they “address the contemporary issues [students] face” (ACARA, 2011c, para. 2). The interpretation and teaching of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are particularly contentious acts, as highlighted during the *history wars*<sup>4</sup> of the past two decades, and more recently with debates about Aboriginal cultures and identities in the media and courts (Atkins, 2010; Berg, 2010; Donnelly, 2011; Fredericks, Moreton-Robinson, & Larkin, 2011; Kelly, 2010; Pyne, 2014; Sharp, 2010). These complexities, combined with the narrow scope for communication between teachers and curriculum authors, and the limited information provided in the curriculum itself provided impetus for this research. The study was designed to explore meanings and interpretations made variously by curriculum authors, pre-service teachers and others involved in the development of the cross-curriculum priority, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. I hope that my own interpretations of the data presented in this thesis will serve as stimulus for clarification about the intentions of the cross-curriculum priority and the ways in which future educators are

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<sup>4</sup> Ongoing public debates about interpretations of Australian history between historians, academics, and political commentators, particularly regarding narratives about the invasion/settlement of the country, and enduring impacts of colonisation, have been referred to as the history or culture wars. While counter-narratives of Aboriginal people, and Torres Strait Islanders, and members of non-white minority groups have always existed in Australia, the topics of debate in the history wars have tended to gain prominence when a non-Indigenous scholar publishes in the area (Sharp, 2010). In the late 1960s through the 1980s, W.E.H. Stanner, Manning Clark and Henry Reynolds published works which sought to address the *Great Australian Silence* (Stanner, 1969): the omission of Indigenous peoples’ histories. A lecture by Geoffrey Blainey (1993) gave commentators a new vocabulary with which to discuss the two major camps of the history wars: those with a *three cheers view* of national history, and those adopting a *black arm-band* perspective. Such terminology has been part of the discourse associated with curriculum content ever since, with politicians referring to it upon the introduction of the Australian Curriculum: History (Australian Broadcasting Commission, 2010).

interpreting these, so that each may be critiqued and steps taken to align, adjust or abandon aspects of policy and practice.

At the time of writing, there has been much commentary in the Australian media about multicultural elements of the Australian Curriculum, but little research conducted regarding the cross-curriculum priority that is the focus of this thesis. Incorporation of multicultural content has been incorporated into Australian curricula for decades, and has been a constant target of criticism. Conservative critics maintain that a focus on the differences between cultural or ethnic groups promotes social discord and takes the focus away from educational ‘basics’ (Donnelly, 2011). Other commentators dismiss multicultural education as being too tokenistic, and for promoting an understanding of culture as a static concept (Gillborn, 2005; 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Critical multiculturalists insist that education has the potential to be emancipatory, but only if multiculturalism is engaged critically, with decolonisation as its ultimate aim (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Such an approach is unlikely in mainstream schools, some suggest, as it would require the surrendering of power by those who have traditionally been vested with a wealth of social and cultural capital (Burgess, 2009; Castagno, 2014; Hickling-Hudson, 2003; Luke, 2010, McAllan, 2011).

Yates and Collins (2010) interviewed authors involved in the attempted development of national curricula in the 1980s and 1990s in order to understand how knowledge was conceptualised and enacted. Further investigation into the impact that the intentions of curriculum writers have had on the outcomes of such initiatives is currently absent from the Australian literature. Luke (2010) has suggested that further research needs to be conducted into the ways in which teachers interpret curricula in order to understand how cultural context influences the enactment of curricula in classrooms.

A significant motivating force behind the development of the curriculum was a desire to compete in the global economy by increasing the skills of future Australian workers (Burgess, 2009; ACARA, 2010c). Fiscal goals of curricula will, Burgess (2009) suggested, result in an education system that leads to the widening of the disadvantage gap. If social justice is an objective of the curriculum, ethical concerns must be a primary goal (Burgess, 2009). Caldwell (2011), on the other hand has maintained that a strong focus on the economic benefits of the curriculum is vital because education is a key contributor to the success of a nation's economy. There are indicators throughout documents associated with the development of the *Australian Curriculum* that the State and Commonwealth governments' approaches to education are more closely aligned with Caldwell's than Burgess' and schools are considered as vehicles to the nation's future economic security (e.g. MCEETYA, 2008; Venturous Australia, 2008).

The impact of international standardised testing regimes on the development of participating countries' curricula has received significant attention by education researchers. There are suggestions that tests undertaken for the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA) have a homogenising effect on curricula across the globe (Hopmann & Brinek, 2007). International organisations such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) are having an impact on curriculum decisions, particularly in areas such as assessment and content (Yates & Collins, 2010). In parliamentary and policy documents, Australian politicians have cited PISA results as justification for requiring change in Australia's education system (see e.g., Commonwealth of Australia, 2008; Luke, 2010; MCEETYA, 2008). One frequently noted outcome of international testing that is evident within this literature is the strong connection between curriculum design and a nation's economy, a link that can eclipse other valid drivers of curriculum design.

Considering these economic drivers behind curriculum development, Burgess (2009) questioned the relevance of the *Australian Curriculum* for all Australian students and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in particular. If knowledge systems are not fundamental to the curriculum and there is no clear strategy for “bridging the achievement gap” Burgess saw little to suggest that the ACARA initiative will be of benefit to *any* students, let alone Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students (p. 1). The consultation between ACARA, its predecessor the National Curriculum Board (NCB), and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members during the development of the *Australian Curriculum* was problematic (Buckskin, 2013; Burgess, 2009). Burgess (2009) and Buckskin (2013) have suggested that the manner in which consultation was undertaken indicated the NCB/ACARA’s lack of dedication to the stated commitment to achieving equitable outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students (MCEETYA, 2008).

The factors that can increase the likelihood of successful curriculum implementation have been the focus of many studies both in Australia and internationally (Edwards, 2005). Among the most significant contributors to curriculum failure are mandated initiatives in which teachers have little input or influence, a perceived divergence between policy requirements and teachers’ workloads, and cynicism about the sincerity of the organisation requiring change (Edwards, 2005; Ingvarson et al., 2005; Henderson, 2009; Moyle, 2004; Mooney, Halse, & Craven, 2003; Surdin, 2007). Although the *enactment* of the cross-curriculum priorities is not a focus of this study, the responses of final year pre-service teachers regarding their interpretations of the *intent* behind this initiative will add to existing literature regarding the interface between curriculum intent and implementation.

## **1.5 A note about the methodology**

This study was initiated as a *bricolage*, an approach to qualitative research that involves the use of various theories from multiple disciplines, and the application of different data collection strategies and numerous analytical tools (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011; Kincheloe, 2001; 2005). The bricolage appealed to me because it provided a methodological framework with inherent flexibility (Kincheloe, 2001), which was vital given my desire to engage in a critical, pragmatic, inductive, interpretivist project. Although the research was broadly mapped out, with a couple of documents earmarked for study and ideas about potential interviewees I would endeavour to speak with, I needed a framework that would enable me to purposefully respond to setbacks and opportunities as they arose. This was particularly important given that interviewing was intended to be a key method of data collection; my previous experiences undertaking such work had illustrated the potential perils of approaches meant for isolated, abstracted research that fail to account for the complexities of interpersonal communication. The rejection of a single method to collect or analyse data (Kincheloe, 2001) was another important factor in my decision because I did not believe that such an approach would have the capacity to reflect the complex answers I expected from my research questions. The bricolage essentially gave me permission to undertake the research that needed to be done, in a manner that best suited the study, my identity as a critical researcher, and the goals of the project.

## **1.6 Limitations of the thesis**

This thesis explores the explicit and implicit intentions behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priorities by analysing the curriculum documents themselves, as well as a selection of documents that informed the development of the curriculum. The conclusions that final-year pre-service teachers drew about these intentions were collected through

interviews and survey responses from participants from around Australia. The lack of participation by curriculum authors or consultants (see Appendix A), means that this thesis has not benefitted from the voices of those individuals, beyond their written contributions to the curriculum and associated documents.

The purpose of this thesis is not to provide either praise for, or condemnation of, the current curriculum or the cross-curriculum priority. This thesis does not provide an argument regarding the need for more or less Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content or pedagogy. Very importantly, the study was not designed to determine whether the existence of the priority is in the best interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Instead, a goal of this project was to determine whether there was evidence in the documents that indicated whether the diverse interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were considered in the development of the curriculum. Connected with this point is the failure of this thesis to capture the voices of a range of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, beyond those whose contribution to the development of the curriculum are captured in published documents, and the authors of those scholarly works I have drawn on throughout. I consider this to be a significant gap in the research I have undertaken and expect that an investigation into the views of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the cross-curriculum priority could be an important contribution to the field.

The original contribution this thesis makes to knowledge is a critical examination of the intentions underpinning the inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority within the *Australian Curriculum*. This has been achieved by connecting curriculum development documents with the *Australian Curriculum* itself, and with pre-service teachers' interpretations of the priority via deployment of a *bricolage* and Critical Race methodology.

## 1.7 Summary of chapters

Chapter 1 provides historical, conceptual and intellectual context for the research project on which this thesis is based. The research problem and questions are outlined, as is the rationale for the study. The research methodology is mentioned in order to orient the reader to the approach deployed in the project. After the limitations of the project are described, the six chapters that constitute this thesis are briefly explained.

*Chapter 2* introduces the reader to the key concepts, theories and literature that informed the study. The early subsections of this chapter review research into race, racism and privilege. Studies around racism and privilege in school curricula are reviewed in the following section which explores curriculum development and intentions behind curriculum initiatives. Research in this area from Australia receives significant attention. Scholarship related to the extrinsic and intrinsic rationales that drive curriculum initiatives is also synthesised. Curriculum implementation is considered in light of the evolving nature of teachers' work and precedes a review of research involving pre-service teachers, specifically studies with thematic connections to topic of this thesis. Finally, research regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in Australian schools, particularly the cross-curriculum priority in the *Australian Curriculum*, is reviewed.

*Chapter 3* provides an overview of key elements of the bricolage and CRT methodology is provided in order to orient the reader to the philosophical and theoretical grounding of the project. Details of my research orientation are provided along with an explanation of the various data collection and analysis techniques utilised throughout the project. Reasons for my methodological choices are provided throughout the chapter, and my experiences with, and reflections on, the process are also detailed.

*Chapter 4* answers the first research question. It consists of thematically organised responses to a short online survey completed by 90 final year pre-service teachers from 14 universities around Australia. Synthesised interview extracts have also been presented according to themes that emerged during my analysis. The interviews were conducted with 26 pre-service teachers who had indicated in their completed survey that they had a desire to participate further in the research project.

*Chapter 5* reports the findings of critical analysis of documents explicitly connected to the *Australian Curriculum*, as well as the *Australian Curriculum* itself. This chapter presents answers to the second research question. The collection and analysis of these texts was informed by Prasad and Mir's (2002) work on hermeneutic research, and an understanding of curriculum and policy documents as raced (Pinar, 2004) and ideological (Huckin, 2002; McGee, 1980). Images from the *Australian Curriculum* website were analysed according to the visual grammar identified by Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006); Barthe's (1977) work around coded constructed images; and Van Leeuwen's (2006) semiotics of typography.

*Chapter 6* synthesises the results of the preceding chapters in light a variety of critical theories including Critical Race Theory, Critical Indigenous Studies, and de-colonial theories (Bell, 2004; Delgado, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2004a; Nakata, Nakata, Keech and Bolt, 2012) in order to answer the final research question.

## Chapter 2: A review of the literature

### 2.1 Overview

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature that has provided theoretical and methodological foundations for this research project. The literature review is strongly influenced by the project's conceptual framework and has been designed to explore the topics and concepts that are at the core of this thesis. The purpose of this chapter is to share with the reader my understanding of the scholarly work that has preceded this project, in particular that which is related, but has not provided answers, to the research questions guiding this inquiry.

The three main sections of the chapter relate to literature concerned with:

#### Race and privilege

After a brief examination of the literature that has informed ways in which race is understood and utilised in this thesis, key works from and about Critical Race Theory (CRT), racial realism, intersectionality, and whiteness are introduced. Finally, CRT literature from Australia is explored.

#### Curriculum as enacted ideology

This section establishes the position taken in this thesis regarding school curricula; that they are inherently political, raced and ideological, both in their construction and consequences. The literature drawn on to explore this position relates to multicultural and culturally inclusive curricula and initiatives. These latter concepts and the associated literature provide insight into the ways in which *culture* has been broadly understood within an Australian education policy context, both historically and

currently. Multiculturalism and cultural inclusion are generally understood to be related to, but distinct from, policies and initiatives related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, histories, education and cultures so the latter are discussed in Section 2.5: Key responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in Australian curricula.

### Intentions and interests

Debates associated with the significance of intentions in Critical Race research are presented in this section. In addition, an exploration of literature from diverse fields illustrates various views about the capacity of researchers to accurately interpret the intentions of others, and the impacts that intentions (or beliefs about intentions) can have on people's actions. The literature associated with the intentions underpinning the *Australian Curriculum* is synthesised to conclude this section.

### Key responses to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in Australian curricula

The final section of the literature review draws together research and commentary related to the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in the *Australian Curriculum* and earlier state curricula<sup>1</sup>. Divided into three sub-sections, these final paragraphs illustrate three major positions taken on the topic, namely that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content should be included only to the extent that it does not interfere with educational 'basics'; that *Indigenised* curricula is an important component of the decolonisation of education in Australia; and that inadequate enactment of such content can do more harm than good to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students and communities.

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<sup>1</sup> Prior to the introduction of the *Australian Curriculum* which was designed to be implemented in all Australian states and territories, each state developed and implemented a distinct curriculum.

## 2.2 Race and privilege

The concept of 'race' is largely out of favour among educators and scholars, particularly as it is discredited as a useful, scientifically supported mechanism for distinguishing between groups of people based on biological characteristics. While the academic community has largely moved on from attributing characteristics, beliefs and actions to race, the concept still impacts people at an individual level during interpersonal interaction and systemically as members of a larger group (Omi & Winant, 2002). Critical education scholars recognise that historical understandings of race continue to permeate and affect contemporary life. Where these scholars tend to differ most, however, is in their views about the degree to which societies are racialised and whether fundamental, systemic changes are required to combat racism and its parallel privileges, or whether sustained, incremental changes are the answer (Delgado, 2003).

This section explores key concepts and debates emanating from within progressive schools of thought on race and privilege. Scholarship that completely denies the relevance of socio-historical conceptions of race is not afforded comparable attention, but is referred to in order to illustrate the range of positions on these issues. The topics of *racial realism* and *idealism* are foregrounded in order to provide readers with an insight into the literature associated with the theoretical foundation of this thesis. The next section focusses attention on privilege, a frequently ignored topic that is integral to any study related to race. These topics are contextualised in the third section, in which the literature around race and privilege in Australia is discussed.

### 2.2.1 Central tenets of Critical Race Theory

Critical Race Theory emerged in the 1980s when US based legal scholars “examined the entire edifice of contemporary legal thought and doctrine from the viewpoint of law’s role in the construction and maintenance of social domination and subordination” (West, 1996, p. xi). Responding to the scholarship of Derrick Bell, the limitations of Critical Legal Studies (CLS), and ongoing racial discrimination within American law faculties, various scholars undertook teaching, research and collaborative work which resulted in the first CRT workshop in 1989 (Crenshaw, 2002; Delgado, 2008).

Various people, including Du Bois, Truth and Douglass, are often credited with articulating concepts fundamental to what was later to be known as CRT, and while such scholars and activists were undoubtedly influential in the tradition or lineage of race critical scholarship, their works must be understood as distinct (Curry, 2009). Du Bois (see e.g., 1903, 1910, 1920/1999) is often recognised for his articulation of the *double-bind of consciousness* and the method of *counter-storytelling* frequently utilised by Critical Race Theorists (Baszile, 2008; Crenshaw, 2002; Delgado, 1995; Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). Sojourner Truth’s *Ain’t I a woman?* speech of 1851 is often referred to as the first public recognition of *intersectionality* that has been subsequently drawn upon by Critical Race Theorists (Crenshaw, 1989; Davis, 2008). Frederick Douglass and other African American abolitionists positioned discussions about race within a realistic present rather than a romantic, idealistic future, distinguishing them from their contemporaries (Bell, 2004; Crenshaw, 2002; Mills, 2005). These ideas and others were drawn upon, critiqued and extended during CRT’s infancy by legal scholars who sought an alternative to CLS which “treated race as a peripheral issue and foregrounded a concern with economic disadvantage” (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010, p. 39).

Although Critical Race Theorists are typically loathe to prescribe rigid frameworks for what is variously described as the CRT ‘movement’ (Delgado, 2003) or ‘discipline’ (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011), the principles of CRT are based upon an understanding that:

- Racism is a *normal* rather than *aberrant* feature of society,
- White people’s *self-interest* is the key determinant of societal change,
- Race is a social construction that exists for the sole purpose of oppressing some groups and benefitting others,
- The experiences of people in minority groups are important and valid sources of critique of race and racism in all aspects of society,
- Race is only one of many constructs that have real impacts on all people’s lives,
- Liberalism’s promise of slow but eventual progress towards racial equality is unachievable. (Bell, 2004; Delgado & Stefancic, 2011; Ladson-Billings, 2009; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002)

Critical Race scholarship is notable for its employment of multiple research methods from a variety of disciplines, drawing upon and valuing experiential knowledge, and representing findings in various creative forms, including creative non-fiction (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). Importantly, CRT is distinct from other race critical scholarship due to the rejection of the notion that racism can be abolished by rectifying ignorance, psychological faults, or philosophical shortcomings (Curry, 2009). Describing CRT as “as endemic American perspective on race”, Curry has summarised the distinction as follows:

Rather than creating a world of peaceful racial co-existence, CRT works from that premise that in America such a world is impossible, and as a consequence, racism cannot be studied with its eye on that illusory promise. In short, CRT maintains that race and racism are inextricable manifestations of the American ethos, and as such, cannot be cured by a constructive engagement with whites. (p. 4)

Critical Race Theory has been criticised from within the discipline as well as without as pessimistic (Barnes, 1991; Baszile, 2008; Clark, 1995), negligent of non-African American experiences (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a), overtly subjective (Crenshaw, 1989), for focussing

too narrowly on race (Davis, 2008), and for moving away from its realist roots (Curry, 2012; Delgado, 2003). Such critiques have prompted the development of various offshoots such as *TribalCrit*, *Asian Crit*, *Critical Latina/o*, and *Critical Indigenous Studies* (Dunbar, 2008; Moreton-Robinson, 2004a), as well as responses suggesting that critics have misunderstood, misrepresented, or failed to sufficiently engage with CRT and its core tenets (Delgado, 1991, 2000; Gillborn, 2009). Of particular significance to this thesis are Moreton-Robinson's critiques of CRT's African-Americancentricism (which are further explored in Section 2.2.5) and Delgado's critique of the current state of critical race scholarship which is described below.

Critical Race Theory is considered by several prominent proponents to be a discipline that is fundamentally divided. Curry (2012) has described the 1990s as a period during which criticism directed towards the work of Critical Race Theorists developed "into a full-fledged allergic reaction against the movement's theoretical perspectives" (p. 2). In a 2003 review of *Crossroads, Directions, and a new Critical Race Theory* (Valdes, Culp, & Harris, 2002), Delgado (2003) asserted that Critical Race scholarship moved away from its materialist and realist roots in the early 1990s towards an idealist school of thought that focussed more on "discourse at the expense of power, history, and similar material determinants of minority-group fortunes" (p. 122). Rather than seeking to analyse an institution according to what it *ought* to be achieving or whether its actions are aligned with its stated founding principles (regardless of the soundness of those principles), early Critical Race Theorists such as Bell sought to understand the reasons for an institution's decisions and their real life implications (Bell, 1992a). Bell maintained that critical race scholarship requires a functional, rather than an abstract approach to inquiries into institutions its proponents seek to understand. By contrast, those in the idealist school have tended to focus on the *discourses* that shape institutions, transmit their beliefs, and construct notions of race. This school:

...holds that race and discrimination are largely functions of attitude and social formation. For these thinkers, race is a social construction created out of words, symbols, stereotypes and categories. As such, we may purge discrimination by ridding ourselves of the texts, narrative, ideas and meanings that give rise to it and that convey the message that people of other racial groups are unworthy, lazy and dangerous. These writers analyze hate speech, media images, census categories, and such issues as intersectionality and essentialism. They analyze unconscious or institutional racism and show how cognitive theory exposes a host of preconceptions, baselines, and mindsets that operate below the level of consciousness to render certain people consistently one-down.

A second school holds that while text, attitude, and intention may play important roles in our system of racial hierarchy, material factors such as profits and the labor market are even more decisive in determining who falls where in that system. For these 'realists', racism is a means by which our system allocates privilege, status, and wealth. They point out that the West did not demonize black or native populations until it determined to conquer and exploit them, and that media images in every period shift to accommodate the interests of the majority group, now for reassurance, now for vindication. Racial realists examine the role of international relations and competition, the interests of elite groups, and the changing demands of the labor market in hopes of understanding the twists and turns of racial fortunes... (Delgado, 2003, pp. 123-4)

Some respondents have claimed that Delgado overstated the distinction between the scholarship of racial realists and CRT idealists, suggesting instead that a more legitimate concerns lies in the *balance* of idealist and realist scholarship in CRT (Johnson, 2005).

Johnson (2005) and others maintain that both schools of thought are necessary if critical race scholarship is to be taken seriously (Tosie, 2005). Curry (2009; 2012) has asserted that the opposite is true, that the principles of CRT are enacted via the realist school alone.

In addition to the idealist/realist divide, scholars who draw upon key principles of CRT have identified limits to the usefulness of CRT when exploring the experiences of people outside its traditional black/white binary (Bernal, 2002; Brayboy, 2005; Chang, 1993; Nunez, 1999). The legacy of the Trans-Atlantic slave trade, segregation of 'Black' and 'White' people, and continued discrimination towards African Americans framed CRT

scholarship, to the exclusion of indigenous<sup>2</sup> peoples and those with a different migration experience. In response, movements such as LatCrit, AsianCrit and TribalCrit developed, with emphases placed upon the unique manner in which racism and white supremacy impacts the lives of those who identify, or are identified as Latino/a, Asian, and/or Native American. For example, while Critical Race Theorists understand racism to be a permanent feature of US society, TribalCrit scholars understand colonisation to be endemic and therefore key to understanding relationships between Native Americans, governments, and the broader community (Brayboy, 2005; Castagno & Lee, 2007). These concerns that have arisen in North, Central and South America are also raised in Australia. Many of the core components of CRT proposed by scholars such as Bell (2004), Delgado & Stefancic (2011), Ladson-Billings (2009) and Solórzano and Yosso (2002) are drawn upon in this thesis in conjunction with those that recognise colonisation and sovereignty as vital for any analysis of race and education in Australia.

### **2.2.2 Central tenets of racial realism**

One of the early Critical Race Theorists mentioned by Delgado in the aforementioned book review is the late Derrick Bell. Bell's theory of *interest convergence* and his thesis of *racial realism* have been fundamental in the development of CRT, but have also been widely criticised and variously mis/interpreted (Delgado, 2003; Feldman, 2012). In the early 1990s, Bell published several journal articles that prompted intense debate in legal studies publications (Bell, 1991, 1992b). Analysis of historical and contemporary legal decisions in the United States led Bell to conclude that racial equality had never been achieved in the United States, would never be realised in that society, and that many attempts to realise equality had in fact been detrimental to non-white peoples (Bell, 1991, 1992b). Bell had

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<sup>2</sup> The lower case 'i' has been used here, and throughout the thesis, to distinguish between indigenous peoples around the world, and Indigenous peoples of Australia.

written about similar ideas in the 1970s and 1980s but that work received very little attention, with references to some (Bell, 1976, 1980a) being literally relegated to footnotes for several years. Perhaps the most striking claim Bell made in those works, and those published since, was that racism is a *permanent* feature of American society (see e.g., Bell, 1987, 1991, 1992a, 1992b, 2004). This statement from a former civil rights lawyer and Harvard's first tenured professor of African-American heritage was, and continues to be, heavily criticised. However, Bell repeatedly demonstrated that, despite the achievement of "periodic peaks of progress" in the struggle to achieve racial equality, a racist equilibrium has always been re-established (Bell, 1992b). The gains that civil rights lawyers and activists fought for and achieved in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, were replaced by less overt forms of racial discrimination that had similar outcomes to their overtly racist predecessors (Bell, 1991; 1992a). While acknowledging the likelihood that his thesis would be criticised for its pessimism, Bell asserted that acceptance of racial realism would serve to enable Blacks<sup>3</sup> "to understand and respond to recurring aspects of our subordinate status" and "to think and plan within a context of reality rather than idealism" (Bell, 1992b, p. 377).

Racial realism has been described as a "future-oriented thesis" since it provides a position from which to develop future anti-racism strategies (Feldman, 2012). A core element of racial realism is the theory of interest convergence which asserts that "the interest of Blacks in achieving racial equality will be accommodated only when that interest converges with the interests of whites in policy making positions" (Bell, 2004, p. 69). Feldman describes these convergences of interests as a historically significant pattern which emerges when events related to race and justice are analysed. Consequently, Bell's interest convergence thesis can be understood as a historically descriptive one rather than a means of predicting the future (Feldman, 2012). While decades of scholarship did not give Bell a

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<sup>3</sup> Bell's terminology

crystal ball, they provided him with enough historical evidence to maintain that the likelihood of progress towards racial equality could not be predicted by analysing the *ethical merits* of a case for change, but via the benefits white people could expect to receive from its success (Bell, 1980b).

Successful outcomes resulting from a convergence of interests tend to be difficult to win, but easily lost “precisely because rights for blacks are always vulnerable to sacrifice to further the needs of whites” (Bell, 1991, p. 83). When employed as a *strategic tool* (i.e. when the converging interests of stakeholder groups are identified and exploited), interest convergence does not undermine white supremacy but instead reinforces the notion that self-interest of the dominant cultural group is the only valid reason to improve social justice outcomes (Alemán & Alemán, 2010). The use of interest convergence as strategy can be a time consuming process because the ethical merits of an issue are insufficient to stimulate change; white people need to be convinced of the validity of a proposal and the benefits it will have for the majority. Racial realists suggest that such strategies are ultimately futile since any gains will be replaced with more covert forms of racism (Alemán & Alemán, 2010). This is the point at which interest convergence and racial realism intersect. Bell (2004) suggested that an understanding of events via interest convergence theory and adoption of a racial realist position is a challenging but important process that will facilitate a more innovative and productive approach to race and racism – a sorely needed replacement for the naïve liberal hope that whites will one day relinquish control and power in the name of racial equality.

Liberal models for solving issues of race rely on institutions such as governments, courts and schools to procure a satisfactory result through the strategic employment of interest convergence (Alemán & Alemán, 2010). Civil and human rights movements have worked within this framework for decades. Activists have demanded changes to policy, law

and curricula through protests which emphasise practices that are incompatible with, for example, a government's stance on social justice or a business' goal for exponential profit (Dudziack, 2010; Bell, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Such strategies are based on the assumption that these institutions can help to provide relief from racist laws and policies – an assumption which racial realists argue is fundamentally flawed, primarily because of the evidence that the majority's self-interest is a primary determinant of outcomes. Bell (1980b, p. 41) summarised this view in the following formula, which he acknowledged was “somewhat simplistic and sardonic”:

White Racism v. Justice = White Racism

White Racism v. White Self-Interest = Justice

This “simplistic” formula provides an important insight into the two ways in which interest convergence is deployed: as a strategic tool and as an analytic tool (Alemán & Alemán, 2010). As a *strategy*, interest convergence requires that stakeholders identify commonalities between their interests and those of other stakeholder groups, then attempt to progress their agenda by ensuring all stakeholders' interests are addressed. As an *analytic tool* interest convergence theory is used to interpret and understand social phenomena by studying the various interests served (or not served) by policies and practices (Alemán & Alemán, 2010).

The institutions that make up societies such as the USA and Australia are inherently racist, founded on the dispossession of indigenous peoples, with institutions established to defend and maintain a racial status quo which they continue to uphold today (Bell, 2004; Curry, 2012; hooks, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2007a, 2007b; McAllan, 2011). As such, Bell (1991, 2004) maintained that it is impossible to achieve just outcomes by working within these institutions, and suggested that the detrimental results that arise from such tactics are significant. Among these is the erroneous validation of racist institutions: This occurs when

activists fight for solutions within an institution and consequently position that institution as capable of facilitating racial equality (Bell, 2004). Another outcome that is detrimental to the achievement of racial justice and is a common result of change prompted by interest convergence strategies is the belief that “the country has done enough for black people” and consequent cessation of struggle for justice (Bell, 1991, p. 84). In other words, the use of a society’s institutions to abolish racism gives the illusion that such a goal is being achieved; each incremental achievement appears to be progress toward that end. As such, arguments can be made that society as a whole is working to end racism and any instances of racism are the fault of wayward individuals.

Racial realists recognise racism as a permanent feature of American society and assert that people in minority groups must recognise their place in society as part of "a permanent subordinate class" (Bell, 1992b, pp. 373-4; Curry, 2009; 2012). This, unsurprisingly, is a proposal that has drawn significant criticism and prompted charges of despair mongering (Clark, 1995). Bell (1991) recognised the "seeming inconsistency" (p. 91) apparent in his thesis - he decried the futility of struggles to attain racial equality, but encouraged the continued struggle against oppression. Clark (1995) dismissed the central tenet of Bell’s works, that racism is permanent in American society, in part because he disputed the truth of Bell’s assertion and also because despair “naturally flows from his thesis” (p. 25). What proponents refer to as *realism* is disparaged as cynicism and pessimism by critics, and the position is almost completely rejected by scholars in race critical fields, even by many self-described Critical Race Theorists (Curry, 2009). This is perhaps unsurprising given racial realism’s lack of support for the belief in perpetual progress toward equality that has sustained activists, scholars, policy authors and curriculum writers for decades (Bell, 1987; Curry, 2012).

A point of ambiguity that Clark (1995) does not raise in his criticisms of Bell's work, and which remains a point of contention, is whether Bell's assertion that "racism is an integral, permanent, and indestructible component of this society" (1992a, p. ix) is an indictment of the contextualised, American society he was speaking about, or whether it was a much broader statement about the permanence of racism in that society, no matter its incarnation. While scholars differ in their interpretation of the implications of this particular point (Curry, 2012; Delgado, 2014), Bell was clearly of the view that, as long as the foundations and structure of contemporary American society remained, equity would be impossible to achieve. Bell asserted that, in order to develop new and creative strategies to counter racism, traditional liberal solutions (read incremental, piecemeal changes) must be understood as incapable of eliminating racism and oppression (Bell, 1992a). Revolutionary solutions, whether armed or peaceful, were similarly recognised as severely limited, not least because of the likelihood that the resistance to revolution would be overwhelming and fatal. In 2004, Bell remained "convinced that America offers something real for black people", but it was not integration or "equality under law" (p. 192). That "something" Bell believed in remained elusive. It can be read as representative of the realist position, rejecting the capacity of existing structures to achieve justice, but constantly seeking innovative approaches in the struggle against white supremacy and racist oppression.

The research undertaken for the current thesis suggests that initiatives that are commonly understood to be part of a social justice agenda are unlikely to have been designed from such a position. Throughout this project interest convergence theory has proved to be a thoroughly appropriate tool with which to analyse education initiatives believed to be in aid of increased equity for all peoples. The data presented throughout this thesis suggest racial realism to be a constructive position from which education policy and phenomena can be interpreted and understood.

### 2.2.3 Whiteness, white supremacy and white privilege

*Whiteness* involves the reduction of complex white, ‘Western’ philosophies, histories, and cultures to a single, unified, universal embodiment of humanity (Dyer, 1997). Whiteness “is defined by what it is not” and “secures hegemony through discourse by normalising itself as the cultural space of the West” (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b, p. 77). Often defined as a constructed identity one can possess, deploy, and benefit from, the power of whiteness is generally agreed to lie in its invisibility to those who possess it (Moreton-Robinson, 2008). Although *critical whiteness studies* was popularised in the 1990s, Du Bois was publishing insights into the psychological, economic, sociological and spiritual foundations, and implications of whiteness in the early twentieth century (see e.g., Du Bois, 1903, 1910, 1920/1999, 1933; 1935a). In *The Souls of White Folk* (Du Bois, 1920/1999), for example, Du Bois reported his observation that whiteness forms the benchmark of humanity (not simply the ideal of human attainment, but of *humanness* itself).

Ironically, critical whiteness studies gained popularity and legitimacy as a result of white academics entering the field. Roediger, a white American scholar, gained renown in the early 1990s with the publication of his book *The Wages of Whiteness: Race and the Making of the American Working Class* (1999). Although Du Bois, an African-American scholar, was discussing the wages of whiteness in 1935 and is acknowledged as a source of inspiration by Roediger, the latter was widely hailed for *introducing* racialised class analysis with a focus on white workers. Watson (2007) highlights the frequency of such misattributions in academia as well as popular culture:

Ruminations on whiteness are not new to many people of color and have been available for white readership. Black women know that their skin color does not match store-bought bandages, Latinos know their language is not spoken by management in most business places, and Asians know that their history rarely achieves the status of what Apple (2000) calls ‘official knowledge’ in schools. White audiences have had access to these traditions of criticism for

over a century. As such, radical writings on the topic of white privilege are new to white audiences *who read mainly white authors*. Much like the popularization of black R & B music by Elvis and Pat Boone, critiques of white privilege are given credence by white authors whose consumers are white readers...the literature on white privilege is indicative of the lag in white uptake of radical racial thought. (p. 142)

Critical whiteness studies scholars vary in their goals, from unpacking white privilege (McIntosh, 1988), problematizing the normalcy of whiteness (Dyer, 1997), and illuminating its violence as an epistemological lens (Moreton-Robinson, 2007b). It is generally accepted amongst whiteness scholars that the role of their work is largely to highlight “dominance and privilege rather than subordination or underprivilege”, that latter of which has traditionally been the domain of social scientists working within fields of race and ethnicity (Bush, 2004, p. 10).

Just as Delgado criticised the idealist imbalance in critical race scholarship, scholars analysing whiteness as an abstract concept have been the target of criticism for analysing *discourse* but failing to examine the *impacts* of whiteness. Some academics have condemned whiteness scholarship for refocussing attention on ‘white culture’ rather than peoples marginalised by it (Ministerial Council of Education Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, 2010), while others have criticised authors of historical studies of whiteness for:

...rely[ing] on arbitrary and inconsistent definitions of their core concepts while they emphasize select elite constructions of race to the virtual exclusion of all other racial discourses. Offering little concrete evidence to support many of their arguments, these works often take creative liberties with the evidence they do have; they also put words into their subjects’ mouths to compensate for the absence of first-hand perspectives by the historical actors themselves. Too much of the historical scholarship on whiteness has disregarded scholarly standards, employed sloppy methodology, generated new buzzwords and jargon, and, at times, produced an erroneous history. (David Unaipon College of Indigenous Education and Research, 2009, p. 5)

The view offered by those in the *race traitor* school of whiteness scholarship (e.g., Ignatiev & Garvey, 1996) has been criticised for suggesting that people with white skin can reject

their racial identity and decline its associated privileges. The notion of opting out of a racial category, critics assert, is the epitome of white privilege and disregards the realities of institutional white supremacy (Watson, 2007).

A common finding of the ethnographic and auto-ethnographic work done around whiteness and white identity suggests that white participants tend to find the notion of whiteness and race in general to be confronting (Loftsdóttir, 2012), upsetting, divisive (Bush, 2004), misguided, confusing (Corossacz, 2012) and unfair because they believe that white people are a newly marginalised racial group and should not be interrogated or blamed for anything (Bush, 2004). Few participants and interviewees enlisted in whiteness research recognise the “crucial reality of white domination and white privilege” (Mills, 2009, pp. 274-275).

This thesis explores Australian curricula and education policy documents as artefacts emanating from a system that once actively and openly pursued the achievement of a *white nation* (Anderson, 2003), and which continues to rely on the institutions that formed the foundations the nation now known as Australian.

#### **2.2.4 Intersections of personal and political identities**

Acknowledging the landmark speech by Truth (1889) and the various contributors to *All the women are white; all the blacks are men, but some of us are brave* (Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1982) as forerunners to her own work, Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989, 1991) is commonly credited with the conception of the term intersectionality (Carbado, Crenshaw, Mays, & Tomlinson, 2013). The notion of intersectionality facilitated a more accurate understanding of the particular, but largely ignored, experiences of African-American women in feminism, anti-racism, and anti-discrimination law than analysing those experiences through lenses of

gender or race alone (Crenshaw, 1991). While specifically focused on the experiences at the intersections of race and gender, Crenshaw saw her work as illuminating the need for other aspects of identity to be combined “when considering how the social world is constructed” (Crenshaw, 1991, p. 1245).

bell hooks (1981), a contemporary of Crenshaw, was also writing about the intersections of institutional racism and patriarchy, as well as multifaceted marginalisation resulting from colonialism and capitalism). Her use of the phrase “imperialist white-supremacist capitalist patriarchy” (hooks, 2003, p, 116) serves as a reminder that the intersections described by Crenshaw are experienced within very specific systems, with particular legacies and ongoing practices (Du Bois, 1933; 1935b; Fanon, 1963; Mills, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2007a; Shiva, 2014). Similarly, Moreton-Robinson (2007a) maintains that the Australian nation was built upon, and continues to function according to, a system akin to that described by hooks: "As a regime of power, patriarchal white sovereignty operates ideologically, materially and discursively to reproduce and maintain its investment in the nation as a white possession" (p. 88).

Critical scholars working with the concept of intersectionality insist on recognising intersectionality in terms of identity politics as well as broader ideologies and systems (Bilge, 2013). Bilge reiterates the importance of “counter hegemonic knowledge production” as a goal of intersectionalist scholarship, and maintains that the concept has been misappropriated and superficially deployed by academics, governments and corporations:

A depoliticized intersectionality is particularly useful to a neoliberalism that reframes all values as market values: identity-based radical politics are often turned into corporatized diversity tools leveraged by dominant groups to attain various ideological and institutional goals (Ward, 2007); a range of minority struggles are incorporated into a market-driven and state-sanctioned governmentality of diversity (Duggan, 2003); “diversity” becomes a feature of neoliberal management, providing “managerial precepts of good government and efficient business operations” (Duggan, 2003, p. xiii); knowledge of

“diversity” can be presented as marketable expertise in understanding and deploying multiple forms of difference simultaneously—a sought-after signifier of sound judgment and professionalism (Ward, 2007). Given the range of deployments available for it, intersectionality has become an “open,” umbrella term used in different, even divergent, debates and political projects, both counter-hegemonic and hegemonic (Erel et al., 2008). (Bilge, 2013, pp. 407-8)

The appropriation of intersectionality described by Bilge (2013) is recognisable throughout the curriculum development documents analysed in Chapter 5, and the degree to which this has led to the achievement of “ideological and institutional goals” is a focus of the pre-service teacher responses in Chapter 4 (Ward, 2007, as cited in Bilge, 2013, p. 407). Rather than applying theories of intersectionality to understanding individual identities, which is not the focus of this study, these ideas have contributed to the way in which collective identities and systems are understood.

### **2.2.5 Research around race and privilege in Australia**

All critical race work is developed in and for a particular context. This can be seen in the development of offshoots of CRT such as TribalCrit which recognises the permanence of colonisation in the USA as a core concern, in addition to racism (Brayboy, 2005). Moreton-Robinson (2004a) asserts a need for contextualisation of CRT, specifically a framework for understanding racism and whiteness in Australia. Moreton-Robinson suggests that the usefulness of CRT is severely limited even in its country of origin because key US-based scholars tend to associate racism with either slavery and the current experiences of African American people, or contemporary experiences related to immigration, but give little attention to “the dispossession of Native Americans and colonisation” (2004a, p. viii). Critical Race scholarship in Australia needs to engage with the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the migrations (both forced and free) of people and peoples to and from sovereign lands, and the role of whiteness throughout the country’s history (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a). The peculiarly British forms of Protestantism,

Catholicism, capitalism, classism, democracy, white supremacy, and patriarchy transplanted and fostered in Australia, then enacted with disregard for the sovereignty of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across the country, mean that Australia has a particular type of whiteness and racism that is distinct from that which exists in the US and Britain (Moreton-Robinson, 2004b). Sovereignty comes to the fore in the present study when nation building and the nation's interests are a focus of curriculum development documents (see Chapters 5 and 6 in particular).

The construction and continued acceptance of the Australian nation-state has required pre-existing sovereignties to be disregarded by colonial, state and federal governments and international governance organisations (Moreton-Robinson, 2007b, 2008; Watson, 1996, 2007). Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' sovereignty of the various nations across this continent and surrounding islands occurs only to the point that it does not interfere with land tenure rights and freedoms bestowed by Australian and state laws (Howitt, 2006). The ongoing failure to acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty permeates all Australian institutions, including schooling. This means that all nation building projects that are purported to simultaneously contribute to reconciliation *and* equity, must be considered as problematic (McAllan, 2011).

While a desktop analysis of critical studies of race and education in the US reveals that CRT is "the dominant framework" in that country (Leonardo, 2013, p. 32), the same cannot be said about CRT in Australia, despite influential texts being available for over a century. The works of W.E.B. Du Bois, often recognised as part of the vanguard of critical race and whiteness scholarship, received recognition in Australia at the beginning of the twentieth century. *The Souls of Black Folk* (Du Bois, 1903) was reported as being "illuminating" and "refreshing" by the *Western Mail* ("The souls of white folk. As seen

through the eyes of a black man”, 1911) whose reviewer expected that “it will surprise some to see that he does not take for granted that white is the best colour, or that the white people have all the virtues, or all the advantages of life” (p. 42). On the same day, *The West Australian* was highly critical of Du Bois’ most recent publication, *The Souls of White Folk* in which the author “assails the white folk with all he can muster” (“The white man's supremacy”, 1911, p. 6). Such a critique was compared unfavourably to Booker T. Washington who had “mastered the high art of propaganda, since he never attacks the white” (“The white man's supremacy”, 1911, p. 6). The apparent shift in DuBois’ writing was reinforced in *Darkwater* (Du Bois, 1920/1999) and, according to *The Daily News* (“The negro menace”, 1925), a result of the First World War and resultant “changed attitude of the negro mind...peculiarly disquieting to the ordinary reader” (p. 5). Published works like Du Bois’ that provided an insight into the socially constructed nature of blackness as well as whiteness, were not common in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century. However, at least one critique of whiteness reached Australia’s shores before Du Bois’ writings were published. In the poem *The Kanaka to the Commonwealth* (TAAFE, 1901), the author repeatedly asks for definitions of whiteness, the assumed connection between skin colour and character is called into question, and the social construction of race is exposed in several stanzas (see Figure 1).

## “UNITED AUSTRALIA” PRIZE POEM.

### The Kanaka to the Commonwealth.

What is this Whiteness you boast of, oh Mother of Christian men?  
Tell us the meaning of Whiteness, for it is beyond our ken!  
Tell us, oh Lady of Virtue, what meaneth this Cry of the White?  
For we see in the Day but the Day, and we see in the Night but the Night!

Ever the sun and the moon and the silvery stars in the sky  
Shine on the White of the Earth—but they shine on the Dark such as I!  
Tell us, oh God of the World, why You give to the Dark of Your Light?—  
For they say that there's nought for the Dark and that all things are meant for the White!

Lady of Virtue, give answer, and help us to understand  
What is the Whiteness you talk of and wish to spread over the Land.  
Judgest thou Whites and the Blacks by the colour of skin that they show?—  
Or judgest thou them by their thoughts and their works, for we fain would know.

What is this Colour-line, tell us? down in the depths of the mine  
Flourish the gold and the silver! (Interpret this strange Colour-line.)  
Seldom we find on the Surface the things that we value the most!  
(Say, what is this Whiteness, oh Lady, thou makest thy glorious boast?)

What is the Union Jack but the symbol of something behind?  
What is the Whiteness of body to Whiteness and Pureness of mind?  
Ask of the Angel-Recorder what placeth he first on the Scroll!  
What is the Whiteness of body compared to the Whiteness of soul?

Is it that since thou art White thou art greater in Virtue than I?  
Thinkest the Christ of the Cross for thee only was given to die?  
You prate of morality, Lady! but not till the White showed his face  
Knew the Dark of the sin and the darkness that blacken the White man's race!

What is the Gospel Christ taught you, and what is the Gospel you teach?  
“All ye are Mine!”—and “Away with who speaketh the Dark man's speech!”  
Never the White man placeth his foot on the Dark man's shore  
But the Dark man's doom is sounded—and the Dark man is no more!

God of the Kingdom of Heaven establish a Kingdom on Earth,  
Judging us not by our colour, but judging us all by our worth!  
Hasten a Kingdom on Earth where the White and the Dark shall be one!  
(Shineth the stars on the White and the Dark—and the moon and the sun!)

“TAAFE.”

Nov. 9, 1901.

Figure 1. The Kanaka to the Commonwealth. Poem published in *United Australia*, December 20, 1901.

The representation of whiteness articulated by TAAFE (1901) was, if not unique, extremely rare in Australian publications, whose contributors were instead debating the then unlikely possibility of the north of the country ever being colonised by “the white race” (“Queensland labour: The white race in the tropics,” 1901), whether non-whites could possibly be as intelligent as whites (“The advance of the yellow race,” 1905; “The coloured race question,” 1907), and the appropriate racial classification of “very sunburnt” Syrians (“Colored Races Restriction Bill,” 1896, para. 1). Dissenting perspectives were published about race-based policies such as the removal of Aboriginal children and discriminatory

immigration laws (e.g., "Black mothers: Kidnapped children," 1911; Foxall, 1903) but these critiques treated these racist policies as the antithesis of Australian culture, rather than representative of it. It was not until the 1990s that critical race studies gained widespread attention in Australian academe (Moreton-Robinson, 2004a).

Contemporary Australian critical race research in education is largely focussed on tertiary settings (Coram, 2009; Fredericks, 2009; Grieves, 2008; Gunstone, 2009; Hart, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Watson, 2005), but also includes the reporting of counter-narratives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's school experiences as part of an exploration of best pedagogical practice (McDonald, 2003); critiques of whiteness pedagogy in colonial (Cote, 2009) and current Australian schools (Rudolph, 2011; Vass, 2012); the whiteness of the advertising related to the, then proposed, national curriculum (Saltmarsh, 2011); application of interest convergence theory to consultation between Indigenous community members and high school teachers (Maxwell, 2012a); and epistemic privilege and violence (Moreton-Robinson, 2007b).

