

National Curricula:  
A Comparative Education Investigation of History  
in Australia and Singapore's Lower Secondary Years  
(Volume I)

Rachel Anne Bleeze

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School of Education, Faculty of Arts, The University of Adelaide

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## Abstract

Until recently, the ‘traditional’ view of history usually went hand in hand with an emphasis on content acquisition in teaching it. This approach, associated with rote styles of learning, and the acquisition of facts and dates, has limited history’s potential as a subject at the school level in the twenty-first century. When taught using inquiry methods to achieve historical literacy, however, the subject promotes historical consciousness and the attainment of higher-order thinking skills that can be transformative to students’ learning. This more relevant, student-centred approach to learning, based on critical thinking and intercultural understanding, enables students to become active learners of history and better informed global citizens. Although this is a commonly stated aim in History curricula in many countries today, it is approached through different pedagogically engaging methods, particularly in the lower secondary years where students’ attitudes to history are usually being established.

This study has used a comparative education framework to investigate the Australian Curriculum: History, which has been developed over the last ten years, as well as its implementation in a number of Year 7-8 classrooms. The point of comparison was provided by a comparable investigation of Singapore’s 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses and the teaching approaches developed for these year levels. These two sets of curriculum documents were used to make a comparative analysis of the aims of History in both countries, and the ways in which the curriculum/syllabus was implemented. The analysis of the history curricula and teaching documents from both countries, was triangulated with public commentary on these documents in newspapers, and journal articles. The third set of data used for triangulation was in the form of personal responses from History academics, experts and teaching professionals. Written comments in response to



guideline questions were collected from classroom teachers and those in charge of History from different contexts in New South Wales, South Australia, Tasmania, as well as Singapore. The purpose was to gain an understanding of how the relevant school stakeholders viewed the strengths and limitations of the new history curriculum they were implementing.

The comparative thematic analysis of the two history curricula documents was focused on statements of purpose, content and pedagogy, with a special emphasis on evidence of student-centred inquiry processes. Evidence from the other two sources of data, the public commentary and the teachers' responses, was incorporated into the discussion to support, explain and critique the curriculum documents, especially in relation to the effectiveness of their implementation. The findings indicated that Singapore and Australia had differing approaches to the teaching of history in the lower secondary years, seen in the content structure of each document. On the other hand, both had introduced a new emphasis on historical inquiry and specific activities involving research and analysis skills, although the implementation of each history curriculum in the classroom was rather different. This comparative study of the new Australian Curriculum with its Singaporean counterpart led directly to practical suggestions and useful alternative possibilities for the teaching of history in Years 7-8 Australian classrooms.

## Declaration

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

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## Abbreviations

21CC	21 <sup>st</sup> Century Competencies
ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
AC	Australian Curriculum
ACARA	Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority
ACH	Australian Curriculum: History
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
AHRC	Australian Human Rights Commission
AIHW	Australian Institute of Health and Welfare
AITSL	Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership
ALP	Australian Labor Party
ANZUS	Australian, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
AUS	Australia
CMIO	Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others framework, Singapore
CPDD	Curriculum Planning and Development Division, Ministry of Education, Singapore.
DER	Digital Education Revolution
DET	Department of Education and Training, Australia
DFAT	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
DOS	Department of Statistics, Singapore
DVA