Bell's theory of interest convergence has received little attention in Australia and it has not been utilised in research around the *Australian Curriculum*. The few academic works that refer to the theory use it as an explanatory tool, but also to promote it as a strategic tool (Alemán & Alemán, 2010). Allen (2007), who explained the *Mabo v Queensland* decision<sup>4</sup> by using interest convergence theory, asserts that Indigenous people need to identify the

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<sup>4</sup> The *Mabo v Queensland* decision of 1992 acknowledged the continuing rights of the people of Mer (Murray Island in the Torres Strait) to that island, surrounding islands and reefs by virtue of their continuous inhabitation of that area, continued practice of customs associated with that place, and the existence of land tenure prior to the colonisation of Australia and annexation of Queensland in 1879. The High Court found that these *Native Title* rights were not extinguished in 1879 when the British Crown became sovereign in the form of the new colony of Queensland. The *Mabo* decision did not, however, automatically reinstate Aboriginal peoples' and Torres Strait Islanders' sovereignty across the continent, nor did the *Native Title Act* of 1994, despite the Court asserting that *Native Title* *may* have survived if it had not been extinguished by the Crown. In order to preserve Australia's "peace and order", the Court ensured that the rights accorded to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were, and are, subordinate to those of the Crown so as not to "fracture the skeleton of principle which gives the body of our law its shape and internal consistency" (*Mabo v Queensland* (1992) 107 ALR 1, 18 per Brennan J).

places where the interests of non-Indigenous people converge with their own and work within that space in order to achieve social justice. Coram (2009) used interest convergence to help explain the professional disregard paid to her as a *racial Other* in Australian universities. Maxwell (2012a) has also used the theory as an explanatory tool to explore the lack of consultation between Indigenous community members and secondary school teachers in Queensland. Reflecting on the utility of the theory within a critical disability framework, Campbell (2009, p. 21) recognised its potential for understanding “interest convergence and the points of departure away from the interests of ableism”. The theory was briefly mentioned by McLaughlin and Whatman (2011, p. 369) as a possible tool to help identify where “systems of privilege need to change”.

Very few scholars working in Australia have explicitly utilised racial realism as a CRT standpoint. Since CRT “foregrounds an understanding of how the world really operates, rather than fetishizing some idealized notion that bears little resemblance to the lives and experiences of oppressed peoples” (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010, p. 38), any work conducted within such a framework could be said to inhabit this position (Bell (1992b)). The notion that racism is a “normal, not aberrant” (Delgado & Stefancic, 2000, p. xvi) part of society exists in various schools of Australian scholarship, including those dealing with issues of sovereignty, whiteness, and colonisation (Hage, 1998; Langton, 1993; Moreton-Robinson, 1999, 2007; Nicoll, 2000). The liberal faith in slow and steady progress towards racial equality (Bell, 1992b) is consequently rejected by these scholars. Although not named as such, some of the themes of racial realism are also apparent in other Australian literature. In an essay for *The Monthly* magazine, Yunupingu (2008) recounted numerous efforts by people from north east Arnhem Land to assert, maintain, or reclaim control over land and lives; “it is a story of disappointment and frustration” (p. 40). He stated that programs supposedly designed for the wellbeing of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people,

have ultimately benefitted the (usually non-Indigenous) people who work in industries supported by such programs: “it gives them oxygen, so they can show their importance and expertise” (Yunupingu, 2008, p.39). Similar sentiments were reflected by Dodson (2010, p. 17) who has asserted that it is impossible for government policies to ultimately benefit Aboriginal people because “they need to subjugate us in order to steal our land, because that is the basis for their wealth accumulation – access to property rights in order to exploit our land”.

As Curry and Moreton-Robinson have explained, CRT has developed from a specific context and scholarly tradition. As such its deployment must be undertaken thoughtfully and with regard for the context in which it is being used. The preceding section of this chapter has been undertaken, in part, to synthesise literature around race and racism, but also in order to provide context for the methodology employed throughout this thesis.

### **2.3 Curriculum as enacted ideology**

When reference is made to *curriculum* in this thesis, official curriculum documents are being referred to. Although *curriculum* can also be understood to involve pedagogical phenomena that occur outside of the formal curriculum (Apple & King, 1983; Jackson, 1968; Ladson-Billings, 2009), the current study is devoted to curricula developed by formal educational institutions.

Much of the literature analysing the theoretical, political, pedagogical and philosophical underpinnings of curricula focus on the intended purpose of school education and evaluate the alignment of practices according to those goals. Butler, writing in 1970, suggested that the purpose of schooling was ill-defined, less well understood than other public institutions with fluctuating values according to the government in office, student

cohorts, and a school staff's inclination and capacity to conserve and/or subvert the values of the society in which it exists. Recent literature suggests that this is still the case, with different actors within schools adhering to various beliefs about the purpose of education, and governments and associated bodies publishing commitments to disparate, sometimes contradictory, schooling goals (Cranston, Mulford, Keating, & Reid, 2010; McAllan, 2011; Stemler, Bebell, & Sonnabend, 2011; Trimmer, 2011). These findings are relevant to the current study as they highlight the fraught environment in which educators work and in which students are expected to learn. This literature and the outcomes of the present study are not, however, intended to provoke a discussion about what ideological foundations curricula *should* be built upon, but to explore those that currently prompt and support curriculum decisions in Australia (Gillborn & Ladson-Billings, 2010).

### **2.3.1 Research into multiculturalism and cultural inclusion in schools**

Multiculturalism in Australian schools has been analysed according to a variety of theoretical frameworks including postcolonial (Hickling-Hudson, 2003), anti-racist feminist (Troyna, 1994) and sustainability (Hatoss, 2005) perspectives, as part of broader historical analyses of Australian education policies (Cahill, 2001), and explicitly within a post-September 11 world (Burnett & McArdle, 2011). Multicultural and culturally inclusive curricula in Australia have also been compared with those of other countries (Resnik, 2009) and decades (Alcorso & Cope, 1986; McInerney, 2003), and problematized when inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people (Moreton-Robinson, 2007).

A key failing of multicultural education policies in Australia has been a lack of critical engagement with, and articulation of, their purpose and goals (Amosa & Ladwig, 2004; Cahill, 2001; Cranston et al, 2010; Hickling-Hudson, 2003). Directives to teachers to teach about multiculturalism and cultural understanding, for example, can be interpreted

variously as part of a government's agenda to promote social cohesion during periods of social instability, to enable students to take advantage of globalisation in order to succeed in the global economy, or in an endeavour to help students to develop prescribed values (Hilferty, 2008). Cranston et al's (2010) national survey of state primary school principals in Australia reported a lack of governmental and departmental support for curriculum initiatives targeted at *public interests* such as the "develop[ment of] a love of learning" and "help[ing] students learn to value diversity" (pp. 528, 520). The surveyed principals identified "inadequate resourcing and support, unsympathetic politicians and bureaucracies, broader societal problems laid at the school door, and a negative media" as the top external factors impeding their capacity to address public interests (Cranston et al, 2010, p. 530). The respondents to the survey received the least institutional support when trying to achieve aims of public interests, "despite the [supportive] rhetoric evident in policy documents" (Cranston et al, 2010, p. 535). Such views resonate throughout the literature, with initiatives such as increased equity for students from disadvantaged backgrounds suffering from lack of institutional support in favour of those that appear to serve the majority of students (Hickling-Hudson, 2003; Tambayah 2011b).

Research into the implementation of multicultural education policies has identified several factors that contribute to an increased likelihood of policy adherence by teachers, namely mandating the new program and assessing student knowledge (Anderson, 2009; Roth & McGaw, 2010), teachers' understanding of the intent behind the policy (Amosa & Ladwig, 2004; Cahill, 2001; Hickling-Hudson, 2003), up to date knowledge about the content or pedagogy (Scarino, 2011), and perceived support of the policy by the school's leaders (Hilferty, 2008). In order to implement new multicultural initiatives, teachers need to have high levels of knowledge and skills in intercultural program design and delivery, as well as support from *community teachers* who bring knowledge that the school staff lack (Scarino,

2011). Teachers also need to continue professional development in order to be successful, reflective practitioners (Scarino, 2011). Much of the literature suggests, however, that these key factors are inadequate in Australian schools (Austin & Hickey, 2011, Hart, Whatman, McLaughlin, & Sharma-Brymer, 2012; Hickling-Hudson, 2003; Mooney et al., 2003, Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012).

### **2.3.2 Critiques of multicultural and culturally inclusive education policies**

In the early 1980s Benoit and Cumming (1983) proposed that Australian multicultural education policies were developed from ethnocentric foundations. They also suggested that policy makers lack sufficient understanding of cultural diversity among people in various ethnic groups to develop accurate and appropriate policies. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have generally been excluded from multicultural policies and conceptualisations of the concept of multiculturalism but are often included in literature associated with culturally inclusive curricula (de Plevitz, 2007; Jayasuriya, 2003). Sachs and Poole (1989, p. 381) maintain that policy authors have used “multicultural education as a palliative rather than for social change”. More recently, commentators such as Hage (1998) have criticised multicultural policies in general for their focus on ‘the Other’ instead of on the majority. Hage maintained that all that multicultural policies require of dominant groups is the adoption of more tolerant attitudes of the cultures and languages of the Other (with the Other principally constituted as non-white immigrants or Indigenous peoples). These latter groups, however, are required to assimilate in all but majority-sanctioned events, such as cultural festivals: situations where the Other is allowed to cook different foods and feed the white voyeur (Hage, 1998). Regardless of whether schools adopt problematic or interculturally proactive pedagogical models, Hickling-Hudson (2003) maintains that Australian schools are structured in such a way that makes it impossible to achieve more than

increased tolerance. Yunkaporta (2009) and Nakata (2007) have been strong opponents of the notion that education, schooling and/or student outcomes can be improved through the introduction of more culturally appropriate content and artefacts alone. They maintain that such a strategy is patently insufficient if the goal is to undermine racism through education. Alternative suggestions include the adoption of local Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander pedagogies, recognition of multilingualism as imperative to successful multiculturalism, and a movement away from economic factors driving multicultural or culturally appropriate school initiatives.

In addition to changes within schools, more holistic approaches to inclusive, pluralist and multicultural pedagogies in teacher education is proposed by Burnett & McArdle (2011). In order for education to move away from its current ethnocentric state, Rivière (2005) has asserted a need to move beyond the legitimisation of students' ethnic and cultural identities to the facilitation of critical reflection upon the complexities of personal and group identities. In order to stand any chance of success, however, the undertaking of such tasks cannot simply be an abstracted classroom activity. Incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, for example, involves more than analysing Indigenous issues as abstract topics to be added to a lesson plan; it involves the privileging of "physical, cultural, temporal and relational aspects of place" (McInerney, Berg, Hutchinson, Maude, & Sorensen, 2009, p. 14) as central to the engagement of epistemologies and ways of being that may well be at odds with those of the cultural majority. As such, educational policy and practice that is not built upon a recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' sovereignty is fatally flawed (Moreton-Robinson, 2007a, 2007b).

### 2.3.3 The Australian Curriculum as contentious document and process

Amid praise for the consultation process undertaken by the NCB and ACARA (Berg, 2010; Dixon, 2012) and excitement expressed by teachers about the possibilities the new curriculum presents (Austin & Hickey, 2011; Halsey et al., 2010; Love & Humphrey, 2012) there have been a variety of criticisms targeted at the *Australian Curriculum* including a lack of consultation and debate about assessment standards (Klenowski & Wyatt-Smith, 2010; Rolph & Jordan, 2010), the use of the *National Assessment Program: Literacy and Numeracy* (NAPLAN) as a diagnostic tool with little consideration for non-Standard Australian English (SAE) speaking students (Wigglesworth, Simpson, & Loakes, 2011) or the routine exclusion of students with disabilities from testing (Elliott, Davies, & Kettler, 2012), a lack of time to effectively plan for and deliver the new curriculum (Halsey et al., 2010; Luke, 2010), apparent contradictions between the goals and content of the curriculum (Matthews, 2011; Penney, 2010; Walsh, 2010), the economic rationale driving the curriculum (Burgess, 2009; Ewing, 2012), perceived attempts to universalise definitions of complex concepts such as sustainability (Franklin, 2011), acceptance of particular social values (Donnelly, 2011; Roskam, 2011), inappropriate design of the History curriculum (Taylor, 2011b), lack of emphasis on sustainability (Gough, 2011), insufficient focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples' cultures (Burgess, 2009) and languages (McKay, 2011), and too much focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (Berg, 2010). While most critiques focus on discrete aspects of the curriculum, several address more foundational issues related to national and cultural identity, and the purposes of education.

Much of the current scholarship around the *Australian Curriculum* focuses on NAPLAN, which sees students in Years 3, 5, 7, and 9 tested on “reading, writing, grammar, spelling, punctuation and numeracy” (ACARA, 2011, p. 1). While acknowledging a need for

accountability in essential services in a time of economic uncertainty Klenowski (2011) raised some concerns with current and future accountability measures, suggesting that in an effort to be accountable, schools and teachers move away from being learning and learner focussed in favour of facilitating the production of acceptable test data. Since their introduction in 2008, NAPLAN tests have been criticised for being discriminatory (Quinnell & Carter, 2011; Truscott and Malcolm, 2010). Students who have insufficient literacy skills to understand or respond appropriately to NAPLAN numeracy questions, for example, perform poorly, despite having the required conceptual or mathematical skills (Quinnell & Carter, 2011). Truscott and Malcolm (2010,) asserted that the nation's "invisible language policy", which privileges SAE, is embodied in NAPLAN tests and has the result of discriminating against "Indigenous students who speak an Aboriginal language, creole or Aboriginal English" (p. 16). A discussion paper about NAPLAN written by Independent Schools Queensland (2010) also raised concerns about the current emphasis on testing and data collection, by using Tripcony's (2002) research to point to the culturally biased nature of standardised tests, which often discriminate against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students.

McAllan (2011) has asserted that education policy authors have sought to position all Australians as *international citizens* within a globalised world in an attempt to de-racialise curricula through discourse. This has been "an effective political strategy" to sidestep discussions about racism, and reframe inequality as a failing of individuals to adequately assimilate to 'mainstream' [read, *white*] culture (McAllan, 2011, p. 3). The discrimination against students based on disability or race raised by Truscott and Malcolm (2010) and Quinnell and Carter (2011) is not considered by McAllan to be the result of a faulty test, but as a symptom of "western cultural and epistemological dominance" (p. 2). While the racialised foundations of the curriculum have largely been left unchallenged by stakeholders,

there has been widespread recognition of a need to include more diverse perspectives (see Chapter 5 for examples). The resulting approach to Indigenous content apparent in the curriculum is based on “‘inclusion’ via colour-blind discourse and ideology”, one in which “alternative histories [serve] to season and flavour the unquestioned cultural dominance of settler-colonial ideologies and epistemologies” (McAllan, 2011, pp. 4, 5).

Roskam (2011), in an open letter to then Federal Education Minister, Peter Garrett, criticised the *Australian Curriculum* as biased and left wing, particularly focussing on the perceived lack of Christianity and Western content, the acceptance of climate change as fact, the pushing of a social justice agenda, and the role and place of the cross-curriculum priorities:

None of those priorities provides an opportunity to explore the strengths and development of Western Civilisation. Indeed, a story of how Australia's political system developed that includes the English Civil War directly contradicts the philosophical and ideological assumptions of those three priorities.

"Sustainability" demonstrates human society not as progressing towards greater wealth, prosperity and improvement in the human condition, but as a problem.

Both Asian and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are valuable and important subjects, but their impact on Australia's liberal democratic framework has been minor compared to the struggle for liberalism in Britain. (p. 5)

Such responses to the *Australian Curriculum* were particularly common in the first two years after the draft curriculum documents were released and prompted responses from ACARA and the Government<sup>5</sup> (e.g., Atkins, 2010; Kelly, 2010).

Burgess (2009) was much less convinced about the potential transformative power of the new curriculum. Burgess suggested that the shift from state to national curriculum would likely be of little benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, or indeed *any*

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<sup>5</sup> At the time of writing, the report from a Government commissioned review of the *Australian Curriculum* has been released. The types of concerns raised by Berg and Roskam feature prominently.

students, if the *Australian Curriculum* was not designed to “bridg[e] the achievement gap” for between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students or seek to centralise Indigenous knowledges, histories and cultures within the curriculum. Burgess’ critique of draft curriculum documents reported a trend of curriculum and policy authors addressing the educational needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as statistical anomalies, rather than being concerned with “what is morally and ethically the right thing to do” (Burgess, 2009, p. 8). Three years earlier, Hickling-Hudson called for an enhanced focus on the achievement “curricular justice as much as for institutional and structural justice” in order to bring about meaningful educational change (Hickling-Hudson, 2006, p. 214).

## 2.4 Intentions and interests

The issue of *intent* is important in racial realist analyses of policy as it better enables scholars to explore the interests served by that policy, and to identify points at which diverse interests converge. Research into intentionality is, however, fraught with epistemological, ontological and methodological concerns, particularly around the significance of understanding intentions, and the capacity of humans to accurately enact, represent, or interpret their intentions or those of others. This section explores key debates and methodological concerns around intentions from Critical Race Theories of education, art historiography, and consumer research. As this thesis seeks to answer questions related to the *intentions* underpinning the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority, this section synthesises literature that challenges or supports the idea that intentions are knowable, explores the relationship between intentions and actions, and those works that have described the intentions behind the *Australian Curriculum* as a whole.

### 2.4.1 The significance of intentions and interests

Some Critical Race Scholars warn against placing emphasis on the intentions behind policies because endemic racism renders the intentions of policy makers insignificant when seeking to understand the *impacts* of those policies (Gillborn, 2006). While a focus on intentions alone is methodologically unsound for racial realist Critical Race Scholars, so too is a disregard of intentions. Analysis of the intentions of policy and curriculum authors should be undertaken alongside analysis of the impacts of policies and practices in order to uncover the complexities of apparently straightforward and well-intentioned initiatives (Alemán, 2009; Alemán & Alemán, 2010; Bell, 2004; Castagno, 2014; Castagno & Lee, 2007).

Bell (2004) maintained that initiatives which appear to benefit groups of people who are traditionally marginalised can be analysed according to the concept of *racial fortuity*, illustrated in the following analogy:

Racial fortuity resembles a contract law concept—the third-party beneficiary. In brief, two parties may contract to provide goods or services to a third-party. For example, a husband wishing to have flowers delivered to his wife on a weekly basis, contracts with a florist to provide this service. If the florist fails to do so, the husband can sue, but there is a large and complicated body of law as to when the wife can sue the florist. While she was the intended beneficiary, she was not a party to the contract and may not even have known about it.

One aspect of this body of law is clear. The contracting parties must intend to confer a benefit on a third-party. As one court put it, “[t]he test is whether the benefit to the third person is direct to him or is but an incidental benefit to him arising from the contract. If direct, [the third party] may sue on the contract...”. Thus, in many states, the wife could sue the florist. If incidental, however, the third-party has no right of recovery. (pp. 69-70)

Bell’s work suggests that it is imperative that analysts understand the rationale and intent behind policy, including education policy and associated documentation, in order to identify who the contracting parties are, who the intended beneficiaries are, and who is simply a *fortuitous* beneficiary. Those in the latter category are at a significant disadvantage if an

educational policy fails to produce a desired outcome for that group. Members of minority group are, Bell maintained, significantly more likely to be in positions in which their interests are sacrificed in favour of those in a majority. Castagno (2014) has reinforced the call to explore intentions, asserting that a failure to understand the impact of whiteness on the design, implementation and response to education policies in the United States has contributed significantly to ignorance regarding continued educational inequities and a dearth of substantive action toward socially just educational reform. As explained in subsequent chapters, the functioning of racial fortuity and sacrifice, when considered in light of Bell's contract analogy, suggest that if Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are not a 'contracting partner' – that is, not a primary intended beneficiary of the cross-curriculum priority – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's interests cannot be assumed to be underpinning the initiative.

## **2.4.2 Interpreting intentions**

Baxandall (1985) wrote about the problems encountered when interpreting the meaning of an object, and the intentions of the creator of that object (in Baxandall's work, this included paintings by Picasso, Chardin and Piero della Francesca). Among these challenges is the recognition that the "actual, particular psychological state or even a historical set of mental events inside the heads of [the creator of the object in question]" cannot be drawn upon in order to understand the intent of the author or artist (Baxandall, 1985, p. 41). In fact, Baxandall maintained that even the explanations of an artist themselves about their:

own state of mind...have very limited authority for an account of intention of the object: they are matched with the relation between the object and its circumstances, and retouched or obliquely deployed or even discounted if they are inconsistent with it. (p. 42)

Instead, Baxandall relied upon the beliefs and assumptions of "rational human action" when selecting historical events that are likely to have had an impact on the intentions behind the

painting in question. Such subjective methods have been criticised and this is recognised by Baxandall:

If we wish to explain pictures, in the sense of expounding them in terms of their historical causes, what we actually explain seems likely to be not the unmediated picture but the picture as considered under a particularly interpretative description. This description is an untidy and lively affair. (1985, p. 11)

It is impossible, according to Baxandall, to understand the precise thoughts and motivations that resulted in a painting and the best scholars can hope to achieve is an attempt to:

reconstruct both the specific problem [the picture] was designed to solve and the specific circumstances out of which [the artist] was addressing it. This reconstruction is not identical with what [the artist] internally experienced: it will be simplified and limited to the conceptualizable, though it will also be operating in a reciprocal relation with the picture itself, which contributes, among other things, modes of perceiving and feeling. What we are going to be dealing in are relations – relations of problems to solutions, of both to circumstances, of our conceptualized constructs to a picture covered by a description, and of a description to a picture. (p. 14)

The notion that researchers can *accurately re-present* the thoughts, feelings, and intentions of another person is widely understood in qualitative research to be naïve, particularly by those working in areas of critical research (Spracklen, Timmins, & Long, 2010). For the present study, the cross-curriculum priority was analysed alongside the context within which it was developed in an effort to better understand the relationship between the two.

### **2.4.3 Licensing effects of intentions**

Findings from consumer psychology research suggest that people's beliefs have significant impacts on their actions, and that intentions and beliefs about the intentions of others also affects action (Catlin & Wang, 2012). According to Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, and Hill (2006) consumers seek to understand intentions motivating businesses that assert a commitment to social causes, and consumers then act according to their beliefs about those intentions. Companies that advertise their support for charities or social causes – such as 'homelessness' or 'the environment' – are likely to be punished by consumers if their

intentions are deemed to be insincere, but supported when the company's intentions are believed to be genuine (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006). Respondents to Becker-Olsen et al.'s (2006) study demonstrated a tendency to believe companies were sincere about supporting causes when there appeared to be a logical connection between the company's brand and the cause. Another significant factor was the stated intention of the company; support for businesses increased when emphasis was placed on helping people, and declined when the goal was to increase profit by associating with a particular cause.

When people believe that their actions will result in positive outcomes for a social cause with little, if any, negative impact on their own life, psychological research suggests that they tend to act to effect that change (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Catlin & Wang, 2012; Effron, Miller, & Monin, 2012; Merritt, Effron, & Monin, 2010). However, several consumer psychology studies have suggested that the intention to 'do good' can result in increased harm. Catlin and Wang (2012) found that, when provided with a recycling option, people's consumption of a free product increased significantly. For example, when participants were invited to evaluate the quality of scissors by cutting up paper, those who were provided with a rubbish bin used under ten grams of paper; those provided with a recycling bin used almost three times the weight. Similarly, the addition of a recycling bin in public bathrooms resulted in increased usage of paper hand towels compared to the control study with no recycling bin (Catlin & Wang, 2012). Catlin and Wang suggest that the promotion of recycling has been successful but that

...merely emphasizing the positive aspects of recycling and enhancing the availability of recycling options may not be sufficient to save natural resources...The increase in consumption found in our study may be partially due to the fact that consumers are well informed that recycling is beneficial to the environment; however, the environmental costs of recycling (e.g., water, energy, etc. used in recycling facilities) are less salient. As such, consumers may focus only on the positive aspects of recycling and see it as a means to assuage negative emotions such as guilt that may be associated with wasting resources and/or as a way to justify increased consumption. Therefore, an

important issue would be to identify ways to nudge consumers toward recycling while also making them aware that recycling is not a perfect solution and that reducing overall consumption is desirable as well. (p. 127)

The studies of Catlin and Wang and Becker-Olsen et al (2006) suggest that people's intentions and their beliefs about other people's intentions have an impact on their actions. The outcomes of those actions, however, will not necessarily correlate with people's intentions.

When people want to appear well-intentioned and are provided with an opportunity to establish their moral credentials, the result can be immoral decision-making (Effron et al., 2012; Merritt et al., 2010). Multiple experiments led Merritt et al. (2010) to conclude that participants who were provided with opportunities to establish their credentials as 'non-racists' exhibited higher rates of racial prejudice and discrimination than those not provided with such opportunities. When provided with opportunities to vocalise support for Barack Obama, for example, participants were more likely to make "ambiguously racist statements" than those who were not allowed to 'prove' their lack of racial prejudice (Merritt et al., 2010, p. 345). Similar findings resulted from earlier studies: opportunities to establish 'non-sexist' credentials resulted in more expressions of gender discrimination and prejudice (Monin & Miller, 2001); establishing credentials as a supportive or helpful person provided participants a licence to donate less to charity than participants unable to establish those credentials (Khan & Dhar, 2006); and "heterosexual participants judged vignettes [about morally ambiguous behaviours towards gay and lesbian people] preceded by licensing behaviour (e.g. attending a gay rights parade) as less discriminatory than other vignettes not preceded by licensing behaviours" (Merritt et al., 2010, pp. 352-353).

The debates about intentions are particularly relevant to the present study as they underpin the questions driving the research presented in this thesis. While my own interpretation of the intentions of curriculum and policy authors may not be sufficient to

understand possible outcomes of the cross-curriculum priority, when combined with future educators' interpretations of those intentions, the potential impact of the initiative can be more accurately anticipated. The work of consumer psychology researchers suggests that one result of believing they are doing something good or moral can be that people "license themselves to act in less virtuous-seeming ways" (Effron et al., 2012, p. 928). The licensing effect that is most relevant to this study is that which results in people being less likely to express concern about instances of discrimination or racism due to their ability to establish non-racist credentials.

#### **2.4.4 Impacts of intentions on the implementation of curriculum initiatives**

Curriculum studies scholars have reported that the likelihood of successful implementation of curriculum initiatives is increased when teachers have sufficient content and pedagogical knowledge, they are supported by school leadership to implement new policies, and there is a consistent understanding of the intentions behind the initiative (Anderson & Fraillon, 2009; McLean-Davies, 2011). These findings are also reflected in current research regarding the introduction of the *Australian Curriculum* (Anderson, 2009; Halsey et al., 2010; Hansford, 2009; Luke, 2010; Tambyah, 2011). Contemporary research suggests that teachers are lacking in knowledge across a broad range of subject areas and the support that is needed should take the form of professional development, and time to plan units of work that incorporate new content, teaching and assessment methods. Mention has been made about the intentions of the curriculum authors by a few researchers, but this remains an area in which the current literature on the *Australian Curriculum* is contains significant gaps.

Multiple studies conducted in the past few years have reported on teachers' content knowledge in technical aspects of English (Love & Humphrey, 2012), grammar (Jones &

Chen, 2012), mathematics (Klein & Smith, 2010), alternative agricultural systems (Dodd, 2011), and Indigenous knowledges and perspectives (Harrison & Greenfield, 2011). Research into the knowledge of pre-service teachers suggests that there are significant gaps in their mathematical knowledge and a general dislike for the subject (Klein, 2010; Klein & Smith, 2010), a lack of knowledge relating to the Language strand of the *Australian Curriculum: English* (Wilkinson, 2011), and information communication technologies (Chalmers, Chandra, Hudson, & Hudson, 2012). Research involving pre-service teacher educators has identified various barriers that are impeding a movement away from an Anglocentric curriculum (Hickling-Hudson, 2003) including a lack of knowledge and time to teach about Indigenous science (Austin & Hickey, 2011), a restricted conception of teaching, learning and achievement, with measureable results being favoured (Cochran-Smith, 2003), and a resistance by non-Indigenous students to Indigenous knowledges (Hart et al., 2012; Mooney et al., 2003; Moreton-Robinson, Singh, Kolopenuk & Robinson, 2012).

Askill-Williams, Lawson, and Skrzypiec's (2012) research suggested that teachers' perceptions of the importance of a curriculum initiative (such as a cross-curriculum priority or general capability) will have a significant impact on the success of that initiative. Two determinants that appear to influence teacher perception of 'core' and 'non-core' aspects of the curriculum are whether the initiative is assessed, and the degree of teacher interest in the topic. When "time pressures, costs, or skill limitations make their maintenance difficult", the non-core elements are dropped by teachers (Askill-Williams et al., 2012, p. 434). The significance of assessment for greater uptake of curriculum initiatives is also raised by Anderson (2009) in her discussion about problem solving within the *Australian Curriculum: Mathematics*, "[w]hile providing valuable resources and more time are important steps, it is possible that problem solving in the mathematics curriculum will only become valued when it is included in high-stakes assessment" (p. 7). The connection between curriculum initiative

uptake, clearly defined curriculum goals and assessment has been identified in multiple Australian studies (Anderson & Fraillon, 2009; McLean-Davies, 2011).

Research suggests that the kind of climate that impedes inclusion of non-core curriculum elements described by Askill-Williams et al. (2012) may exist in Australian schools (Halsey et al., 2010; Hansford, 2009; Tambyah, 2011). The four major findings of an online survey responded to by 44 rural, remote and distance education school leaders were that they lacked information about the *Australian Curriculum*; perceived a lack of funding, time, human and material resources to enable successful implementation (particularly lack of specialist teachers and a lack of relief teachers when teachers are away for *Australian Curriculum* professional development); desired greater recognition of rural and remote contexts in the curriculum; and believed that the parameters of distance education needed to be recognised (Halsey et al., 2010). A result of these concerns, particularly the lack of information about the whole curriculum, “feeds into both the perceived difficulty of the task, and views about the importance of implementing a national curriculum” (Halsey et al., 2010, p. 4). Tambyah (2011) recognised that the “absence of a clearly articulated integrative framework or guidance on how [elective aspects of the curriculum] could be taught” combined with a “formidable list of things” that should be taught”, will result in non-core initiatives being addressed in a cursory manner (p. 75). When asked for their initial responses to the *Australian Curriculum* teachers have reported concerns about a lack of time to effectively integrate new elements of the curriculum in their classrooms (Halsey et al., 2010; Luke, 2010). Teaching in a way that leads to deep understanding and transformative learning requires risk taking and time – elements that are not readily available to teachers working within the current education system (Hansford, 2009). This conclusion was supported by data gathered by Hansford during interviews with teachers that suggested that they were likely to include content only as required to ‘tick the box’. Chapter 4 of this thesis presents data which

suggests that pre-service teachers anticipate that the issues reported in the literature are likely to impact on their implementation of the curriculum.

Research involving teachers, pre-service teachers and pre-service teacher educators suggests that the factors that negatively impact on the implementation of an initiative become particularly significant when the initiative involves Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, knowledges, histories, or cultures. Non-Indigenous pre-service teachers are reported to be especially resistant to Indigenous studies when required to complete such courses for their degree (Hart et al., 2012; Mooney et al., 2003; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). Phillips (2011 as cited in Hart et al., 2012) described the phenomenon as resistance “to knowledge that challenged colonial ways of knowing and being”, and suggested that this resistance occurred as the new knowledge was simultaneously deconstructed and questioned by pre-service teachers (p. 4). Conversely, teaching experiences in remote Aboriginal communities during pre-service teacher education can foster a greater concern about “culturally inclusive teaching for the future” and a desire to compensate for past teachers’ failings (Naidoo, 2011, p. 18). Austin and Hickey (2011) interviewed teacher educators about the inclusion of Indigenous science in the *Australian Curriculum: Science*. Challenges teachers identified included the *compressed curriculum* (a lack of time to develop programs and a lack of ‘space’ within the curriculum), a lack of ‘Indigenous experiences’ (interactions with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people) among the teachers themselves, a general lack of interest in the topic within the pre-service cohort, and finally, a lack of trained educators in the field. It was suggested that Indigenous science would be neglected or ignored by teachers unless it was made mandatory:

Especially with all the other pressure for testing. The temptation for a lot of educators will be just to teach the stuff that’s tested. (Sharon, 23/7/10, para 64)

I think a lot of science teachers feel so under pressure to get through what they’ve got to get through and tick all the boxes and make sure that their

documents are correct when they go to panel, that they'd see it as one more thing that they have to do. If it's not something they feel confident with themselves, it's going to be a big ask for them. (Leilana, 26/7/10, para 124) (Austin & Hickey, 2011, p. 147)

Much of the literature suggests that curricula for pre-service teacher education can be as problematic as that offered in schools, with pre-service educators learning little to help them avoid teaching an Anglocentric curriculum or interpreting a more multicultural curriculum via Anglocentric lenses (Cochran-Smith, 2003; Hickling-Hudson and McMeniman, 1996, as cited in Hickling-Hudson, 2003, p. 393). Research has also indicated, however, that pre-service teachers' reluctance to assimilate decolonial, anti-racist, non-Anglocentric knowledge can result in a piecemeal education (Hart et al., 2012; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012).

#### **2.4.5 Intentions behind the Australian Curriculum**

Briant and Doherty (2012) interpreted the rationale of the *Australian Curriculum* as being framed in economic terms and they maintained that there was little attempt to disguise the “discourse of new capitalism” within the curriculum (p. 53). They drew on Rizvi and Lingard's (2010) assertion that neoliberal approaches to policy are becoming more common throughout the world, and that “economic restructuring has become the metapolicy framing proposals for education policy reform” (cited in Briant & Doherty, 2012, p. 53). Klenowski's (2011) overview of *Australian Curriculum* and Queensland assessment processes also identified global competitiveness as a key driver in curriculum reform. Several scholars maintain that the neo-liberalisation of schooling has led to a shifting of responsibility from groups to individuals. This has resulted in some students, particularly those who have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage, being viewed as wholly responsible for their own achievement, while systemic causes of poor reportable outcomes are largely ignored (Lingard, Creagh, & Vass, 2011; Ma Rhea, 2012; McAllan, 2011).

There is debate about the collective and individual impacts of a neo-liberal curriculum. Some scholars maintain that Australian curriculum development over the past three decades has been significantly influenced by neo-liberal ideals which prioritise individualism above the common-good (Lingard, 2010). An analysis of discourses within education policy documents and curricula prior to the development of the *Australian Curriculum* identified neo-liberalism as a significant element in the development of education policy, but these were framed in terms of education for citizenship and “preserving economic stability and maintaining cohesive society” (Ailwood et al., 2011, p. 651). Klenowski (2011) has located the *Australian Curriculum* within a broader education policy context that is very much influenced by global competition and concerns. Rizvi and Lingard (2010), and Mahony, Hextall, and Menter (2004) supported assertions that the education policy decisions of nations are increasingly being made beyond their borders and that the driving forces behind those decisions are primarily economic. Proponents, such as Reid (2005, as cited in Yates & Cherry, 2010), of models of curriculum development that arise from economic imperatives, acknowledge and defend the stance as logical and necessary: “the purpose of schooling in industrial and post-industrial societies is to systematically facilitate growth and development and the curriculum is the medium through which that process is planned” (p, 96). Such motivations, Klenowski (2011) maintains, are coming at the expense of equity in schools.

Specific examples of economic rationales for various subjects can be found throughout the *Australian Curriculum*; proficiency in mathematics, for example, is needed to equip workers for competition in a global marketplace where they need to know how to “learn, adapt, create, communicate, interpret and use information critically” (NCB, 2009 as cited in Klein & Smith, 2010, p.1). Duncan (2011) cited a stated aim of the *Australian Curriculum: Mathematics* which is “to ensure that students ... [are] able to investigate,

represent and interpret situations in their personal and work lives" (ACARA, 2010, cited in Duncan, 2011, p. 27). Similarly, Love and Humphrey's (2012) analysis of 'persuasion' as a topic within the *Australian Curriculum: English* revealed that it is deemed valuable in "social, civic and workplace contexts" (p. 189). Fehring and Nyland (2012, p. 8) asserted that "the neoliberal discourse of literacy as human capital is very evident as the dominant ideology framing the major curriculum initiatives being promoted" and McAllan (2011) has identified the focus on the "three Rs" as skills required for success in a global economy, and evidence of economic imperatives of the curriculum. Baldwin (2011) maintained that a major factor determining which languages are taught in Australian schools is the potential economic benefit each hold for the nation. Ailwood et al (2011) have concluded that "Australian education policies are couched in the discourses of knowledge economy and social capital, and are focussed upon creating abstract future citizens and workers who will maintain the democratic nation and ideals of Australia." (p. 651).

Analysts have identified a variety of other stated intentions behind the introduction of the *Australian Curriculum*. The national curriculum was sold as a way to improve educational outcomes and streamline the education process, particularly for the 80,000 students who move across state borders during their school careers (Reid, 2009). Taylor (2011a) asserted that the *Australian Curriculum* was introduced to increase uniformity among schools. Similarly, Henderson (2011) referred to the Council of Australian Governments' (COAG) desire to introduce more consistency across Australia's essential services such as health and education, and has suggested that the development of a national curriculum was in line with this policy direction. The significance of the debates about the curriculum are emphasised by Kennedy (2009) and Anderson (1983), respectively, who have suggested that the debates about the national curriculum are "debates about a nation's soul. About its values. About its beliefs", and that "nations are imaginary communities" (cited in Henderson, 2011,

p. 2). A role of the national curriculum, therefore, has been to strengthen and legitimise this collectively held illusion. McConney, Oliver, Woods-McConney and Schibeci's (2011) research identified several reasons for a focus on scientific literacy in Australian classrooms, namely to *close the gap* in key indicators such as life expectancy, improved economic outcomes. As such, scientific literacy was expected to provide a "vehicle for social justice as well as potentially contributing to achieving reconciliation" (McConney et al., 2011, pp. 2020-2021).

Most of the pre-service teachers surveyed and interviewed for this study were aware of the economic and social justice related justifications for the *Australian Curriculum* raised in the literature. Those who spoke about the cross-curriculum priority in a broad context tended to recognise the need for education systems to be seen to contribute positively to social justice outcomes, particularly in cases where significant disparities exist. There was also a level of cynicism apparent in a number of responses, with some pre-service educators suggesting that governments and policy authors are seeking to appease various stakeholders by including the priority, but there is little commitment to the initiative. In addition, an understanding that curricula are designed to address the needs of a nation's economy appeared to have a significant impact on the way in which interviewees interpreted the intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority. That economic priorities are significant drivers of Australian education policy is widely supported in the literature. However, an understanding of what motivated the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority that is the focus of the current study is less well developed.

#### **2.4.6 Intentions behind the cross-curriculum priorities**

Unlike the literature regarding 'core' subjects such as English, which often refers to the inherent pedagogical worth of the content (e.g., Derewianka, 2012; Jetnikoff, 2007;

Southcott & Crawford, 2011), the cross-curriculum priority is more often discussed in terms of the broad *social* benefits that may be promoted as a result of its implementation. Tambyah (2011) has asserted that all three cross-curriculum priorities were included to facilitate the bridging of disciplines, rather than because the topics were considered by curriculum authors as inherently valuable. As multidisciplinary subjects such as *Studies of Society and Environment* were replaced with the distinct disciplines within the *Australian Curriculum*, the priorities address the need to make connections between disciplines because they “harmonis[e] common skills, concepts or attitudes embedded across the curriculum often through big ideas and important life skills” (Tambyah, 2011, p. 64). The facilitation of harmony is also identified as a purpose of the cross-curriculum priorities by Gordon (2012) whose research revealed that the inclusion of multiple perspectives in classrooms should lead to “a more harmonious classroom” (p. 10). While Gordon mentioned the need to increase Australian students’ cultural literacy and reduce racism through initiatives such as the cross-curriculum priorities, the ultimate aim of such outcomes is to ensure that students can interact productively in a globalised society.

While several scholars have explored the possible outcomes of the cross-curriculum priority or the likely content that might be addressed, there has been a lack of attention focussed on the intentions underpinning the priority. The forthcoming chapters serve to illustrate why it is important for stakeholders to explore and understand the intentions underpinning the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority.

## 2.5 Key responses to the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in Australian curricula

Studies of education policy and curricula with a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content (Craven, 1999; Lowe & Tassone, 2001; Ritchie & Butler, 1990; Sharp, 2010) are sparse, particularly when compared with the extensive amount of research done on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander student outcomes (e.g., Ma Rhea, 2012; Masters, 2011; Moyle, 2004; Taylor, 2011a; Yeung, Craven, & Ali, 2013). Much of the former research arises from the recommendations in the latter, with changes to curricula and policy identified as potential solutions to a crisis of ‘underachievement’ (Vass, 2014). Historical studies of Aboriginal education policies form a significant body of works seeking to uncover silenced histories of institutional racism and neglect (Beresford, 2003; Dunn, 2001; Partington, 1998). Such scholarship was the focus of intense scrutiny in the 1990s and early 2000s during the Australian history wars. At this time the *three-cheers* view of history, which focused on nation building achievements was challenged by *black arm-band* revisionist histories which recognised and publicised more humbling aspects of the country’s history (Macintyre & Clark, 2004, pp. 128-32). Australian historian, Geoffrey Blainey described the two approaches to understanding the country’s history in the following way:

To some extent my generation was reared on the Three Cheers view of history. This patriotic view of our past had a long run. It saw Australian history as largely a success. While the convict era was a source of shame or unease, nearly everything that came after was believed to be pretty good. There is a rival view, which I call the Black Armband view of history. In recent years it has assailed the optimistic view of history. The black armbands were quietly worn in official circles in 1988. The multicultural folk busily preached their message that until they arrived much of Australian history was a disgrace. The past treatment of Aborigines, of Chinese, of Kanakas, of non-British migrants, of women, the very old, the very young, and the poor was singled out, sometimes legitimately, sometimes not. My friend and undergraduate teacher Manning Clark, who was almost the official historian in 1988, had done much to spread the gloomy view and also the compassionate view with his powerful prose and Old Testament phrases. The Black Armband view of history might well represent the swing of the pendulum from a position that had been too

favourable, too self congratulatory, to an opposite extreme that is even more unreal and decidedly jaundiced'. (Blainey, 1993, p. 11)

These kinds of arguments have again gained prominence within the media and public consciousness with the introduction of the cross-curriculum priorities (Hurst, 2014; Karvelas, 2014).

### **2.5.1 Anything is better than nothing (but not at the expense of something important)**

The revived concerns some commentators have aired around the formalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures within the *Australian Curriculum* are ostensibly around issues of curriculum 'space'. Some commentators (Berg, 2010; Donnelly, 2011) have decried the ousting of 'traditional' content, a disregard for the impact of Christianity and Westminster systems of parliamentary governance, and the mockery made of "real science" when it is conflated with "Indigenous science". Although these sorts of overtly critical responses are not as well-publicised as those supporting the initiative, there is thinly veiled sympathy for the idea that Indigenous content should be included in the curriculum but not at the expense of any topics that are considered to be foundational (Hage, 1998; Maiden & Kelly, 2012; Valdes et al., 2002).

Appeals are frequently made for the Australian public to refer to 'common sense' rather than ideology when evaluating contentious curriculum issues, such as the cross-curriculum priority. The arguments against inclusion of 'too much', 'new', and 'non-core' content are framed within a common sense desire for the nation to achieve economic prosperity in a globally competitive environment (Dodson, 2009; McCormack, 2013). McGee (1980) demonstrated that these kinds of tactics are particularly effective at stifling dialogue because those with alternative views are forced to adopt a position outside the realms of common sense. Consequently, critics of taken-for-granted narratives are easily disregarded as

illogical ideologues. To argue against the position adopted by economic rationalists is to risk being perceived as an extremist; someone who is anti-prosperity, therefore working against the interests of the nation, consequently anti-Australian and, as a result, anti-Australian students. Castagno (2014) identified similar concerns for theorists challenging mainstream interpretations and implementations of diversity education programs in the US: critique of diversity programs is conflated with criticism of the very notion of diversity.

### **2.5.2 Something is better than nothing**

Much of the literature around Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in Australian school curricula is based on surveys of curriculum documents and resources and reports on its absence or presence, and the degree to which this is appropriate according to criteria related to representations, biases, and accuracy of information (e.g. Sharp, 2010). The need for an increased amount of ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content’ within curricula is often framed in terms of the need to provide Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with content that reflects their cultures (Ritchie & Butler, 1990) in order to enhance Indigenous students’ retention and outcomes (Lowe & Tassone, 2001) and to ‘close the gap’ (McConney et al., 2011). The conclusion drawn in such literature is that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children will achieve better results with the introduction of more Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and/or pedagogy (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012).

Moore (2012) has concluded that well-intended ‘ethnicised’ educational policies fail in part because they do not account for contemporary “post-ethnic realities”, or the complexity and diversity of Aboriginal people’s identities (p. 153). Rudolph’s (2011) discourse analysis of reports and documents, including educational policy documents identified how Indigenous students are conceptualised and represented in terms of ‘success’

within the school system. According to Rudolph, non-Indigenous students are presented in policy and curriculum documents as the benchmark to which Indigenous students are required to aspire. The study also highlighted that, in direct contrast to the goal articulated in the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education Action Plan 2010-2014* (MCEETYA, 2010) to avoid cultural biases in standardised tests, there was a prevalence of Eurocentric imagery and linguistic devices throughout NAPLAN tests of the mid-2000s. Sharp's (2010) doctoral thesis analysed discourses and images in Queensland school history text books published and used throughout the twentieth century and revealed visible (but problematic), representations of Aboriginal people, histories and cultures in early texts, and a decline in their presence in later decades.

The research into policy, procedures and resources associated with the teaching of Indigenous studies or the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in mainstream school subjects is augmented by that which explores the role of teachers in delivering that content. Some small scale studies have reported that a majority of interviewed teachers appreciate the discipline-related contribution Indigenous content makes to their subject (Dunbar-Hall, 2002) while others appreciate the significance of the political gesture but are concerned about the impact the inclusion of such content may have on their teaching and students' learning (Austin & Hickey, 2011). Recent research into Australian pre-service teacher education provides insights into factors that contribute to the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content and/or pedagogies in schools (Luke, Shield, Theroux, Tones & Villegas, 2012; Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). Both reports conclude that Indigenous studies courses in pre-service teacher education programs, particularly those with a *content* focus (rather than a pedagogical one), are insufficient to bring about significant changes in the practices of pre-service teachers upon entering schools as qualified professionals.

While teachers' *cultural knowledge* (i.e. knowledge of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander cultures) was identified as important when analysed as a predictor of their incorporation of Indigenous pedagogies, Luke et al. (2012) found that the only consistent predictor of teachers' incorporation of Indigenous pedagogical practice was the degree to which they interacted with members of the Indigenous community outside school. Luke et al. concluded that

...while courses may be extremely important in building cultural knowledge, generalised education in Indigenous student learning may be difficult to apply to classroom settings if the teacher does not actively engage with Indigenous community outside of the school. (Luke et al., 2012, p. 44)

Moreton-Robinson et al.'s (2012) findings provide additional information about the role of pre-service teacher education and its relationship to the embedding of Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander pedagogies and content into curricula. Significant differences were in evidence when Indigenous and non-Indigenous early career teachers were interviewed about their programs. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander teachers supported the notion of developing an Indigenous pedagogy, and reported good levels of knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, but insufficient knowledge about how to teach Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Only a small number of non-Indigenous teachers reported that they had opportunities to engage in Indigenous content related courses: 30% maintained that they did not have this opportunity (compared to all Indigenous teachers identifying opportunities to engage in Indigenous content related courses). After conducting focus group discussions, Moreton-Robinson et al. (2012) concluded that non-Indigenous students may be less inclined than their Indigenous peers to take courses related to Indigenous education when offered as an elective. Alternatively, non-Indigenous students may be less aware of those subjects. The findings of Luke et al. (2012) and Moreton-Robinson et al. (2012) demonstrate a need to understand the enactment of curricula as a phenomenon that extends beyond professional practice to pre-service education. Rather than

studying interpretations and implementation of curricula in isolation, pre-service experiences should also be explored.

### **2.5.3 Sometimes nothing is better than something**

The title of this section may be overstating the views of those whose works are referred to here, but the title is included to suggest the concerns of some scholars exploring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content in curricula. Like much of the critical scholarship around Indigenous content and pedagogies, the work reported on in this part of the literature review is largely focussed on university curricula and the work of those working in academia, rather than those working in schools (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012). The questions being asked of those who are involved in educating teachers are, of course, particularly relevant to this study and may serve as an indication of the kinds of questions that may be asked in future research into school curricula. While most of the theorists whose ideas populate this section have not advocated a complete disassociation of ‘Indigenous knowledge’ from curricula, they have demanded that that which is included is accurate (Nakata, 2013) and of genuine benefit to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples (Burgess, 2009) rather than piecemeal attempts at ‘ethnicising’ curricula.

The inclusion of content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures has not been convincingly demonstrated to improve student outcomes (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012) or eliminate racism by virtue of its presence alone:

Aboriginal studies, done badly can be a greater problem for Aboriginal students than not having it at all. The key issue is not just about the incorporation of Aboriginal studies curricula, but the effect of the Australian education system as a whole. This involves interrogating and correcting the negative impact of hidden messages in the broader curriculum. (Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey, 2006, p. xx)

A major criticism of attempts to ‘embed’ Indigenous knowledges or other content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures has been the notion of *fitting it in*

to an existing framework; a pre-existing, culturally, ideologically, and pedagogically specific framework (Yunkaporta, 2009). Such an approach means that, regardless of the accuracy of materials, the knowledge of teachers, the level of engagement with local Indigenous communities during the planning of lessons or curricula, the study of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures must always inhabit a subordinate position to those disciplines and learning areas that make up the pre-existing framework. As a result, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander knowledges, cultures and histories are liable to be deconstructed, reconstructed and metamorphosed in order to fit into the curriculum. Such attempts to *include* indigenous knowledges and/or cultures into curricula have been understood by some scholars to be acts of epistemological dismemberment (Hokowhitu, 2011) and ontological violence (Hokowhitu, 2009, p. 102). De Plevitz (2007) drew similar conclusions from her analysis of social justice goals of education within an anti-discrimination law framework:

Given the unconscious yet omnipresent influence of Western culture in education it is suggested that in schools where the content of Indigenous studies is presented merely as another item on the curriculum, this may be having an adverse effect on Indigenous students. For example, they may experience distress when what the teacher is telling them is in conflict with what they have learnt at home; or that non-Indigenous teachers are professing to represent Indigenous knowledge without Indigenous peoples' agreement and permission; or that their culture is portrayed as an add-on to the curriculum rather than an integral part of life and learning and the life-blood of identity. (p. 103)

While the types of concerns raised by de Plevitz (2007), Hokowhitu (2009; 2011), and Yunkaporta (2009) are touched upon in government literature and guides published by other curriculum bodies (e.g., DET, 2011; Vass, 2012), structural and cultural parameters of schools limit the potential of initiatives such as those referred to by each author. Concerns about a lack of engagement between teachers and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community members during the development of units and lessons (de Plevitz, 2007) can be addressed, according to the Queensland Studies Authority and other organisations, when

teachers take the time to undertake community consultation and draw on the knowledge of Indigenous people in the school community (Luke et al., 2012). The time available for teachers to undertake work outside the classroom, however, is very limited, as is the capacity for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to address shortcomings in teacher knowledge (Bond, 2013; Colvin, Torepe, & Manning, 2011; Maxwell, 2012, 2012b; Moyle, 2004; Zubrick et al., 2006). These aspects of teachers' work that impact on their ability and capacity to meet stated outcomes of curriculum initiatives are significant, and when combined with major limitations regarding consultation during curriculum development at a national level (Buckskin, 2013) it is imperative that the potential of curriculum initiatives are investigated and understood.

Some of the foundations of Indigenous studies are challenged by Nakata et al., (2012) who charge many involved in the discipline with simplifying notions of Indigenous knowledges as being that which are in opposition to Western knowledges and those which are based upon a conglomeration of ideas about Indigenous cultures (Nakata, 2013; Nakata et al., 2012). Teaching practices utilised in de-colonial education are similarly problematised:

...instating regenerated Indigenous 'ways' or traditions' as the counter-solution to overcoming colonial legacies occurs too hurriedly in some scholarly analysis and in lecture settings... Approaches that focus on changing students' thinking through constant engagement with or reflection on their complicity with colonialism, its knowledge, and its privileges personalises a deep political and knowledge contest in ways that can be counter-productive for both students and their educational goals (Nakata et al., 2012, p. 121).

Such critiques extend the conversation about who should develop Indigenised curricula, teach Indigenous content, and utilise Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander pedagogies by asking whether the goals of de-colonisation or the elimination of racism can be achieved through *any* form of education, subversive, transformative, or otherwise.

A desktop audit of literature around Indigenous studies found a “lack of empirical evidence in the [Australian and international] literature to substantiate the claims being made for the transformative effect of Indigenous studies [for non-Indigenous and Indigenous student outcomes]” (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012, p. 1). Moreton-Robinson et al. have asserted that attempts to bring about transformative educational outcomes fail when educators rely on ‘culturally relevant’ content without sufficiently recognising historical and contemporary impacts of race, racism and racial privilege.

Burgess (2009) has predicted that the introduction of a national curriculum driven by economic imperatives will result in problematic outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, even if it does include more focus on Indigenous histories and cultures than previous curricula. Commenting on *The shape of the National Curriculum: A Proposal for Discussion* (NCB, 2008), Burgess identified a curriculum emerging from a position of assumed white supremacy and Indigenous deficiency, which could only be detrimental for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Burgess suggested that a curriculum grounded in a belief in Indigenous student failure, with a “narrow focus on assessment, outcomes, and test results” (p. 6), cannot benefit Indigenous students, despite the (then planned) inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures within the curriculum.

## **2.6 Conclusion**

At the core of much of the literature around the introduction of Indigenous content to curricula, are questions about who is expected to benefit from the content, at what cost (or advantage) to students and society this inclusion will have, and whether these initiatives and associated processes are inherently worthwhile or problematic. The current study intends to build upon existing research to fill a gap that exists within the literature, namely the conversation about the intentions driving the introduction of the cross-curriculum priority. In

the chapters that follow, the ways in which pre-service educators have interpreted those intentions are presented, as is an analysis of important curriculum and curriculum development documents in order demonstrate how the intentions underpinning the priority have been communicated and understood.

## Chapter 3: The why and how of the research process

### 3.1 Overview of methodology

In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of the intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, this project was guided by a multifaceted methodology. The research was conceived as a *bricolage* (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005); various methods of data collection were utilised and those data were analysed according to a range of theoretical frameworks. The bricolage necessitates explorations of philosophical underpinnings of research and the researcher, and a multidisciplinary approach to data collection and analysis (Kincheloe, 2001; 2005). Critical Race Theories and scholarship also guided this project, and promoted rigour via the deliberate selection of data collection and analysis methods that are most appropriate for a research project (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002). The methodological framework of this project was selected in order to facilitate engagement with, and representation of, the complexities inherent in the development of the *Australian Curriculum* and the cross-curriculum priority. Kincheloe's description of the 'active bricolage', in which the impact of researchers' subjectivity and agency on their choices is recognised and encouraged, articulates my approach to the bricolage:

In the active bricolage we bring our understanding of the research context together with our previous experience with research methods. Using these knowledges we *tinker* in the Levi-Straussian sense with our research methods in field-based and interpretive contexts. This tinkering is a high-level cognitive process involving construction and reconstruction, contextual diagnosis, negotiation, and readjustment. Researchers' interaction with the objects of their inquiries, bricoleurs understand, are always complicated, mercurial, unpredictable and, of course, complex. Such conditions negate the practice of planning research strategies in advance. In lieu of such rationalization of the process bricoleurs enter into the research act as methodological negotiators (2005, p. 325).

As a qualitative researcher, I reject the idea that there is an ultimate truth to be uncovered via adoption of the correct combination of data and analysis (Cooper & White,

2012). Consequently, I have not sought to definitively answer the three research questions guiding this project, but have interpreted and re-presented the data I have gathered and analysed according to a range of theories and methods. The processes of selecting theoretical frameworks, scholarly texts, data, and methods of analysis and representation were undertaken purposefully and according to what made sense according to my political, philosophical, personal and contextual standpoint. In order to make these processes transparent I have detailed the processes engaged in throughout the study here in Chapter 3 and at various points throughout the thesis (e.g. Appendix A).

The boundaries of the theories and theoretical frameworks I utilised in this project are not clearly discernible, with various points of convergence and overlap (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Like the bricolage, Critical Race Theory (CRT) is inherently multidisciplinary and informed by a range of theoretical traditions (Delgado & Stefancic, 2011). There are several schools of CRT and I consider my work to be aligned with that of racial realist scholars and Critical Race scholarship of education. Since context informs research (Connell, 2007; Grande, 2008), the context in which this study has been undertaken is recognised and reflected in this thesis which draws heavily from research undertaken in Australia, particularly in Critical Indigenous Studies (Nakata, 2011), Australian Critical Race Theories (Moreton-Robinson, 2000a, 2004b, 2007a, 2007b; Nicoll, 2000; Vass, 2012, 2014), post-colonial (Hickling-Hudson, 2003) and de-colonial scholarship (Nakata, 2012). In addition, my interpretations are informed by works regarding globalised education (Lingard, 2009; Rizvi & Lingard, 2010), theories of whiteness (Dyer, 1997; Hage, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 1999, 2004b, 2007b) and critical theories of multicultural education (Hill & Allan, 2001; Jayasuria, 1990, 2003). CRT is at the core of this project, but is most prominently employed in the final chapter.

Along with CRT, which requires recognition of the raced nature of institutions, phenomena and concepts (Solórzano & Yosso, 2002), Noddings' (1984) ethic of care and hooks' interpretation of love (2000) have provided impetus for this research. These scholars prompt educators to engage in critical and often uncomfortable intellectual work in the name of love or care for students and our broader communities. This project is based on an understanding that one of the roles of critical educators and researchers is to engage with topics that are often controversial and in doing so, engage in pedagogies or research of care and love (hooks, 2010). Critical feminist pedagogy foregrounds various identity markers and applies them to analysis of education and schooling, while seeking to deconstruct, undermine and overturn racist, heterosexist, patriarchal, and colonial ideologies and practices (hooks, 2010). The deployment of these theoretical frameworks is undertaken here in the context of a country that has a recent history of invasion and colonisation, and continues to exist as a colonised space (Moreton-Robinson, 2007; Smith, 1998).

This project is underpinned by an understanding that policies and government literature are developed within particular cultural contexts and reflect those contexts (Gee, 2011). These settings are complex and consequently need to be studied in a manner that recognises this complexity (Kincheloe, 2005). In line with this approach and my view of knowledge and truth as contextual, cultural, and subjective, this study has proceeded from a point that positions the cross-curriculum priority as an initiative shaped by cultural and ideological factors. As such, I have not interpreted the priority as a benign curriculum element, but one that embodies and represents important features of the culture and context in which it was developed.

### 3.1.1 An introduction to the researcher

Just as the culture and context within which curriculum are developed were significant considerations this study, so too were the factors that influenced me, as researcher. The deployment of autoethnography by white scholars in race critical and Critical Race fields has been variously praised for exposing the racialised nature of those scholars' work, and criticised for representing little more than "confessional declarations" (Curry, 2009, p. 7; Watson, 2007). As such, I have sought to harness the critical consciousness raising function of autoethnography and avoid indulgent 'confessional tales' while locating myself as the author of this study. Within the context of this introduction to the various factors that influenced this study I have provided this, more personal, introduction as a means to highlight factors that influenced the choices made during the project.

I was recently sent a workplace satisfaction survey which asked whether I considered my ethnic background to have been a factor in my experiences at my workplace. I answered 'yes'. Since completing a Bachelor of Indigenous Studies several years ago and being introduced to the idea of white privilege I had often reflected on my various achievements that were assisted by my whiteness within a white supremacist society (McIntosh, 1988). The fact that the list of ethnicities did not include white people suggested that the surveyors were not interested in the ways in which racism and white supremacy privilege white people like me. The other side of the racism coin, racial privilege (Bush, 2004; Delgado, 2003), is something I have sought to engage with explicitly as I have selected and analysed data.

Moving to Australia at the age of 18, in order to take advantage of the available economic and experiential opportunities, did not strike me as at all hypocritical given my teenage disdain for people doing the same in New Zealand. Living and working at a resort, I witnessed a young, white, male colleague repeatedly openly harass and bully an older,

Aboriginal, female colleague. This man's actions, my concern but inaction, and the organisation's eventual dismissal of the Aboriginal woman caused me to reflect on the blatant racism in this country and more subtle forms of discrimination. A year or so earlier, the continual media coverage of the events of September 11, 2001 had made me keenly aware the manner in which the United States of America was constructed here in Australia. The burning of a mosque down the road from my house, the attacks on people of 'Middle Eastern appearance' and anti-Muslim hysteria that gripped the nation similarly reinforced the danger of being tolerated but not belonging in a place (Hage, 1998).

The concepts of whiteness, 'alternative' histories, and institutional racism that I had learnt about in my undergraduate degree informed my subsequent studies and decision to teach (with goals of promoting anti-racism). Within my scholarship and pedagogy these ideas and my attempts to implement associated actions illuminated divergences in rhetoric and action, policy and practice, and intent and result. After commencing research for a Master's degree, I came across an article by Castagno and Lee (2007) that introduced me to Bell's interest convergence principles, the broader works of Critical Race Theory, and TribalCrit. I was excited by the analytical framework interest convergence theory provided to explore education policy and practice. Bell's theory had the potential to enable exploration of the complex network of reasons gaps might exist between an institution's rhetoric, policies and their enactment. These theories, combined with the pedagogies and methodologies I experienced and learnt about in my undergraduate degree, and some education courses around critical and indigenous pedagogies continue to inform my research. The project reported here carries the legacies of these earlier concerns.

### 3.2 Design of the project

The broad approach to the research undertaken for this project was a critical, emergent, interpretative and qualitative one. Various theories and methods were combined as a *bricolage* in order to collect, analyse and re-present data in a manner appropriate and responsive to the needs of the researcher, participants and requirements of this study. The variety of data collection and analysis techniques is reflected in the way the outcomes of my research are presented in this thesis. The primary data collection techniques included an online survey, interviews, and the collection of documentary and visual texts. A summary of each chapter is provided in Chapter 1. The following table offers a diagrammatic guide to the final three chapters in the thesis.

Table 1. Data collection and analysis methods utilised to answer research questions.

Chapter	Research question	Data source	Primary analysis method
4	What intentions do future educators believe underpin the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Surveys completed by pre-service teachers</li> <li>• Interviews with pre-service teachers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thematic analysis (e.g. Srivastava &amp; Hopwood, 2009)</li> </ul>
5	What are the explicit and implicit intentions underpinning the inclusion of the cross curriculum priority in the <i>Australian Curriculum</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Curriculum development documents</li> <li>• Freedom of Information Request</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical hermeneutic analysis (e.g. Prasad &amp; Mir, 2002)</li> </ul>
	What are the explicit intentions underpinning the inclusion of the cross curriculum priority in the <i>Australian Curriculum</i> ?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Australian Curriculum</i> website <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Images</li> <li>• Text</li> <li>• Videos</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Critical discourse analysis (e.g. Fairclough, 2003)</li> <li>• Visual semiotic analysis (e.g. Barthes, 1977; Kress &amp; Van Leeuwen, 2006)</li> </ul>
6	Why are the intentions underpinning this curriculum initiative significant?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Synthesis of all of the above</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CRT analysis (e.g. Bell, 2004; Moreton-Robinson, 2007a)</li> <li>• Critical Indigenous Studies analysis (e.g. Nakata et al., 2012)</li> </ul>

At this point it is important to note that the final chapter synthesises and extends the discussion from Chapters 5 and 6 via CRT (particularly interest convergence theory) and principles of de-colonial and Critical Indigenous Studies. As such, Chapter 6 does not simply summarise the previous chapters, but introduces new interpretations of those data.

### **3.3 Data collection techniques**

Information regarding the data collection methods adopted during the study is presented in the order each data set appears in the thesis. This begins with surveys and interviews with pre-service teachers, followed by the selection of *Australian Curriculum* data, and the documents that contributed to the development of the curriculum.

#### **3.3.1 Surveying and interviewing pre-service teachers**

Pre-service teachers in the final year of their program were invited to participate in the study by completing an online survey. Permission to distribute a link to the survey via e-mail was sought from all Deans of Education in Australian universities that offer programs in school-based education (see Figure 2). Of the 39 universities in the country, 36 met the criteria for this study and those Deans were contacted. Over half of the Deans responded to the request for permission to contact students in their program and 15 agreed to allow distribution of the survey. The distribution of the invitation to participate in this project was facilitated by administrative or academic staff in charge of relevant programs at each university. The invitation e-mail and survey link were distributed via e-mail to 14 Australian universities and to pre-service education students enrolled in undergraduate and post graduate (Graduate Diploma and Masters) courses in a range of sectors (early childhood, primary and secondary education). On the advice of one Dean, distribution of the survey was facilitated in person by a lecturer, rather than by email. The lecturer requested that a summary of the

findings from that institution be provided in order to inform and improve teaching and learning for their students, in accordance with the reciprocity principle within the *Guidelines for ethical research in Australian Indigenous studies* (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies [AIATSIS], 2011).

Subject: Permission to conduct research

Dear Professor \_\_\_\_\_,

I am currently undertaking a research project about the intentions behind aspects of the Australian Curriculum. I wish to seek your permission to send a one question, online survey to final year pre-service teachers completing a degree within the School of Education. I have attached a copy of the content of the survey to this e-mail.

The purpose of the survey is to collect data about pre-service teachers' interpretation of the intentions behind the cross curriculum priority, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Students who wish to continue to participate in the project will be invited to enter their contact details at the end of the survey. A number of those participants will then be contacted for follow up interviews. The survey will be accessible to participants via a link I will include in an explanatory e-mail that can be distributed to a cohort of students. Completion of the survey is expected to take a maximum of 10 minutes. Upon receipt of your approval, I will send an e-mail that can be forwarded to the relevant head of department for distribution to students.

The research project seeks to investigate intentions behind this component of the Curriculum and make connections between those intentions and interpretations of them by practicing and pre-service teachers. It is expected that the research findings will be of interest to a broad range of stakeholders, including members of school communities and pre-service teacher educators. Full ethics approval has been granted by the University of Southern Queensland (Ref: H11REA217).

Thank you for taking the time to consider my request. I hope to hear a positive response from you by the 13th of May.

Kind regards,

Jacinta Maxwell  
Associate Lecturer  
Faculty of Education  
University of Southern Queensland

Figure 2. Information letter sent to Deans or Heads of Education.

The text of the invitation e-mail was sent to staff members responsible for facilitating distribution of the e-mail to students. These staff members were asked to enter 'Australian Curriculum survey' into the subject line of the e-mail and to copy the e-mail text in full. The invitation to students included a brief description of the project and the survey focus, and a statement about the voluntary nature of the survey (see Figure 3).

Subject: Australian Curriculum survey

I would like to invite you to participate in a major study being conducted within the Faculty of Education at the University of Southern Queensland by completing a one question survey. The project and the survey are about one of the Australian Curriculum cross-curriculum priorities. You don't need to feel strongly about the cross-curriculum priorities to participate in the project - I hope to hear from students with a variety of experience and opinions.

Participation in this study is completely voluntary and your comments and perspectives on the topic will be reported anonymously. The survey has one question and is expected to take between 10-15 minutes to complete. If you are happy to participate or would like more information about the survey, please follow this link <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/BK7G9Y5>.

This project has ethics approval from the University of Southern Queensland (H11REA217) and permission to send this survey to you has been sought and gained from your university.

Kind regards,

Jacinta Maxwell

Associate Lecturer

Faculty of Education, University of Southern Queensland, Toowoomba Campus

e-mail: [Jacinta.Maxwell@usq.edu.au](mailto:Jacinta.Maxwell@usq.edu.au), phone: +61 7 4631 2340

*Figure 3.* Email sent to final year pre-service teachers inviting them to participate in the study.

The survey was created using SurveyMonkey, an online, cloud-based survey tool. The decision to ask respondents only one question was made, in part, due to my belief that a very short survey that required a minimal time commitment might be more readily received by participants and those Deans of Education authorising the survey to be distributed. I also hoped that a short survey would help avoid the kind of resistance exhibited by other groups of potential participants who I had previously been unsuccessful in recruiting (See Appendix A). Similarly, I expected that the response rate from students would be higher if the introductory e-mail made clear that the commitment level for the survey was minimal. Research into the response and completion rates associated with online surveys suggests that scrolling design and length of a survey contribute to completion rates (Vicente & Reis, 2010). In conjunction with this, while open questions can result in a lower response and completion rate (Jakob & Zerback, 2006 as cited in Vicente & Reis, 2010), the single open-question used in this survey was readily responded to, and all respondents completed the survey once it was started. In

addition to the information provided in the introductory e-mail, additional detail about the project was provided to respondents (see Appendix B). The voluntary nature of participation was explicitly reiterated, and a button was included to enable respondents to indicate understanding of the project and willingness to participate.

Respondents were prompted to provide their first name and an e-mail address to indicate that they would be willing to be contacted at a later date and potentially participate in a brief follow-up interview. Those who did not wish to participate further were not required to provide this information and could simply submit the survey. Of the 90 respondents to the survey, 46 supplied these additional details and were sent an e-mail inviting them to participate in a 30 minute interview via Skype, telephone or in-person<sup>1</sup>. Of the 46 survey respondents who indicated a desire to continue their participation, 27 participants agreed to an interview and a time and date for that interview was established. Reminder e-mails were sent to interviewees after one planned interview had to be rescheduled because the interviewee had forgotten the appointment. One respondent who agreed to be interviewed did not supply a phone number or Skype details required to undertake the interview, despite being asked for these in the original e-mail regarding the interview time, and again in an e-mail reminding them about the interview.

Respondents were not asked to supply demographic data beyond their university and program affiliation, but some provided information about themselves in their survey response or their interview. Survey responses were received from students at 14 Australian universities from all States and Territories except Tasmania and the Australian Capital Territory. Most survey respondents (n=60) were completing an undergraduate education program or combined undergraduate education degree, n=21 were completing a Graduate

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<sup>1</sup> The option to be interviewed in person was only offered to respondents who lived nearby.

Diploma, and n=9 were completing a Master's degree. One survey respondent (and subsequent interviewee) identified as an Aboriginal person and one survey respondent explicitly identified as a white Australian. During the interviews, four interviewees explicitly identified their ethnicity or nationality. One interviewee identified as a "first generation Asian-Australian" with Vietnamese and Chinese parents, another interviewee identified her mother's South American background, another interviewee explained that she has a "Japanese background", and another interviewee identified as a "New Zealander". Most respondents did not identify their heritage although a small number suggested that they are non-Indigenous with their use of terms such as "we", "our", "they" and "their" (e.g., "I think we are finally beginning to understand that Indigenous peoples have been excluded in our education system and the intention is to bring their cultures and history into this system to make it really whole"). Interviewed participants tended to make references to Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander people and students using terminology which suggested that they did not identify as an Indigenous person. In addition, interviewees who did not explicitly identify their background, frequently alluded to a European, or white, non-Indigenous background, for example:

...everyone was mostly European descent, we didn't really have anyone...great grandparents settled there and then you know, by the time they got to kind of my generation you know were well and truly Aussies I guess you could say. Um and we didn't really have anyone from other cultures in my community. (Sonia<sup>2</sup>, personal communication, June 27, 2013)

All interviewees were asked whether they wished to share any insight into factors they considered to be influential on their response to the survey and interview questions. Some participants took this opportunity to discuss their experiences (or lack of) with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and their cultural or ethnic heritage.

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<sup>2</sup> All survey respondents' and interviewees' names have been changed to pseudonyms.

Prior to the interviews, I read through each respondent's survey response, and identified topics that could serve as prompts during the conversation. These prompts were designed to encourage interviewees to unpack their understanding of concepts they had raised in response to the survey, and to facilitate a more thorough exploration of the intentions they identified as underpinning the priority. For example, many respondents suggested that the intention behind the cross-curriculum priority was simply to increase students' knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures; in these cases I would ask interviewees why they thought ACARA might consider the increase in such knowledge to be desirable. Those interviewees whose survey response explained their interpretation of the initiative in a detailed manner were prompted to talk about the connections they saw between the cross-curriculum priority and the rationale they identified. When, for example, a respondent explained that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures were included in the *Australian Curriculum* in order to enable Indigenous students to feel included in schools, I asked them what they understood the connection to be between curriculum content and feelings of inclusion. Since the primary goal of the interviews was to unpack the responses to the sole survey question my identification of 'prompts' emerged as a result of my own critical analysis of those responses (see Figure 4).

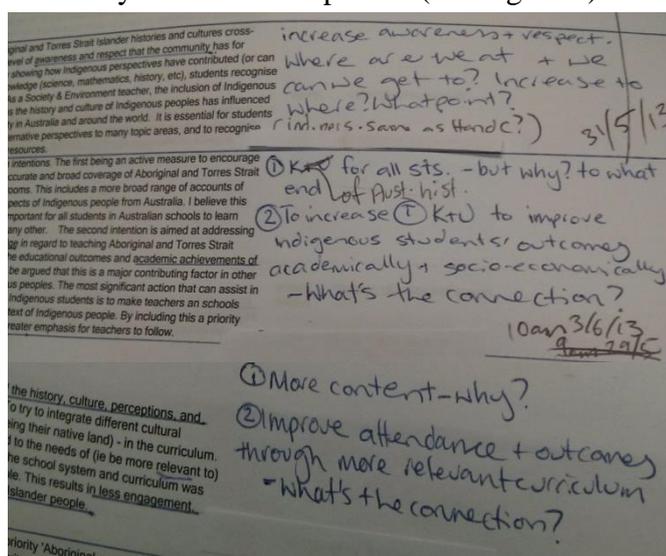


Figure 4. Annotations on survey responses include critical questions and potential interview prompts.

In total, 26 interviews were conducted, with all but six being telephone interviews. The mode of communication was determined by the preference of the participant and the practicalities of each option. Five interviews were conducted via Skype (Four with two-way video and one with voice and photo only), and one interview occurred in a classroom at the Toowoomba campus of the University of Southern Queensland. My office was the location from which all telephone and Skype interviews were conducted. Interviewees were not asked to provide details about the location from which they were speaking, although many interviewees indicated that they were at home, and one said that they were speaking on a mobile phone while walking home from work. No discernible differences in interviewee responses were noted that could be attributed to interview location, nor were any significant or extended distractions evident during the interviews. Upon receiving permission from interviewees to do so, all interviews were recorded using two digital voice recorders (Olympus VN4100 and an iPod Touch with Voice Memo). Interviews ranged in length from 17 minutes to one hour, with the average length being 32 minutes.

The recordings were transcribed by the interviewer within a week of each interview. An Olympus AS-4000 transcription kit was used to facilitate playback of recordings for transcription and subsequent checking because the software reduced background noise and enabled multiple playback speeds. The transcription pedal provided hands free control of play, rewind and fast forward functions which resulted in faster transcription than was possible without the transcription kit. During transcription the adjustable playback speed function was utilised, with recordings slowed down in order to facilitate more accurate transcription.

While transcribing the first interview, the decision was made to adopt a denaturalised approach to transcribing that captured speech and utterances, but did not record the physical

or contextual details of the interview (Oliver, Serovich & Mason, 2005). This decision largely came about as the result of reflections on the extensive number of decisions I would otherwise have to make about which pauses were particularly significant and should therefore remain, and which were accidental and could be deleted to improve the clarity of the transcript. Rather than imposing my interpretations about the deliberateness and significance of speakers' pauses and repetitions, I decided to transcribe the interviews as faithfully as I could, include (but not focus on) these features of speech in my analysis, provide participants with opportunities to provide feedback on their transcript, and provide those reading this thesis with the opportunity to interpret these features for themselves. These decisions are important because of the impact they can have on readers' perceptions of participants (Edwards, 2003; Morgan, 2009). When transferred to the thesis, however, the inclusion of multiple pauses, stutters and minimal responses impacted the readability of the extracts too severely, and the decision was made to delete extraneous utterances. The following conventions were utilised during transcription:

Table 2. Transcription conventions.

<b>Speaker identification</b>	Interviewer identified as 'Jacinta', interviewees identified by pseudonym
<b>Slang and abbreviations</b>	Included verbatim
<b>Pause</b>	One dash (-) for each one second pause
<b>Stutter or falter</b>	Partial word included for example, "and he sor., he tells us some of his story"
<b>Repetition</b>	Repeated word included
<b>Minimal responses</b>	Included for example, "um", "ah"
<b>Minimal positive responses</b>	Included for example, "mmm", "mmhmm"
<b>Minimal negative responses</b>	Included for example, "nuh uh"
<b>Interjections and inaudible sections</b>	Included in square brackets for example, [coughs], [inaudible]
<b>Section of original transcript omitted</b>	Indicated by ellipses (...)
<b>Speaker emphasis</b>	Word or phrase <i>italicised</i>
<b>Speaker interrupted</b>	Indicated by forward slash (/)

Audit checks, which involved replaying each interview and editing the transcript for accuracy, were conducted by the researcher within a week of completing each transcript. A signification portion of the interview transcript was sent by e-mail to the interviewee for comment. This served multiple purposes, including the verification of the content of that interview and to enable the participant to provide further information about points they made. These transcripts were sent with questions about unintelligible parts of the recording or a phrase that required further explanation. Once the findings section of the project was in a draft form it was sent to participants again and any comments or insights they had on the interpretations of the interview data were considered and some were incorporated into that section of the thesis. All respondents indicated that they were satisfied with the accuracy of the transcript, with only one participant sending additional information to add to their transcript.

The interview data are explored in Chapter 4 and serve the purpose of addressing the research question regarding pre-service teachers' interpretations of the intentions behind the introduction of the cross-curriculum priority.

### **3.3.2 Data collection via the Australian Curriculum**

The written content of *the Australian Curriculum* website selected for analysis was chosen according to a simple criterion: content which explicitly referred to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, students, or perspectives. This content includes the overview of the three cross-curriculum priorities, the description of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures priority, the results of searches for the terms *Aboriginal* and *Torres* within the part of the curriculum that outlines content to be taught, and the 'Student diversity' section of the website.

The Australian Curriculum is publically available online. At the time of writing, the curriculum had been updated nine times since the initial release on 8 December 2010 and the website design underwent structural and cosmetic changes part way through 2014. At the time of writing, ACARA had developed and published the Foundation-Year 10 (F-10) curricula for English, Mathematics, Science, History, and Geography, and over a dozen senior secondary subjects. For each Key Learning Area (KLA) in the years F-10 the following information is provided:

- a rationale and a set of aims,
- an overview of how the learning area is organised,
- year level descriptions,
- content descriptions (knowledge, understanding and skills) specifying what teachers are expected to teach,
- content elaborations to provide additional clarity by way of illustrative examples only,
- achievement standards that describe the quality of learning (the depth of understanding and sophistication of skill) expected of students at points in their schooling,
- annotated student work samples that illustrate the achievement standard at each year level, and
- a glossary to support consistent understanding of terms used. (ACARA, 2012)

The function of *year level descriptions* differs across the KLAs, but they generally provide an overview of the year's study, emphasising the interconnectedness of the various strands (such as language, literature, and literacy in the *Australian Curriculum: English*), and providing context for that year's focus (e.g. the study of a particular period and place in the *Australian Curriculum: History*). The *content descriptions* describe the content that must be taught and assessed by the end of each year level. While various themes and/or concepts may be repeated at increasing levels of complexity across multiple year levels (e.g., "Respond to and pose questions, and make predictions about familiar objects and events" in years 1 and 2 in the *Australia Curriculum: Science*), the contexts and topics in the content descriptions are unique to each year level (e.g., "Connect number names, numerals and quantities, including zero, initially up to 10 and then beyond" in the *Australian Curriculum: Mathematics*).

*Elaborations* are included with each content description to “illustrate and exemplify content and assist teachers to develop a common understanding of the content descriptions. They are not intended to be comprehensive content points that all students need to be taught”

(ACARA, 2013, para. 15). Finally, the *achievement standards* describe the expected depth of understanding for a year level. The achievement standards and content descriptions are closely connected, with the former summarising the latter as statements of expected learning.

Two searches of the *Australian Curriculum* website were conducted, the first for ‘Aboriginal’ and the second for ‘Torres’. The two terms were searched for separately in order to retrieve the highest number of results; this was the result of noting that the curriculum contained a range of combinations of the terms (e.g., Aboriginal *or* Torres Strait; Aboriginal *and* Torres Strait). Each search was conducted with no filters initially, the number of results was recorded, then the search was filtered by each curriculum element, and the results were read prior to being recorded. ‘Indigenous’ was also searched for with 22 results produced, with no required elements or elaborations besides those that suggested ‘Indigenous topics’ as one example of several possible topics to study.

The idea to include an analysis of visual elements of the *Australian Curriculum* website arose during research for the pre-service History curriculum and pedagogy course I taught within a pre-service Bachelor of Education program at the University of Southern Queensland. I watched a video on the website entitled ‘An introduction to the development of the *Australian Curriculum: History*’ and was surprised by what I saw as very Eurocentric content on the title screen, especially considering the debates in the media at the time around a perceived dearth of European history in that curriculum compared to the glut of Aboriginal and ‘other’ history reported by some conservative commentators (Donnelly, 2011; Berg, 2010). The four original introductory videos (F-10 English, History, Mathematics, Science)

were originally selected for analysis, and those that were uploaded to the site during the period this project was underway were subsequently analysed.

### 3.3.3 Data collection via curriculum development documents

The initial stage of data collection related to the curriculum development documents involved the selection and critical reading of publications related to the development and implementation of the *Australian Curriculum*. I had become familiar with some of these documents a secondary school teacher working to facilitate the transition from a state based curriculum to the national curriculum. Reading various NCB and ACARA documents, I had noticed in passing that the latter often stated that the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008) was a foundational document in the development of the *Australian Curriculum*.

The first block of text within the *Melbourne Declaration* contains statements about values which are offered *a priori* despite representing, to my mind, a fairly specific point of view. My reaction to the preamble of the *Melbourne Declaration* resulted in part from a disinclination to accept broad axiological statements made on behalf of over 21 million people<sup>3</sup> as being representative of that population's values. My understanding of historical and contemporary issues related to race and nation also raised questions for me about the value of a *diverse* but *socially cohesive* nation which was reminiscent of, if not assimilationist, at least integrationist discourse (Hage, 1998; Kidd, 1997). Since both assimilation and integration tend to require minorities to surrender their cultures while leaving the majority largely unaffected, these concepts were, and continue to be, problematic for me. Since this document's preamble was very clearly designed to frame Australia's educational goals within a context of a competitive global economy, the relationship between the 'social' and 'economic' aspects of the document struck me as being worthy of further

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<sup>3</sup> The population of Australia at the time of writing.

investigation. On page 15 of the *Melbourne Declaration* the authors state that the *Federalist Paper 2: Future of Schooling in Australia* and the United Kingdom's *National Curriculum* were particularly influential documents in the development of the *Melbourne Declaration*. Since there was a clear and explicit connection between the *Australian Curriculum*, the *Melbourne Declaration*, the *Federalist Paper 2* and the UK curriculum, it seemed logical to investigate the genealogy of the *Australian Curriculum* via documents that were similarly connected. Consequently, when I came across explicit reference to a particular document that had preceded any current one, or where the authors explicitly stated that another document had been particularly influential, that document too was added to the corpus.

This project was originally intended to involve interviews with curriculum authors and members of curriculum advisory groups. My lack of success securing interviews with members of these groups (See Appendix A) led me to seek an alternative data source.

Consequently, I decided to submit a Freedom of Information request to ACARA, which was submitted in early April 2013 seeking:

- All memos that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
- Minutes of all meetings that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.
- All internal documents that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, Indigenous perspectives, or a variation thereof.

An e-mail from the Senior Project Officer – Legal and Compliance requesting a phone conversation to discuss the scope of my request was received several days after the original request was made. The following text is taken from my research diary.

10 April 2013

Basically they are going to recommend a practical refusal because of the wide scope of my request. After discussing what I want (documents and guides regarding the purpose of the ccp, records of the ccp purpose being interpreted

from 2008→) they said we'll go back and forth via e-mails for the next few weeks until the final form of the request is decided upon, then the documents will be sent out 30 days later. An informative and encouraging conversation.

The initial decision letter from ACARA stated that the “request would substantially and unreasonably divert the resources of ACARA from its other operations: s24AA(1)(a)(1) of the FOI Act” (Robert Randall, personal communication, April 18 2013, see Appendix C).

During the next two months the Senior Project Officer and I engaged in negotiations by e-mail correspondence in an attempt to narrow the scope of the FOI request. On one occasion during the consultation process, the Senior Project Officer sent Web links to publically available documents that he believed addressed the part of the request related to the rationale behind the inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority. The suggestion that the public documents addressed this part of the FOI request was one I rejected, and negotiations continued. In early June the Senior Project Officer sought confirmation that the scope of the FOI request involved:

- Non-public documents that explain the rationale for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority; and
- Documents regarding a learning area in the *Australian Curriculum* that demonstrates how the rationale for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cross-curriculum priority is interpreted.

The e-mail also contained a request that I confirm whether two sets of documents (guidelines for curriculum authors, and NCB minutes) would satisfy my request. Since part of this project was to interpret implicit as well as explicit intentions behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority, I asked to be provided with documents that referred to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures even if they did not explicitly state what the rationale was behind it. The response to this request maintained that the scope was still too broad and another practical refusal would likely result. Consequently, I agreed to the phrasing of the FOI request suggested by the Senior Project Officer and to having that request filled by the documents discussed in Chapter 5 (see Appendix C for more details).

### 3.4 Data analysis techniques

Critical hermeneutic research aims to make connections between texts and the context in which they are created in order to present an interpretation of the meaning of those texts (Butler, 1998; Prasad & Mir, 2002). In recognition of the fact that all components of this study are deeply influenced by social, cultural and historical contexts, I have sought to make some of these influences explicit. All data collected from texts were not simply analysed as “abstracted, formal entities” but as data emanating from specific socio-historical contexts (Prasad & Mir, 2002, p. 96). Data collection and analysis processes comprised the following four steps, with the final step being the focus of Chapter 6:

1. Choosing and ‘reading’ the texts (this step was repeated due to inclusion of both visual and written ‘curriculum’ texts, and written ‘curriculum development’ texts)
2. Considering and exploring the context relevant to the text.
3. Making connections between *context* and *text*.
4. Analysing these interpretations via theory (adapted from Prasad & Mir, 2002).

Some hermeneutic researchers reject the notion that authors’ intentions are important, can be interpreted, or can even be known by the author themselves (Prasad & Mir, 2002). This point could suggest fundamental methodological issues for this study which explores the intentions underpinning a curriculum initiative. However, this study synthesises apparent intentions communicated through curriculum and related documents, highlights intentions which were explicit but which I interpreted as influential, and the ways in which pre-service teachers have interpreted the intentions of the curriculum authors. As indicated in Chapter 2, I have not sought to definitively prove that I know what the curriculum authors’ intentions were when including the priority, nor do I believe that these intentions can accurately predict the outcomes of that curriculum’s enactment. However, I do not accept that they can be

summarily dismissed as unimportant. Gadamer (1975) asserts that efforts to understand a person's creations by seeking to interpret their intentions is futile. I have approached this study, however, according to a belief that at the least, there is a need to recognise the interplay of author, interpreter and broader context, which is what I have sought to describe in this thesis.

### **3.4.1 Analysing pre-service teacher surveys and interviews**

Analyses of surveys and interviews drew on largely inductive processes, with themes emerging during my initial engagement with the data (for instance, during the conducting of interviews or scanning the survey responses as they were submitted), during a closer reading of survey responses prior to conducting an interview, as transcription proceeded, and then during a focussed, iterative coding process. Srivastava and Hopwood (2009) have developed a framework that requires an acknowledgement of the role of the researcher in the analysis process and enables focussed attention on research questions while remaining open to emerging themes. The framework consists of three key questions that are adapted and extended when asked of specific data:

Q1: What are the data telling me? (Explicitly engaging with theoretical, subjective, ontological, epistemological, and field understandings)

Q2: What is it I want to know? (According to research objectives, questions, and theoretical points of interest)

Q3: What is the dialectical relationship between what the data are telling me and what I want to know? (Refining the focus and linking back to research questions)

(Srivastava & Hopwood, 2009, p. 78).

The first of these questions was asked of the data until no new themes or insights emerged.

The process was then repeated with the second and third questions.

Several initial codes were developed from the main research topic (the intentions behind the inclusion of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority). Two of those codes were phrased as questions (‘What is the intended outcome?’ and ‘Who is the intended recipient?’) and entered into NVivo10 as major nodes (see Figure 5). Additional themes emerged during the interview and transcription process, and again during audit checks of the interview transcripts. As these themes were identified, child nodes were created under the question-based parent nodes. The responses to the survey and interviews were broadly analysed according to a pre-service teacher’s original statement regarding intent, the ultimate goal they believed the authors of the priority were aiming for, and the intended recipients of benefits which were expected from the priority.

NVivo10 contains a function which enables researchers to create relationship nodes that connect two existing codes in order to

describe either a one way, associative or symmetrical relationship. Once data was sorted into nodes, I started to code the relationships between nodes and the topic under study (rather than reading and coding whole transcripts). Relationships that were particularly obvious to me, due to the explicit manner in which they were described by respondents, were entered into NVivo10. When I started coding data from the ‘Addressing past and present wrongdoing’ node, however, I found the complexity of interview responses within that node to be



Figure 5. Examples of thematic codes in NVivo10.

substantial. The complexity resulted from multiple (often incompatible) interpretations of core concepts such as ‘culture’ and ‘perspectives’, discussions around individual and systemic racism, contradictions in respondents’ statements, and the changes and developments of respondents’ interpretations of the cross-curriculum priority and associated topics during the course of the interview. The analysis of chunks of data at that stage of the analysis process meant that I was unable to encapsulate a cohesive, overarching narrative of each interview. I realised that the continuation of systematic but piecemeal data analysis was not a process that could facilitate the most accurate interpretation of the interview responses. Consequently, I read through each interview transcript again and added annotations to every paragraph (excluding those that related to introductions and the ending of the interview) (see

were relevant to him, you know even things like painting his flag, the Aboriginal flag and um yeah he was all excited about that, so yeah it's good having the focus um for NAIDOC week and other such occasions but trying to um bring that in and integrate it throughout the whole year as well, will really help to engage students like him and others to really feel the relevance, um which obviously when you've got kids engaged it helps them learn.

]Sure, and so that's something that you mentioned in the survey that um, that idea of making the content or the perspectives more relevant to your students, um, is that something that you think is the intention of ACARA? – Is that why you think they've included it in there?

[Um – it's entirely possible that that's one reason, because surely one of their aims would be to try and make the curriculum relevant to all students. Um I think one of the other reasons they've included it would be simply to educate other people about um the different cultures and that one's such a relevant culture because it's where we live, um about the different cultures, the different heritages um about what Aboriginal people *did* go through so that um there is

Annotations	
term	Content
1	Personal experience (prac) NAIDOC prep -> Indigenous boy excited by activities. Engage Indigenous students through relevance. Leads to helping them learn
2	Reiterates CCPs for relevance
3	Educate non-Indigenous people about different cultures and what Aboriginal people went through Leads to understanding of differences and where they're coming from Leads to reduction of fear which comes from lack of understanding
4	Understanding the past Leads to understanding Aboriginal people today Leads to reduction of racism and overgeneralisations
5	Reiterates past's impact on people today

Figure 6. Annotations added to transcript section in NVivo10.

Figure 6). This was done with the expectation that a more complete picture of each interviewee’s response would allow me to identify complexities and development of thinking throughout each interview, rather than within the nodes themselves. Once these narratives were annotated, thematic analysis and coding of smaller chunks of data recommenced.

During the annotation of whole transcripts, I noted a lack of explicit reference to the intentions of the curriculum authors. Instead, interviewees spoke primarily about how they *interpreted* the intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority. When I noticed this I was

concerned that the interviewees and I had not focussed explicitly enough on the authorship of the cross-curriculum priority, and therefore the transcripts did not reveal interviewees' interpretations of those authors' intentions. Consequently, I added another node in NVivo in order to code those responses in which interviewees explicitly referred to the intentions of (who they perceived to be) the curriculum authors. My intention was to divide responses according to whether they were explicit references to ACARA's intentions or interviewees own beliefs and knowledge. Upon reflection on the purpose of the survey, interviews, and this section of the project, I realised that whether interviewees were referring to *ACARA's* intentions or *their own interpretations* of the intentions underpinning the cross-curriculum priority was not cause for major concern. The purpose of the interviews was to hear and represent how pre-service teachers were interpreting the intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority. If some interviewees drew upon their *knowledge or beliefs* about initiatives like the cross-curriculum priority, rather than what they believed to be the curriculum authors' intentions, that was important in itself and provided a theme to be reported.

### **3.4.2 Analysing the Australian Curriculum and curriculum development documents**

'Reading' the visual components of the *Australian Curriculum* proceeded according to a Barthesian model in which *linguistic, coded iconic* and *uncoded iconic messages* were identified and analysed (Barthes, 1977). Barthes (1977) maintained that signifiers within coded iconic messages, (collections of 'signs' as opposed to the literal messages communicated by the uncoded iconic), can be read by those who have knowledge of a culture (for example, a sandstone situated building behind a person appearing as a university professor will often be associated with education). Barthes stresses that constructed images

cannot contain literal meaning alone. The analysis of *Australian Curriculum* videos was consequently conducted with the view that these public ‘texts’ are powerful communicators of a particular message (Foss, 2004; Van Leeuwen, 1993). McGee (1980, p. 427) maintained that ideology needs to be communicated in order to be effective, so political documents and the terminology utilised within them can be analysed in order to reveal “interpenetrating systems or ‘structures’ of public motives”. Semiotic features of these videos were identified and analysed in order to identify the ideological messages that are communicated non-verbally (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006; Van Leeuwen, 2006).

Data collected from curriculum development documents were considered in light of the social, political and economic context in which they were developed. The contextual picture is built up around the documentary analysis in a somewhat literal sense in the latter part of Chapter 5. Editorial cartoons from 2004-2010 are included Chapter 5 in order to represent a range of contextual issues that provide a partial backdrop to the development of the *Australian Curriculum*. The recurring themes that emerged from the document analysis, such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, issues, and people; the economy; and education, guided my selection of cartoons (Townsend, McDonald, & Esders, 2008). To further refine the selection of media, historical and contemporary themes or events that were mentioned by interviewed pre-service teachers (for example, the Prime Minister’s apology to members of the Stolen Generations) are visually represented in Chapter 5. All cartoons were selected from the National Museum of Australia’s *Behind the Lines* archives. Editorial cartoons were selected because of their contribution “to constructive debate about the political issues that affect the general public” (Townsend et al., 2008, p. 3) and their capacity to “condense the meaning of events, personas and actions into tableaux that encourage people to think (Edwards & Ware, 2005, as cited in Townsend et al., 2008, p. 3).

Each curriculum development document was approached using strategies applicable to critical discourse and critical hermeneutic analyses (Fairclough, 2003; Prasad & Mir, 2002). Discourse analysis is a broad term that can be used to refer to a variety of research methods that facilitate the uncovering, explanation or description of various aspects of written or spoken communication (Paltridge, 2006). This thesis employs two overlapping approaches to analysing text and interview data: critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 2003) and critical hermeneutic analysis (Prasad & Mir, 2002). Each of these approaches provide tools with which to highlight both the explicit meaning of texts but also serve to enable exposure of less obvious elements of discourse, such as ideologies.

Fairclough's critical discourse analysis (CDA) requires that discourse is understood and analysed as the product of "three elements: social practice, discursive practice (text production, distribution and consumption), and text" (2010, p. 59). As such, the analysis of selected texts and images involved various steps, with a close reading of each artefact at a word and sentence level occurring at the same time as social and discursive practices were considered. At the text level, the specific terminology of a document was focused upon, with phrasing analysed as a means of understanding power relationships between identified stakeholders within a text, and the hierarchies of ideas and concepts (Fairclough, 1989; Gee, 2011). Of particular interest were those relationships and concepts that are presented as universally understood, common sense things that do not require explanation or justification (Fairclough, 1989). These instances of 'common sense' were analysed with reference to the broader social, political and economic context within which the documents were created, and into which those documents were being disseminated.

Texts were read in full in order to identify genre and purpose, and then my impressions of these were recorded. Next, a closer reading of each document was carried out;

each instance of the following words or phrases were highlighted and analysed in the context of the whole document: *Aboriginal*, *Torres Strait Islander*, *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander*, *Indigenous*. I then focused on the immediate context of each of these words and phrases, identifying themes that emerged around them. These themes were highlighted with different colours, and coded in NVivo. Themes that were repeated throughout the curriculum documents were noted as potential indicators of dominant narratives that might indicate a common ideological position (Fairclough, 1992; McGee, 1980). Recurring themes, such as human capital and economic competition, were further analysed as ideographs (McGee, 1980) when they were presented as ‘common sense’ concepts (Fairclough, 1992) that were presented by document authors as universally understood and not warranting explanation or justification.

Common sense terms were analysed as *ideographs* in order to understand the meaning of those terms as constructed within the context of each document (McGee, 1980; Fairclough, 1989). McGee (1980) advocated a focus on the socially and politically powerful concepts that make ideologies apparent within a text by identifying contested concepts that are presented by authors as unproblematic. Terms such as *development* and *prosperity* are largely understood by the public as being positive aspects of society (McGee, 1980, p. 6). They can be used to great effect by policy authors because “it is presumed that human beings will react predictably and automatically” (McGee, 1980, p. 6) despite the vague way in which such terms are commonly understood. Although ideographic analysis did not form a significant part of the final written component this thesis, the principles underpinning McGee’s work were influential, and ideographs were identified and explored where relevant.

Huckin (2002a) has suggested approaching texts with a view to understanding ‘higher-level concepts’ such as ideologies and interests that present themselves upon a critical

reading. In order to uncover these deeper meanings, textual silences need to be examined alongside that which is explicitly stated in a text. The following questions guided my reading of curriculum development texts, specifically my attempts to establish whether particular silences were manipulative (intentionally deceiving or misleading readers to the advantage of the author/s):

Do these textual silences form an ideological pattern? How so? Who wrote the text? How much did he or she likely know about the topic? What socio-political pressures might the writer have been subjected to? In what way might he or she benefit from the textual silences? Are the textual silences manipulative? Is there anything else in the text that supports this assessment? (Huckin, 2002b, pp. 356-7)

The result of my analyses of curriculum development documents are presented in the latter part of Chapter 5.

### **3.5 Applying Critical Race Theory to the conclusions**

In Chapter 6, the three research questions are revisited and answered by drawing upon the findings presented in the thesis. In order to answer the final research question about the significance of the intentions underpinning the priority, CRT tools are utilised to further consider the preceding data. In particular, the interpretation of the data by applying the principles of interest convergence theory from a racial realist position is undertaken. The utility of a CRT methodology for the analysis of education initiatives is emphasised, particularly for those scholars seeking an alternative approach to education research that does not require faith in the inherent righteousness of current institutions.

## **Chapter 4: How the intentions driving the cross-curriculum priority were interpreted by final year pre-service teachers**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter addresses one research question, “What intentions do future educators believe underpin the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?” and one data set (pre-service teacher survey and subsequent interview responses). Some broad findings that arose from the survey responses are presented in Section 4.2 in order to provide an overall account of the survey’s outcomes. Survey data are also included at the start of each subsequent section and provide a broad overview prior to the rich interview data. Interviews conducted with 26 survey respondents provide the primary data drawn upon in this chapter, with excerpts from most interviews<sup>1</sup> presented in order to provide insight into the themes that emerged during discussions with each participant.

Interview responses are presented under thematic headings. Each excerpt has been selected because of the indicative theme or stance it represents, its relevance to the main research question and the insight it provides in light of the larger data set.

### **4.2 Responses to the main question: An overview of survey and interview responses**

All but one survey respondent submitted at least a tentative guess about the intentions behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority in the *Australian Curriculum*. These statements suggested various degrees of confidence about respondents’ interpretations of the intentions behind the priority. The level of certainty ranged from guesses, such as:

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<sup>1</sup> One extract was excluded as the participant was not a final year pre-service teacher, and another participant’s interview data repeated themes described throughout this chapter, without adding new information.

I honestly have not read it so am not informed. I guess it is to include a more comprehensive and inclusive picture of our past. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 65)

I don't really know, I haven't looked at it, and the classes that we attend have not mentioned this particular aspect of the curriculum, yet. My guess: in an effort to include Aboriginal [people] and Torres Strait Islanders in the curriculum, i.e. include aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders culture[s] etc., into the curriculum which strives for a more inclusive environment. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 18)

through to an apparent confidence in their interpretations, as indicated in the following:

The idea of incorporating humanities within the Australian curriculum is to provide students a full understanding of Australia's history (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures) right from the beginning.

There are several main intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures'. Firstly, the cross-curriculum priority aims at introducing students from the dominant, often Caucasian Australian, culture to an alternate historical perspective which is integral to understanding our country's history and past. Secondly, the priority can help to integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives into other curriculum areas such as Science, Art, English and S&E [Society and Environment]. Many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are from completely different cultural contexts which can lead to misunderstandings or difficult obstacles within a classroom. Ideally the cross-curriculum priority should aim to explain some of these misunderstandings and aid children from different cultures in understanding multiple perspectives and learn about the benefits (not disadvantages) to being Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and the varying knowledge that those cultures can bring to an average Australian classroom. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 2)

Guilt that it has never been taught properly before. Overkill as to the need for it now. Guilt over there not being proper history units dedicated to it that you think teachers will follow through on. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 80)

Views regarding the intentions behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority were consistent across the survey and interviews. The pre-service teacher participants (survey respondents and interviewees,  $N=90$ ) suggested that the cross-curriculum priority was developed to achieve the following:

- to increase knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures;
- to remedy past Eurocentric curricula;

- to atone for past acts of institutional and individual racism;
- to increase respect for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures and people;
- to promote a sense of inclusion within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students;
- to reduce social, educational and economic inequality; and
- for political gain by governments.

Just over half ( $n=47$ ) of the survey respondents explicitly stated at least one possible intended beneficiary or target of the cross-curriculum priority: Almost one third of respondents ( $n=28$ ) to the survey explicitly stated that the intended beneficiaries of the cross-curriculum priority were likely to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students or Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people more broadly (just under half of those respondents ( $n=12$ ) indicated that the cross-curriculum priority was designed to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people exclusively). Interestingly, 19 respondents explicitly mentioned possible beneficiaries other than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to the exclusion of the latter, with examples including non-Indigenous students, non-Indigenous teachers, and governments. These topics were the general themes to emerge from the surveys and interviews.

## **4.3 Competing intentions and interests**

### **4.3.1 An overview of survey and interview responses**

In several survey responses and the majority of interviews, participants identified conflicts of a professional, personal or political nature that had arisen, or might arise, during endeavours to implement the cross-curriculum priority. Although the pre-service teacher participants generally reported support for the idea of the cross-curriculum priority,

competition between the initiative and other aspects of teaching were thought likely to factor in its success (or failure).

Optimistically, I'd like to think that it is a form of governmental admission that the people of [Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander] origin have been treated unjustly and unfairly under European rule and this is an attempt in some small way to try and set history straight for the next generation. The past can't be changed, but at least bringing it up in the curriculum may empower the next generation to recognise poor policy making before it is implemented. Pessimistically, I fear that many teachers will be too afraid of saying the wrong thing and will teach the content in a superficial manner. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 84)

One of the most prominent predictions among interviewees regarding the likely success of the cross-curriculum priority related to its ability to compete for teachers' time. Associated with this issue were factors interviewees thought would make the priority more appealing to teachers: access to resources designed to facilitate implementation of the priority, professional development around the initiative, and a clear understanding of how it relates to the KLAs. A lack of these incentives, interviewees feared, would result in teachers being unconvinced of the worthwhileness of the priority's integration. While these issues raised by interviewees were not often explicitly stated in survey responses, some respondents were concerned that the (perceived) good intentions behind the priority would not be realised due to a lack of stakeholder commitment:

By including this cross-curriculum priority in the Australian Curriculum, it appears that the government wants us to value Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures more than we historically have, to foster understanding between cultures, and to promote reconciliation between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Australians. This being noted, I also recognise that the government may have felt pressured to include this cross-curriculum priority due to the many public protests and debates held over time, which have highlighted multiple perspectives on different events and issues. Consequently, there is a chance that the government may care more about 'being seen to do the right thing' by including this priority, than they really care about valuing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, fostering healthy relationships and promoting reconciliation. I hope I am incorrect in this regard. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 43)

The Australian Curriculum has been developed during a Labor Government, therefore, I believe it is part of Labor Government policy to extend token gestures to the [I]ndigenous population through policies like the national

apology and inclusion of this cross-curriculum priority. I do not believe it will have any meaningful benefits for [I]ndigenous or non-[I]ndigenous students and will probably just annoy teachers. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 50)

The conflicts identified by interviewees ranged from i) *epistemological*, with Mel, for example, discussing differences between indigenous peoples' and 'Western' peoples' ways of knowing and interacting; ii) *ideological*, with Christine, for example, advocating for a 'colour-blind' pedagogy despite having knowledge of such policies' failures in the past; iii) *professional*, with Alyssa, for example, maintaining a staunch view on the work teachers should engage in that was at odds with her interpretation of intent behind the cross-curriculum priority; and iv) *pedagogical*, with Laura, for example, being committed to the implementation of the priority but expecting possible failure to do so due to the curriculum choices she might make as a teacher in response to community pressure. The geographical scope of this theme is similarly broad, with Alyssa speaking of globally relevant knowledge and skills, Alfred speaking of the national and state based politics that might be driving the initiative, Esther and Mel concerned about a globalised testing regime likely impact on Australian education priorities, and Hasana referring to the somewhat abstracted approach to teaching Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in her local community.

### **4.3.2 The interviewees discuss competing intentions and interests**

#### ***Alyssa***

After Alyssa told me that she had been up late working on an assignment that required her to demonstrate how she understands and implements the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) standards for graduate teachers (Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership, 2014), she said that she supported the requirement that students study the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. However, she needed some clarification about the topic of the interview,

...When you say that they included that, because my area is teaching is in mathematics and science so it's not in history or in culture...is it inclusion of the culture in *every*, across all the KLAs, or is it just in history and culture?

When I explained that the cross-curriculum priority did indeed need to be included in each KLA, Alyssa expressed significant concern – concern that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures were to be included in Mathematics and Science, and concern that she was unaware of this curriculum requirement.

I'm trying to see how it can come in. For example is it their way of counting? Or their way of - - - I don't understand *how* – I don't see at this point...a reason that will require that that culture is inputted in mathematics. At this point, sorry I am really struggling to think how that can be in mathematics. How can that be?... offhand I do not, I cannot see the usefulness of putting that in. No, I do not think it should be there because that's curriculum; maybe we as teachers can do some changes or modification in the pedagogy and creating the teaching and learning experiences in the classroom. Doing those things, but not touching the curriculum...

Since Alyssa hadn't realised that teachers were expected to implement the cross-curriculum priorities in all subjects, she attempted to determine the intentions behind the initiative as we spoke but failed to draw a firm conclusion. Struggling to establish a possible reason for the priority's implementation, Alyssa referred to the AITSL standard "Know your students and how they learn", but rejected this guess because she understood the standard to relate to pedagogy, and the cross-curriculum priority relates to content. During this part of the interview a determination to understand ACARA's reasoning was evident, with Alyssa taking time to pause and think about the issue, to ask herself questions and to test out possible answers to her questions.

A significant issue that Alyssa identified as hindering her ability to understand the intentions behind the initiative was a lack of awareness of a body of literature that suggests that Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples' histories and cultures can contribute new knowledge to the disciplines of Mathematics or Science. This was particularly disturbing to Alyssa, who considered the requirements of the *Australian Curriculum: Mathematics* to be of

a higher standard than the previous state-based curriculum, and expected those standards to drop with the introduction of content related to the priority. Alyssa made a distinction between “the priorities part” and “the real contents of what to teach”.

Failing to understand the rationale behind the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the Mathematics curriculum, or any potentially worthwhile outcomes for students, Alyssa switched her perspective from that of a pre-service teacher to a mother:

*I wouldn't want my children to learn things that will not really be helpful to them. When they become adults and they become competitive and they go to the university and then become complete adults, I don't want them to be learning... something that will isolate them from the rest of the world... I don't like us to be concentrating *too much*, focussing too much on the tradition or on the differences... the content should not be touched unless the whole world or the whole body of experts say so.*

The Australia-centric nature of the priority starkly contrasted with the content expected to contribute to their success in a competitive global education and economic system.

At several points during the interview Alyssa reiterated her willingness to learn more about the intentions behind the priority. She also maintained a strong support for the *Australian Curriculum* as a whole, and for the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures somewhere in the curriculum, just not in Mathematics and Science. As much as she tried, Alyssa was at a loss to comprehend what ACARA could possibly have hoped to achieve with the priority. While unable to establish a clear idea of what the priority required of teachers, it was evident that Alyssa was far more comfortable with subtle adjustments in practice in order to better personalise students' learning experiences, than she was with the introduction of *content* related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Such an imposition was clearly unacceptable to Alyssa, who prophesised a diminishing of curriculum quality should it occur.

## *Laura*

Laura asserted that a key driver behind increased attention on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' outcomes was shame:

Australia wants to have this impressive education standards and be a major player on the world stage, the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are still, generally, at great educational disadvantage and it's one of our sort of terrible for human rights really, that you can still live in the same country in Australia, and because of your background, you are very likely to not experience educational success, or not achieve what we would consider skills that are necessary for life, you know, your basic reading, writing, Maths which affects your whole life as we know, education's really important. So the fact that...the general public's really interested and want to be proud in our system...so I think maybe putting the um the perspectives the history and the culture in is one way that they're maybe trying to address that.

The disparities between achievements levels of Indigenous and non-Indigenous students Laura saw exposed by PISA and NAPLAN had resulted in an increased interest in seeing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' education outcomes improve. The connection Laura made between outcomes and the cross-curriculum priority was one reiterated during the interviews: More Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content was expected to result in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students being more engaged in school.

Despite being hopeful about the potential outcomes of the cross-curriculum priority and her own commitment to the initiative, Laura expected several factors to negatively impact its implementation. Teacher training would likely be vital to its success she suggested, given that practising teachers have said to her that nothing really needs to change with the shift to the *Australian Curriculum*, "you just write a different outcome number under [classroom activities and assessment]". Another issue she saw as likely to influence the extent to which the cross-curriculum priority is included, is the amount of assessed components of the curriculum.

For me though, I mean again, this is just my classroom and I haven't had to look through my own NAPLAN results yet, but, I'd personally rather have a fuller curriculum and less impressive test scores, but that's just me, you know,

I don't know about the parents that I'm going to have banging on my door asking about it [laughs], scoring and test practice so I, for me it would be *devastating* if your cross-curriculum priorities and all of your skills in relationships and communication and looking at different perspectives and critical thinking and all of those things, if they were lost I'd be so devastated.

Laura expected that the decision to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the *Australian Curriculum* was primarily an attempt to respond to a widespread desire to feel pride in the nation's education system. This collective sense of satisfaction could not be achieved without an increase of equity in the system, so Laura suggested that the priority could have been developed as part of a strategy to increase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' test results. Laura was not hopeful of widespread uptake of the initiative by teachers required to choose between assessed content and a non-assessed cross-curriculum priority.

### ***Alfred***

Despite seeing great value in the cross-curriculum priority, especially given his recent experience working as a chaplain in low-socioeconomic status schools, Alfred considered the initiative to be politically driven. He believed that the priority was intended to impress an electorate who, he maintained, want their government to appear to be contributing to reconciliation. Alfred also mentioned a desire by governments and organisations such as ACARA to convince Indigenous members of the public of their commitment to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the curriculum.

There's a whole bunch of reasons I think. First and foremost, it looks good politically. And I think that you know the, that governing body for the national body, you know whatever part looks good for them to be engaging in cultural awareness of Indigenous issues and things like that... I don't know who they're trying to target specifically but I think they're just showing the, like the community...thank you for...voting for us, this is what we're doing about Indigenous culture and this is how we're trying to deal with reconciliation.

Alfred suggested that the intended recipients of the curriculum initiative were likely to be Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, specifically in terms of the social indicators

he believed to be directly related to increased engagement with schooling, such as employment and diversion from the criminal justice system. The potential benefits for non-Indigenous students were a lot more difficult for Alfred to pinpoint given the lack of employment outcomes he could see the priority leading to.

Political point scoring was clearly the driver behind the cross-curriculum priority, according to Alfred, a result of which was an underdeveloped curriculum initiative unlikely to be able to compete with other content. The extent to which anything more than awareness raising could be achieved would be minimal, and Alfred did not believe that the content comprising the priority would be deemed valuable in a schooling culture that privileges transferrable knowledge and skills. Since he believed the intentions behind the priority to be cynical ones, Alfred considered likely outcomes to relate only to political promise keeping: Any pedagogical outcomes would be purely fortuitous.

### ***Christine***

A curriculum initiative with an explicit and exclusive focus on Indigenous cultures, and apparently designed *for* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, was problematic for Christine. This interpretation of the priority conflicted with Christine's desire for a world in which ethnicity does not matter, where there is no need to target school content to a particular cohort. Christine recognised that her idealism is inconsistent with her knowledge of Australian history, in which supposedly culturally *neutral* policies were actually culturally *specific* policies in disguise. The inconsistencies Christine saw in her own reaction to the priority would, she believed, be shared by other Australians.

Christine appeared to take the opportunity provided by the interview to speak on behalf of various group of people who might respond critically to the cross-curriculum priority. Several of the hypothetical reactions were akin to the one described above, whereby

a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander heritage would be off-putting for some members of the community. Another possible reaction related to a view of such policies as being a means by which politicians can gain popular support:

Yeah I mean I think if you're being cynical and you say well you know [then Prime Minister] Julia Gillard or someone gets up on the soap box and says 'look at all we've done for Aboriginal people, we've said "Sorry", we've done this, we've done that, we've even included it as part of the curriculum'. So I think the point I was trying to make is, you know, you can actually have it written in your curriculum but unless you're doing something, like unless it's really happening in the schools and it's actually effective and it's not just words on a paper, then it's really just for the government to say, 'yeah we did all this great stuff', but if it didn't actually happen in reality then what was the point of it?

Christine considered the improvement of educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to be the most likely intended consequence of the priority. Christine indicated that Indigenous students' knowledge has important gaps as a result of their (apparently homogeneous) culture that will need to be filled by teachers in order to improve student outcomes. Somewhat pessimistic about the potential outcomes of the initiative, Christine suggested that an increase in Indigenous students' grades resulting from the priority could be used by the Government to impress voters with the strides made in the curriculum on behalf of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Christine feared, however, that the priority would result in the alienation of people who might be "turned off" by "special treatment for different people", which I interpreted to mean that some non-Indigenous people might not appreciate the notion that Indigenous students might be in receipt of culturally relevant resources.

### ***Hasana***

Hasana began the interview by explaining some personal reasons why she values the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the curriculum.

...because my family background is that my mum is [from South America] so she came to Australia from overseas and she, when she came here we lived in

Brisbane and she had a lot of friends in the Murri community in Brisbane um so I was brought up quite often going on Land Rights marches and that kind of thing in that community a bit so it's an area that I feel fairly strongly about and I think that it's really important and I like that it's included in the curriculum...

The intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority were not something Hasana felt qualified to speak about, so spoke instead about what she *hoped* the intentions were, namely “reconciliation and less racism and just a more cohesive community, overall”.

At the time of the interview Hasana was living in a community with a very small number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In such towns, she expected, the cross-curriculum priority would largely be understood by students as an abstracted concept, rather than a tangible concern:

Like basically I'm still a white girl so I'm teaching it from a piece of paper, and it's not my experience...so I'm trying to do what I can and to say, 'I know this is out there and it's our history and I want everyone to be aware of it in my class, that we've got an Aboriginal history, and that its recent history and it's now as well'...but I'm only doing it from my point of view, so we still need to have connections with the community that's around.

Even before the priority could be utilised as a meaningful or superficial tool for engaging with the broader school community, Hasana, like many other interviewees, feared that it would fail to compete content with mandatory assessment and reporting requirements:

... I think it's something that's like a 'it would be good if we can but gee I'm really flat out busy this week and I just have to teach them this because next week I've got to assess it and then I've gotta do my report cards before week 7!' and so um, so don't think it's [exhalation] um – yeah, yeah, I think it can tend to be put into that 'it'd be good if we could'[laughs].

Hasana expressed admiration for the New Zealand education system as she had heard that Maori culture is thoroughly integrated into the curriculum well and is respected within the wider community as a result. The ‘normalisation’ of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures within Australian classrooms was a goal Hasana was committed to achieving.

While believing the goals of the priority to involve the advancement of reconciliation, social cohesion and the reduction of racism, Hasana expected that teachers will need to make a particular effort to find time to include it. Hassana suggested that various factors, including administrative pressures and perceived value placed on the priority in relation to other subjects, mean that the priority will only be implemented by a few committed teachers.

### *Mel*

At the time of the interview, Mel was teaching in an international school in a south-east Asian country and studying through an Australian university, having previously undergone teacher training in New Zealand<sup>2</sup>. During the interview Mel described a variety of assumptions she considered to be relevant to the intentions underpinning the cross-curriculum priority then suggested that there are several contradictions inherent to the initiative. Mel understood the priority to have been designed to facilitate the understanding and appreciation of ‘Indigenous ways of learning’, which she described as being fundamentally different from the ways of learning and doing that are currently valued in societies such as Australia. In order for the priority to be successful then, Mel expected that it would need to demonstrate the potential to develop marketable skills.

When asked to explain why she thought her views on the cross-curriculum priority changed over time from an initially negative response to a more favourable one (as she had indicated in her survey response) she said:

It seemed like a very token, a bit of a tokenism inside the standard and I sort of reacted to it in a negative way and then I thought, well I suppose the *only* way that you can begin something sometimes is through tokenism and then *from* that it starts coming into consciousness of teachers to actually take it into account. So I could, yeah I definitely did change.

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<sup>2</sup> Since Mel was working toward an Australian teaching qualification, a decision was made to include her interview data, despite her pre-existing teaching qualification from New Zealand.

Mel proposed that the priority came from good intentions involving the promotion of understanding and embracing Aboriginal ways of learning. A potential hurdle to the priority's success, she suggested, may be the strong vocational focus she described as existing in Australian schools. Mel maintained that the cross-curriculum priority may not be implemented thoroughly by teachers because it contradicts the competitiveness of this school culture.

...I'm reflecting on the times and comments people have made about Indigenous people...I feel like the cultures are not respected at present and there just seems really blanket – there's not even enough time to really get to know the cultures and it's not worth it because financially how are they going to, you know, get us anywhere, how is knowing the culture going to financially get us anywhere. It seems to come back to money or how it's going to benefit.

Despite identifying some fundamental concerns with the capacity of the current education system to genuinely integrate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of doing and knowing, Mel suggested that apparent conflicts in values need not exist. Viewed another way, she maintained, factors traditionally thought to be in opposition to one another might successfully coexist.

I think it's difficult sometimes when you have an education system that's quite business like and they're trying to churn kids out, that are going to work for businesses... working for some iPhone company or something ...then suddenly you've got these standards that come in that seem to *contradict* being that competitive business worker in the marketplace and you know I just think [the priority is] going to be one of the things that gets dropped out because I don't think it's in line, if you had to shoot a straight line to, in a student who's apparently successful in the Australian marketplace I suppose, that wouldn't really come into it.

While reconsidering her initially negative response to the perceived tokenistic gesture she saw in the cross-curriculum priority, Mel maintained the view that the priority was largely symbolic. Despite this, she sought to make connections between cultures she saw as existing dichotomously – 'Western culture' and 'Indigenous cultures'. As a result, Mel concluded that the priority could be implemented in such a

way that highlights the value of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and their relevance in the world of markets and business.

### *Esther*

Although dubious about the motivations behind the inclusion of the priority, Esther suggested that she still saw potential for social change to be facilitated from within the curriculum.

I'm quite cynical, I believe that many of the politicians are just ticking boxes, but you know sometimes you've just got to tick the boxes first and get in there and then it's the next generation that come up believing it and understanding it. Um ah oh god, I've just had a terrible, terrible analogy pop into my head [laughs] um there's this feminist commentator called Bettina Arndt... There's all that thing... how, husbands always want to have more marital relations than the wives do, and Bettina Arndt said 'look, just go with it, and if you, just, you know, say yes and go with it for your husband's sake and eventually you'll find you'll enjoy it'. [laughs]... I was just thinking of that because I think there's a big, there is an element of that, is that they're doing it because they have to, because post-Mabo, post-Apology, it's got to be done... because otherwise they're empty, the Apology is an empty apology, if you don't make reparation.

Like Mel, Esther was originally repelled by the tokenism they saw within the priority. Upon reflection, however, she thought that teachers would need to “just go with it” in order to find out whether or not it was worthwhile. The types of practices Esther expected to implement in order to address ACARA's requirements largely involved storytelling, critical thinking and the introduction of information related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, though perhaps only in a superficial manner. Ultimately, Esther saw the priority as facilitating educative processes that could put the sentiments of the Apology into practice by arresting ignorance and racism in schools.

### **4.3.3 Competing intentions concluded (for now...)**

The in-principle support of the cross-curriculum priority suggested by the majority of participants corresponds with findings from Moreton-Robinson et al.'s (2012, p. 144) pilot

study into pre-service teacher education, which reports that 100% of interviewed first and second year teachers “think it is important for all students to know Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander history, contemporary culture and languages”. Research has shown, however, that endorsement of curriculum initiatives alone is often insufficient to result in *non-core* curriculum components succeeding (Luke et al., 2012; Mooney et al., 2003). As Askell-Williams et al. (2012) note:

Initiatives that are considered to be appended to the recognised core curriculum suffer from perceptions that they are not essential, and have low status due to lack of teacher-ownership, and because such subjects are typically not examined to a set of standards (Shucksmith et al. 2005). As such, addendums are likely to be dropped when time pressures, costs, or skill limitations make their maintenance difficult. The alternative, namely, embedding the initiative in the regular curriculum, is a current aim of innovative curriculum designers across a number of fields. (pp. 433-4)

Although Askell-Williams et al.’s work suggests that the cross-curriculum priority is an embedded initiative so could be immune to the problems associated with ‘addendums’, the above interview extracts show that pre-service teachers do not consider the priorities to be embedded.

The assertion by Briant and Doherty (2012) that the economic reasons offered by curriculum authors to rationalise the implementation of the national curriculum were presented “unapologetically” was also borne out in many of my interviews. Pre-service teachers appear to be well aware that “curriculum reform [is] no less than a matter of national economic competitiveness” (Briant and Doherty, 2012, p. 53). The impact of competition between countries was raised by Laura, Alyssa, and Mel, with Laura connecting the educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students with Australia’s reputation globally. Mel and Alyssa emphasised the need for a curriculum to prepare students with the skills and knowledge to prosper in a globalised economy. The lack of perceived future academic or vocational benefit of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and

cultures to a broad range of students was recognised by Alyssa, Alfred and Mel as disadvantaging the cross-curriculum priority when in competition with other curriculum components; a prediction supported by Klenowski (2011), Briant and Doherty (2012) and Resnik (2009).

Although expressed through a rather crude analogy, Esther's thoughts on the potential benefits of including at least *some* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures may not be too far off the mark. Nakata et al. (2012) have maintained that the shallow level of critique usually facilitated in undergraduate Indigenous Studies is not ideal, but that,

simplistic critique, although a dangerous end point, provides an entry point for understanding the presence of other ways of viewing the world and one's position in it. It provides an entry point for understanding the erased and continuing Indigenous knowledge systems and societies. It also provides an entry point for understanding the political struggles of Indigenous people to exert some control over Indigenous pasts, present, and futures. Importantly it provides an entry point for understanding the relations between the history of Western philosophy and Enlightenment thinking, colonial expansion, colonial injustices and ongoing Indigenous grievance (p. 132).

While reassuring on one level, Nakata et al.'s suggestion that superficial understanding is "dangerous" underscores the potential impact competing demands on teachers are likely to have on the implementation of the priority. Without appropriate support and commitment to developing deep understandings of the content within the priority, students are at risk of exiting school with a level of understanding suitable as a starting point, but far from a desirable end goal.

## **4.4 Potential and progress**

### **4.4.1 An overview of survey and interview responses**

Although the survey respondents and interviewees often differed in their beliefs about what the intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority were or whether the initiative is likely to be successful, almost all participants suggested that the priority was indicative of

progress in, what could be broadly termed, race relations in Australia. The survey responses as a whole strongly conveyed the assumption that the cross-curriculum priority was an indicator of advancement and progress.

...It is there to promote understanding and appreciation of Indigenous culture and history for all students and is a step towards reconciliation... (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 88)

...As a nation it is not until we face up to the wrongs of the past that we will be able to move forward. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 60)

...I think that you can't move forward until you acknowledge the past, at least not in any way that is going to be productive and mutually satisfying to all parties... (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 41)

The first four extracts detailed in this section provide an insight into this aspect of the theme. Morgan, Victoria, Jonah and Maeve all maintained that the cross-curriculum priority was probably developed in an effort to reduce racism and inequality through an increase in knowledge. Justine, Amelia and Kerry also suggested that the initiative was a sign of the country making progress in race relations via incremental means. The focus of the following extracts is on interviewees' interpretations of the intended impact of the cross-curriculum priority either on individual students or on Australian society more generally.

#### **4.4.2 The interviewees discuss potential and progress**

##### ***Morgan***

Morgan asserted that the healing of the nation's trauma and the promotion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures would serve the interests of Australia as a whole. The priority would enable the country to mature and take a stand against injustice elsewhere without being charged with hypocrisy.

I think that it's just the horrors of our nation's history and dealing with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples really does mar a lot of great things that have happened, necessarily. And I think that for us to progress as a nation we need to heal those wounds...I think that change of mind-set is really going to affect how Australia moves forward. Because until we have our own culture at home sorted out, we can't really can't go abroad and start talking to

other cultures or especially criticising other cultures or...intervening in cultures that we see as detrimental to humanity and you know persecutions and wars and things like that.

Because the other two cross-curriculum priorities are not constrained by Australian boundaries, and since Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures sits alongside them, Morgan interpreted the cross-curriculum priority as being developed with a “global point of view in mind”. The focus on ‘culture’ in addition to ‘history’ suggested to Morgan that ACARA expected teachers to avoid deficit and solely historical approaches to teaching and learning about Indigenous topics.

While seeing huge potential for the priority, Morgan expressed a fear that the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures priority could be confined to the Humanities due to (what she described as) less obvious links between the priority, Mathematics and Science. Her opinion was that relevant resources and content could be found for those KLAs, but that teachers who were unfamiliar with the content associated with the cross-curriculum priority could view it as less relevant to subjects that have not historically contained Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

Morgan’s family history involved suppression of Aboriginality over multiple generations, and late discoveries of cultural and family heritage. Being an Aboriginal person with light skin provided Morgan with an insight into racist views that she hoped would enable students to “be more overt in their views in front of me than they would someone who may fit into their stereotype of an Aboriginal person”. Combined with the focus of the cross-curriculum priority resultant insight into her students’ views should, Morgan suggested, provide her with opportunities to address stereotyping in children, which would hopefully filter into their adulthood and have a positive impact within the broader society.

## *Victoria*

Discussing the excitement of an Aboriginal student at a professional experience<sup>3</sup> site during NAIDOC<sup>4</sup>, Victoria raised the possibility that the priority might have been designed to improve Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' learning outcomes via increased engagement. This had the potential, she suggested:

...to break that cycle and it it's hard, you don't wanna talk about it in negatives like that because...there are positives out there and you don't wanna *impose* those stereotypes on the kids, but the stats *show* that there are problems there, so you wanna try and help and so by um increasing engagement and relevance, and um, I would expect that they're trying to help break that cycle and keep the kids at school happy at school.

Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders may also benefit from a curriculum initiative with the potential to reduce ignorance and number of "racist people out there" in the non-Indigenous community. Victoria maintained that more knowledge of the past would be likely to lead non-Indigenous people to understand Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the present, again resulting in reduced racism.

Victoria looked through the curriculum during the interview and was surprised by the lack of detail regarding expected outcomes when compared to other elements of the curriculum.

Um, okay let's have a look [typing], well, if we got to the Australian Curriculum - - - - - let's see ah [typing] - - - we can look at - - the cross-curriculum priorities, and then 'organising ideas', and - - - - - yeah, it's a bit hard to - - - - a bit hard to see... With English and Maths and what not it's very easy to say 'yes you've achieved this and yes you haven't' or 'no you haven't'...it's a bit more, a bit more vague, 'cause it...has things like that 'the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many Language Groups' and that they' have sophisticated family and kinship structures', which is quite *broad*. So – I mean I, yeah it would be hard to say whether you've done that

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<sup>3</sup> Also referred to as 'prac' or 'practicum', professional experience is undertaken at various stages during pre-service teacher education. Pre-service teachers spend time in schools to gain teaching experience under the guidance of mentor teachers.

<sup>4</sup> An acronym for the National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee, NAIDOC is now associated with a week of events celebrating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's achievements, cultures and histories. Schools often mark NAIDOC week by holding events that might have an 'Indigenous theme', or at which Indigenous guests are invited to speak or facilitate activities.

sufficiently um, I mean you could touch on it and say ‘there you go, ticked that box’, um but have you actually achieved what they had in mind? Well, that’s a bit hard to tell, isn’t it?

Victoria expected that the lack of guidance around the priority was likely to impact on its implementation. Those teachers who “don’t wanna be doing it anyway” would be justified in simply paying “lip-service” to the content rather than facilitating meaningful engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures.

Intended to raise Indigenous students’ outcomes by increasing their engagement in lessons, Victoria suggested that the priority was also likely to have been introduced to reduce discrimination by increasing non-Indigenous students’ knowledge. Faith in such admirable intentions received a blow, however, when Victoria sought more information about the priority and found a distinct lack of guidance about ACARA’s expectations of teachers and learners. As a result, Victoria suggested that the priority was perhaps intended to affect teachers’ attitudes and rhetoric rather than their practices.

### ***Jonah***

Jonah described his recent professional experience site as a “high socio-economic... independent school, independent boy’s school and it’s predominantly white um, ah Anglo Australian with some Asian cultures, but there isn’t a huge Indigenous presence at the school”. Such a setting is where Jonah expected the incorporation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ‘perspectives’ to a particularly important role. When asked whether he interpreted *perspectives* and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as being interchangeable, Jonah quickly and clearly distinguished between the concepts. He suggested that transmission of content about Indigenous histories and cultures by non-

Indigenous teachers has been extremely problematic in the past and that recognition of diverse perspectives in combination with diverse content is a step in the right direction:

I think the distinction should be made between perspectives and histories and culture. I think history and culture are the facts and knowledge which can be passed on to our students, but the way in which it's imparted is where you need to bring an Indigenous perspective. I think the most authentic way to teach those, that history and culture, is through an Aboriginal person with an Aboriginal voice. I think we've run into a lot of problems over the last century or so, in which we've tried to teach culture and history of Indigenous peoples through a very white sort of filter.

The cross-curriculum priority resonated with Jonah who stated a commitment to social justice resulting from his previous career as a lawyer and experiences as a target of racism and witness to it. Jonah expected that a significant driver behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority was likely to be a desire to educate all students about the creative and academic contributions, both historical and contemporary, that Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islander peoples have and can make in a wide variety of fields. Jonah expected that ACARA believed that such teaching would lead to the development of a more inclusive society.

I guess in terms of what we can do in terms of - teaching um understanding and acceptance it's a case of overcoming ignorance and sort of biases, which may be passed down from generation to generation; it's about being as informed as possible and being as appreciative of, not only the, I guess, the negatives which um I associate with um the interactions between Anglo-Australian culture and Indigenous culture, it is, but it's also ways in which we can move forward and in the many ways in which Indigenous people can contribute in terms of their knowledge systems and their understanding of the land and the country...it's a case of not just saying 'oh in terms of how Indigenous people can um inform us', and that's not just traditional knowledge and, you know, about the Dreamtime and local food sources, it's also about how their unique perspective can sort of make them really creative and individual contributors to society.

The potential Jonah saw in the priority stemmed from the belief that a lack of knowledge leads to racism and prejudice, and that a solution to such ills is the correction of misinformation. In this way, initiatives such as the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures priority were considered capable of enabling Australian society to evolve from ignorance to enlightenment.

## ***Maeve***

Maeve saw content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures integrated to various degrees in professional experience sites she had visited, with a much greater emphasis placed on them in private schools. She thought that ACARA expected teachers to expose students to multiple perspectives and to promote active participation in society. Consequently, the priority was expected to have been developed with an eye to future employment opportunities in the Asia-Pacific region where an understanding of multiple perspectives and the skills associated with active citizenship would serve to strengthen the nation's future prosperity.

...I think a lot of um people kind of fear what they don't know. So if we can get people, and kids especially, like they're going to be the ones running this country in future generations, if we can get them to you know be really tolerant and understanding of different cultures and understand the way and the reasons behind why they might do things a little bit differently, then that's just gotta be good for everyone. Like, the whole world as a whole society.

Future uptake by teachers would likely be determined predominantly by their attitude toward systemic change, much like any change in a business or organisation. Maeve saw EQ's Curriculum into the Classroom (C2C) initiative<sup>5</sup> as being an important tool to facilitate the transition to a national curriculum.

I'd like to think that we'd eventually get back to looking at the Australian Curriculum, but yeah, at the moment, with the time pressure that gets put on teachers, it's really just getting the C2Cs, get what you can get done and move on to whatever else you've got to move on to...clever teachers are adapting them, like they're starting to do a bit of backwards planning, so looking at the assessment first and then kind of going back and seeing, you know, what the kids have already done... But no I've seen other teachers literally just go day by day through the C2C and then time runs out and all of a sudden they've got to assess, because that's the critical part of it, 'cause it's reporting period or whatever, but the kids haven't been taught half the information.

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<sup>5</sup> The C2Cs were developed by Education Queensland staff to provide Queensland based teachers with unit and lesson plans, assessment items, and teaching and learning resources aligned with the *Australian Curriculum*. Interviewees based in Queensland tended to refer to the C2Cs rather than the *Australian Curriculum*.

Maeve viewed the priority as a tool to reduce ignorance induced fear. Like Jonah, she considered the initiative to be one that, if implemented correctly, could move the nation forward by raising awareness of contemporary and historical events. Maeve expected that the potential of the priority to effect significant change would be largely limited or enabled by the design of the C2Cs.

### *Justine*

Justine thought that the cross-curriculum priority was “nice” as it has the potential to encourage a more holistic approach to education. An important characteristic of the priority Justine identified was its cross-curriculum nature: Students who enjoyed Mathematics but disliked a subject such as History would be exposed to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures within a subject they were interested in. Justine thought that this would result in many more students developing their understanding of such topics due to increased exposure and attention:

Some kids would love to do an Aboriginal history class and just talk about that, cool, no worries; some kids would find that the most boring thing ever but they love to do tribal dance, or they'd love to do story telling in Drama or they'd love to do dot painting in Art... by doing it cross curricula, you are covering your bases, you're giving the information to the kids in a whole bunch of different formats, and giving them the opportunity to pick it up in a way that's comfortable for them and that they can engage in.

Justine believed that a goal of the cross-curriculum priority would be to increase the knowledge of non-Indigenous people in order to reduce racism and increase tolerance, both of which she thought would have a positive flow on effect for Indigenous people who would develop an improved self-image. When I asked Justine whether she saw the cross-curriculum priority as being as important as other aspects of the curriculum she had mentioned during the interview, particularly literacy and numeracy, she suggested that the latter were core academic skills and the priority was a panacea for societal problems.

One of the features of the priority that Justine considered to contain significant potential was the integrated way in which she believed it was intended to be taught. The benefit of such an approach, Justine predicted, would be extending the priority to students who are not interested in humanities subjects, where content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures has traditionally be taught. The priority's likely inability to compete with literacy and numeracy for class time was something she appeared to accept as quite natural. The latter skills' utility in various fields of employment was something Justine did not consider Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to have on its side.

### *Amelia*

Amelia stated that the cross-curriculum priority was a good idea but that she needed more information about how to implement it. She suggested that the learning students could achieve as a result of the priority might lead them to critique their parents' views on Aboriginal people and other topics, thereby arresting the perpetuation of "generational racism". Embedding the cross-curriculum priority into English was something Amelia found to be very easy during professional experience. She expressed a commitment to including the cross-curriculum priority in a genuine manner, rather than in a way that could be interpreted by students as tokenistic:

I don't wanna make them feel like I'm just saying this because I have to - - and I'm just including that little tidbit of information just because the government says that I have to. I wanna include that information in a genuine way that is sharing that cultural information with all of the students and you know, they feel like they if they have something to contribute they can say something, they can say 'well' you know 'my grandmother told me that this happened and um she saw this happen' and they feel like they can contribute then in that way... I mean, in Maths, you can't just say 'oh well, you know, what's four witchetty grubs plus four witchetty grubs', I mean that's just pandering to it.

When asked whether she felt confident in her knowledge and the resources currently available to her, she said that as an enthusiastic pre-service teacher she knew information was

available should she need it. However, the resources produced by EQ that she relied upon for much of her teaching were described as being problematic. Some of the C2C unit plans Amelia had used during her professional experience felt overcrowded and not designed with a realistic classroom context in mind. She expected the uptake of the cross-curriculum priority by experienced Queensland teachers to be less enthusiastic than the uptake by new teachers for whom the priority would be a normal part of the curriculum from the start of their career. The implementation of the priority, Amelia suggested, would also be impacted by the content of the C2C: if explicitly included, easy to implement and well-resourced she believed teachers would be more likely to incorporate the priority into their teaching.

### ***Kerry***

Kerry maintained that the cross-curriculum priority was an important step toward recognising the country's history in a way that should help Indigenous students to feel comfortable and respected. When asked whether she had seen examples of the cross-curriculum priority being implemented during her professional experience, she offered an anecdote about a student sharing information about himself:

Umm, - - in prac we were really lucky, one of our Indigenous boys is part of a national um dance crew and, an Indigenous dance crew, so he's been over to Hawaii and he tells us some of his story. So that's *really*, it's lovely. And then, that also, the other kids then respect his culture and he can tell us things, and show us photos, it's really lovely.

Kerry's own experiences at school were identified by her as being a significant influence on how she understands the topic: "I remember we, we had an Indigenous boy in our class and his Dad would come in and um they'd tell us stories and would do *art* and just things like that. Little things... Like we'd go to his house and yeah just little things. The phrase "little things" was significant as it was so frequently repeated. That it was used to describe Kerry's beliefs about the input ACARA expected of teachers in order to effect transformative social change was also a distinguishing feature of the interview. The

complexities involved in incorporating the priority that were described by some other pre-service teachers were not anticipated by Kerry.

#### **4.4.3 Potential and progress concluded (for now...)**

While the interviewees were sometimes pessimistic about the uptake of the cross-curriculum priority, they suggested that if implemented as intended the initiative could have a transformative effect on society. One of the most commonly stated beliefs of interviewed pre-service teachers was that more knowledge about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures will lead to a reduction in discrimination and an increase in respect. This is a widely held belief among organisations (Austin & Hickey, 2011; Australian Human Rights Commission, 2011; Gordon, 2012, Ma Rhea, personal communication, September 11, 2012), which is supported to a point by Mooney et al. (2011). However, an important distinction is required when the intentions of an initiative are being explored. If the *reduction of ignorance* is the end goal, then it is likely to be achieved (Mooney et al., 2011). If, however, the goal is the *elimination of racism*, some scholars are less convinced of possible success (Bell, 2004).

The various factors these pre-service teachers identified as being likely to impede progress, including the lack of reportable outcomes and assessment associated with the priorities; insufficient or ill-designed content within resources such as the C2C; and lack of curriculum guidance, are those shown to reduce implementation of curriculum items in schools (Halsey et al., 2010; Thompson, 2012). Halsey's research suggests that when the identified factors are combined, teachers perceive a lack of support for the initiative and are less likely to embed it in their teaching

Raised as a possible intention behind the cross-curriculum priority by Justine, Emily and Sophie was that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may be encouraged to

accept and value their own culture. Rivière (2005) suggests, however, that genuinely multicultural curricula must enable students to *live* their culture, not simply learn about it. The implementation of ‘little things’ is unlikely then to achieve the transformative goals some interviewees anticipated.

## **4.5 Intentions for the marginal and mainstream: Insiders and outsiders in ‘Australian culture’, schooling and curricula**

### **4.5.1 An overview of survey and interview responses**

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, cultures, and curriculum content were often explicitly identified by survey respondents and interviewees as existing *outside* the mainstream. ‘Mainstream’ tended to be used as a synonym for non-Indigenous people, cultures or curriculum (e.g., “to help mainstream Australians understand more about Aboriginal culture”, Pre-service teacher survey respondent 34), but survey respondents more frequently used terms such as “non-Indigenous”, “white”, and “non-Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander”. Terms used to describe spaces and identities in the surveys as those which have excluded and continue to exclude Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, histories and cultures included “school culture”; “the school community”; “the curriculum”; “society”; “Australians”; and “the dominant...culture”. The notion of the *insider* (non-Indigenous people, cultures, and institutions) was frequently established by referring to those who were perceived as being excluded (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people). The transformational potential for the cross-curriculum priority was generally expressed in relation to notions of the insider/outsider binary, with interviewees expecting ‘outsiders’ to experience a “feeling” of “acceptance”; “belonging”; “inclusion”; “connection”; or “comfort”. The survey responses that exemplify an explicit engagement with notions of insiders and outsider are illustrated by the following example:

[The priority has been included] to make it a truly Australian Curriculum. Indigenous Australians are excluded with the curriculum targeted at 'white Australians'. We are still treating our education system like the Indigenous people need to learn what we (white Australians) are about and not teach their cultures or histories. I think we are finally beginning to understand that Indigenous peoples have been excluded in our education system and the intention is to bring their cultures and history into this system to make it really whole. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 16)

More subtle references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people as outsiders and non-Indigenous people, schools and curricula as insiders are in evidence in the following statements,

...It will also help the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to feel welcome and comfortable in suburban cities etc. It will help them to fit into the school if they feel included. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 17)

In my opinion, it likely is an attempt to cater to those minority groups so that perhaps they may feel more included. The intent may be that this inclusiveness may improve those group's academic motivation and performance. Another potential benefit could be educating future adults on the culture of the original inhabitants of the region. (Pre-service teacher survey respondent 45)

During their interviews Ellie, Selena and Layla highlighted the exclusion of Aboriginal peoples and knowledges from classrooms and society, but each suggested different ways in which the cross-curriculum priority might result in, respectively, the integration of people, reduction of racism towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, and integration of Indigenous themed content. While Vivienne offered the view that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students can be outsiders in classrooms because they have particular, cultural learning styles, Dylan maintained that exclusion of Indigenous students and content has been the result of teachers' lack of knowledge about both. Both Ada and Camilla discussed the ways in which they had witnessed the cross-curriculum priority being forced to 'fit' into the curriculum, while the mainstream curriculum was left largely intact. While Thalia suggested that all people could be considered outsiders in a classroom context, Helen's interview data offers a view of a cultural insider who has a glimpse into the world of cultural outsiders. Finally, Mariko's reading of the cross-curriculum priority

presents the possibility that the initiative is part of a nationwide strategy to position Australia as a dominant power within Asia and the rest of the world.

#### **4.5.2 Interviewees discuss intentions for the marginal and mainstream**

##### ***Ellie***

From the outset of the interview, it was clear that Ellie had concerns about the potential of the cross-curriculum priority. She suggested that the priority was included, in part, to appease “*vocal* Indigenous people feel like they’re being left out or their needs aren’t being catered for” who have demanded a closing of the education gap. In line with this idea was the notion that the priority was introduced to enable Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to integrate into school and broader society more readily.

I think it’s probably partly for them [Indigenous students], and to try and help them fit in with the system and so on. Um, but probably also partly for, you know, the other members of the community who look at the Indigenous people and say ‘this is a problem’...If you do have a lot of Indigenous people at the school then it makes a lot of sense to me to you know, to teach those kids how to live in that community, um and fit in with that community and so on, which means using their ideas where relevant.

When asked what the intended outcome of the priority could be, Ellie suggested that the ultimate goal was likely to be reconciliation. She suggested that explicit teaching of the priority was likely to be tokenistic and she identified the lack of practical, useable skills associated with the cross-curriculum priority as being a factor in reducing the relevance of the initiative. Around this topic she suggested that one of the curriculum’s ‘General Capabilities’, *Intercultural Understanding*, would be more useful than the priority for non-Indigenous students who were, she thought, more likely to come into contact with foreigners or Indigenous people who are “living more sort of westernised types of life”, rather than those who are “culturally, significantly different from mainstream Australia”. This suggests that

Ellie viewed the priority as involving histories and cultures that are significantly distinct from ‘westernised’ ones.

The idea that the cross-curriculum priority was intended to bring about social or educational changes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples was, for Ellie, unconvincing. Goals related to such a strategy would be doomed to failure due to the diverse experiences, perspectives, and beliefs of Indigenous people around the country (and beyond). The potential outcomes for non-Indigenous students also struck Ellie as problematic since she considered their utility and transferability to be extremely limited. Ultimately, Ellie was not convinced that the priority had been designed with educational outcomes in mind, and considered the motivation to be more political than pedagogical. Ellie held grave concerns about the ability of teachers to implement the priority in a way that would avoid tokenism and essentialism.

### *Layla*

Layla had recently been on professional experience in a “very high socio-economic” school and had been comparing it to schools she had visited in APY (Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara) Lands<sup>6</sup> where there are high proportions of Indigenous students. According to Layla, the perceived relevance of the cross-curriculum priority would likely be much greater in the latter schools because she thought that teachers with few or no Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander students were unlikely to think about the priority. Layla’s suggestion also indicated that she expected that “very high socio-economic schools” would have few Indigenous students. If teachers were to focus on the priority only in schools with high numbers of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, Layla believed that the intended outcomes of the initiative (the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and

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<sup>6</sup> Area in north western South Australia recognised in 1981 Anangu Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Land Rights Act. Traditional owners are Pitjantjatjara, Yankunytjatjara, and Ngaanyatjarra peoples.

cultures in *all* schools, regardless of the heritage of their students) would not be met. The overall goal, she believed, would be to address ignorance and racism in non-Indigenous students, but also to bolster Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students' self-esteem:

...by looking at it through the curriculum then you're kind of ...developing that understanding in all the students of what's actually happened historically and why their culture has become what it is now, and also how we can kind of resurrect the more traditional aspects of their culture and take the focus off of, you know, if you can use the phrase 'urban Aboriginals', you know where there's lots of social issues and just create a much more positive presence of them in white society I guess...if there *was* a positive public opinion then perhaps it would lead to increased um self-respect and motivation and all of those kinds of things in the Aboriginal people, because, well from my experience, the ones that I've worked with in schools in um the APY lands and that, there's very *low* expectations and very *low* sense of um self-esteem and um self-efficacy I guess...

Recognising the existence of racism and discrimination in Australia, Layla considered the priority to be a strategy intended to increase Aboriginal people's feelings of acceptance by overcoming non-Indigenous people's ignorance. In order to achieve this acceptance (or a sense of it at least) attention would need to be redirected from, what Layla described as, a deeply problematic, Westernised, urban, Aboriginal culture. Instead, Aboriginal peoples could be more readily "included into mainstream culture" via a revival of more "traditional", palatable aspects of their cultures.

### ***Vivienne***

At the time we spoke, Vivienne had just returned from a southern European country where she spent a year studying as part of her education course. That trip influenced her thoughts around the importance of learning about and having pride in your place, simply because it is an important aspect of identity. She thought that this kind of knowledge could lead all Australians to have more respect for the land they live on and develop a sense of belonging.

Yeah, you know, and I was just going through, I've just moved house so I found some Aboriginal Studies stuff that we had done previously and it *is* such

an important part of *our* culture as well, I think after 200 years we are *starting* to begin a culture here, you know, white people coming into this land and how that fits in with the previous, you know, not previous I shouldn't say that, the current and previous holders of the land...I noticed after being in Europe, I lived in a city that was 2000 years old and the people have a pride and a knowledge of their history and culture far more than we do and it's certainly something that is taught and developed far more than studied vocationally. It's 'here's where we come from, you need to know because it's important, no matter what you do'. And I think in Australia we're really lacking with that.

Vivienne's understanding of the cross-curriculum priority led her to consider it to be a very positive initiative which could enable all Australians to position land and place more centrally in the national psyche. She spoke primarily about the learning non-Indigenous students could expect to engage with and this largely involved gaining wisdom from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and histories. The content associated with the priority was described by Vivienne in terms of the clear connections she saw with several KLAS, but also with Australians' personal identities.

### ***Dylan***

Dylan was quite adamant that the purpose of the cross-curriculum priority was predominantly to serve as a reminder to teachers to seek to incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures throughout all subjects as much as they can. While he mentioned that the ultimate goal of the priority was likely to be for students to have a more accurate understanding of Australian history than previous students have had, he believed that ACARA's focus was on teachers first and foremost: "historically schools have always seen you know Aboriginal kids as just not as capable as others, so um I think that priority in the curriculum will just help and hopefully help teacher be more aware of all those things and, and teach better basically". Dylan saw a need to explicitly require the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures because they were previously excluded. He also suggested that some topics do not need a comparative focus in the curriculum in order for them to be taught:

And the acknowledgement that it has specifically been ignored in our history so it's, it needs to be [laughs] specifically prioritised. We don't need to specifically prioritise the First Fleet as a cross-curriculum priority.

Presenting a unique interpretation of the purpose of the priority, Dylan considered the development of teachers' knowledge to be the driver behind its introduction. The *Australian Curriculum* could serve as a prompt to remind teachers of that which they may not be used to incorporating in their lessons, thus increasing the likelihood that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures would become a standard element across the curriculum. Rather than considering the achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students as a problem to be solved by focussing on the students themselves, Dylan suggested that the problem lies with teachers who need to "teach differently". This critique of people within the *mainstream*, rather than seeking to modify those on the *margins*, was uncommon in the interviews.

### ***Ada***

Ada believed that schooling should be transformational and hoped that the cross-curriculum priority would have a role to play in achieving that outcome. The main focus of her response was the increase in knowledge about Australian history, with a particular emphasis on Aboriginal history, which she acknowledged had been excluded in past curricula. An ultimate goal of the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, Ada believed, would be a reduction in racism through an increase in tolerance, especially among non-Indigenous people who have limited interactions with Indigenous people. Ada's interpretation of the priority involved additions by way of resources and content, rather than pedagogical adjustments.

Ada raised the importance of numeracy and literacy in the curriculum so I asked whether the cross-curriculum priorities were “on an equal footing with things like literacy, numeracy, ICTs”. Although Ada maintained a commitment to the priority and its potential to improve the lives of Indigenous students, she accepted its probable abandonment in favour of these skills:

With NAPLAN testing and that sort of thing it’s hard to switch the focus because you know this is what is tested and if they’re ranking schools, you know all that sort of thing, it plays on teachers minds. So they do numeracy and they do literacy and they fit everything else into the gaps, for the most part, I’m sure not everybody does that. But it would seem to me the majority, that’s the way they think about it. And I think, to an extent it’s justified because numeracy and literacy are really really important, yeah so it’s a hard case to argue and I think it’ll be a long time before that changes.

Like several other interviewees, Ada saw the priority as existing at the very edges of the *Australian Curriculum* – far removed from the core of the curriculum where literacy and numeracy reside. Ada, like Justine, accepted the logic of favouring these skills over Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures due to the widespread belief that literacy and numeracy are vital survival skills for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The cross-curriculum priority, Ada suggested, could serve as a useful vehicle for students to learn critical thinking skills.

### ***Selena***

Selena started the interview by suggesting an inherent link between her decision to study education and her values:

I’m quite all for inclusion and obviously not just Aboriginal [people] but all kinds of walks of life and disabilities and learning situations but I think because they are such an iconic part of our his., our culture in Australia that we should all be, it should just be a way of life, an everyday thing that, yeah, I think it’s really important.

She was quite unsure about the intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority beyond the embracing of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in order to

include everyone. Any educational outcomes beyond affective ones appeared to be the most difficult to pinpoint, and Selena was even uncertain about ACARA's commitment to the affective outcomes:

Well maybe the purpose that they *say* it's for the Aboriginal[ people], for them to feel more included. I suppose it's more for them. But is that, is that how it's approached or is that how it's portrayed? I don't know. But I think, is it more so Australia um looks good, to other countries that we're showing we're including or are they actually really prioritising the Indigenous or just, just for themselves...

Uncertain about the intended outcomes of the priority, Selena suggested that the continued marginalisation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students was detrimental to Australia's international reputation so the remedying of this was the likely impetus. Concerned about the perceived lack of support around the implementation of the priority, Selena suggested that some teachers may shy away from the initiative should gaps in their knowledge not be addressed by external support. Selena also raised the intriguing possibility that some teachers may experience a shift from *insider* to *outsider* as the result of traditionally marginalised content being introduced to the curriculum.

### ***Thalia***

Thalia is a non-Indigenous person who grew up with and continues to be friends with Aboriginal people. She has witnessed racism directed towards those friends. Time spent in New Zealand resulted in knowledge of some Maori protocols and an awareness that different protocols may exist in a diverse classroom. She suggested that increased awareness and knowledge of this kind of content will decrease racism in schools. Although she said that she expected non-Indigenous children to benefit from the cross-curriculum priority, she also thought that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were an intended audience of the initiative due to the loss of 'cultural knowledge' that has resulted since Invasion.

I think a lot of Indigenous students don't necessarily have a full understanding either. I know some of my friends, it wasn't until they were adults that they

even found some of their family...but the class [inaudible] four Indigenous students are all with single mothers and um – the mothers aren't actually the Indigenous component of their background so they, they don't have that upbringing with their Indigenous family... So, I think it's just something that – it's nice for people to be aware of and to have that understanding of.

Thalia's interpretation of ACARA's intentions for the priority involved ensuring that all Australian students develop a solid understanding of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures to reduce racism perpetrated by non-Indigenous students and to enhance Indigenous students' personal identities.

### *Helen*

Helen had recently finished a university History course and said that it was where a lot of her ideas came from. She suggested that the aim of the cross-curriculum priority was probably to develop teachers' knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures which could then impact on the broader community's knowledge of historical and contemporary events and issues. Helen suggested that such knowledge should enable the Australian population to understand past wrongdoing and avoid the repetition of similar practices. She saw a significant benefit of the priority for Aboriginal students to be empowerment arising after 'seeing themselves' in the curriculum. Helen did not go into great detail about this, but she thought that knowledge about events like Australia Day/Invasion Day<sup>7</sup> "would be an amazing step forward" for all Australians.

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<sup>7</sup> Both references to 26<sup>th</sup> of January 1788. The 26<sup>th</sup> of January is officially referred to as Australia Day and marks the arrival of the First Fleet in (what is now known as) Sydney Cove: Eleven ships carrying over 1500 people from England. The arrival and subsequent colonisation of the continent was not undertaken in a manner recognised by international law, nor the laws of the peoples whose lands were being encroached upon. The day is therefore also referred to as Invasion Day, which reflects the illegality of the intrusion on that date.

### *Mariko*

Mariko suggested that the repairing of damage caused by conflict between Aboriginal people<sup>8</sup> and non-Aboriginal people was likely to be a major reason behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority. She thought that ACARA could also be seeking to foster a sense of inclusion for Aboriginal people which was a reason for including Indigenous themed content in the curriculum. Mariko thought that the content that could come under the umbrella of the priority might also provide non-Indigenous students with knowledge about Aboriginal people, which would be useful should these students go on to work with Aboriginal colleagues. Including content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures could enable non-Indigenous students to develop cultural competence, therefore reducing workplace conflict and discriminatory employment practices. The economic repercussions of these actions, Mariko suggested, would include a reduction in unemployment rates of Indigenous people, increased social cohesion and harmony, and a more productive, sustainable economy.

So it's broadly the three priorities are kind of connected achieving towards that same goal...Australia becoming economically strong and considering the sustainability...caring for all us and also be like harmonious like caring society, for the whole world. So kind of like creating the peaceful culture.

The inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority was interpreted by Mariko part of a nationwide, multifaceted strategy by Australian governments to increase the country's capacity to compete in the global economy by increasing national harmony.

#### **4.5.3 Intentions for the marginal and mainstream concluded (for now...)**

Benoit and Cumming (1983) assert a need for the aspirations of a curriculum to be matched by the knowledge of authors. Although ACARA, and previously the NCB, prided themselves on significant community consultation, interviewees such as Ellie did not appear

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<sup>8</sup> Mariko tended to speak about Aboriginal people rather than Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

to have recognised a diversity of voices represented within the cross-curriculum priority. Members of Indigenous Education Consultative Bodies (IECBs) participating in the pilot project undertaken by Moreton-Robinson et al. (2012) indicated that despite participating in the development of the curriculum, “processes are inadequate in that ACARA is not committed to listening to considerations, comments and feedback from IECBs” (Moreton-Robinson et al., 2012, p. 172). Similar concerns were raised by Professor Peter Buckskin, a member of ACARA’s *Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Advisory Group* (Buckskin, 2013).

That Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of learning were frequently mentioned raises a popular and contentious topic. Vivienne envisioned an Aboriginal way of learning that is historical, different to Western ways of knowing, and universally applicable to all Indigenous people. The notion of culturally specific learning styles is challenged by some scholars (Biermann & Townsend-Cross, 2008; Nakata, 2012) but is recognised as valid when applied to distinct groups of Aboriginal people or Torres Strait Islander people, and within a relevant temporal context (Brown, 2010; Morgan & Slade, 1998). Throughout the interviews the notion that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, particularly those in remote areas, have a distinct learning style was common. A few interviewees, such as Ellie in the previous section identified diversity within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, while others like Layla made distinctions between ‘traditional’ and ‘urban’ Aboriginal people, a simplistic and outdated comparison (Fredericks, 2004).

While the level of critical engagement with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures will be significantly lower than that experienced in undergraduate courses (at least until senior years of secondary school), the idea that each year the priority may serve as an ‘entry point’ to succeeding content supports the point suggested by several interviewees, that some content in the curriculum was better than nothing. The important

point made by Nakata et al. (2012), however, is that a student coming away from school with only shallow understanding is ‘dangerous’ if the overall end goal is to achieve something more than an incomplete knowledge base.

McAllan (2011) argued that “Australia’s education system is one of the most powerful institutional mechanisms in constructing and maintaining white-dominated social hegemony” and that despite assertions that the *Australian Curriculum* has been designed to be more inclusive of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, the curriculum “would require a fundamental restructuring to comprehensively address this Eurocentric institutional dominance” (pp. 4, 5). Consequently, McAllan has suggested, the hopes that Helen and most other interviewees had for the cross-curriculum priority’s capacity to bring about sweeping social and educational changes are unlikely to be realised; without fundamental reform to the curriculum, little change is possible. The more conservative hopes for ‘inclusion’, or the even less aspirational, *sense* of inclusion are more likely. McAllan’s assertions regarding the effective attempts by education policy authors to ‘de-racialise’ curricula appear to be borne out by the interviews and survey responses. The racialised nature of content was identified by several pre-service teachers, but the *whiteness* of the education system did not feature prominently in their responses. Instead interviewees tended to discuss a system that had been culturally exclusive in the past, but that is now ready to embrace those that have historically been shunned. My analysis of the curriculum and curriculum development documents presented in the forthcoming chapter suggest that the Australian education system is still strongly tethered to the principles of whiteness and cultural exclusivity, albeit under the guise of openness and diversity.

# Chapter 5: Implicit and explicit intentions from curriculum development documents and the Australian Curriculum

## 5.1 Overview

The first part of this chapter focuses on the content of the *Australian Curriculum* website, including the curriculum content and imagery within the website. Aspects of the curriculum directly related to the cross curriculum priority are identified and discussed, as is curriculum content that is explicitly related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures, histories, and/or students. The outcomes of a semiotic analysis of the videos embedded in the *Australian Curriculum* website are also presented in this chapter.

The *Australian Curriculum* contains frequent explicit references to the significant influence the *Melbourne Declaration on the Educational Goals for Young Australians* (hereafter, *Melbourne Declaration*, MCEETYA, 2008a) has had on its development. Since this study involves exploring the implicit intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority, the MCEETYA document served as a useful entry point to the historical development of the curriculum and its various components. Upon reading the *Melbourne Declaration*, however, it was clear that the document was only one of many that shaped the current curriculum. From section 5.4, this chapter traces the documentary lineage of the *Australian Curriculum* in order to provide some answers to the research questions around the explicit and implicit intentions underpinning the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority in the *Australian Curriculum*. An analysis of the documents gained in response to an FOI request is also included in this chapter.

In preparation for this part of the thesis, I read the text of the *Australian Curriculum* website (Version 5.0 at the time of writing), again noticing the frequent mention of the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008a). I subsequently took notice of documents referred to in the *Melbourne Declaration* as having an influence on its development, then sourced and analysed those documents. Each document referenced in Section 5.4 of this chapter was selected because it was explicitly identified by the authors of a later document as being influential. The purpose of each document has been summarised, connections between the document under scrutiny and those that came earlier or later have been explained, and the inclusion or omission of references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and/or peoples analysed. A close textual analysis of the documents revealed a particular way of framing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. The document analysis and outcomes of this exploration are presented chronologically, where possible, from 2005-2010. See Appendix D for a representation of the documentary lineage that has explicitly informed the development of the *Australian Curriculum*.

Presented alongside the document analysis in Section 5.4 is a visual, contextual timeline. This was furnished with cartoons selected from the National Museum of Australia's (NMA) *Behind the Lines* online exhibition, which contains an archive of a selection of political cartoons from 2003-2010 (excluding 2005<sup>1</sup>). These images have been complemented by a short précis that provides a contextual description of the images under discussion. Specific cartoons were selected because of their broad relevance to themes frequently raised in the curriculum development documents: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, national identity, education and the economy. These political cartoons were considered to

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<sup>1</sup> Cartoons from January-June, and December 2005 are included in the 2004 and 2006 *Behind the Lines* online exhibitions, so a collection from that year has been included in the timeline but the selection was more limited than the other years. Dr Judith Hickson, Duty Curator at the NMA suggested during a telephone conversation with the author that a possible reason for the omission of the 2005 exhibition was the development of another significant exhibition at the time. The curator of the time has since left the NMA.

provide an effective mechanism for setting the scene of the time period in which the national curriculum was being constructed. Various scholars have underscored the contribution of political cartoons to understanding and shaping social phenomena (Edwards & Ware, 2005; Townsend et al., 2008; Sani, Abdullah, Abdullah & Ali, 2012).

## **5.2 Australian Curriculum text**

### **5.2.1 Text of the Australian Curriculum homepage**

The first paragraph on the homepage of the *Australian Curriculum* website identifies the *Melbourne Declaration* as the document steering the development of the curriculum. In keeping with the *Melbourne Declaration*, the various elements of the curriculum were “designed to support 21<sup>st</sup> century learning” (ACARA, 2013d, para.1), are “important for all Australian students” as they provide a “foundation for their future learning, growth and active participation in the Australian community” (ACARA, 2013d, para. 2). The emphasis on the relevance of the curriculum for *every* student in the nation was an important one for ACARA to make given justifications for the shift to a national curriculum included comparable content and standards across all states and territories. In addition, the statement emphasises the point made throughout the *Australian Curriculum* and *Melbourne Declaration* that *all* students are expected to be provided with equitable access to core knowledge and skills, regardless of enrolment in a state or private school, ability or disability, language or cultural background. Referring to the *Melbourne Declaration* gives the impression of reciprocal endorsement between ACARA and MCEETYA. By reiterating the influence of the *Melbourne Declaration*, the *Australian Curriculum* authors affirm the national education goals outlined by MCEETYA. Because the *Melbourne Declaration* was endorsed by all state, territory and federal education ministers at the time, ACARA’s frequent reference to that

document positions the curriculum as aligned with MCEETYA's; giving the impression of having received nationwide support.

### 5.2.2 F-10 Curriculum: Description of cross-curriculum priorities

The purpose of the three cross-curriculum priorities is explained on a separate page of the website. A three paragraph overview of the cross-curriculum priorities informs readers about the general goals of the *Australian Curriculum*, with a rudimentary explanation of the priorities and how teachers should use them (as shown in Figure 7). In this summary, the

#### Cross-curriculum priorities

[Print this page](#)

##### Cross-curriculum priorities

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia

Sustainability

The Australian Curriculum has been written to equip young Australians with the skills, knowledge and understanding that will enable them to engage effectively with and prosper in a globalised world. Students will gain personal and social benefits, be better equipped to make sense of the world in which they live and make an important contribution to building the social, intellectual and creative capital of our nation.

Accordingly, the Australian Curriculum must be both relevant to the lives of students and address the contemporary issues they face. With these considerations and the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* in mind, the curriculum gives special attention to these three priorities:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures
- Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia
- Sustainability.

Cross-curriculum priorities are embedded in all learning areas. They will have a strong but varying presence depending on their relevance to the learning areas.

The content descriptions that support the knowledge, understanding and skills of the cross-curriculum priorities are tagged with icons. The tagging brings to the attention of teachers the need and opportunity to address the cross-curriculum priorities at this time. Elaborations will provide further advice on how this can be done, or teachers can click on the hyperlink which will provide further links to more detailed information on each priority.

- Cross-curriculum priorities in English
- Cross-curriculum priorities in Mathematics
- Cross-curriculum priorities in Science
- Cross-curriculum priorities in History

*Figure 7. Cross-curriculum priorities webpage. ACARA. (2011b). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Retrieved from <http://web.archive.org/web/20110308010439/http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/CrossCurriculumPriorities/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-histories-and-cultures>*

curriculum authors connect the three priorities with a vision of students engaging with, and prospering in, “a globalised world” (ACARA, 2011c, para. 1). It is proposed that students will benefit socially, personally, and intellectually from being educated in a futures-oriented education system, and are expected to contribute “to building the social, intellectual and creative capital of our nation” (ACARA, 2011c, para. 1). The overview makes reference to

the *Melbourne Declaration* as a guiding document, and offers the cross-curriculum priorities as an initiative designed to result in a curriculum that is “both relevant to the lives of students and address[es] the contemporary issues they face” (ACARA, 2011c, para. 2). ACARA asserts that “Cross-curriculum priorities are embedded in all learning areas. They will have a strong but varying presence depending on their relevance to the learning areas” (ACARA, 2011c, para. 2). What “strong but varying” means is not explained, nor is the means by which teachers are expected to determine the priorities’ “relevance to the learning areas”. These are both important omissions given the inherently precarious nature of curriculum initiatives associated with multiculturalism, cultural literacy and competence, and content related to non-core subjects.

In a media release announcing the first meeting of the interim NCB, then Chair Barry McGaw was reported as demanding that curriculum authors develop a curriculum that was readable and useable, “Curriculum writers are often tempted to write for one another but ours will write in plain English and with a limit to the length of their documents to ensure that they are useful to practising teachers,” (NCB, 2008c, p. 2). While the language used in the cross-curriculum priority overview is not convoluted so could be described as being written in ‘plain English’<sup>2</sup>, the vagueness and therefore usefulness of the cross-curriculum priority section is less certain. The varied responses from interviewed pre-service teachers regarding what they think ACARA expects from them once they are *in-service* suggests that further guidance is required.

The final paragraph of the section explains how the curriculum has been designed to highlight spaces where the cross-curriculum priorities can be addressed:

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<sup>2</sup> Defined in the NCB media release at the time as that which will ensure that “that everyone, from academics to beginning teachers to community members, will understand what our nation’s schools are teaching”.

The content descriptions that support the knowledge, understanding and skills of the cross-curriculum priorities are tagged with icons. The tagging brings to the attention of teachers the need and opportunity to address the cross-curriculum priorities at this time. Elaborations will provide further advice on how this can be done, or teachers can click on the hyperlink which will provide further links to more detailed information on each priority. (ACARA, 2011c, para. 3)

The use of the term ‘need’, as in “tagging brings to the attention of teachers the *need* and opportunity to address the cross-curriculum priorities at this time” is an interesting one since the cross-curriculum priorities are to be incorporated according to teachers’ professional judgement as to what is “relevant” to their teaching area.

In terms of the intentions behind the cross-curriculum priorities, the overview suggests that they should contribute to a curriculum that is relevant and one that enables students to address ‘contemporary issues’. The lack of explanations regarding the drivers behind the priorities or the goals of the initiative requires pre-service and in-service teachers (not to mention pre-service teacher educators, parents, students, and community members) to interpret the meaning of and requirements of the priorities with inadequate information.

### 5.2.3 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures description

The first two paragraphs of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures page contain statements about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, identity, and a conceptual framework that was developed to support the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority (ACARA, 2011b; See Figure 8). The third paragraph contains a statement about the learning students will have opportunities to engage with, and the



Figure 8. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures conceptual framework. ACARA. (2011b). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Retrieved from <http://web.archive.org/web/20110308010439/http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/CrossCurriculumPriorities/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-histories-and-cultures>

following statement about the expected result of that learning,

The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander policy provides opportunities for all learners to deepen their knowledge of Australia by engaging with the world's oldest continuous living cultures. This knowledge and understanding will enrich their ability to participate positively in the ongoing development of Australia. (ACARA, 2011b, para. 3)

The intended audience of the cross-curriculum priority is 'all learners', and the explicitly stated goal is to "enrich their ability to participate positively in the ongoing development of Australia" through increased knowledge and understanding resulting from engagement with "the world's oldest continuous living cultures" (ACARA, 2011b, para 3). The lack of explanation about what qualifies as 'development' means that this goal of the priority is particularly vague. The documentary analysis undertaken in Section 5.4 explores the meaning of such terminology within the broader context in which the *Australian Curriculum* was created.

Unless the authors of the aforementioned paragraph were suggesting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were expected to be involved in all cross-curriculum priority related teaching episodes, the assertion that the priority will facilitate engagement with cultures is a curious one. The statement belies an understanding of 'culture' as something disembodied from people; something that can be learnt *about* (Hokowhitu, 2011; Rivière, 2005). As will be demonstrated throughout this chapter, the separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures from peoples is not uncommon and is in evidence throughout the curriculum development documents.

It is interesting to note that a stated intended outcome of the cross-curriculum priority in 2010 was "an appreciation of the ongoing contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to Australia" (Australian Curriculum, 2010a, para. 3). The following year, the goal was changed to "enrich[ing] [learners'] ability to participate positively in the

ongoing development of Australia” (Australian Curriculum, 2011b). The shift away from Indigenous peoples’ contributions to Australian society to a focus on *all* students’ future participation in nation building is representative of efforts to de-racialise the curriculum (McAllan, 2011). By replacing a reference to the contributions of a particular group of Australians with a statement about all students, the curriculum authors have ensured that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people “have been paradoxically included while excluded” (McAllan, 2011, p. 2). The significance of this connection ACARA makes between the priority and broad, nation building goals will be addressed further in Section 5.4.

Below the statement of intent is a list of *organising ideas* which indicate the major themes and areas of focus within the priority (see Figure 9).

### Organising ideas

For each cross-curriculum priority, a set of organising ideas reflects the essential knowledge, understandings and skills for the priority. The organising ideas are embedded in the content descriptions and elaborations of each learning area as appropriate.

Code	Organising ideas
<b>Country/Place</b>	
OI.1	Australia has two distinct Indigenous groups, Aboriginal Peoples and Torres Strait Islander Peoples.
OI.2	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities maintain a special connection to and responsibility for Country/Place throughout all of Australia.
OI.3	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have unique belief systems and are spiritually connected to the land, sea, sky and waterways.
<b>Culture</b>	
OI.4	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies have many Language Groups.
OI.5	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples’ ways of life are uniquely expressed through ways of being, knowing, thinking and doing.
OI.6	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have lived in Australia for tens of thousands of years and experiences can be viewed through historical, social and political lenses.
<b>People</b>	
OI.7	The broader Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies encompass a diversity of nations across Australia.
OI.8	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have sophisticated family and kinship structures.
OI.9	Australia acknowledges the significant contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people locally and globally.

Figure 9. Organising ideas for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority. ACARA. (2011b). Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Retrieved from <http://web.archive.org/web/20110308010439/http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/CrossCurriculumPriorities/Aboriginal-and-Torres-Strait-Islander-histories-and-cultures>

Intriguingly, at the time of writing, a scope and sequence document exists for the cross-curriculum priority, but is not publically available. The document contains information about the intended scope of the priority and the sequence in which the teaching and learning of content was intended to take place. This scope and sequence document was one of the artefacts sent to me as part of the FOI response package that I requested after finding little in the curriculum documents that provided insight into ACARA's intentions for the priority.

The information provided on the *Australian Curriculum* website means that teachers have only the short description of the priority, conceptual framework and organising ideas table upon which to develop an understanding of what they are expected to teach and what students are expected to learn. Part of the NCB's remit was to restrict the size of the curriculum, so the omission of a cross-curriculum priority scope and sequence document could be the result of this directive. The existence of a scope and sequence document for every year level in every KLA, and learning continua for each of the general capabilities suggests that the cross-curriculum priorities lack similar documents for other reasons. Nakata (2011) has asserted a need for content like that of the priority to be thoughtfully sequenced in order to assist teachers to construct appropriate units of work that develop sufficient depth of knowledge, "avoid patronisation and the endless repetition of thematic approaches that have students doing the same projects over and over" (p. 6), and ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content is visible throughout students' schooling. The *Australian Curriculum* contains no evidence of such sequencing.

The cross-curriculum priority page provides web links to each KLA's statement about embedding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in that subject. Each of the curriculum areas contains statements declaring Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are valued. Following this generic statement, each KLA articulates the

connection between the priority and the subject by stating that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples have, for example, “sophisticated applications of mathematical concepts”, “longstanding scientific traditions”, and “histories [that are] part of the shared history belonging to all Australians”. The *Australian Curriculum: English* says that it “articulates relevant aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages, literatures and literacies” (2014a, para, 5). The curriculum authors have attempted to reinforce the connections that exist between the priority and each KLA, but each statement is mitigated by the caveat that the incorporation of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures needs to occur only where it is deemed “relevan[t] to the learning areas”. If it is accepted that curricula are cultural artefacts (de Plevitz, 2007; Hickling-Hudson, 2003; Jayasuriya, 2003; McAllan, 2011; Nakata, 2007; Yunkaporta, 2009), then the proposition that Indigenous cultures may not be relevant at any point in the *Australian Curriculum* is patently problematic. It reinforces whiteness by suggesting that Indigenous histories and cultures are only relevant sometime, while the non-Indigenous cultures that underpin the KLAs are so relevant that they do not even warrant a mention. In this curriculum, non-Indigenous, Western European histories and cultures are relevant at all times. The Othering of the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples reveals the assumption that the *Australian Curriculum* exists as a culturally neutral object contained *universally* relevant content (unless otherwise specified, as in the cases the cross-curriculum priorities).

#### **5.2.4 Search results within the Australian Curriculum website**

The F-10 curriculum is searchable, with all results being presented and then filtered according to KLA. Searches can be refined by selecting check boxes next to various ‘Curriculum Elements’: *Achievement standard, Content description, Elaboration, Other, or All* (see Figure 10). For this project, searches for the keywords ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Torres’

rather than ‘Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander’ were conducted, as the latter excluded results that *only* mentioned Aboriginal topics or those *only* related to the Torres Strait Islands to the exclusion of the mainland.

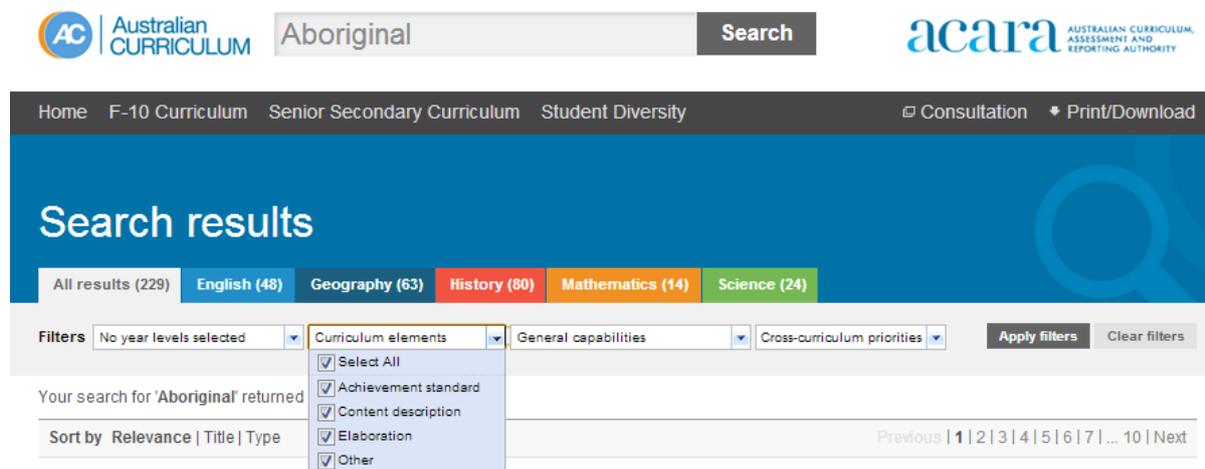


Figure 10. Search function of version 5 of the Australian Curriculum website. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/Search?q=aboriginal>

Table 3 presents the results of each search. The numerals in the purple columns represent the total number of results produced by the search engine. The numerals in the blue columns represent the instances when ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Torres’ are included as the topic of study as opposed to being only one of several examples of *possible* areas of study. Similarly, the results regarding the *elaborations* (which are only suggested, not mandatory, content) are separated according to those that contained the search terms as the only suggested area of student (in yellow), and those that were one of several suggested topics (in orange).

Table 3. Results of search for ‘Aboriginal’ and ‘Torres’ within the *Australian Curriculum* website.

“Aboriginal”	All		English		History		Geography		Mathematics		Science	
All	210		54		63		61		10		22	
Achievement standard	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Content description	22	104	1	24	12	33	9	28	0	7	0	12
Year level description	17	17	11	11	1	1	5	5	0	0	0	0
Elaborations	87	2	17	2	29		28		3		10	

“Torres”	All		English		History		Geography		Mathematics		Science	
All	207		46		75		60		6		20	
Achievement standard	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Content description	22	63	1	23	12	32	9	27	0	3	0	10
Year level description	17	17	11	11	1	1	5	5	0	0	0	0
Elaborations	86	16	17	6	26	7	30	3	3		10	

<b>Key:</b>	Mandatory content		Total number of results generated as indicated by search engine	
	Content is the sole focus of suggestion or example		Content is one of several suggestions or examples	

Because only the achievement standards, content descriptions and year level descriptions outline the content that is required to be taught, assessed and reported upon, the results above show that in the 11 years of schooling prior to the senior secondary years, teachers are not directed to teach, and students are not required to learn about topics associated with the term ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Torres’ in Mathematics or Science. Between students’ first year of schooling until year 12, teachers are explicitly required to teach about a topic related to the terms ‘Aboriginal’ or ‘Torres’ a total of 22 times within three KLAs (English, History, and Geography, not Mathematics and Science). Each year, English teachers are required to include “Australian literature, including the oral narrative traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as the contemporary literature of these two cultural groups” (ACARA, 2013a, para. 4), the Year 4 level description for History explicitly requires a focus on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories as a topic of inquiry, and ‘Aboriginal’ and/or ‘Torres’ appears in Geography year level descriptions in Years 2, 3, 4, 8, and 10. There appears to be at least an effort to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures across the five KLAs in the elaborations, but of the 104 elaborations containing either term, 17 are included as only an example of *suggested* topics of focus. Of the 104 search results produced by the search for ‘Aboriginal’ within the content descriptions, 79 were either elaborations (regardless of the application of a filter to exclude elaborations showing in results) or were included as one of multiple examples of *potential* focus. A similar result was achieved when ‘Indigenous’ and ‘Aborig\*’ were entered into the search engine.

An examination of the curriculum reveals that the *cross-curriculum* aspect of the priority appears to be more aspirational than actual at the time of writing. Apart from one content description in the F-10 English curriculum, the only places Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander content is required rather than suggested, is in History and Geography. The

struggle several interviewed pre-service teachers experienced when trying to understand the place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures within Science and Mathematics, and in English (beyond the inclusion of Indigenous themed texts), is reflected in the curriculum documents themselves.

### 5.2.5 Senior Secondary Curriculum

Over the course of their studies, senior secondary students who choose to enrol in Modern History in years 11 and 12 will engage in four units of study. For each unit, teachers must select a set number of elective topics from several options. In Unit 2, teachers may select two of the following elective topics: *Women's movements*; *Recognition and rights of indigenous peoples*; *Decolonisation*; *The Civil rights movement in the USA*; or *Workers' movements*. Only the second of these elective topics requires study of content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Teachers can choose to focus on such content in the other elective topics, but they are not required to do so. If a teacher selects *Australia 1918-1949 WWI – Election of Menzies*, one of four elective topics on offer in Unit 3, students will be required to engage with material related to two content descriptions related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories:

(ACHMH121) The adjustment of national priorities in the 1920s, including the tensions between urbanisation, industrialisation and rural development; the difficulties of soldier settlement; the exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples; and the changing role of women.

(ACHMH125) The key features of post-war reconstruction, including industrialisation, immigration, the provision of social welfare, and attitudes and policies towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, and women. (ACARA, 2013, para. 29, 33)

If, however, a teacher does not choose one of the aforementioned electives, students will not be required to engage with any content related to the priority.

Students who do not chose to study Modern History are not required to be taught about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures unless, of course, the teacher decides that there is particular “relevance to the learning areas”. The senior curriculum is similar to that offered F-10 in that there is little required (or even suggested) content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Teachers can, of course, choose to include more content should they deem it to be “relevant”. This reliance on teachers to include this content show regard for their professionalism, but research has demonstrated that such a strategy is likely to detrimentally impact the likelihood of the priority’s inclusion.

### **5.2.6 Student diversity**

The cross-curriculum priority is mentioned to in the *Student Diversity* section of the website, under the heading for *Curriculum Adjustments*. This section of the curriculum provides advice about adjustments that can be made to provide opportunities to achieve equitable learning outcomes for “all Australian students” (ACARA, 2014c) para. 1. It is suggested that one way for teachers to ensure that students with specific learning needs receive such support would be by:

...drawing from and emphasising specific aspects of one or more of the cross-curriculum priorities to adjust the learning focus of a particular learning area (for example, providing opportunities to examine historical perspectives from an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander viewpoint). (ACARA, 2014c)

While the introduction to the *Student Diversity* section refers to ‘all Australian students’, the page’s sub-sections are devoted to advice around curriculum adjustments and strategies for students with disabilities, learning difficulties, those who are identified as gifted, and those for whom English is an additional language or dialect (EAL/D). The explicitly stated goal of the priority is to increase the relevance of the curriculum for students, so it is reasonable to interpret the above statement as alluding to an instance in which a student with specific

needs has an Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander heritage. It is impossible to know whether the author of this text had a student for whom EAL/D in mind, a ‘gifted’ student, or a students with learning difficulties or a disability. The historical and ongoing practice of positioning Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in deficit locations, mean that ACARA’s suggestion to utilise “an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander viewpoint” is likely to be interpreted as relating to the latter. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have been positioned in deficit locations at least since the establishment of the Native Institution at Parramatta referred to in Chapter 1. As demonstrated in Chapter 4, many pre-service teachers reveal a tendency toward deficit descriptions of Indigenous students and, as will be shown in Section 5.3 some contemporary curriculum resources continue this tradition.

### **5.2.7 Australian Curriculum text conclusion**

The lack of clear guidance around implementation of the cross-curriculum priority that was identified by some of the interviewed pre-service teachers is reinforced by this analysis of the textual components of the *Australian Curriculum*. The fears some interviewees held regarding a possible lack of uptake of the initiative due to its optional nature also appears to be a well-founded one, given the lack of compulsory elements associated with the priority. Perhaps most telling is the failure of the curriculum authors to articulate a vision or framework for the priority that requires that it be more than an addendum to the core curriculum (or something to be ignored should it be deemed irrelevant).

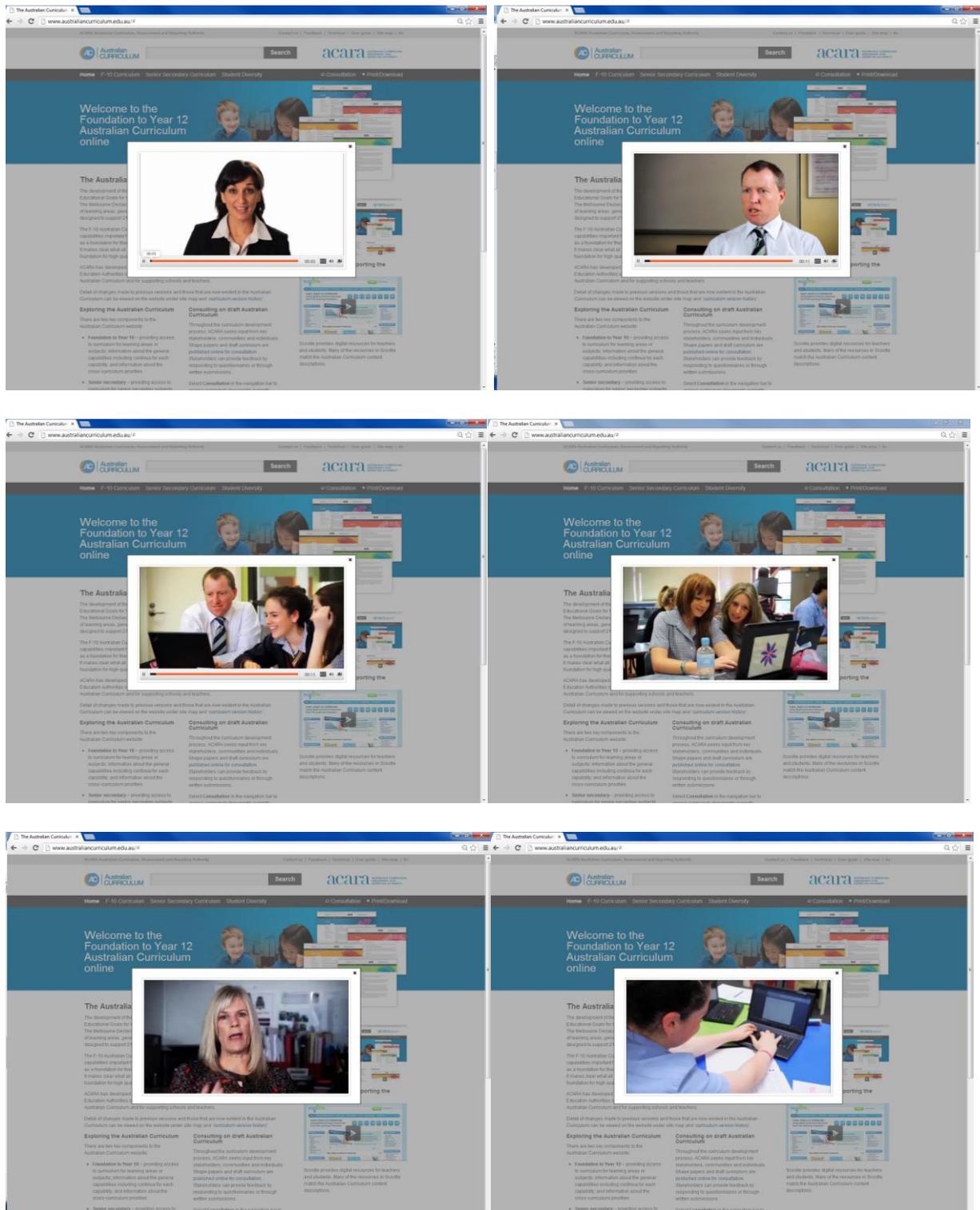
## **5.3 Australian Curriculum images**

### **5.3.1 Scootle video**

The *Australian Curriculum* homepage has links to specific curriculum areas, sections containing administrative and organisational information, and two videos: one is a guided tour to orient users to the mechanics of the online curriculum and the other explaining the

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potential uses of *Scoutle*, a website containing “digital resources supporting the *Australian Curriculum*”. The *Scoutle* video makes no references to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures or the cross-curriculum priority. There are various representations of people throughout the five minute video:



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Chapter 5: Implicit and explicit intentions from curriculum development documents and the Australian Curriculum



Figure 11. Screenshots of Scoutle introductory video from the Australian Curriculum website. From ESA, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>

If skin colour and tone can be assumed to be a marker used to communicate racial identity (Hunter, 2013), there are three images within the *Scoutle* video that appear to include

people who might be supposed to have Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander heritage<sup>3</sup>. One of the images is a cartoon from a digital resource and portrays a young man with dark skin and hair. The other two images contain female students with dark skin. One of these images represents the apparently Aboriginal student with another student and a teacher, both of whom have light skin; and the other contains an apparently Aboriginal student and a fair-skinned teacher. The latter image has a voice over and text explicitly related to it. The image overleaf is a screenshot of the image from the *Scoutle* video; the voice-over is transcribed below.



Figure 12. Screenshot showing Indigenous student and light skinned teacher from *Scoutle* video from *Australian Curriculum* website. From ESA, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>

ESA [Education Services Australia] has conducted several major research projects into the impact of learning with digital materials. One of the strong findings was how well they developed the foundations of mathematics: place value, fractions, area, pattern and measurement. In the middle primary years, the years when it counts. This wasn't true just of topics which are thought of as hard to teach, but also for students who are sometimes thought of in the same way. (ESA, n.d., 2:03-2:34)

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<sup>3</sup> Skin colour is, of course, not a reliable indicator of ethnicity or cultural heritage, but the selection of people with particular physical attributes is a commonly employed strategy to communicate messages.

By presenting the quote from the ESA report which mentions ‘Indigenous students’ overlaid on an image of a student with dark skin (and who is apparently Aboriginal), along with the narrator describing students who are sometimes thought to be “hard to teach”, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are pathologised within a deficit location. By comparison, fair-skinned students in the videos are represented as agentic learners.

Light-skinned students appear in five scenes. In all but one of these scenes the students are learning independently or with another student. Students who have dark skin appear in two scenes, one in the aforementioned shot, and another in a screenshot of a banner from the *Scootle* website. In both of these scenes, the student with dark skin is being assisted by an adult with light skin who is not wearing a school uniform and is presumably a teacher. These teachers lean over their student’s shoulder and gesture towards or use the computer the student is in front of. Both teachers look towards the computer. The relationship between the light skinned teachers and the dark skinned students is represented through action as unidirectional, with the dark skinned student positioned as the passive recipient of assistance (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 74). The narrative told in the scenes of lighter skinned students is of peer learning and independence most of the time, with occasional assistance by a teacher. The narrative of the relationship represented in the other images tells of dark-skinned students in need of teacher help all of the time, despite having access to a computer. (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006).

The image below portrays “the wide diversity of sources from which digital materials have been obtained. The ABC is certainly one, along with the National Archive, the National Library, Screen Australia and dozens of other cultural institutions” (ESA, n.d.). There are no “cultural institutions” included that are organisations specifically related to Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, or peoples (such as the Australian Institute of

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies), but Te Papa, Museum of New Zealand is included. Like the suggestion that the core of the *Australian Curriculum* is relevant to all Australians, here too those cultural institutions that are not explicitly connected to a minority group within the country are presented as universal.

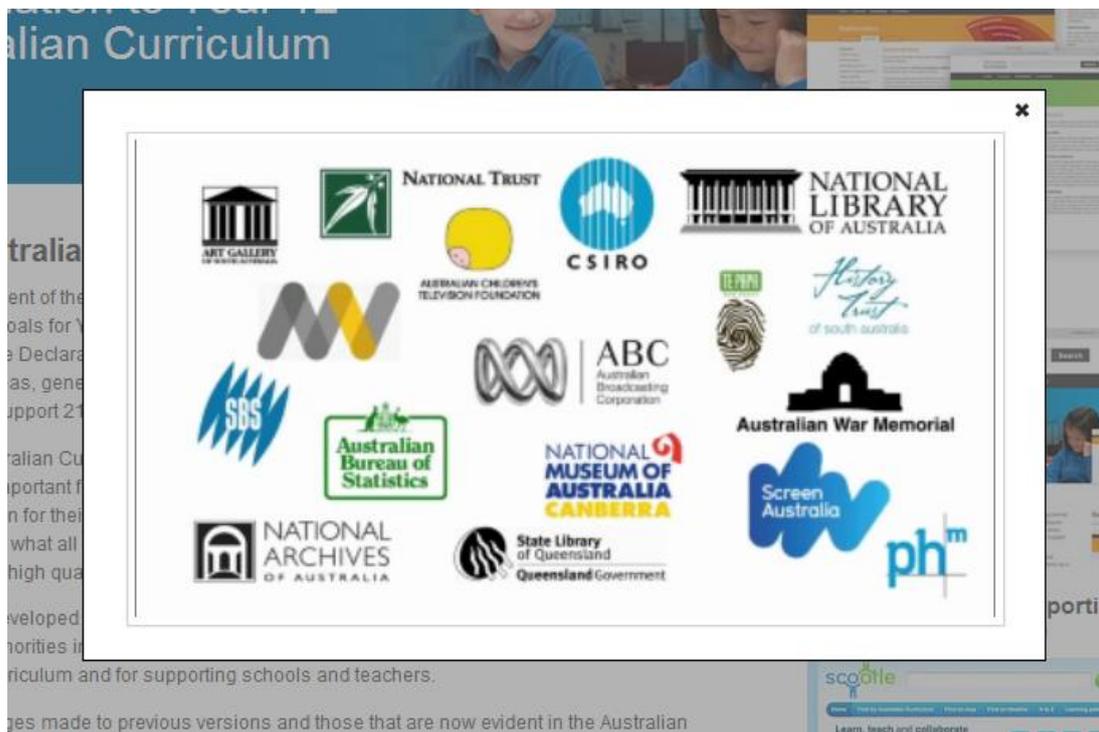


Figure 13. Screenshot of institutions from which digital resources have been drawn to develop *Scootle* database. From ESA, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>

The *Scootle* video is inclusive to the extent that it ‘includes’ people with dark as well as light skin, but the treatment of the two groups is far from equal.

### 5.3.2 KLA development videos

Like the *Scootle* video, the five F-10 ‘An Introduction to the Development of the *Australian Curriculum*’ videos, and five senior secondary learning area videos contain images of people, as well as places. Unlike the *Scootle* video, however, there is a distinct lack of apparent cultural, ethnic or racial diversity amongst the speakers on the curriculum area videos. The first four F-10 videos were published in 2010, with the senior subject videos

going online in December 2012, and the F-10 Geography video released in 2013. Since the first four videos are distinct in their design, they are analysed together, with the analysis of the later videos to follow.

### ***Typography within title shots***

Each of the title shots appears to have been designed to represent a specific interpretation and embodiment of each core KLA. As the palette is the same for each KLA, the ‘message’ is transmitted via typeface and background images. Research into the impact that typefaces have on consumer behaviour has an extensive history and body of literature behind it, particularly in the disciplines of psychology and business (Childers & Jass, 2002). Although the semiotic study of typography is comparatively new (Van Leeuwen, 2006), there is a body of research that suggests that typefaces have personas and connotative meanings that are commonly understood by readers or viewers, so are deliberately chosen by designers (Brumberger, 2003; Childers & Jass, 2002; Doyle & Bottomley, 2009).

The typeface used to introduce the *Australian Curriculum: English* video is a cursive script called ‘Adine Kirnberg’ designed by David Rakowski. Typefaces of this kind are often used to portray a sense of elegance (Brumberger, 2003; Childers & Jass, 2002) since they reference sophisticated, calligraphic handwriting styles (Van Leeuwen, 2006). Adine Kirnberg was created with reference to an Art Nouveau-era typeface, ‘Schreibschrift Romana’, designed at the Bauer Type Foundry (Petzendorfer,



Figure 14. Screenshot of the title screen from *Australian Curriculum: English* development video. From ACARA, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/rationale>

1984). The script and the typeface in the background both reference European handwriting and typeface styles (Van Leeuwen, 2006).

The Mathematics video title fades from pseudo- equation to a typeface resembling a

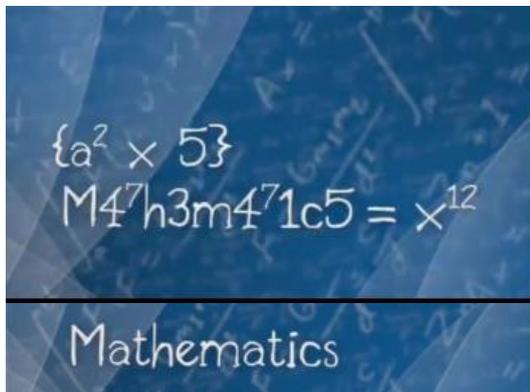


Figure 15. Screenshot of the title screen from *Australian Curriculum: Mathematics* development video. From ACARA, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/mathematics/rationale>

The title slide of the Science video contains an image of a Rutherford atomic model, a representation of an atomic particle, and a retro science typeface ‘UnovisEFOP-Bold’. Again, reference has been made to an earlier era via typeface.

handwritten typeface called ‘Designer Notes Pro Regular’ (Childers & Jass, 2002). Handwritten typefaces are often described as having a casual personality (Mackiewicz & Moeller, 2004). Since the background image is reminiscent of writing on a chalkboard, the typeface and associated imagery is reminiscent of a bygone era.



Figure 16. Screenshot of the title screen from *Australian Curriculum: Science* development video. From ACARA, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/science/rationale>

Finally, the ‘Gothicus Alternate’ typeface of the History video is a ‘Fraktur’ script



Figure 17. Screenshot of the title screen from *Australian Curriculum: History* development video. From ACARA, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/history/rationale>

from the ‘Blackletter’ typeface family (Bain & Shaw, 1998). Fraktur was popular in central Europe during the Middle Ages when Maximilian I sought a common typeface to be used throughout the Holy Roman Empire. After the dissolution of the Roman Empire in 1806, Fraktur was in competition with

‘Antiqua’, a Roman typeface, to become the national typeface in Germany. Antiqua was rejected and Fraktur remained the national typeface until it was spurned by propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels as *Judenletteren* (English translation: Jewish lettering, Bain & Shaw, 1998). Despite being eventually rejected by the Nazi party, the use of Fraktur in German propaganda until the early 1940s meant that the typeface became associated with German fascism. The typeface fell out of favour worldwide in part because of the negative connotations associated with it and because modernist designers rejected Blackletter in favour of more readable typefaces (Bain & Shaw, 1998).

Like all other visual components of the curriculum under study in this chapter, the typefaces and accompanying images that introduce each KLA do not prove or expose anything definitive about the individuals compiled the videos. When taken together with the images and written content of the curriculum, they serve to highlight a way of understanding and representing concepts, people and KLAs. The typefaces and imagery within the videos reflect traditional forms of representing the subject matter, and it is therefore likely that the choices were made with reference to common sense (Brumberger, 2003; Mackiewicz & Moeller, 2004). The point here is not to evaluate the appropriateness of such images or to recommend others. Instead, each image and typeface provides viewers (me, you, parents, teachers, and students alike) an opportunity to interpret both the implicit and explicit messages each communicates about what English, History, Science and Mathematics *are*. Interpretation of the component elements of the *Australian Curriculum*, will likely help some stakeholders determine whether or not each cross-curriculum priority is relevant to that subject or not. Just as the title shots of the KLA development videos reference traditional imagery for each KLA, the remaining content of each video does little to suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures were considered to be vital elements of the core subjects.

### *The people and the places*

The traditional, Eurocentric interpretation of the core learning areas is emphasised once the video's title shots fade and each KLA is explained by a professor standing or sitting in the grounds of an educational institution. The four professors in the videos all happen to be men, each appears to be white and speak English as their first language. Three of these men gesture with their left hand to the extent that it can be seen in-shot; each wears a wedding ring. Three of the four men wear what appears to be the same light blue, button up shirt and grey suit jacket. The places they are speaking from all appear to be educational institutions, three universities and one high school. One building is covered in ivy, has a green mowed lawn and has a bicycle parked outside; another is turreted and built of sandstone; and around the school runs a brick wall with a mature tree behind it. The only inside location resembles the corner of an office containing dozens of bound theses arranged neatly on wooden bookshelves, and a globe turned so that Asia and Australia are facing toward the camera.



Figure 18. Screenshots of KLA curriculum development videos from *Australian Curriculum* website. From ACARA, n.d. Retrieved from <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/english/rationale>; <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/mathematics/rationale>; <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/science/rationale>; <http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/history/rationale>

Conventional framing of the four interviewees is evident in each video: the professors are framed in a medium close up and speak to an off-camera interviewer. Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006) explain that the significance of the *breast pocket shot* in analyses of videorecorded interviews lies in the establishment of interviewees as experts through shot framing. The four professors in these videos are represented as *carriers* of various possessive attributes that combine to signify the ‘expert’. In addition to the framing of the camera shot, the pose of the professors is important; it “cannot be interpreted as narrative: they just sit or stand there, for no reason other than to display themselves to the viewer” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 106). The distance between the camera and the speaker is “used to signify respect for authorities of various kinds” (Kress & Van Leeuwen, 2006, p. 126). The display of the names, titles and universities serves to synthesise each speaker’s achievements, further reinforcing their expertise and trustworthiness.

Various signs suggest that, although these four men are experts and consequently well-qualified to lead curriculum development in their respective disciplines, an effort has been made to avoid representing them as elitist. This is likely, in part, to be in response to a general disdain in Australia of the ‘intellectual elite’ (Glasson, 2012; Gross, 1999; Mickler, 2005). Each expert’s title is abbreviated to ‘Prof.’, suggesting a degree of informality. None of the men wear a tie, and three of the four have not buttoned their shirt all the way to the top. The combination of the setting, the identifying caption, the button up shirt, suit jacket, with the whiteness, age, sex and marital status of the experts, all serve to suggest to the viewing audience (comprised of teachers, parents, pre-service teachers and their educators) that these men can be trusted to use their expertise to construct a quality curriculum that will not be too heavily influenced by non-traditional factors (Kwan & Trautner, 2009; Rosette & Dumas, 2007). The touches of informality introduced by way of a shirt button, lack of tie and abbreviated title denote four relatively down-to-earth, *everymen*, who have enough of an

understanding of the world outside their ivory towers to reassure viewers that the curriculum will not only be academically rigorous, but relevant to the lives of today's students (Dagaz & Harger, 2011; Lightstone, Francis, & Kocum, 2011). These visual factors, combined with the settings and objects described above coalesce to signify a visual representation of expertise, knowledge and education that is much more staid and conservative than that represented in the written text of curriculum documents.

The only video that mentions Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, or peoples explicitly is the History video. At the beginning of the video, Professor Stuart Macintyre raises the need for the history curriculum to be relevant to students from a variety of backgrounds, including "Indigenous Australians who feel they have a history that needs to be registered" (ACARA, 2010d, 0:23-0:27), he also mentions the "cross-curricular elements" including "Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders" who, Macintyre says, the History curriculum pays "substantial attention to". He asserts the importance of this inclusion and the need for "all Australians to gain a sense of those people, their place within Australian society and their historical experience" (ACARA, 2010d, 0:47-1:05).

The phrasing of Macintyre's first statement has the effect of acknowledging the need to include Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories in the History curriculum, but a failure to personally assert support for such an initiative. The suggestion here is that the inclusion of such content was actioned to address the 'feelings' of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The essence of Macintyre's references to Indigenous peoples' place in Australian society serves to affirm viewers of the commitment the curriculum authors have made to including Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories within the curriculum. However, Macintyre's reference to "those people" about whom "all Australians" should "gain a sense" reveals a cavalier attitude toward the people he speaks about. These few

comments are suggestive of the approach politicians take when discussing groups of people about whom public opinion is divided (van Dijk, 1997). The approach enables speakers to *hedge their bets*, by fluctuating between positive and less than flattering phrasing.

The video *An Introduction to the Development of the Australian Curriculum: Geography* has a title slide more in keeping with ACARA's overall branding. The two fair-skinned people appear to be speaking from a lobby which contains some plants and a rattan lamp, and in front of a backdrop with ACARA's logo printed repeatedly upon it, next to a large leafy plant. Each of the speakers are identified as an 'advisory board member', neither is a professor, nor are they attached to a university.



Figure 19. Screenshots of scenes in *An introduction to the Development of the Australian Curriculum: Geography* video. From ACARA, n.d. Retrieved from [http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/humanities-and-social-sciences/geography/rationale#video-popup\\_8c4389f8-a8bd-4d83-849f-52bbf2100d05](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/humanities-and-social-sciences/geography/rationale#video-popup_8c4389f8-a8bd-4d83-849f-52bbf2100d05)

Each of the senior secondary curriculum videos appears to have been recorded at the same location as the final F-10 Geography scene, in front of the ACARA backdrop (see

Figure 19). Each is introduced by the same recording of Barry McGaw (see Figure 20) and involves a number of advisory board members answering questions which appear on the screen. Like the Geography video, the typeface within the senior secondary videos is aligned with the ACARA brand. While it is impossible to identify a person's cultural heritage by appearance, speech and accent, there is a distinct lightness of skin of most of the advisory board



Figure 20. Screenshot from *An introduction to the development of the Australian Curriculum: Geography* video showing Barry McGaw. From ACARA, n.d. Retrieved from [http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/humanities-and-social-sciences/geography/rationale#video-popup\\_8c4389f8-a8bd-4d83-849f-52bbf2100d05](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/humanities-and-social-sciences/geography/rationale#video-popup_8c4389f8-a8bd-4d83-849f-52bbf2100d05)

members who speak in the videos. There is, however, greater diversity of gender and professions than the original four F-10 videos (see Figure 21).



Figure 21. Screenshots from senior secondary History, English, Science, Mathematics, and Geography curriculum development videos from *Australian Curriculum* website. Retrieved from [australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://australiancurriculum.edu.au)

### 5.3.3 Curriculum images conclusion

The various elements within the images on the *Australian Curriculum* website coalesce to form a picture about diversity and the manner in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and students are valued that is quite removed from that presented in the text of the curriculum and *Melbourne Declaration*. Rather than finding evidence of innovation and progressive curriculum development processes, the images selected to characterise ACARA’s labour do little to challenge the idea that the curriculum lacks input from people from racially, ethnically, and gender diverse backgrounds. In

addition, these images not only fail to undermine stereotypical notions of Indigenous student (under)achievement, but reinforce them. Finally, criticisms that national curriculum authors have sought to undermine the Western roots of Australian society (Berg, 2010; Donnelly, 2011) is visibly challenged by the videos which firmly locate knowledge in the buildings and grounds of ivy-clad, sandstone universities and schools, and expertise firmly in the grasp of white, aged, wedding-ring clad, masculine hands.

## 5.4 Curriculum development documents

The *Australian Curriculum* and the ACARA and NCB documents that preceded it refer to the shaping and guiding influence the *Melbourne Declaration* had on the curriculum. The latter document was developed by a Working Group chaired by Peter Dawkins who was then Secretary of the Victorian Department of Education and Early Childhood Development, and a member of the Council of Australian Governments [COAG] Productivity Agenda Working Group. The *Melbourne Declaration*, which was endorsed by all state and territory education ministers at the time, makes explicit reference to two key sources that influenced its development:

The goals were informed by extensive national and jurisdictional consultation over two stages. Initial input and feedback based on the *Future of Schooling in Australia* report helped shape the first draft of the new Declaration, which was then the basis for a second round of targeted consultations and public submissions. All feedback was considered in developing the final document.

The Working Group also drew on a range of international literature and particularly benefited from the United Kingdom Qualifications and Curriculum Authority's *Futures in action: Building a 21st century curriculum*, which informed the drafting of Goal No. 2. (MCEETYA, 2008a, p. 19)

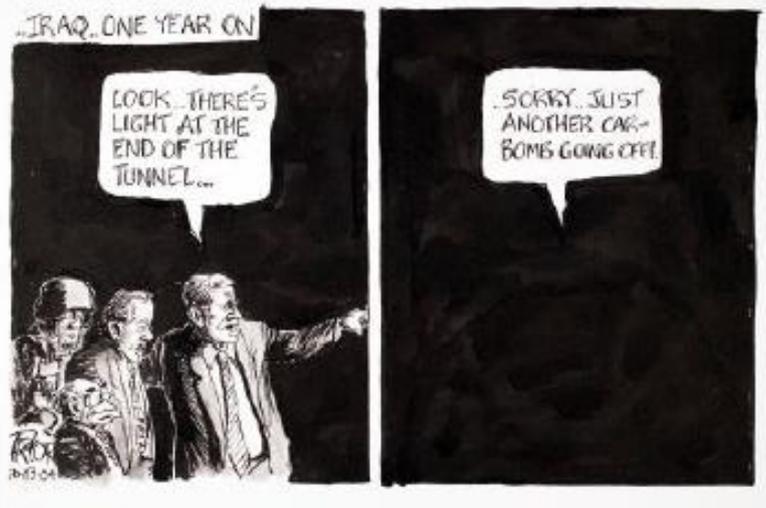
The aforementioned *Federalist Paper 2: Future of Schooling in Australia* (hereafter, the *Future of Schooling*) (Review Steering Committee, 2007a) reported on the review of the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First century*

(MCEETYA, 1999). The review had been requested by the Council for the Australian Federation (CAF) as part of the COAG's human capital reform agenda. Analyses of some COAG meeting minutes from 2006 are included in this chapter since they are mentioned in the *Future of Schooling*. Those minutes record COAG's support for the recommendations made in the *Review of National Competition Policy Reforms* (Productivity Commission, 2005) which contains a focus on education and is also analysed in this chapter.

As mentioned previously, political cartoons from the NMA's digital archive are included alongside the analysis of the curriculum development documents in order to provide the reader with an insight into some events occurring around the time the documents under examination were being written and published. The first two cartoons, for example, serve to remind readers that, at the time the Productivity Commission's report was released, Australia was part of the 'coalition of the willing' that invaded Iraq in 2003 and had recently signed a Free Trade Agreement with the USA. The nation's participation in a war ostensibly engaged in to protect countries such as the US and Australia from future attacks from countries in the Middle East, further contextualise the events around Cronulla beaches in 2005 which saw people of 'Middle Eastern appearance' attacked by white Australians, and the efforts by various governments to promote 'social cohesion' amongst Australia's diverse population. Similarly, the policies of governments specifically targeted at (or neglectful of) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities, are presented alongside the analysis of the curriculum development documents in order to illustrate shifts and stagnations in policies.

2004

Australia's involvement in the war in Iraq continues.



Geoff Pryor, Iraq one year on  
Canberra Times, 20 March 2004

Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement is signed.



Andrew Weldon, Free trade  
Big Issue, 22 March 2004

Howard Government introduces legislation to dismantle the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission.



Fiona Katauskas, ATSIIC  
Chaser News, 1 May 2004

### 5.4.1 Review of National Competition Policy Reforms 2005

The Productivity Commission reviewed the *National Competition Policy (NCP) Reforms* at the request of then Treasurer, Peter Costello (Productivity Commission, 2005). The purpose of the review was:

...to consider the extent of the benefits the reform program has delivered to date and to inform an assessment of the most worthwhile competition related reforms that could be achieved in the future, including competition related reforms which could apply beyond current NCP arrangements. (Costello, 2004 cited in Productivity Commission, 2005, p. iv)

The Productivity Commission's (2005) review was also designed to inform a review into the NCP being completed by COAG at the same time.

One of the conclusions drawn by the Commission was that a focus on competition alone was too narrow if the economic and social challenges Australia faced were to be met.

Those challenges were outlined by the Commission:

Increasing integration of the world's economies will provide significant rewards to countries able to respond efficiently, flexibly and innovatively to changing patterns of demand, technological change, shifts in underlying comparative advantage and the increasing mobility of global capital to take advantage of those shifts. For example, though a resurgent China is viewed by some as a threat, strong economic growth in that country is opening up a myriad of new export opportunities, as well as giving businesses and households in Australia and other countries access to a range of better and cheaper goods and services. (Productivity Commission, 2005, p. 160)

Environmental sustainability was also raised as a significant issue in Australia, but an aging domestic population was suggested as being "perhaps the biggest challenge facing Australia in the next 50 years" (Productivity Commission, 2005, p. 161). The Commission explicitly linked this concern about the aging population with the comparatively poor health outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Within the context of workforce participation and the impact education has upon it, the comparatively low rates of Indigenous people's literacy and numeracy were identified as having a negative correlation (Productivity Commission, 2005, p. 338).

2004

The Liberal-National coalition gains a majority in the Senate after the 2004 federal election.



Bruce Petty, Senate majority  
The Age, 1 October 2004

Michael Long stages protest walk from Melbourne to Canberra to gain an audience with Prime Minister John Howard about an apology to the Stolen Generations.



Peter Nicholson, The long walk  
The Australian, 4 December 2004  
Image 9 of 9

The 'Boxing Day Tsunami' kills 230,000+ people in 14 countries.



John Spooner, On the beach  
The Age, December 2004

The Commission emphasised the significant contributions school education makes to workforce participation in Australia and the ongoing role schooling would play in determining the nation's prosperity within an increasingly competitive global economy. Unlike the recommendations made with regard to other issues related to increased prosperity, such as transport and trade infrastructure, the Commission did not recommend that a nationally coordinated productivity reform agenda should include human services such as education:

... in the Commission's view, it would not be appropriate to incorporate the proposed reform programs for health care and VET [Vocational Education and Training] (or any other human services) within a direct successor to NCP. As discussed in chapter 11, competition-related and other market-based mechanisms will have a role to play in delivering better outcomes in these areas. However, the broader equity, access and quality objectives involved mean that such policy approaches will not be the mainstays of reform. Hence, 'packaging' an area like health care with economic infrastructure and the like would probably be counterproductive. In particular, it could send the wrong signal about the motivation for policy reform and thereby increase resistance to change amongst service providers, at the political level, and in the wider community. (Productivity Commission, 2005, p. 379)

Added to the concern about possible resistance to reform resulting from the receipt of "wrong signal[s]" about the intent of future policies, the Commission identified potential problems associated with the application of market-based, competition-related strategies to the provision of human services. These concerns included significant negative impacts of poor "purchasing decisions" in the health and education sectors, the needs based nature of human services, and the negation of the benefits that flow from not-for-profit work (Productivity Commission, 2005, p. 280). Despite these caveats, the Commission suggested that the human services could be included in a broader suite of productivity reforms, but that care should be taken when doing so:

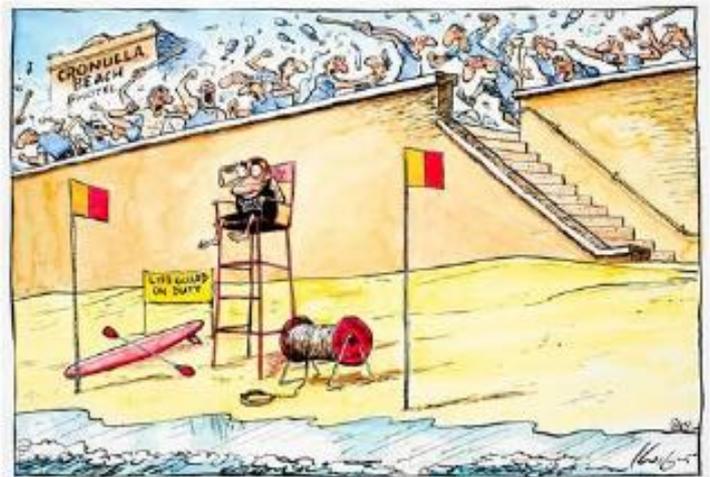
2005

Benefit concerts and other public displays of grief for people immediately affected by the Tsunami are exhibited around Australia.



Warren Brown, Empathy  
Daily Telegraph, 1 January 2005

Prime Minister Howard denies that the Cronulla Riots were racially motivated.



Lifeguard on duty  
Mark Knight - Sun Herald, 13 December 2005  
Image 4 of 5

White participants in the Cronulla Riots are widely criticised.



Proud to be un-Australian  
Fiona Katauskas - New Matilda 21 December 2005

In many cases, competition-related reform will only be a small part of the overall policy package. Explicit recognition that reform is designed to boost productivity and sustainability rather than promote competition, and tailoring reform principles and frameworks to the particular circumstances involved, will also be essential, both to achieve good outcomes and to secure support for change. (Productivity Commission, 2005, p. xxxiii)

As will be seen throughout this chapter, this advice appears to have been taken up by authors of some policies and documents, but the focus on ‘competition’ remains in others. Additionally, the Commission proclaimed a reliance of Australia’s future prosperity on the effective utilisation of *human capital*, stating that “Access by all Australians to an education system of high quality, which fosters the skills, innovativeness and adaptability needed to prosper in an increasingly competitive global market is imperative” (Productivity Commission, 2005, p. 305). As this chapter will demonstrate, this idea was adopted by COAG, CAF, MCEETYA and, ultimately, ACARA.

#### **5.4.2 COAG 10 February 2006 meeting communiqué and attached documents**

The work completed by the Productivity Commission and published in the *Review of National Competition Policy Reforms* provided data to COAG for their own review of the NCP as well as recommendations to increase competition, productivity and prosperity (COAG, 2005). Although the scope of the COAG NCP Working Group was described as ‘broad’ by COAG, the economic competition and human capital agendas were clearly the drivers behind the National Reform Agenda (NRA) that was agreed to by COAG in February 2006:

2006

Prime Minister John Howard says that Australians accept all people who move to Australia if those people assimilate.



John Howard's Australia  
Ron Tandberg - The Age, 23 February 2006  
Image 6 of 17

In a speech to the Sydney Institute about the meaning of Australian citizenship, Treasurer Peter Costello explains that there are fundamental components of Australian law, and sharia law is not part of it.



Imam Costellos call  
Dean Alston - West Australian, 24 February 2006

Summit of state and territory Aboriginal Affairs Ministers to discuss violence and sexual abuse focuses on policing rather than service provision and alleviation of poverty.



Two things at the same time?  
Bruce Petty - The Aas. July 2006

The NCP Working Group has two broad foci – to expand competition within the Australian economy and improve regulation... This involves completing unfinished NCP business, further reforms in energy and transport, improving the efficiency and effectiveness of infrastructure regulation and reducing the regulatory burden on business. All of these reforms aim to boost Australia's productivity.

The NRI [National Reform Initiative] Working Group has focussed on lifting both productivity and workforce participation by building the capabilities of our people – our human capital – through improvements in health, education and training, and work incentives... The NRI Working Group has drawn on the insights of the related COAG Health and Skills Working Groups. For this human capital agenda to be advanced, COAG will also need to satisfactorily resolve important issues of governance and funding arrangements. (NRI Working Group, 2005, p. 10)

Under the heading 'A new national reform agenda' the February COAG communiqué stated that the NRA was designed "to help underpin Australia's future prosperity" (COAG, 2006a, p. 1). Located explicitly within the context of an economically competitive world, a key goal of the NRA was to offset the impacts of an aging workforce by helping more Australians to "reach their potential" by entering the workforce (Council of Australian Governments, 2006a, p. 1). Along with competition and regulatory reform, development of human capital was one of three key areas of focus of the NRA because, according to COAG's own NCP review attached to the communiqué:

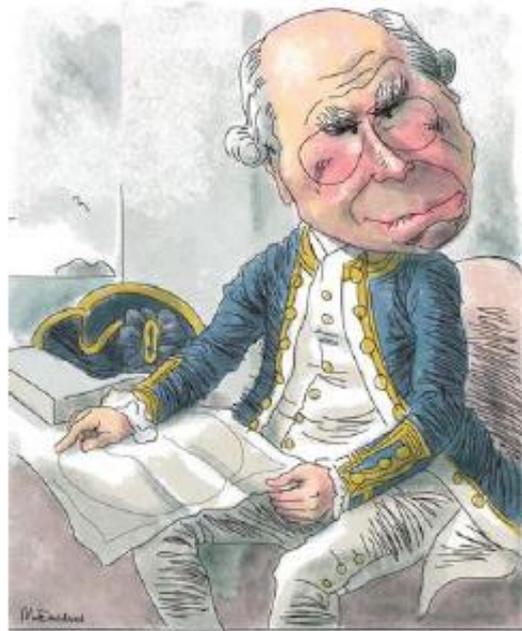
Evidence shows that a healthy, skilled and motivated population is important to both workforce participation and productivity. By achieving better outcomes in health, education and training, and work incentives, GDP will be increased over the long-run, generating a fiscal dividend that could be reinvested in further advances in workforce skills and public health.

For this virtuous cycle to eventuate, it is imperative to focus on a limited number of strategically chosen outcomes – and indicative progress measures – that are known to be important to higher participation and productivity. (NRI Working Group, 2005, p. 14)

Education, health and work incentives comprised the human capital stream. The purpose of education according to the COAG communiqué is to provide "the tools to participate in

2006

Prime Minister Howard adopted a strongly conservative stance during the Australian 'History Wars'.



Howard's history  
Matthew Davidson - The Age, 2006

The Australian History Summit recommends that Australian history be taught as a core subject in junior secondary school.



Stand alone  
Bruce Petty - The Age, August 2006

Prime Minister Howard and Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Multicultural Affairs, Andrew Robb, announce that applicants for citizenship will be required to pass a test about Australian language, values, history and symbolism.



Integration  
Mark Knight - Herald Sun, 13 December 2006

work” (p. 3). The reason for the NRA’s focus on early childhood education and the ‘core skills’ of literacy and numeracy was similar; because an improvement in these skills is likely to lead to an increase in “workforce participation and productivity outcomes” (COAG, 2006a, p. 4). Such statements indicate that COAG took the Productivity Commission’s Advice about focussing on enhancing human capital by focussing on *participation* (if not sustainability) rather than economic competition within the human services stream.

There are two points within COAG’s *Human Capital Reform* report at which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are explicitly mentioned; the first is within a section discussing groups of students who have comparatively low levels of participation in pre-school, and the other is the comparatively low levels of attainment Indigenous students and students from low-socioeconomic backgrounds achieve in national and international literacy and numeracy tests (NRI Working Group, 2005, p. 31). Considering that human capital reform was the focus of the report, it is perhaps not surprising that the reasons given by the COAG NRA Working Group for improving educational attainment were framed according to the economic benefits this reform might yield:

Improved early childhood development outcomes can lead to better academic performance, higher workforce participation and higher earnings, as well as reduced criminality, health inequalities and demands on social services. Such benefits have been found to be greatest among disadvantaged children and their families.

Compulsory schooling provides many of the foundation skills required for a life of learning and work. Success in improving literacy and numeracy outcomes is important in meeting both the future economic needs and the needs of the broader community.

For a national agenda, there is a strong argument for a focus on literacy and numeracy as the fundamental skills for future school success and economic participation. Numeracy and literacy skills are strongly correlated to students staying at school to year 12. As such, they are also likely to be important determinants of productivity and participation in the long run. (NRI Working Group, 2005, pp. 31, 32-3)

2007



Reports about policing, violence, and sexual abuse are being undertaken by various government departments.

The details'll be along later  
Geoff Pryor — Canberra Times, 27 April 2007



Hope 2000k  
Peter Nicholson — The Australian, 26 May 2007

The Howard Government's policy on asylum seekers arriving by boat is to stop them from entering Australian waters.



Stop  
Simon Letch — Sydney Morning Herald, 12 July 2007  
Image 1 of 16

Even the mention of criminality and health inequalities, when read within the context of the whole document, relate to economic concerns rather than ones of social justice:

Young people who leave school without completing Year 12 or an equivalent face lower earnings and a far greater likelihood of not participating in work. Early school leaving may also impose significant personal, social and economic costs through interactions with the health and criminal justice systems, and can lead to intergenerational challenges as the effects of disadvantage flow through to children. *These effects have major budget implications for Commonwealth, State and Territory governments* [emphasis added]. (NRI Working Group, 2005, p. 34)

COAG's commitment to the NRA was reiterated at their next meeting, with progress measures and intended outcomes for the human capital stream published in that meeting's communiqué (COAG, 2006b). In order to improve "participation and productivity", the following goal was agreed to: "significantly improve the proportion of children acquiring the basic skills for life and learning (*subsidiary outcome: The gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous children is closed*) [emphasis in original]" (COAG, 2006b, p. 6). The explicit statement about reducing the educational disparities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students as a *secondary* goal to the overall improvement of educational attainment levels is an important one, especially given MCEETYA's assertion in *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* the previous year that "Improving outcomes for Indigenous students is the *top* [emphasis added] priority issue for MCEETYA for the quadrennium 2005–2008" (MCEETYA, 2005, para. 2). The human capital stream of the NRA was mentioned by the authors of *Australian Directions* as guiding MCEETYA's Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education policies between 2005-2008:

Implementation [of the recommendations in the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* report] will provide systems and schools with the capacity to engage Indigenous children and young people in learning. It will also assist jurisdictions to meet proposed education and training outcomes of the national reform agenda (human capital stream) agreed by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in February 2006 and address key indicators of Indigenous disadvantage endorsed by COAG in 2003. (MCEETYA, 2005, p. 4)

Neither the COAG documents analysed here, nor any other documents studied and reported on in this chapter mention the *Australian Directions in Indigenous Education 2005–2008* report.

### 5.4.3 CAF 13 October 2006 inaugural meeting communiqué

The Council for the Australian Federation (CAF) is comprised of Premiers and Chief Ministers from Australia's State and Territory governments. It was, and continues to be, tasked with making contributions to the shape of national policy. In particular, CAF focuses on the cooperation of all governments, including the Commonwealth, in the development of policy affecting key services, including health and education. The National Reform Agenda was a topic of particular importance during CAF's inaugural meeting in 2006. Endorsing the agenda outlined by COAG earlier that year, CAF stated:

At the core of that vision [of a new type of cooperative federalism] has been this simple idea: that Australia faces unprecedented challenges in sustaining our prosperity in the face of ever intensifying global competition, in particular the rise of the giants of our region in China and India. We can become more competitive, and enjoy the potential prosperity that these new circumstances may offer us, or we can increasingly be consigned to also-ran status in a booming region, to the detriment of future generations of Australians. (CAF, 2006, p. 2)

CAF criticised the Federal Government of the time for moving away from the intentions behind the *Adelaide Declaration on National Goals for Schooling in the Twenty-First Century* (hereafter, *Adelaide Declaration*; MCEETYA, 1999) when the Government suggested a unilateral move towards a national curriculum, and CAF signalled their intent to conduct a review of the continued usefulness of that document. The resulting report, *The Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling*, was published in April 2007, with a revised edition being released in September of that year after consultation with stakeholders (Review Steering Committee, 2007a, 2007b).

The CAF communiqué contains no mention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, curriculum content, or policies related to Indigenous education.

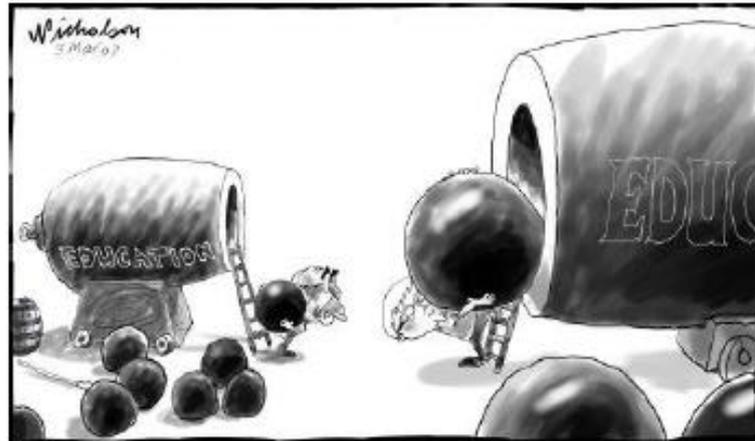
#### **5.4.4 The Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling in Australia (original and revised editions): April & September 2007**

The *Federalist Paper 2: The Future of Schooling in Australia* (hereafter, *The Future of Schooling*, Review Steering Committee, 2007a) was written by a panel directed by CAF to review the *Adelaide Declaration* (MCEETYA, 1999). The review was chaired by Peter Dawkins (then Secretary at the Department of Education, Victoria), and the majority of the paper was prepared by Barry McGaw (then Director for Education in OECD) and Stephen Lamb (then Executive Director of the Australian Council for Educational Research). The *Future of Schooling* was guided by four questions related to the achievements of corporate federalism in school policy, Australia's educational performance on an international stage, the timeliness of writing a new national education declaration, and strategies for promoting high-quality schooling in Australia.

The revised edition of the *Future of Schooling* was a significant document in the year following its publication (Review Steering Committee, 2007b). It was one of two documents identified by the authors of the *Melbourne Declaration* as being a cornerstone of that MCEETYA publication. In fact, sections of the *Future of Schooling* appear verbatim in the *Melbourne Declaration*. Along with the *National Curriculum Development Paper* (NCB, 2008b), the document was also recommended reading for participants engaging in the inaugural national curriculum consultation forum, *Into the Future* (NCB, 2008a).

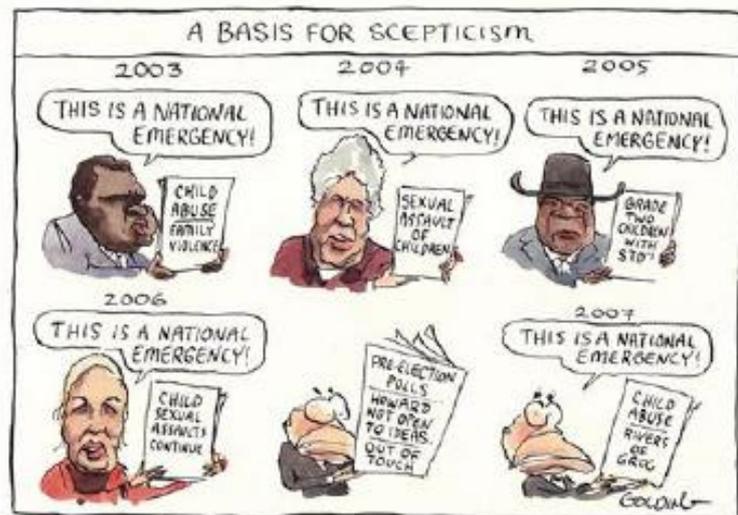
2007

Opposition leader Kevin Rudd focusses on education in the lead up to the 2007 federal election.



Nicholson, 03/03/07

The *Little Children are Sacred* report is publicly released in June 2007, coming to conclusions similar to previous reports.



A basis for scepticism  
Matt Golding — The Age, 26 July 2007

Visible signs of an impending financial crisis arise in the United Kingdom.



Religion 2007  
Bruce Pettit — The Age, 13 August 2007

Reviewing goals of the *Adelaide Declaration* alongside data from the OECD, the *Future of Schooling* presented a position on future economic challenges and potential prosperity based on the human capital development approach endorsed by COAG and CAF (Review Steering Committee, 2007a). Considering the context in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students were discussed in the COAG documents from 2005 and 2006, as two of several disadvantaged groups of students, the stance adopted by McGaw and Lamb regarding the impact disadvantaged students have on Australia's educational outcomes are worthy of exploration. Comment was made about low achieving children and "the impact of the company they keep in school", the lack of progress made on improving equity outcomes for Australian students since the mid-1970s, and the fault for low achievement lying not with curriculum standards but the "challenge of getting the lower performers to meet the standards" (Review Steering Committee, 2007b, pp. 13, 21). The impact of *association* (or "the impact of the company [low achieving students] keep in school"), was also a topic of a 2008 paper by Barry McGaw. In that paper he stated that the 2003 *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA) data suggested that:

...the company the students are keeping within schools accounts for more of the variation in educational achievements than their personal social backgrounds...For students and their parents, the message would appear to be for students to try to enrol with as socially selective a group of other students as possible to gain the advantage that appears to be associated with such company. For national policy-makers, the counter message may be more relevant. (McGaw, 2008, p. 240)

References to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, peoples, or cultures in the *Future of Schooling* are limited. There is a section of the report entitled 'A commitment to improving Indigenous student outcomes'. This section contains three sentences:

While Indigenous student outcomes have improved incrementally over recent decades, marked disparities continue to exist between Indigenous and non-Indigenous student outcomes. Poor results limit the post-school options and life choices of students, perpetuating intergenerational cycles of social and economic disadvantage. A commitment to improving Indigenous student

outcomes through equality of opportunity is outlined in the new statement detailed in Chapter 4. (Review Steering Committee, 2007b, p. 23)

Prior to the publication of the revised edition of the *Future of Schooling*, this particular section was three times larger than the section below it, ‘A commitment to parents and the community’. With the release of the September edition of the *Future of Schooling*, however, the latter section was rephrased ‘Partnerships with parents, the community, business and industry’, and additional information about connections between schools, business and industry was inserted. In the revised edition then, ‘Indigenous student outcomes’ became the smallest of the ‘commitments’.

Chapter 4 of the *Future of Schooling* contains ‘A commitment to equality of opportunity’ in which the need for equitable accessible education in democratic countries is highlighted. One statement refers to Indigenous students in particular:

...there is a need to ensure that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students have equality of opportunity to access and participate in high-quality schooling. This has been explicitly recognised by the Council of Australian Governments and also by State, Territory and Commonwealth Education Ministers. (Review Steering Committee, 2007b, p. 31)

The reference to ‘high-quality’ education is introduced with regard to PISA results which report that Australia’s education system is “high-quality but low equity”, meaning that the achievement of benchmark levels in mathematics and reading is strongly related to students’ “social backgrounds” (OECD, 2000; OECD, 2004, as cited in Review Steering Committee, 2007b, p. 11).

In the third chapter of the *Future of Schooling*, ‘Schooling in 2007: Dealing with new challenges’, the following statement appears:

2007

The Northern Territory National Emergency Response ('the Intervention') is announced. The Howard government uses *The Little Children are Sacred* report to justify increased police and military presence, alcohol, kava, and pornography restrictions, suspension of permit system that controls access to Aboriginal lands, income quarantining of all welfare benefits, along with other measures in Aboriginal communities in the Northern Territory.



Indigenous intervention  
Simon Kneebone — Australian Options, Spring 2007



Between traditional and white culture  
John Tiedemann — The Australian, 18 August 2007

Newly elected Prime Minister Kevin Rudd promises to deliver an apology to the Stolen Generations.



Sorry bandaid  
Matt Davidson — Sunday Age, 23 December 2007

While the developments discussed above have changed the context of schooling, the need for schools to be inclusive of children of diverse socio-economic (and cultural and linguistic) backgrounds remains paramount, especially given the increasing representation of Indigenous children and the forecast growth of the Indigenous population. All Australian children must be given a ‘fair go’; it is no longer acceptable or affordable to have 15% of school-aged children not achieving benchmark standards in a country that has a proportionally smaller population than its major competitors. (Review Steering Committee, 2007b, p. 17)

The “increasing representation of Indigenous children and the forecast growth of the Indigenous population” was an interesting point for the Steering Committee to focus on with regard to the education achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. It suggests that a significant reason schools need to “be inclusive” of Indigenous students is because they are currently achieving at lower levels *and their numbers are increasing*. Although not explicitly stated, one interpretation might suggest that if the population of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders was *not* increasing, the problem would not be so concerning. In addition, the next sentence suggests that inadequate academic achievement by Indigenous students undermines the competitiveness of an already vulnerable Australia, and the authors indicated that there was a point in history when underachievement was “acceptable or affordable” but then the economic implications became untenable (Review Steering Committee, 2007b, p. 17).

The changes to the *Future of Schooling* between the publication of the April edition and the production of the September version are worth noting because they indicate a shift in stakeholder focus. In addition to the changes made to the introductory pages of the revised edition there was an increased focus on Indigenous students’ education, connections between schools and industry, public reporting, disadvantaged students’ outcomes, and the need for a new national statement on educational goals. Letters from the National Catholic Education Commission and the Independent Schools Council of Australia were added, and three additions to the reference list that highlight increased engagement with the business

2008

Debate about legal implications of the Apology revolves around possible compensation claims by members of the Stolen Generations, and the precedent this may set.



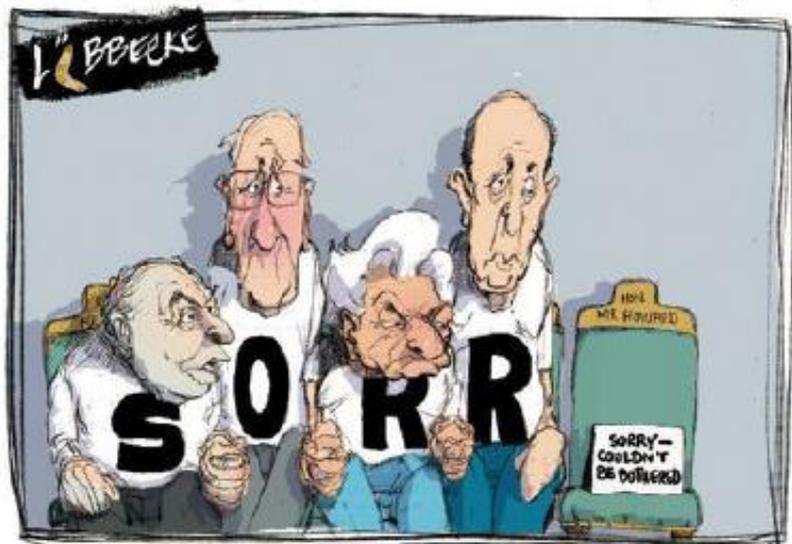
Compensation claims  
Bruce Petty - The Age, 4 February 2008

Former Prime Minister John Howard refused to apologise to members of the Stolen Generations.



Alan Mair, 08/02/08

Former Prime Ministers Whitlam, Fraser, Hawke, and Keating attend the Apology. Former Prime Minister Howard does not.



Sorry - couldn't be bothered  
Eric Lobbecke - The Australian, 9 February 2008

community are documents authored by the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry; Australian Industry Group & Dusseldorp Skills Forum; and Business Council of Australia.

The focus of the *Future of Schooling* on students' achievement in terms of financial impact on the nation and Australia's performance in a competitive global stage should not be surprising given the remit its authors received. That this document was co-written by Barry McGaw (future Chair of NCB and ACARA) and Peter Dawkins (future Chair of the Working Group responsible for the *Melbourne Declaration*), and was recommended reading for participants at the first national consultation forum (see Section 5.3.6) indicates that the positions taken in the *Future of Schooling* were of some consequence during the development of the *Australian Curriculum*.

#### **5.4.5 National Curriculum Development Paper: April-June 2008**

The *National Curriculum Development Paper* (hereafter, the *Development Paper* (NCB, 2008b) was published on the NCB's website ([www.ncb.org.au](http://www.ncb.org.au)) to provide stakeholders with information about the remit of the NCB and to pose key questions for consideration during that early consultation stage. Like many curricula (Moore, 2012; Sharp, 2010) the stated goal of the national curriculum was presented as a nation building one:

Their schooling should help develop a sense of themselves and Australian society, a capacity and predisposition to contribute effectively to society, and the knowledge, understanding and skills with which to work productively and creatively. The schooling of Australia's young people should help develop a cohesive society, with individual members aware of the rich diversity of histories and cultures that have shaped it, and committed to its continuing development. It should build strong foundations for future national prosperity, helping to make Australia productive and internationally competitive in the global economy. (NCB, 2008b, p. 1)

Like the documents preceding it, Indigenous themed content was not a focus of the *Development Paper*, but Indigenous students *are*. The NCB proposed that cross-disciplinary groups could review [the curriculum] from the perspective of various stages of schooling,

2008

The Opposition Leader, Brendan Nelson's response to the Apology is controversial. Nelson endorses the Apology but distances current generations from actions undertaken by previous generations with 'good intentions'.

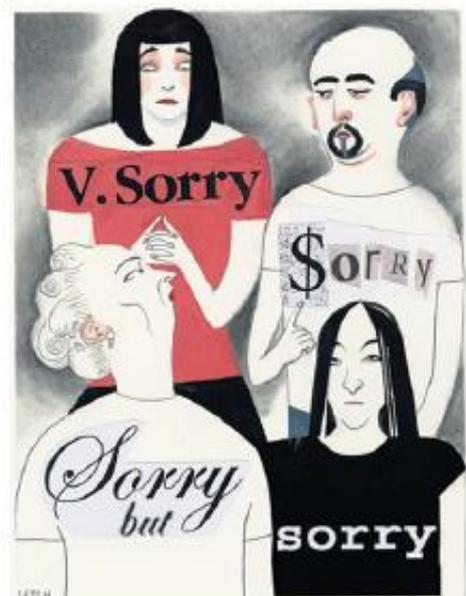


Nelson's two Australias  
Ron Tandberg - The Age, 14 February 2008



Sorry — the first brick  
David Rowe - Australian Financial Review, 14 February 2008

The Apology is variously responded to around the country.



Sorry, v. sorry  
Simon Letch - Sydney Morning Herald, 15 January 2008

such as primary or middle school, or in terms of the needs of specific groups of students, such as Indigenous students, students working in English as a second language, or students with disabilities (NCB, 2008b, p. 8).

Although cross-curriculum priorities such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures did not exist when the *Development Paper* was written, the precursors to the *General Capabilities*, ‘cross-curricular learnings’ were. These ‘learnings’ included skills such as problem solving, literacy, and numeracy. “Cultural sensitivity and respect, engaged citizenship and a commitment to sustainable patterns of living” were described in the *Development Paper* as the kinds of cross-curricular learnings that could be considered ‘perspectives’ rather than competencies (NCB, 2008b, p. 6).

There was no mention of human capital in the Development Paper and, although the NRA was not explicitly discussed, significantly, COAG’s productivity and competition agendas *are* mentioned:

National curriculum has a significant focus as part of COAG’s broader productivity agenda and its drive to sustain Australia’s prosperity and productivity. In this context, national curriculum has a key role to play in increasing Australia’s international competitiveness, both in terms of its economic competition and its educational performance. (NCB, 2008b, p. 29)

The focus of this statement was very much on the NCB contributing to the achievement of nation building goals – goals which are apparently achievable by training students into productivity and addressing education deficits via social engineering.

#### **5.4.6 Event Record of the Into the Future – National Curriculum Forum: June 2008**

The first national curriculum consultation forum was held in June 2008, two months after the inaugural NCB meeting. The record of the keynote addresses, workshop sessions and panel discussions were published as *Event Record of the Into the Future – National*

*Curriculum Forum* (hereafter, *Into the Future*) (NCB, 2008a). Barry McGaw opened the forum as NCB's Chair with an acknowledgement of country and an explanation of the NCB's role and background to the national curriculum. McGaw referred to the work on the *Draft National Declaration on Educational Goals* that MCEETYA was completing at the time, stating that the NCB would be connecting with that work and influencing it. The responsibility of the NCB, however, was not to focus on the work of MCEETYA, but to facilitate a "genuinely collaborative" development of a national curriculum, which required "all of Australia working together to achieve not just world-class curriculum, but a world-best curriculum', in the same way as on the sporting field we don't want to settle for silver or bronze" (NCB, 2008a, p. 5). The forum involved:

...practising teachers, representative of national professional teaching associations, academics, parent groups, principals, Indigenous leaders, unions, business and industry groups, youth, as well as government, Catholic and independent sectors at state/territory and national level. (NCB, 2008a, p. 5)

That first consultative forum was described by the NCB Chair as important, but only the first of many future collaborative events, including the launch of the interactive NCB website.

The keynote topic at the forum was entitled 'Shaping the student of the future', and the Deputy Secretary of the Hong Kong Education Bureau, Chris Wardlaw, shared his insights into schooling in Hong Kong's education system; described as one of "the world's best-performing school systems" (NCB, 2008a, p. 8). Two workshop sessions followed the keynote, with participants discussing 'Approaches to developing national curriculum', 'National curriculum content', 'National curriculum achievement standards', and 'National curriculum and cross-curriculum learnings'. Finally, a panel discussion about the processes required for a consultative development of the national curriculum commenced, and included Chris Wardlaw, Debbie Efthymiades (Teaching, Learning & Standards, Department of Employment, Education and Training, Northern Territory) and Allan Luke (Research Professor, Faculty of Education, Queensland University of Technology).

2008

Opposition Leader Brendan Nelson is required to defend his response.



The apology  
David Rowe - Australian Financial Review, 16 February 2008

Parallels are drawn between the occupation of Tibet and Australia.



What sort of people are they?  
Rolf Heimann - Overland 193, Summer 2008

The financial crisis continues.



Boardroom crisis  
Michael Fitzmales - Australian Financial Review, 30 April 2008

While topics directly related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures or peoples were not recorded in the *Into the Future* document, undefined ‘cross-curriculum perspectives’ were discussed. Concerns were expressed about the possibility that content such as Asia literacy might be dealt with superficially if included in the curriculum as part of “a cross-curriculum perspective” such as intercultural awareness. The lack of diversity among the forum’s participants was also raised as an issue by one speaker who reflected on the impact this might have on the curriculum’s capacity to address the needs of diverse learners for whom the curriculum was being developed.

#### **5.4.7 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians 2008**

The *Melbourne Declaration* was published in December 2008 after a draft was made available for public comment in September of that year (MCEETYA, 2008b). Some changes of note that were made prior to the release of the final version of the *Melbourne Declaration* include the rephrasing of a section where most of the content about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, families, cultures, and learning outcomes was located. While the *National Declaration on Educational Goals for Young People - Draft* (hereafter, the *Draft National Declaration*) referred to “Improving educational outcomes for disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from Indigenous and low socioeconomic backgrounds” (MCEETYA, 2008b, p. 7), the final version of the *Melbourne Declaration* contains a section about “Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous youth and disadvantaged young Australians, especially those from low socioeconomic backgrounds” (MCEETYA, 2008a, p. 15). This change indicates an attempt to move away from such an obvious deficit positioning of Indigenous students (MCEETYA, 2005), but one that is not quite realised. A statement that appeared in the *Draft Declaration* but not in the *Melbourne Declaration* said “Improving educational outcomes for Indigenous children and young people is a key component of our

educational goals for young Australians, and requires additional, targeted support”

(MCEETYA, 2008b, p. 11); with the omission suggesting that although the improvement of Indigenous student outcomes was a concern in the *Melbourne Declaration*, it was part of a larger goal not a goal in and of itself requiring “additional, targeted support”.

The introduction of the *Melbourne Declaration* contains a unified axiological statement for Australia:

As a nation Australia values the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society – a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia’s Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation’s history, present and future. (MCEETYA, 2008a, p. 4)

This statement contains the kinds of terms McGee (1980) described as ‘ideographs’, words that have complex meanings, but are frequently used in policy documents because their meaning tends to be taken for granted by the public. These are the kinds of words that are also widely accepted as positive and aspirational (King & Palmer, 2012). One example of a problematic assumption relates to the perceived coherence of the principles. “Diverse” societies are those which have members who can have superficially different views, as well as fundamentally divergent understandings and knowledge systems. However, in the latter instance MCEETYA’s desire for both a ‘cohesive’ *and* ‘diverse’ society would require assimilation, integration, or extreme tolerance; hardly universally desired principles (Hage, 1998). The simultaneous wish for a *diverse but cohesive* society suggests that this statement of national values was created without due consideration of damaging historical and contemporary expressions of such policies and practices in Australia (Kidd, 1997; Macnaughton, 2001; McAllan, 2011; McInerney, 2003; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Nakata, 2007; Thompson, 1994). The potential for contradiction within this value statement reveals much about the assumed authority of the status quo. Historical records suggest that when put into practice, ‘cohesion’ will generally trump ‘diversity’ (Chesterman, 1998, p. 62; Falk &

Martin, 2007; Moreton-Robinson, 2007a; Strelein, 1996). In addition, ‘Indigenous cultures’, which involve systems of law, will only be valued “in so far as they [are] cognisable within the white legal framework; and their recognition must not threaten to fracture a ‘skeletal principle’ of ‘our’ legal system” or society (Chesterman, 1998, p. 62).

In the *Melbourne Declaration*’s epigraph, and again as part of a goal related to active citizenship and reconciliation, the authors twice stated that Indigenous cultures were to be valued. The separation of culture from people is impossible so it is helpful to explore the notion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures in the *Melbourne Declaration* alongside its authors’ representations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, parents and communities. While Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *cultures* were said to be “value[d] as a key part of Australia’s past, present and future” (MCEETYA, 2008a, p. 4), when Indigenous *people* were mentioned in the *Melbourne Declaration* they were always lacking: the focus was on Indigenous students *not* achieving educational benchmarks; the need to *improve* their ‘outcomes’ (not learning, but *outcomes*); *raise* community expectations (which suggests existing low expectations); and *increase* community participation in schools. The people in whom Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures were embodied were consistently positioned within a deficit location in the *Melbourne Declaration*.

There is one mention of the need for schools to “build on local cultural knowledge and experience of Indigenous students” (MCEETYA, 2008a, p. 6). “Indigenous content”, however, was only deemed likely to be “relevant” for *all* students *sometimes* (MCEETYA, 2008a, p. 14). That Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander content might not be relevant at *any* stage of schooling is a problematic suggestion. It is particularly concerning when juxtaposed with the apparently non-racialised, non-Indigenous remainder of schooling which, in the *Melbourne Declaration*, is presumed to be constantly relevant (McAllan, 2011). The

suggestion by MCEETYA then, is that ‘Indigenous content’ only needs to be slotted into classrooms “where relevant” (MCEETYA, 2008a, p. 14).

#### **5.4.8 NCB papers: Late 2008**

Once the national curriculum consultation process was underway and the goals for Australia’s students were set out in the *Melbourne Declaration*, the NCB began publishing documents providing stakeholders with information about the curriculum’s development. Later on, these documents demonstrated the NCB’s *incorporation* of stakeholder recommendations from forums and online feedback. In October 2008, *Initial Advice Papers* for English, Mathematics, Science and History were published. These documents were produced by discipline experts recruited by the NCB with a remit to provide “a rationale for students studying the curriculum and a broad scope and sequence of material to be covered over the years Kindergarten to Year 12” (NCB, 2008g, p. 2).

Only the *History* and *English Initial Advice Papers* mention content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures (NCB, 2008e, 2008g). The *Mathematics Initial Advice Paper* contains a table comparing Indigenous student achievement to non-Indigenous student achievement but no content related to histories or cultures, and the *Science Initial Advice Paper* contains no mention of Indigenous students or content (NCB, 2008i, 2008k). The *Science Initial Advice Paper* presents science on this continent as a “long-established Australian tradition”, extending “over the past 200 years” (NCB, 2008k, p. 5). This statement excludes the scientific traditions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples that extend tens of thousands of years prior to the arrival of non-Indigenous scientists (Appanna, 2011; Austin & Hickey, 2011).

The influence of the *Draft National Declaration*’s themes is in evidence in the NCB’s *Advice Papers*. The *History* and *Mathematics Initial Advice Papers* making reference to

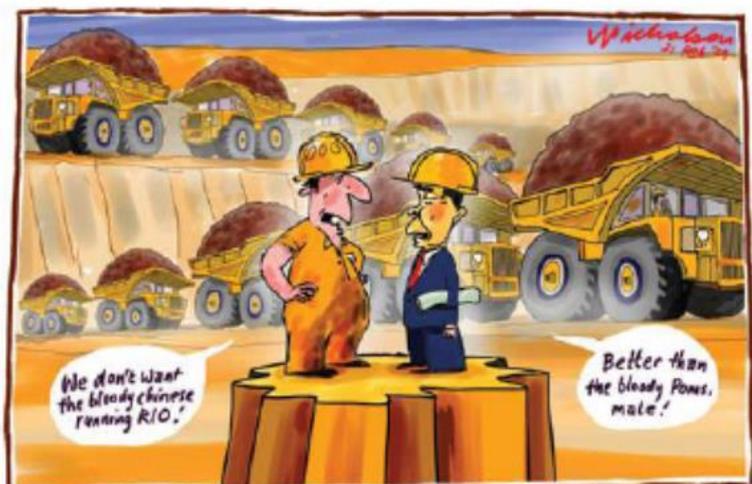
2009

Professor Mick Dodson, Yawuru barrister and academic named Australian of the Year.



Mick Dodson  
John Shakespeare - Sydney Morning Herald, 27 January 2009

Chinese investors express interest in large Australian mining companies.



Better than the bloody Poms, mate!  
Peter Nicholson - The Australian, 21 February 2009

globalisation, its impact on the context within which schools operate and the assertion that the national curriculum must prepare students for the social, political and economic challenges, and opportunities resulting from participation in a global marketplace (MCEETYA, 2008b).

In addition to the Initial Advice Papers, the NCB published *The Shape of the National Curriculum: A proposal for discussion* (hereafter, the first *Shape Paper*, NCB, 2008i). The first *Shape Paper* answered questions posed in the NCB's *Development Paper*, which was published a few months earlier. Since the public consultation process continued after the publication of the first *Shape Paper*, its provision of answers may be read as somewhat premature. The first *Shape Paper* was the first NCB document to draw very heavily on the *Draft National Declaration*, and subsequent *Shape Papers* contain explicit reference to the *Melbourne Declaration*. The *Draft National Declaration* was employed in the first *Shape Paper* to describe the context in which the national curriculum was being developed; the challenges global changes presented to Australians; the consequent need to focus on particular core areas of knowledge and skills in order to increase student success after leaving school; and the overall goals for education in Australia.

The development principles and content of the curriculum were outlined in the *Shape Paper* with a focus on foundational skills and knowledge, namely literacy and numeracy, but also those related to the Sciences and History. PISA results from 2000, 2003, and 2006 were interpreted in the first *Shape Paper* as indicating a need for schools to increase their focus on these areas. This increased emphasis was discussed with reference to the space needed in the curriculum for depth of knowledge to develop, while avoiding a crowded curriculum. This consideration was described as a key principle guiding the development of the curriculum, particularly regarding decisions about the inclusion or exclusion of content. The first *Shape*

*Paper* contained no reference to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority except when the *Draft National Declaration* was cited and the “special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures” was mentioned (NCB, 2008l, p. 3). The first *Shape Paper* did include the general capabilities and it is clear that they were being developed in order to address employability skills identified by various education and industry reports:

*Table 4.* Mapping key competencies onto employability skills table from ‘The shape of the National Curriculum: A proposal for discussion’. Adapted from NCB, 2008l, *The shape of the National Curriculum: A proposal for discussion*. Retrieved from [http://www.ncb.org.au/verve/\\_resources/The\\_Shape\\_of\\_the\\_National\\_Curriculum\\_paper.pdf](http://www.ncb.org.au/verve/_resources/The_Shape_of_the_National_Curriculum_paper.pdf), p. 8)

Key competencies	Employability skills
Communicate ideas and information	Communication
Work with others in teams	Teamwork
Solve problems	Problem solving
Use technology	Technology
Collect, analyse and organise information	Planning and organising
	Initiative and enterprise
Plan and organise activities	Self-management
	Learning
Use mathematical ideas and techniques	Contained in descriptions of several of the employability skills

After further consultation, the NCB released *National Curriculum Framing Papers* for each of the four core KLAs which built on and superseded the *Initial Advice Papers*. The *Science* and *Mathematics Framing Papers* were unchanged in terms of their coverage of Indigenous related content (NCB, 2008h, 2008j). The *History* and *English Framing Papers* were largely the same as the *Initial Advice Papers* in this regard, but the *History Framing Paper* mentioned Indigenous ‘perspectives’ in addition to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ‘histories’ (NCB, 2008d, 2008f).



### 5.4.9 NCB papers: 2009

The first indications that content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures was to be included in the *Australian Curriculum* in a form recognisable as a precursor to the cross-curriculum priority was in the *Shape Paper Consultation Report* (e.g. NCB, 2009b) and *Curriculum Design Paper* (ACARA, 2009). These documents were published in May 2009 after public consultation via online and face-to-face forums. Stakeholder concerns about the lack of an *explicit* focus on Indigenous content were recorded several times in the *Shape Paper Consultation Report* (NCB, 2009b), and the action proposed by the NCB (with an apparent reference to the *Melbourne Declaration*) was to include “further reference to the importance of valuing and recognising Australia’s Indigenous past, present and future in the Shape Paper. Indigenous perspectives will be considered in all stages of curriculum development process” (NCB, 2009b, p. 11).

In the May 2009 NCB documents ‘cross-curriculum perspectives’, which were distinct from the general capabilities, were introduced:

There are other cross-curriculum matters that can be thought of as perspectives rather than capabilities. These are:

- Indigenous perspectives, which will be written into the national curriculum to ensure that all young Australians have the opportunity to learn about, acknowledge and respect the culture of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders.
- a commitment to sustainable patterns of living which will be reflected, where appropriate, in national curriculum documents.
- skills, knowledge and understandings related to Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia. Each of these perspectives will be represented in learning areas in ways appropriate to that area.

The curriculum documents will be explicit on how the perspectives are to be dealt with in each learning area and how links can be made between learning areas. (NCB, 2009a, p. 13)

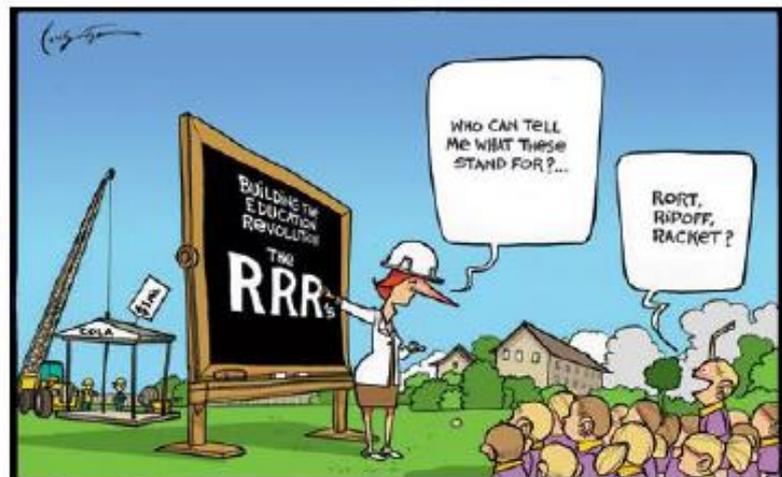
2009 - 2010

The impact of the financial crisis is comparatively minor in Australia, compared to similar countries.



Australia avoiding a recession:  
John Ditchburn - Ballarat Courier, 11 June 2009

Rudd Government's Building the Education Revolution initiative is criticised for misappropriation of public funds.



R is for revolution  
Brett Lethbridge - Courier-Mail, 3 April 2010

Education Minister Julia Gillard calls on parents to administer NAPLAN tests in response to boycotts by teachers and teacher unions.



Minister Trunchbull's NAPLAN boycott solution  
David Pope - Canberra Times, 13 April 2010

Although the cross-curriculum priorities were being called ‘dimensions’ in the July 2010 *Report on Trial School Consultation* (ACARA, 2010d), the ACARA website was referring to cross-curriculum ‘perspectives’ before this, in March 2010 (ACARA, 2010a). Between April and July 2011, the cross-curriculum perspectives changed to cross-curriculum priorities, and Indigenous ‘histories and cultures’ replaced Indigenous ‘perspectives’ on the ACARA webpage. No publically available document records a reason behind the change in terminology, nor is information available that details the reason for the priority’s inclusion in the curriculum.

#### **5.4.10 Curriculum development documents acquired through Freedom of Information request**

I submitted a Freedom of Information (FOI) request to ACARA on the 4<sup>th</sup> of April, 2013, hoping to gain an insight into the directives issued to curriculum authors around the intentions behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priorities. This original request was for:

All memos that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures;

Minutes of all meetings that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures;

All internal documents that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, Indigenous perspectives, or a variation thereof.

The response to this request was a ‘practical refusal’ on the basis that it would “substantially and unreasonably divert the resources of ACARA from its other operations” (R. Randall, personal communication, April 18, 2013). Communication with two of ACARA’s Legal and Compliance officers revealed that there were no known documents that explained the intent or rationale behind the cross-curriculum priority. In order to receive approval, a revised request was required. After phone conversations and email

communication with the two officers, I was informed that I would be likely to receive another refusal if the amended request required all documents that referred to the cross-curriculum priority. Rather than risk another refusal, I agreed that the documents supplied would satisfy my revised request for documents explaining the rationale for the cross-curriculum priority.

The documents supplied by ACARA in response to my FOI request for “Non-public documents that explain the rationale for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority” included nine documents which, together, represent internal ACARA guidelines that assist writers for each learning area:

- *Interim NCB Paper, Meeting 9, Curriculum Design*
- *Cross-Curriculum Priorities Inclusivity Check Process*
- *Agenda CCPs in HPE and Technology Workshop 1 2012*
- *Agenda CCPs in Technologies Writers Meeting 2 2012*
- *Health and Physical Education and Technologies Writers’ initial workshops – PowerPoints*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures - organising ideas and learning area statements*
- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority draft continuum of learning based on organising ideas*
- *Cross Curriculum Priorities - organising ideas in Health and Physical Education and Technologies Template*
- *Technologies Learning Area Statement - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures*

ACARA’s Chief Executive Officer acknowledged the lack of a rationale provided within the supplied texts in the FOI decision notice:

...these documents are not intended to explain the rationale for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority but rather provide guidance to writers in relation to each cross-curriculum priority as part of the curriculum development process. (R. Randall, personal communication, July 17, 2013)

The documents supplied in response to the FOI request *are* almost devoid of reasons or rationales but there is one instance in which something akin to an explicit articulation of intentions underpinning the inclusion the priority appears. In a

PowerPoint presentation created for authors of the Health and Physical Education, and Technologies curricula in May 2012, several years after the publication of the *Australian Curriculum*, the reasons for including the were outlined as such:

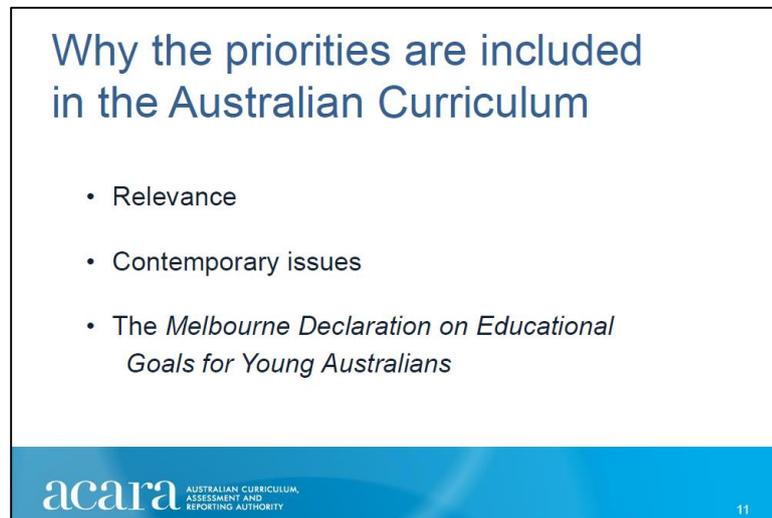


Figure 22. Slide 11 from ‘Cross-curriculum priorities Health and Physical Education and Technologies Writers’ Workshop’. From ACARA, 2012, Cross-curriculum priorities Health and Physical Education and Technologies Writers’ Workshop.

The next two slides state the benefits of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures priority being included across the curriculum:



Figure 23. Slides 12 and 13 from ‘Cross-curriculum priorities Health and Physical Education and Technologies Writers’ Workshop’. From ACARA, 2012, Cross-curriculum priorities Health and Physical Education and Technologies Writers’ Workshop.

Most of the points on these slides are similar to those seen in other documents (e.g., MEECETYA, 2008) but the final point which asserts a need for all students to

understand the “ongoing impact of white occupation on the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples”, is significantly different from that included in other ACARA texts. There is no mention of, or further elaboration on the issue of white occupation anywhere else in the documents. The only point similar to this one is contained within the *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Histories & Cultures Priority Draft Continuum of Learning*, which states that by the end of year 10, students “investigate the impacts of removal from and/or disconnection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People from Country/Place in order to understand that “diverse connections to Country/Place are central to the well being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities” (ACARA, personal communication, July 17 2013). It is interesting to note that this content, included as an *organising idea* is not in the current version of the *Australian Curriculum*. The mention of occupation and its impact on the well-being of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people is an anomaly among the curriculum development documents. While its presence suggests attempts by individuals within ACARA to rationalise the priority in social justice terms, those attempts do not echo throughout the curriculum.

The *Technologies* and *HPE CCP Agendas* for meetings and workshops undertaken during the curriculum ‘shaping’ phase indicate that teams were allocated one hour and 35 minutes to craft a statement about the place of cross-curriculum priorities in their focus KLA, as well as a statement about each priority. Just over three hours were set aside for each priority in each learning area in order to:

- Identify where priority learning opportunities exist in Technologies scope and sequence,
- Map the priorities organising ideas against the sequence of learning in Technologies,
- Identify sample content areas to be developed,
- Write sample content as a guide for writers utilising Understanding by Design template,

- Refine sample content as a guide for writers,
- Check against Shape papers and CCP [organising ideas]

These points were subsequently addressed by the curriculum writers during the next curriculum development phase.

The documents supplied in response to the FOI request provide some insight into the manner in which the cross-curriculum priorities were incorporated into the curriculum and into some curriculum development documents. While some of the provided documents have a creation or publication date indicated, several do not (and requests for further information about the documents were not responded to by ACARA). The *Cross-Curriculum Priorities Inclusivity Check Process* document, which outlines the curriculum development process for cross-curriculum priorities, for example, is not dated but the properties of the document indicate that it was created in July 2012. While this document may provide an indication of processes undertaken since that time, it cannot be assumed that these same processes were engaged with during curriculum development prior to 2012.

The process for incorporating the cross-curriculum priorities since July 2012 has involved consultation and research regarding each priority and its inclusion in each learning area's position paper, and several events at which feedback was received on each priority's position in a KLA's *Initial Advice Paper* and *Draft Shape Paper*. The curriculum writing phase involves multiple instances of communication among and between writers and advisory panels regarding:

- position on inclusion of the priorities in learning area,
- inclusion of priorities in relation to broad general directions of learning area,
- sequence of learning for the priority in the learning area,
- sample content for the priority in the learning area,
- inclusion of priorities to ensure it reflects agreed position in learning area,
- mapping of inclusion of priorities in learning area,

- learning area statement for priorities, and the
- representation of priorities in content descriptions and elaborations (adapted from ACARA, *Curriculum Development process for cross-Curriculum priorities*, personal communication, July 17, 2013)

#### **5.4.11 Curriculum development document conclusion**

Throughout the curriculum development documents, Aboriginal students and Torres Strait Islander students are generally located within deficit positions, despite affirmations in *Australian Directions for Indigenous Education 2005-2008* (MCEETYA, 2005) that such positioning is detrimental to those students. Neither the *Australian Directions* document, nor any other report focussed on Indigenous content, students, or people, is explicitly referred to by any of the curriculum development document authors. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures only appear in curriculum development documents in May 2009, in the *National Curriculum Consultation Reports* (NCB, 2009b). The documents supplied by ACARA in response to the FOI request reveal little about the intentions underpinning the inclusion of the priorities beyond those which are explicitly outlined in curriculum documents themselves. Those explicit statements of intent that *are* included were drawn from the *Australian Curriculum* and are the same as those that appear to have been picked up by the interviewed pre-service teachers. The lack of artefacts recording the intentions behind the inclusion of the priorities can be interpreted as the result of time pressures on ACARA staff at the time of the FOI request that meant the required documents could not be readily found and supplied. Alternatively, this lack of documentation articulating a well-considered reason for incorporating Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures could indicate that the priority was included without a well-considered rationale.

Since the priority did not exist before the middle of 2009 and there is no record that indicates that its inclusion was initiated by the NCB or ACARA, the call for more content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures appears to have resulted

from external stakeholder consultation. In the early stages of curriculum development, it was in the Federal Government's interests for ACARA to facilitate processes that enabled public feedback because transparency and consultation were key Government platforms at the time (Davis, 2008). The interests of various stakeholders and the Government converged as contributors could see their contributions recorded and actioned, and ACARA, which reports to the Government, was seen to be part of a consultative and transparent process. In addition to the consultative context, the Government's public commitment to reducing inequities between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians meant that recommendations from the public about Indigenous content appear more likely to be actioned.

The interests that are explicitly mentioned in documents leading up to the creation of the Curriculum are those of 'the nation'. While views will differ about whether the building of the nation and the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander are in opposition to one another they can be examined as potentially problematic because the existence of the Australian nation relies on the denial of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty (McAllan, 2011; Pearson, 2009; Watson, 2009). Since the explicit intentions underpinning the curriculum were related to Australia's competitiveness through increased productivity and participation, alongside the improvement of the nation's reputation as a fair country with a high-equity education system means that it sits on decidedly shaky ground.

Throughout the documents that played a key role in the development of the *Australian Curriculum* there was some acknowledgement of the challenge of addresses both economic and social justice interests through schooling. The authors of the *NCP Review*, for example, spoke about the problematic relationship between the two and go so far as to suggest 'repackaging' human services policies such as those in education in terms of participation and productivity, rather than the more explicitly fiscal 'competition'. While economic

interests and competitiveness were a focus of many NCB and ACARA documents, explicit references to the human capital agenda diminished as the documents moved towards the publication of the curriculum, with no mention of the term in the Version 5.0 of the *Australian Curriculum*.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Productivity and global competitiveness, drivers that were so prominent in the curriculum development documents, had disappeared from the *Australian Curriculum* by the time the [www.australiancurriculum.edu.au](http://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au) website went live. This terminology continues to be absent at the time of writing. Similarly, ‘human capital development’ is not mentioned in the curriculum. ‘Participation’ is still evident in the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority as well as in the ‘Student Diversity’ section; with literacy and numeracy identified as key capabilities that enable more complete participation in society; and ‘participation’ is again raised as a more generic goal in all KLAs (e.g., participating in Science based careers). The absence of these terms is significant considering their omnipresence in the very early stages of the development of the *Australian Curriculum*. Rather than indicating that competition and the development of human capital are no longer relevant to education policies, the curriculum’s pared down terminology simply makes it harder to determine just what the goals are.

The content of the *Australian Curriculum* website contains a range of materials that provide visitors with information about the various aspects of the curriculum, including the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority. It is possible to find statements regarding the intentions behind the curriculum as a whole, and of the cross-curriculum priority. These statements are, however, vague and open to a good deal of interpretation. That may well have been the object of the curriculum authors and the

approach has a significant number of benefits, particularly in terms of professional and pedagogical freedom. However, the introduction of the cross-curriculum priority must be understood against the backdrop of research that has demonstrated that traditionally marginalised content tends to remain marginalised when it is inadequately introduced (e.g. de Plevitz, 2007; Watts, 1981, as cited in Ritchie & Butler, 1990; Western Australian Aboriginal Child Health Survey, 2006). Of particular concern is the fact that ACARA created the cross-curriculum policies in such a way that ignores almost every recommendation regarding such initiatives made by scholars for the past few decades (e.g., clear scope and sequence for learning and teaching, and sufficient resources to support implementation).

The ambiguity around the priority is compounded by statements and images within the curriculum website contradict one another. While diversity is highlighted as important in the curriculum, diversity is not reflected in the representations of people in videos on the website. The one image explicitly referred to in the video of someone who appears to be Aboriginal represented someone “sometimes thought of [as] hard to teach”. In addition to this combination of words and images that reinforce stereotypes about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students are the curriculum development videos which are heavily influenced by European imagery. The selection of typefaces for the introductory videos signifies an adherence to traditional, culturally exclusive interpretations of these KLAs. The people and places selected to communicate messages about the four core KLAs similarly reinforce conservative, culturally exclusive notions about knowledge, education and each specific discipline.

References to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures are scattered throughout the curriculum. Those KLAs in which the interviewed pre-service teachers expected to see the priority being easily embedded, did indeed contain the most references to

the cross-curriculum priority. However, the *overall* lack of compulsory content (in the form of content descriptions or year level descriptions containing explicit reference to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures) contradicts ACARA's stated commitment to the priority across all KLAs. The complete absence of any achievement standards directly connected to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories or cultures is a key omission considering the body of literature that recognises the impact of requiring teachers to assess some material but not others (Anderson, 2009; Askell-Williams et al., 2012; Tambyah, 2011). In fact, Barry McGaw made the following statement in 2010, when asked why he accepted the position of Executive Director of the Assessment and Teaching of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills

Project:

...what attracted me as well, partly because I'm a measurement person, was that it's based on...a recognition that if you want people to pay attention to skills in the educational setting you need both to be able to be clear about what they are and to be able to measure them, and that's why this project is of interest. And I think it's, quite properly, founded on the view that *if you can't define and measure, people won't pay attention to things* [emphasis added]. (Roth & McGaw, 2010, 0:40-1:50)

At the time McGaw made the statement, he was Chair of ACARA and had been the Chair of the NCB since 2008.

## **Chapter 6: Why all this matters**

### **6.1 Introduction**

The cross-curriculum priority is an important element of the *Australian Curriculum* for two reasons. The first is that the priority embodies a particular social and political context. Consequently, stakeholders armed with appropriate analytical tools can develop an understanding of the intended outcomes of the initiative. Only with such an understanding can an evaluation of the curriculum initiative commence. The priority is also important because of the way in which its capacity to function as a catalyst for significant social change is understood by scholars and future educators. Despite misgivings pre-service teachers expressed about the initiative, there were strong indications that the priority will be relied upon in an effort to achieve a socially and racially just schooling system. The voluntary nature of such an endeavour is, however, a crucial factor in this equation that is discussed here. This final chapter serves to interrogate these two broad topics utilising various theories. The employment of interest convergence theory from a racial realist (Bell, 1992b; 2004) position will illuminate the significance of the intentions underpinning the priority, as well as demonstrating the utility of the methodology for education research.

### **6.2 Answering the first question: What intentions do future educators believe underpin the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures?**

Although the surveyed and interviewed pre-service teachers had varying views about the intent behind the inclusion of the priority, themes emerged from the complete data set. The cross-curriculum priority was understood to be an initiative that ACARA included in order to increase the content knowledge of students, to facilitate the learning of a more accurate version of history than that presented in the past, to increase respect for Indigenous

people by teaching about cultures in a positive way, and as a means to achieve reconciliation. Another significant belief about the priority was that it was designed to convince stakeholders of a commitment to improving educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. There was less consistency regarding pre-service teachers' thoughts on what ACARA expected regarding the enactment of the initiative. This appeared to be closely related to widespread confusion around the knowledge school students were expected to demonstrate as a result of engaging with the priority.

The topic was frequently discussed against a backdrop of overt political activity in the form of the then Prime Minister's apology to members of the Stolen Generations, increased international educational and economic competition, ongoing disparities in living standards between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people, and the perceived impact of standardised testing on curriculum development. There was a noteworthy degree of cynicism amongst the interviewees regarding the motives of those believed to be behind the introduction of the priority (namely, the Federal Government and ACARA). Rather than believing that the priority was the result of a desire to encourage genuine reform and improvement of educational outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students, or the promotion of reconciliation, many interviewees considered a more likely impetus to be a desire to *appear* committed to such causes. Despite this suspicion about the intentions, in only one instance did this appear to tarnish the priority to the point that it was rejected as a strategy the interviewee would implement after qualifying as a teacher. In most other cases, the respondents either feared that their cynicism was well founded but they hoped they were wrong; they thought that the intentions of the Government and ACARA would have little impact if teachers were committed to the implementation of the initiative; or they accepted that politically motivated education policy is an unpleasant reality that teachers must accept.

Some pre-service teachers who were concerned that the priority was largely a public relations exercise still asserted their commitment to it.

Most interviewed pre-service teachers expressed a hope that the initiative would be transformative in local and national contexts. Even those who were less than complimentary about the curriculum authors' likely reasons for including the priority *hoped* that its (potentially superficial) implementation would yield substantial educational and social improvements. During our conversations, however, it was clear that the interviewees' hope did not readily translate into *hopefulness*, with many interviewees hoping for the best but expecting the worst. This attitude tended to be associated with the decisions they expected to have to make as teachers about including non-compulsory content, rather than a disinclination to embed the priority. The pre-service teachers appeared well aware of their agency as future educators and their responsibility regarding the implementation of curriculum initiatives, however, they generally expected any failure to implement this priority to be sanctioned by the wider community.

The most effective kind of domination takes place when both the dominant and dominated classes believe that the existing order, with perhaps some marginal changes, is satisfactory, or at least the most that anyone could expect, because things pretty much have to be the way they are. (Gordon, 1990 as cited in Bell, 2004, p. 187)

This description of Gramsci's (1971) notion of *hegemony* was clearly in evidence throughout the interviews with the pre-service teachers. This continued adherence to strategies and systems that have repeatedly failed to deliver justice is the danger Bell (2004) hoped to see avoided through a more widespread adoption of a racial realist standpoint.

The priority the interviewees wanted to see in the *Australian Curriculum* tended not to be the priority they saw in the curriculum. Nevertheless, they all expressed a commitment to incorporating (their interpretation of) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures into their classrooms (even Alyssa was willing to implement relevant pedagogy, if

not content). Comments like that made by Laura, who said she would be “devastated” should she find herself unable to integrate the priority, were uncommon. Instead, there was a palpable fatalism regarding the initiative. Having the opportunity to reiterate support for a curriculum initiative they thought could have social, academic and economic implications, could also have had an impact on their pessimism regarding its longevity. Having established their credentials as a caring, non-racist teacher by committing to the priority, the pre-service teachers gained licence to resign themselves to failure in practice (Efron et al., 2012; Merritt et al., 2010).

These theories from psychology research are particularly illuminating when considered in light of the potential outcomes interviewees thought could result from the implementation of the priority and their resignation to probable failure. Despite thinking that the priority could result in transformative outcomes – Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feeling respected and recognised by seeing their culture and history reflected in the curriculum; non-Indigenous people realising that racism is illogical and abandoning its practice and, the life chances of all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people consequently improving – when interviewees placed themselves in hypothetical situations facing the choice of teaching the priority or abandoning it, the latter was the (reluctantly expressed) decision. The theory of moral licencing (Khan & Dhar, 2006; Merritt et al., 2010; Monin & Miller, 2001) suggests that the interests of teachers making such decisions would be two-fold: Abandoning the priority in favour of core material would not only produce practical benefits (such as job security), but their moral integrity would remain largely intact due to their commitment to, and attempts to implement, the cross-curriculum priority.

The fact that so many respondents to the survey and interviews suggested that the initiative was designed to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in some way is

unsurprising (although incorrect, according to my interpretations presented in Chapter 5). What is interesting was the frequency with which interviewees spoke of these ‘benefits’ in terms of *affective* outcomes, or those that relate to a *feeling* or *sense* of acceptance (for example). It was clear that most interviewees recognised the inherent disparities between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people within the school system and in broader society, and subsequently saw a need to help Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students to feel more included. That the structures that ensure those disparities were largely bypassed in favour of discussions about affective outcomes was significant because it highlighted a desire to make Indigenous students *feel better* within a racist system, while maintaining allegiance to the racist system itself. Rather than discussing how to ensure that students were *actually* included or *actually* accepted, the focus was largely on whether students *believed* that they were accepted or included. The desire to see Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students feel accepted extended beyond the school years and into their post-school lives, where non-Indigenous people across the board, would be less racist than they would have been had they not been exposed to the cross-curriculum priority. In other words, the interviewees conveyed a genuine desire to shield students from the barbs of a system that has been, and continues to be, a racist one, but few raised solutions that might undermine that system. In addition, there was little to suggest that the interviewees problematised the white privilege of being an ‘acceptor’ or an ‘includer’, with the power to accept or exclude other people (Hage, 1998; Hickling-Hudson, 2006; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Vass, 2014).

The affective outcomes many interviewees and survey respondents wished for were complemented with pragmatic ones, such as improvements in test scores, student retention; improved chances of future employment, good health, and avoidance of incarceration. These potential outcomes are more in line with those mentioned in the curriculum development documents examined in Chapter 5. A large majority of the interviewed pre-service teachers

who spoke about these kinds of issues in any degree of depth gave me the impression that they understand underemployment and comparatively low school retention rates among Indigenous people to be a result of systemic failings rather than cultural or racial shortcomings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. While dubious about the capacity of teachers to effect significant improvements at a school level, the cross-curriculum priority was often discussed as *part* of a solution to achieving social justice and reducing widespread racism. An important feature of this strategy was a reliance on curriculum content to provide an accurate portrayal of the cultures and histories of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in order to counter individual students' racism. The expected result of such teaching was often expected to be the reduction of racism around the nation and across generations.

Critical Race Theorists, however, challenge ways of thinking about racism that do not critique the issue as systemic, and require faith in institutions like schools for its abolition (Bell, 2004; Delgado, 2003; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). The idea that racism is the problem of a few ill-informed, wayward individuals is popular and lies at the heart of many assertions made by the interviewed pre-service teachers. It also forms a solid core of the literature regarding multiculturalism and racism in education (e.g. Benoit and Cumming, 1983; Burnett & McArdle, 2011; Love & Humphrey, 2012; Rivière, 2005; Sachs and Poole, 1989). The notion that racism can be 'educated away' through the teaching of *truth* is often expected to benefit two groups: victims of racism, as well as the person who engages in anti-racism via education. The former can be 'saved' by a network of allies, whilst the latter undertakes a never-ending crusade to strike down racist talk and action by teaching some long neglected truth, all the while showing students (and society by extension) the error of their racist ways. Those who seek to abolish discrimination 'one racist at a time' (or via a group of potentially racist students in a classroom) can carry out their work without ever

challenging the system they work within, for they do not consider the system to be the problem, but *individual people* within it who perpetrate racist acts (Freeman, 1995).

The implication, as noted by Critical Race Theorists, is one of never really attending to the problem of systemic racism and white supremacy. The important contributions Catlin and Wang (2012), Merrit et al. (2010) and Effron et al. (2012) make to our understanding of this phenomenon is that it shows that, not only can the problems of racism be ignored, but an anti-racist utterance or belief that is not even followed by anti-racist action, can result in people feeling satisfied with their anti-racist efforts. This self-satisfaction can lead to a failure to recognise or point out instances of racism, and it can result in people abandoning the type of action they expressed commitment to. Since the structure of the priority leaves teachers to decide whether or not to incorporate relevant content into their classrooms, repeated ‘efforts’ can be made to incorporate it but the pressures of the crowded curriculum may just prove too much to sustain the effort. The continued reliance on the institution of the school to bring about transformative change serves to “deepen the legitimacy of the system” (Bell, 2004, p. 188) while leaving justice unrealised

### **6.3 Answering the second question: What are the explicit and implicit intentions underpinning the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority in the *Australian Curriculum*?**

As discussed at various points in the preceding chapters, an explicitly stated intention behind the inclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures was to increase the relevance of the curriculum in order to better enable students to productively participate in nation building. Where referred to in the *Australian Curriculum*, content related to the priority is suggested for use with that purpose in mind. The ambiguity of further goals

of the priority required further investigation of curriculum development documents to uncover more subtly communicated intentions.

The cross-curriculum priority is inextricably bound in the goals of the *Australian Curriculum*. As highlighted earlier, this national curriculum is part of a strategy to improve Australia's competitiveness on the global economic stage in order to increase the 'prosperity' of the nation. These goals, conveyed by the authors of the curriculum development documents as being inherently good and universally beneficial, are contentious, ideological, and culturally particular. The curriculum was developed in a context in which whiteness and neo-liberalism combined to render a culturally loaded curriculum apparently neutral, and one whose success will rely on the efficacy of individual teachers and students rather than the system itself (Lingard et al., 2011; Ma Rhea, 2012; McAllan, 2011; McGaw, 2008). In addition, Indigenous peoples were consistently framed as part of, but distinct from 'the nation' (e.g. MCEETYA, 2008b; Review Steering Committee, 2007a, 2007b). I propose, therefore, that the goals of the curriculum and, consequently, the cross-curriculum priority cannot be *assumed* to have been intended for *all* Australians.

It is clear that until the draft curriculum was presented for public comment on multiple occasions, the priority did not exist. The lack of 'Indigenous perspectives' was raised as a concern by teachers and other education professionals, and was remedied by the inclusion of the cross-curriculum perspective. The curriculum development documents until that point either failed to mention issues related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, or content or, in the case of the *Melbourne Declaration* (MCEETYA, 2008a), stated a need for them to be valued. In all cases, however, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were assumed to be deficient in numerous ways. In addition, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories, cultures, and people were discussed as

discrete topics, not as living entities that are inherently linked. The asserted admiration of peoples' cultures but apparent disdain for the people themselves suggests that the cross-curriculum priority was constructed with a view to disembodied content intended to fit within a pre-existing, non-Indigenous framework (Hokowhitu, 2009; 2011; Moreton-Robinson, 2000; Nakata et al., 2012).

The presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in the *Australian Curriculum* must result in their abstraction as they are translated from lived realities into topics of study. This will occur at various stages as the content is distilled during interpretation by pre-service teacher educators, then pre-service teachers; during the planning of teaching and learning episodes, then the delivery of lessons and units; and again by each student as this information is disseminated in the classroom. At every stage each person will adopt what they determine to be the essence of a topic. If cultures are understood to be complex systems rather than a collection of discrete components, it is reasonable to expect that anything that remains 'unlearnt' is likely to be integral to the whole. Hokowhitu (2011) has asserted that the quest to render indigenous cultures *knowable* to outsiders is a violent and irreversible act. Hokowhitu's description of cultures dismembered into digestible pieces should serve as a vivid reminder of the fact that histories and cultures are not simply topics for examination, but that which was, is, and will be embodied in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

It is important that I reiterate at this point of the thesis (and I hope it is clear already) that my analysis of the selected documents was not simply undertaken in order to identify points where governments and authors have slipped up and inadvertently used some less than desirable phrasing to describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or revealed surprising reasons for including a cross-curriculum priority. The point of this thesis is not to

highlight those areas where those involved in the development or deployment of policy or curriculum should work harder to appear less racist. The document analyses is a means to shine a spotlight on those words and images that *reveal the reality of Australian society and education as raced institutions*. Without recognising the raced nature of a society's institutions, those institutions' practices that prop up a racist status quo simply cannot be addressed in practice.

#### **6.4 Answering the third question: Why are the intentions underpinning this curriculum initiative significant?**

At the beginning of this chapter, I said that the priority is important for two (admittedly broad) reasons. I hope that the two preceding sections have gone some way to illustrate the significance of this study's findings. In this final section I hone in on answers provided by interest convergence theory (Bell, 2004) in order to demonstrate its methodological utility for drawing conclusions to my final question.

Analysing the cross-curriculum priority via the intentions behind its inclusion allows for the perceived interests of various stakeholders to be highlighted, and then the points at which these apparent interests intersect can be identified. While these convergences or divergences may result in *actual* benefits to particular stakeholder groups, they can also involve *projected* benefits, based on assumptions about another group's interests. Because this study did not investigate the interests of Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders, I do not pretend to know what is in the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. The answer to this final research question, therefore, utilises interest convergence theory to discuss the significance of the *failure of curriculum and curriculum development document authors to sufficiently consider the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people*.

Of course, it is quite possible that the interests that the curriculum was developed to address may be the very same as those of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people across the nation. The fact is, however, that there is *no evidence* to suggest that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's interests were influential during the development of the curriculum and cross-curriculum priority. As a result of a lack of explicit (or even implicit) reference to the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, it cannot be *assumed* that the priority was developed with those interests in mind. The responses of surveyed and interviewed pre-service teachers suggest, however, that a common assumption is that the priority was designed to improve social, educational, and economic outcomes for Indigenous people, or to achieve societal cohesion more broadly.

The significance of the concerns raised about the cross-curriculum priority is not centred on the fact that the authors and editors of the curriculum documents and artefacts contain images and phrases that locate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, cultures and students in deficit locations. The significance of the concerns raised about the cross-curriculum priority does not revolve around the comparative lack of prescribed content related to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. The significance of the concerns raised about the cross-curriculum priority does not stem from the ways in which pre-service teachers are interpreting the intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority. The significance of this thesis and the concerns raised within it relate to the racism that forms the fabric of this nation (Moreton-Robinson, 2007a), is inherent to the education system (McAllan, 2011), that we cannot escape from but continue to perpetuate when we implement curriculum initiatives designed to make this system more palatable (Bell, 1992b; Hage, 1998; Vass, 2014). The data brought to light by this thesis serve as indicators of a system that is fatally flawed, but not fatal for the system itself but for those who were never intended to survive and thrive within it.

### 6.4.1 Heads or tails: The art of compromise via convergence

The strategic use of interest convergence is a commonly employed tactic in endeavours to disrupt colonialism, racism, inequity, and all manner of injustice (Bell, 2004; Dudziak 2000; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Moreton-Robinson has referred to a “politics of embarrassment” (2000, p. 163) which sees members of marginalised groups shine an exposing spotlight on the inherent contradictions of liberal democracies. This is largely achieved by exploiting a powerful group’s interests (such as the desire to avoid international condemnation for ill-treatment of Indigenous peoples) in order to achieve the former group’s aims (cessation of ill-treatment of Indigenous peoples). Bell (2004) suggested that this popular approach, *which exploits the self-interest of the powerful in an effort to promote racial equity*, is severely limited as a long term tactic for bringing about transformative change.

Australian history is littered with examples of the exploitation of (apparently) converging interests undertaken in part to benefit Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. In the first example, a correspondent with the editor of *The Australian Newspaper* calls for an end to the annual meeting between Aboriginal people of Parramatta and the then Governor as it was no longer mutually beneficial:

When this meeting was first established, I have no doubt it was considered necessary and found beneficial, but its continuance now seems to me to answer no good end whatever. It has ceased to be either necessary or beneficial. Those who live within the precincts of the Colony, and who constitute the only portion of the black population that can attend those meetings, are already tame and peaceable enough; we have no longer any thing to dread from them. And besides, receiving food and raiment from the white inhabitants has become with them such a matter of course, that they do not now regard it as an act of peculiar kindness; they have become common beggars, and common beggars have no gratitude. If the savage hordes that hover on our borders could be brought together every year, and such an expression of our good will shown to them; if they were then to be met by our Governor, or some other person in authority, and spoken to in a firm but friendly tone, this perhaps might have some salutary influence upon them. But to congratulate a hundred or two of the

wretched creatures that stroll about our settlements, and give them a good meal and plenty of grog once in twelve months, and to do nothing more for them than this, is a mere mockery of kindness; if, by the debauchery and quarrels it occasions, it does not in reality do more harm than good. (Humanitas, 1827, p. 2)

The Prime Ministership of Gough Whitlam, much praised for its progressive policies, relied heavily on interest convergence to convince the public of the need for change.

What the world sees about Australia is that we have an Aboriginal population with the highest infant mortality rate on earth...the whole world believes that our immigration policy is based on colour...the combination of such policies leans heavily indeed on the world's goodwill and on Australia's credibility. (Whitlam, 1971, as cited in Whitlam, 1985, p. 23).

Finally, Cowlshaw (2004, p. 67) provides an illustration of the “power of moral embarrassment” on individual, white academics engaging in anti-racist work :

There is a fear of seeming, or accused of being, or indeed of actually being exposed as, racist in some way. There is a fear of inadvertently silencing black voices. Finally there is a fear of having one's racial identity named, that is, being positioned as being a specific rather than a universal intellectual...

In these examples, white colonists, Australia, and the white academic are distinguished from, respectively, the black population, an Aboriginal population, and those with “black voices”.

In each case, the interests of the former are privileged, albeit in an apparent attempt to prompt ‘improvements’ for the latter. Herein lies a fundamental flaw of the strategic deployment of interest convergence in attempts to overcome racism: It is a self-defeating exercise. Appeals to the interests of the (already privileged) majority reinforce their powerful position in society. The interests of all peoples are consequently dependent on the continued investment of white people in the concerns of those in minority groups. In addition, appeals framed within the confines of existing institutions require that change be made without fundamental reform ever needing to take place. If, like in the Whitlam (1985) and Cowlshaw's (2004) examples, it is in the interests of the majority to present a persona of empathy, humanity, tolerance, or anti-racism, those interests can be more easily addressed by simply *appearing* to have changed their practice rather than making *actual* changes.

There was an assumption among the interviewed pre-service teachers that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples *will* benefit from the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority *if* it is ‘properly’ implemented. The fact that there is a lack of evidence that the priority was part of a considered attempt to increase equity in schools, or that the priority has been implemented into the *Australian Curriculum* in a way that will result in its widespread integration in classrooms, should contradict this view. However, the history of racism and whiteness in Australia has resulted in a culture that allows race-related contradictions to go largely unchallenged, particularly by non-Indigenous stakeholders (Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Jayasuria (2003, p. 9) has asserted that such contradictions result in part from “the paradox of pluralism and dilemma of universalism”, the combination of which characterise multicultural policies in Australian. Education policies and initiatives have been developed upon foundations of essentialised constructions of concepts such as *culture*, while their authors pronounce an understanding of and appreciation for diversity (Jayasuria, 2003). The recent report on pre-service teacher education undertaken by Moreton-Robinson et al (2012) maintains that

Indigenous peoples, most certainly in Australia, are primarily seen through the optics of ‘race’ not ‘culture’, and so racially indeterminate approaches which seek to solely celebrate cultures and lifestyles will do nothing to interrogate the racialised social and political structures which Indigenous peoples must negotiate. (p. 15)

These contradictions, which are inherent to Australian education, are woven throughout policy and were echoed up by many of the interviewed pre-service teachers.

That the authors of the policy and curriculum documents explored in this thesis spoke of equity and valuing cultures, while reducing the people in whom those cultures are embodied to uninterested, problematic, challenging members of society, suggests that contradiction and hypocrisy around racial issues remains strong. That many pre-service teachers expected that the initiative was only introduced to add another level of veneer to the

‘fair go everyone’ branding of Australia, but were still committed to teaching it, highlights the power of the rhetoric. Despite their concerns, pre-service teachers often spoke of wanting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in their class to *feel* as though they belonged in the classroom, in the curriculum, and in Australian society. There is an understanding that Australia remains a country in which white supremacy continues and that these school students *do not* currently belong, which is why these well-meaning future educators want to contribute to the *sense* that Indigenous children have a place in this country. The frequent reference to ‘inclusion’, ‘acceptance’, and ‘belonging’ articulates the reality these pre-service teachers see around them, that the majority culture is not Indigenous, it is one in which room can be made for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, should teachers choose to do so and if the system allows that to happen.

The impact of the cross-curriculum priority is yet to be seen. It is of course possible that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people will benefit from the initiative despite being fortuitous beneficiaries. A reliance on racial fortuity for educational equity will leave the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in a precarious position for several reasons. The major concern around this strategic use of interest convergence is that the interests of the non-Indigenous majority will trump those in the minority wherever a conflict between them arises (Bell, 2004). Regardless of the merits of an initiative, it is not politically expedient for governments, for example, to develop policies that are likely to ostracise the majority of voters. If a policy or curriculum can be implemented in such a way that avoids public and political backlash, if the nation can be convinced that an initiative will ‘make a difference’ or ‘close the gap’ without negatively impacting on their economic, social and racial capital, its chances of implementation and longevity are improved. If, however, the non-Indigenous sacrifice is deemed too significant, the initiative can be easily disposed of

with little regard for the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples because they were not intended to be a primary beneficiary in the first place.

#### **6.4.2 Flipping the coin: The sacrifice side of compromise**

Racial sacrifice involves the involuntary surrender of rights or interests of members of a racial minority. Bell (2004) suggested that these sacrifices usually occur as an outcome of negotiations to bring about agreement between two disparate groups within a majority. The format of the cross-curriculum priority addresses the interests of two disparate groups within the non-Indigenous Australian majority: liberal interests are served because the priority serves as affirmation of perpetual movement towards equality, in the form of the nation's commitment towards educational gap closing. In addition to these interests, conservative fears of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures asphyxiating the core subjects at this time of heightened global competition are quite easily allayed by pointing to the lack of compulsion for teachers to incorporate them throughout (McGaw, 2014). The priority serves the purpose of appeasing those within the majority because they stand to lose little educational, economic and cultural capital, while gaining the kudos and self-congratulations that result from attempts to close equity gaps. Anticipation of such a phenomenon can facilitate a more complete understanding of the significance of the current study's findings.

Moreton-Robinson (2000) has problematised the notion of 'knowing about' another peoples' culture and highlighted the limitations of such attempts:

*To know* an Indigenous constructed social world you must experience it from within; to *know about* such a world means you are imposing a conceptual framework from outside. These two ways of knowing inform us that there are limits to knowing an "Other" be they black or white and these restrictions impact on inter-subjective relations and the exercising of power. (p. 185)

Nakata et al (2012) have also recognised the inherent problems that arise when scholars and tertiary educators romanticise or simplify Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in attempts to decolonise education. This simplification and romanticising is not reckoned to be inherently problematic since cultures are dynamic. However, they state that

...it is a problem if this knowledge production is not transparent and mystifies its sources by a practice of homogenising or universalising the Indigenous. A familiar risk re-presents: that of misrepresentation of Indigenous people via generalisation, misunderstanding, or distortion of knowledge, social meanings and the social functions of knowledge organisation. (Nakata et al, 2012, p. 128)

Most interviewees and survey respondents believed that the priority was developed to enable students to *know about* Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. This apparently superficial and simplistic belief is revealed as significant in light of the work of Moreton-Robinson (2000), Nakata et al (2012) and Hokowhitu (2011). The epistemic damage each of these authors refers to cannot be thought of as being something removed from people – as simply abstracted concerns with no practical impact: “One effect of such knowledges for Indigenous women in making claims for land is that they can become victims to anthropological knowledge that devalue their interpretations of their lives and contexts in their own terms” (Moreton-Robinson, 2000, p. 92). Historical examples akin to those alluded to by Moreton-Robinson abound, and continue today. In addition to the undermining of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people’s knowledge in legal cases, Indigenous people’s knowledge is negated to the point where their very identity (and right to self-identify) is called into question (Gelber & McNamara, 2013). Nakata and Moreton-Robinson emphasise that, at the very least, the limitations associated with teaching and learning about the Other must be made apparent to teachers, learners and society more broadly.

The vagueness of the cross-curriculum priority makes it impossible to evaluate in terms of its successful implementation. The only explicit pedagogical goal proffered by the curriculum authors, that students attain more knowledge about the topic, is certainly

achievable. While it could be suggested that this 'common sense' pedagogical goal should be *carefully* undertaken, and done in consultation with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, I am not convinced that *carefully* engaging in epistemological violence is sufficiently better than doing so carelessly. Australian school systems do not allow for the required work to be undertaken to address concerns around this issue (Maxwell, 2012a;2012b; Nakata et al., 2012; Vass, 2014). Simply focussing on how to teach more 'appropriately' is likely to do more to reassure well-intentioned teachers that they are doing their best, while failing to adequately resource or address the problems of racism or culturally exclusive curricula.

### **6.4.3 The constancy of a racist equilibrium**

Because the Australian education system is an inherently racist one which maintains a commitment to white supremacy, measures will be (consciously or unconsciously) sought and found to thwart any potentially transformational initiatives. It is simply not in the interests of the majority to undermine the structures that support the status quo. The cross-curriculum priority is not a radical or transformative initiative. It is not a foundational element of the curriculum, and it is included in such a way that teachers and school communities can essentially opt out with no repercussions and there is little but good-will to drive its inclusion. There is no thorough, considered rationale for the initiative that suggests that anti-racism, social justice, equality, equity, or social transformation were intended goals of the priority. The authors ignored evidence that has shown that curriculum initiatives tend to fail when they are not accepted as inherently important to education, especially those that are not valued by education departments via recognisable indications of value, such as assessment. In addition, historical, theoretical and empirical works which problematise the practice of teaching *about* cultures appear to have been ignored.

The existence of the priority could enable teachers to demonstrate their commitment to social justice and racial equality. Students are likely to be provided with opportunities to develop some knowledge of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures. Those on the liberal side of politics could use the curriculum content as evidence of progress in tolerance, inclusion and race relations, while conservative critics could use the priority as evidence of a society in the grip of political correctness and demand a return to more traditional values and content. What the priority cannot achieve, however, are those transformative outcomes that so many pre-service teachers thought could be possible.

## **6.5 Converging interests: Not the solution to racial inequities perpetuated through schooling**

Whether the cross-curriculum priority was included in the *Australian Curriculum* with a view to avoid the continued embarrassment of the achievement gap between Indigenous and non-Indigenous students, or whether it was to avoid charges of hypocrisy post-Apology by rectifying past exclusion of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures in school curricula may not mean much for the outcomes of the initiative. Similarly, if the priority is in the curriculum because of pressure exerted by various interest groups during consultation may be of little consequence in the end. The fact that has been the most noteworthy in my efforts to better understand the priority is that it was not designed with much, if any, consideration of the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people or peoples. The *utility* of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures is emphasised ahead of their inherent worth. The priority, ACARA suggests, can contribute to the achievement of the nation's economic goals. As such, an apparent convergence of interests arises between those who want more Indigenous content and those who see the curriculum as a vehicle to economic prosperity. Reliance upon converging interests leaves

initiatives such as the priority vulnerable to removal or dismantling should these interests diverge at a later stage.

At the core of strategic interest convergence is a reliance on the majority's self-interest to provide impetus for change. Such tactics, however, are extremely risky because the majority's interests may be realised by simply *appearing* to have enacted change, rather than *actually* enacting change. The goals of those seeking justice by deploying strategic interest convergence will remain unachieved, while those in the powerful majority reap the rewards of greater self-concept and the political kudos of (apparently) enacting changes to increase social justice. The solution to systemic racism cannot arise by relying on the system itself, for it merely serves to strengthen those institutions. Without precedent to indicate that those within the institution will ever surrender psychological and material power with selfless regard for the Other's interests, alternative strategies must be sought.

We must recognize and acknowledge (at least to ourselves) that our actions are unlikely to lead to transcendent change and, despite our best efforts, may be of more help to the system we despise than to the victims of that system whom we are trying to help. Then, that realization, and the dedication that is nurtured, rather than discouraged, based on that realization, can lead to policy positions and campaigns that are less likely to worsen conditions for those we are trying to help, and more likely to remind the powers that be that out there are persons like us who are not on their side and who are determined to stand in their way. But beyond that, continued struggle can bring about unexpected benefits and gains that, in themselves, justify continued endeavor. (Bell, 2004, p. 192)

## 6.6 Conclusion

The elimination of racism was never raised as a goal of the cross-curriculum priority or the *Australian Curriculum*. The undermining of structures that support white supremacy and the racist status quo in Australia were not goals of the curriculum. The inherent worth of the histories and cultures of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was apparently not sound enough reason to include the priority in the curriculum. The priority was included in the curriculum in order to achieve the broader aims outlined in this thesis. Some of the

reasons that *were not* behind the priority's inclusion will be unlikely to surprise many people, but my interviews with pre-service teachers who were about to head out into schools suggest that some are placing a great deal of faith in this initiative which they have interpreted as being in the service of social justice.

As I stated earlier, multiple (perceived) benefits could certainly come about as the result of the implementation of the priority – piecemeal progress towards a more socially just society could well arise. Several key points must, however, be understood:

- Benefits for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people should not be assumed to have driven the priority, nor should they be expected to naturally result from the existence of the priority – such outcomes will be fortuitous.
- The existence and structure of the cross-curriculum priority will be easy to undermine, regardless of the impact on the interests of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people because the initiative was not designed for the specific benefit of Indigenous people.
- The reliance on the priority to bring about transformative change will serve to legitimise the education system as a means to achieve justice, without requiring strategies to undermine white supremacy.
- When the priority 'fails' to facilitate the achievement of social justice and anti-racism goals that many stakeholders believe it was designed to address, the argument may be advanced that an Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander focus in curricula should be dumped and not reattempted because it does not facilitate justice. In addition, the 'failure' of the initiative to facilitate improved educational outcomes of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students may be utilised as evidence that such improvements cannot be achieved via curriculum content.

At the end of this project, after the three research questions have been answered and the potential implications of the findings explained, I am left wondering whether the scenario outlined above is the best we can expect from our education system. I am of the view that these outcomes may not be the best or the worst we can expect, but if we keep focussing our efforts on strategies like the cross-curriculum priority, they will be the type of outcomes we should expect to be repeated time and time again. The initiatives may look a bit different and the words will have changed, but within this society, within this education system, these initiatives will continue to serve the interests of the many with disregard for those of the few. The inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority and its deployment in schools should not be considered by any stakeholder as individual or collective acts that warrant smug, self-satisfaction, having convinced ourselves that we have done what we can to contribute to a more just society.

## Post script

In September, 2014, the report on a Government ordered review of the *Australian Curriculum* was publically released. The recommendations of the reviewers (one of whom has been a long standing critic of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross curriculum priority) included the removal of the *cross-curriculum* feature of the priorities. Instead, it has been recommended that they be “redesignated as ‘curriculum priorities’, but they must be embedded properly within particular learning areas, only where relevant, and where their inclusion can be justified on epistemological grounds”. The initial Government response suggests that it supports the recommendation.

Less than five years since its inception, it appears that the precarious position of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority has been revealed.

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## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: The data that weren't

#### Part I - Teachers

This project was originally designed to include interviews with teachers practicing within the Queensland state school system. The decision to only invite teachers from Queensland state schools was pragmatic as well as methodological. Timing was significant in the decision to focus on Queensland state schools rather than schools in other states and territories. Permission needed to be sought from educational authorities (in this state, Education Queensland [EQ]) before inviting teachers to participate in research, with permission then required to be sought again from individual principals, and consent gained from individual teachers. My previous experience in seeking such permissions had demonstrated that it can be a protracted process, and since there were other participant groups for whom I also needed to seek organisational permission, the decision was made to contain the study to one state. As I currently live in Queensland, this decision was expected to increase the likelihood that interviews would be able to occur in person should participants prefer to nominate a face-to-face interview, rather than communicating on the telephone, internet (for instance, via Skype) or e-mail. The methodological considerations around the decision to stay within Queensland involved the intent of this aspect of the proposed study, which was to collect data that may be *indicative* of the manner in which the cross-curriculum priority was being interpreted, rather than seeking to collect definitive or universally applicable data. Approximately 30 interviewees were to be sought from this group.

Upon receiving my application to conduct research within Queensland state schools, EQ staff advised me that the project did not need approval from Head Office, but could instead be advertised in schools if individual principals gave their permission. Once permission was received from EQ, posters advertising the study were designed and printed in

preparation to be sent to principals with an explanatory letter (see Figure A1). An electronic copy of the poster was attached to each e-mail sent to Queensland state school principals who I had randomly selected from a list made publically available by EQ (see Figure A2).

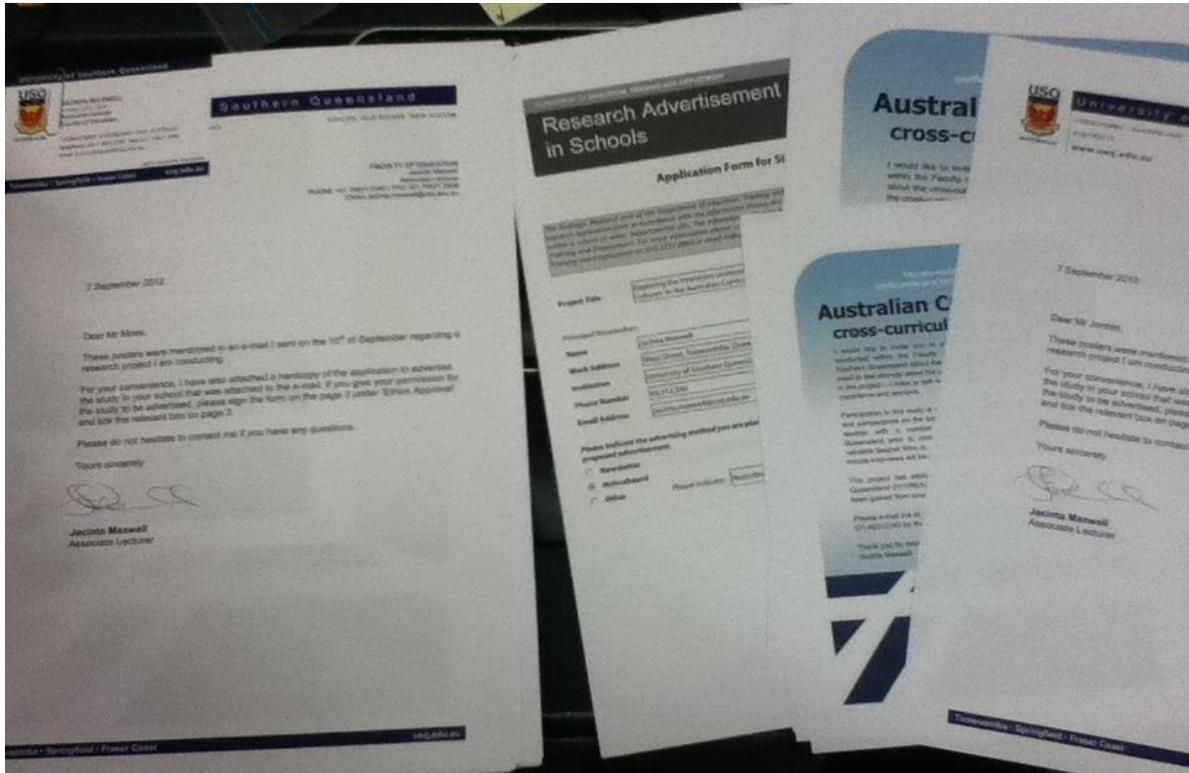


Figure A1. Posters and letters ready to send to school principals.

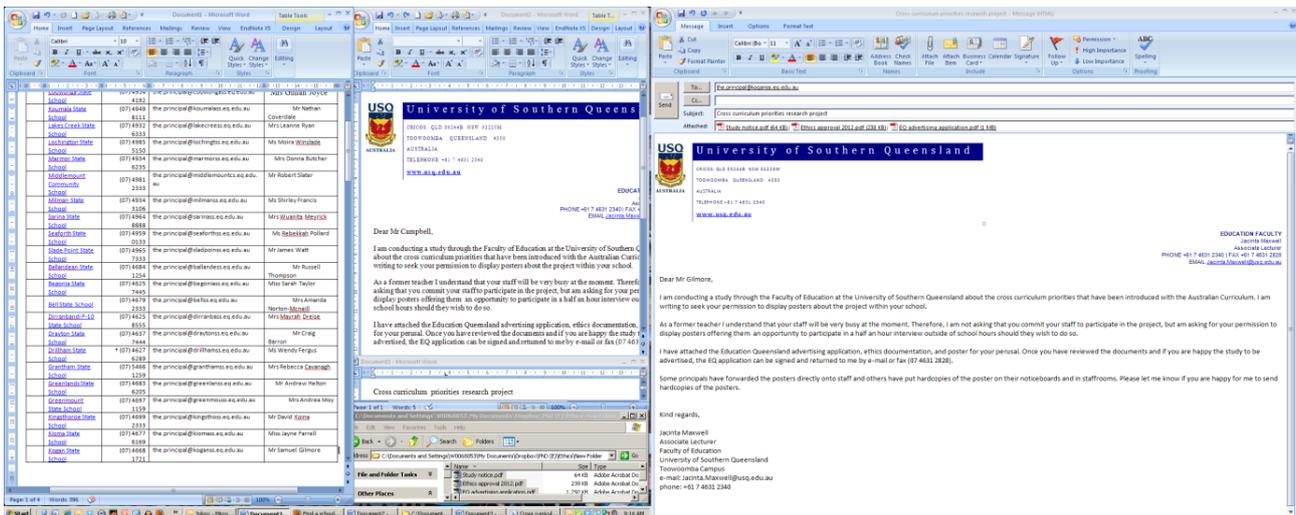


Figure A2. List of Queensland state school principals and email to one principal.

This initial request for permission to advertise the study in schools was largely unsuccessful, as noted in an excerpt from my research diary:

30 August 2012

...Yesterday I got an email from a principal saying that her teachers were too busy to participate, which is annoying because I'm not actually asking their permission for teachers to participate, merely to advertise in the school...

05 September 2012

I've had a positive response from a principal today, who initially said that the teachers didn't have time to participate, but I told her no one has to participate but I'd appreciate the opportunity to put the posters up. I just spoke to another principal who said they're too busy. I need to change the email to principals to reflect the need to allow their staff to choose by putting the posters up and allowing them to make that decision...

As suggested above, the principals' decision to refuse my request to advertise the study upset me for several reasons. Obviously, the practical implications on my project as a result of being shut out of schools were of particular concern to me. In addition, teachers were being denied an opportunity to discuss an aspect of their work and to contribute to research about that work without their knowledge. While I was cognisant of a desire to protect busy people from additional tasks, the refusal to even allow teachers a chance to decide whether they participated in the project or not struck me as patronising and paternalistic. I acknowledged, however, that the manner in which I was broaching the topic with principals could have been problematic, so the next batch of e-mails I sent was designed to address their concerns about teachers' heavy workloads and to reassure them that agreeing to advertise the study did not mean that their staff was committed to participation in the project. The response rate was still low (four positive responses after approximately 50 e-mails), but more positive responses were received to the second, amended e-mail. Only two teachers responded to the invitation to participate in the project. After the information sheet and consent form were e-mailed to both potential participants no further correspondence was received from either teacher, despite a follow up e-mail enquiring about their desire to participate.

Participants from schools were sought for several months without success. This was disheartening, but also concerning in terms of the pragmatics of getting my project underway. My initial response was to start contacting principals in schools interstate. However, my day-to-day work as a lecturer in an education faculty presented me with inspiration for another

possible participant group; that of final year, pre-service teachers. Although there are significant differences between practicing and pre-service teachers, the fact that I was seeking to find out what interviewees thought the intentions were behind the cross-curriculum priority (as opposed to how they were implementing it in the classroom, for example) suggested that pre-service teachers in the final stages of their degree would be able to provide interesting and relevant contributions to the project. I was concerned about receiving a response similar to that which I received from principals and teachers, but was pleasantly surprised almost immediately upon sending the first e-mails to deans of education.

## **Part II - Curriculum authors and contributors**

The *Australian Curriculum* has been developed according to a model that involved consultation at various stages with a range of interested groups and individuals. The current project was originally designed to answer questions about the implicit and explicit intentions behind the cross-curriculum priority in part by interviewing authors of the curriculum and members of curriculum advisory groups. The ACARA website includes information about these groups, the names of those involved and their usual place of work, so I expected that contact could be readily made. I was particularly interested in speaking with members of the Equity and Diversity, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander advisory groups because they struck me as being the most obviously relevant to this study. Another group of people I wished to speak with were those involved in the writing of the *Australian Curriculum*. A key reason behind my desire to speak with people directly involved in the curriculum's development was to hear their own interpretations of the intentions behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority, and to find out what information they had been given about these intentions.

Because of my experiences with research involving teachers, and the requirement that principals and/or the relevant government body be approached in order to gain access to those

staff members, I approached ACARA to seek permission to contact curriculum authors and advisory group members. Permission to invite potential participants to contribute to the proposed study was initially sought in early April 2012. Permission to make contact with members of advisory groups was gained at the end of August in that year after multiple email and phone interactions with various ACARA staff members. Participants were sought from one of the advisory groups until February 2013. All contacted persons declined to participate or did not respond to my e-mails requesting that they consider contributing to the project.

The delays resulting from an initial lack of participants were quite frustrating, but mainly concerning. With every potential participant declining to participate or not replying to emails, my fears of being unable to complete the study increased. My feelings and concerns were captured in my research journal:

24 July 2012 21:03

My ethics application might be able to be resubmitted by the end of the week as I've heard back from every education department apart from South Australia and Maree [pseudonym for ethics contact] from ACARA is getting back to me soon...hopefully. It will be good if I can get into the interviews before too long.

I was just thinking about ethics and institutional approval seeking which is doing my head in at the moment. I don't think getting approval from ACARA is going to be very easy, or at least getting in touch with the people I want to will probably be difficult. We'll have to wait and see. I found out that there are minutes of meetings that I'll be able to get access to through freedom of information. That might cost money though, so it will be interesting to see how much. It is very frustrating that these kinds of organisations are able to act as gatekeepers to their staff – I think I should be able to do something similar to what I'm doing in the schools – sending out an advertisement and if people want to participate, they're allowed...

8 August 2012 07:39

As soon as I wrote this up yesterday I thought I'd tell Andrew [my PhD supervisor] that I have got ethics approval pending ACARA.

17 August 2012 08:34

I got a lot of my stuff ready to send off to potential participants yesterday. I made a poster for staff rooms and notice boards as well emails for principals and one for [a person involved in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education] who I met at the conference in Vancouver. I thought I could start sending some stuff but when I re-read my ethics clearance notice and noticed it said that I can't do ANY data collection until I hear back from ACARA. So I can't even do research with non-ACARA folks. Arrggh! So it's back to waiting.

21 August 2012 07:15

So I called ACARA yesterday, feeling a bit worried that they'd be annoyed for me hassling them. However, Maree said 'have you sent it?' I said I had and she said she'd follow it up. So, that's fucked. I got in touch with them so long ago and have nothing yet to show for it. On top of that, the new ethics person [at my university] hasn't got back to me about the data collection through EQ or anywhere else without ACARA permission. Sure is frustrating. I think I'll phone the ethics person today and check whether they have my email. I can't just hope that the messages are getting through to people - learnt my lesson there.

22 August 2012 08:26

I seem to be in a bit of a funk. I'm not feeling as though I'm making much (any?) headway. I really want to get started on data collection. Having to rely on other people to get shit done is starting to get a bit old. I'm also finding it hard to read.

3 September 2012 05:52

I was thinking that I wouldn't write on Friday because I knew I was just going to write a lot as part of my literature review chapter (which is currently about 27 pages including refs), but I think I should have as the rest of Thursday (30<sup>th</sup>) was a rollercoaster. After I got my email from the principal, I continued to work, all fine, then I emailed ACARA and they said they'd given me the green light – totally ecstatic.

10 September 2012 07:53

I spoke with Angela [pseudonym for advisory board contact person] from ACARA who said she'd get me on the agenda for the advisory board meeting. I sent a message to Chris [pseudonym for a member of that board, who I had had previous contact with in another capacity] to say I'd be speaking during it and wanted to let him/her<sup>1</sup> know that I can tell Chris a bit about the project in case s/he was not going or in case s/he wanted more information. Chris wrote back to say [the board] hadn't been asked to put me on the agenda. I wrote back saying it had just been raised that morning. It seems like every time I'm in contact with Chris I feel like I'm fucking up. It makes me a bit stressed. So I didn't hear back from either Chris or Angela. I don't want to do future research with people! It's so much harder than doing the other work. When it goes well it's really good though – it's just a matter of actually getting to talk to people... Today I'll send the emails, and keep going with that literature review... But I've only got three more weeks to finish whatever it is I'm going to finish so I've really got to get going.

12 September 2012 08:16

Today I'm e-mailing principals as a follow up to the package and email I sent. I'll also hopefully be speaking with the ACARA advisory board if I have been put on the agenda. I hope this email gets fixed soon (Outlook has been playing up the past couple of days)...

14 September 2012 07:47

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<sup>1</sup> As I have only mentioned two ACARA Advisory Boards I have used gender neutral pronouns throughout this excerpt to retain Chris' anonymity.

Angela from ACARA phoned me yesterday morning to tell me that the advisory board meeting had been called off, so I waited around for nothing. She was apologetic. I've written to Chris as s/he...to ask whether I can speak with him/her about the project – am yet to hear back...

17 September 2012 08:16

On the way to work I was feeling happy about getting here, then I started thinking about the lack of response from Chris and that gets me down...

25 September 2012 08:08

Had a great day of reading and writing yesterday so want to get straight back into it this morning...Still no word from any teachers (it's holidays for the next fortnight) or from Chris. I should get in touch with ACARA today and find out about getting access to minutes through the FOI [Freedom of Information] stuff.

## Appendix B: Survey information and survey question provided to participants

### Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures

This survey is collecting responses for a project which seeks to explore the intentions behind the inclusion of the cross curriculum priority 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' in the Australian Curriculum. This research is being conducted by Jacinta Maxwell who is an Associate Lecturer and PhD student at the University of Southern Queensland. The project, which will report on the ways in which pre-service teachers are interpreting the intentions behind the cross curriculum priority, is expected that the research findings will be of interest to a broad range of stakeholders, including members of school communities and pre-service teacher educators. Full ethics approval has been granted by the University of Southern Queensland (Ref: H11REA217).

#### Confidentiality

All data collected for this project will be stored on a password protected computer. Documents containing information that allow you to be identified will be stored separately from your survey responses and interview transcripts. Any information obtained in connection with this project and that can identify you will remain confidential. It will only be disclosed with your permission, subject to legal requirements regarding the privacy of others. If you give your permission by completing the survey, the results may be included in a thesis and in professional journals.

In any publication, information will be provided in such a way that you cannot be identified. Any data that may enable a reader to identify you will be separated from your response and will not be published.

#### Voluntary Participation

Participation is entirely voluntary. If you do not wish to take part you are not obliged to. If you decide to take part and later change your mind, you are free to withdraw from the project at any stage by sending an e-mail to [jacinta.maxwell@usq.edu.au](mailto:jacinta.maxwell@usq.edu.au). Any information already obtained from you will be destroyed at your request.

Your decision whether to take part or not to take part, or to take part and then withdraw, will not affect your relationship with the University of Southern Queensland or your university.

#### Please indicate whether you understand this information and agree to participate in the project

- I have read and understood the information about this project and wish to complete this survey
- I do not wish to complete this survey

#### Name of university

#### Name of program e.g. Bachelor of Education (Primary)

#### What, in your opinion, are the intentions behind the inclusion of the cross-curriculum priority 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures' in the Australian Curriculum?

If you are happy to be contacted for a brief follow up interview, please include your first name and e-mail address below.

Name:

Email Address:

Done

Powered by [SurveyMonkey](#)

## Appendix C: Final decision letter from ACARA in response to FOI request



AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM,  
ASSESSMENT AND  
REPORTING AUTHORITY

Level 10, 255 Pitt Street, Sydney NSW 2000  
Phone 1300 895 563 Fax 1800 982 118  
Email [info@acara.edu.au](mailto:info@acara.edu.au) [www.acara.edu.au](http://www.acara.edu.au)

### Final decision letter providing documents

17 July 2013

Our ref: F11/2363-14

Ms Jacinta Maxwell  
School of Linguistics, Adult and Specialist Education  
Faculty of Education  
University of Southern Queensland  
West Street  
Toowoomba QLD 4350

**By express post and email:** [Jacinta.Maxwell@usq.edu.au](mailto:Jacinta.Maxwell@usq.edu.au)

Dear Ms Maxwell

#### Your Freedom of Information Request

I refer to your email of Thursday 4 April 2013 to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) seeking access to documents under the *Freedom of Information Act 1982* (Commonwealth) (FOI Act). I also refer to my acknowledgement and initial decision letter to you dated 18 April 2013 and subsequent communications with members of my staff.

#### 1. Your initial request

I note that your initial request was for access to the following:

- *"All memos that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures;*
- *Minutes of all meetings that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures;*
- *All internal documents that make reference to the cross-curriculum priority Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, Indigenous perspectives, or a variation thereof".*

#### 2. Practical refusal reason

By way of summary, I confirm that:

- I made an initial decision by letter to you dated 18 April 2013 that a practical refusal reason exists in relation to your initial request, as the work involved in processing your request would substantially and unreasonably

Page 1 of 6

divert the resources of ACARA from its other operations: s24AA(1)(a)(i) of the FOI Act.

- Subsequently, several members of my staff, Peter Matheson and Peter Verey, communicated with you by phone and email to narrow the scope of your request. I understand that a revised request has now been agreed (heading [3]). A summary of the key communications is noted under heading [4].

I am satisfied that a practical refusal reason no longer exists in relation to your revised request.

### 3. Your revised request

Your revised request is for:

- A. Non-public documents that explain the rationale for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority.

I am informed that you accept that this part of your revised request will be satisfied by the provision of:

- the Interim National Curriculum Board (NCB) paper meeting 9 item 7.1 Curriculum Design; and
  - ACARA's internal guidelines that assist writers for each learning area (noting that these documents are not intended to explain the rationale for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority but rather provide guidance to writers in relation to each cross-curriculum priority as part of the curriculum development process).
- B. Documents regarding a learning area in the Australian Curriculum that demonstrate how the rationale for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross-curriculum priority is interpreted.

I am informed that you accept that this part of your revised request has already been satisfied through Peter Matheson's email to you of 12 June 2013. In this email, Peter Matheson provided you with a web-link to the Geography learning area, now available on the Australian Curriculum website.

### 4. Correspondence since your initial request

I note that, as a result of my initial decision that a practical refusal reason existed, there has been a number of communications between you and members of my staff to narrow the scope of your request. I summarise the key communications in the table below.

Date	To/From	Summary of content
4 April 2013	An email from you to ACARA	Your FOI request
10 April 2013	A telephone conversation between you, Peter Matheson and Peter Verey	Discussing your FOI request
18 April 2013	An email from Peter Matheson to you	Attaching my initial decision and acknowledgement letter
22 April 2013	An email from you to Peter Matheson	Acknowledging receipt of my initial decision and acknowledgement letter
1 May 2013	An email from Peter Matheson to you	Providing you with a set of public documents in relation to the rationale for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures cross curriculum priority
2 May 2013	An email from you to Peter Matheson	Clarifying your request
9 May 2013	An email from Peter Matheson to you	Providing a progress update
12 June 2013	An email from Peter Matheson to you	Seeking to clarify your request and proposing a number of documents to satisfy your request
18 June 2013	An email from you to Peter Matheson	Clarifying your request and agreeing to a number of proposed documents
21 June 2013	An email from Peter Matheson to you	Seeking to clarify your request
21 June 2013	An email from you to Peter Matheson	Agreeing to revise your request
26 June 2013	An email from Peter Matheson to you	Setting out the revised request
26 June 2013	An email from you to Peter Matheson	Confirming the revised request
27 June 2013	An email from Peter Matheson to you	Providing you with the due date for release of the agreed documents

## 5. My decision

I have identified 9 documents relevant to Part A of your revised request. I have decided to release all these documents in full. I set out at **Attachment 1** details relating to each document and enclose copies of these documents.

I note that Part B of your revised request has already been satisfied through providing you with a web-link to the Geography learning area on the Australian Curriculum website. I am not required to make any decision regarding these documents.

I hope that you find all these documents helpful.

## 6. Decision On Charges

The *Freedom of Information (Fees and Charges) Regulations (Regulations)* prescribes the charges that can be levied in respect of a request for access to documents. These charges are set out in the Regulations and are for search and retrieval of documents, decision making and provision of access (for example, copying and postage).

Under section 29(4) of the FOI Act I have a discretion to reduce or not impose a charge. In relation to this request, I have decided not to impose a charge.

## 7. Contact person

If you require clarification of any of the matters discussed in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact Peter Matheson, Board Secretary, on [peter.matheson@acara.edu.au](mailto:peter.matheson@acara.edu.au) or 02 8098 3116.

Yours sincerely



Robert Randall  
Chief Executive Officer

**Attachment 1**

No.	Title of document	Authored by	Number of pages	Description of contents	Decision
1.	Interim National Curriculum Board (NCB) paper meeting 9 item 7.1 Curriculum Design	Interim National Curriculum Board	25	A high level document: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• establishing a framework for the Australian Curriculum; and</li> <li>• providing technical specifications for various components of the Australian Curriculum</li> </ul>	Release in full
2.	Cross-Curriculum Priorities Inclusivity Check Process	ACARA	2	Curriculum development process for cross-curriculum priorities	Release in full
3.	Agenda CCPs in HPE and Technology Workshop 1 2012	ACARA	3	Agenda for first writer's workshop	Release in full
4.	Agenda CCPs in Technologies Writers' Meeting 2 2012	ACARA	3	Agenda for second writer's workshop	Release in full
5.	Health and Physical Education and Technologies Writer's initial workshops - powerpoints	ACARA	19	Powerpoints used in Writer's workshops	Release in full

No.	Title of document	Authored by	Number of pages	Description of contents	Decision
6.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures - organising ideas + learning area statements	ACARA	5	Draft organising ideas and learning area statements	Release in full
7.	Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander priority draft continuum of learning based on organising ideas	ACARA	9	Draft continuum of learning	Release in full
8.	Cross Curriculum Priorities - organising ideas in Health and Physical Education and Technologies Template	ACARA	6	Template worksheets	Release in full
9.	Technologies Learning Area Statement - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures	ACARA	1	Technologies learning area statement	Release in full

# Appendix D: Documentary lineage of documents that have explicitly contributed to the development of the Australian Curriculum

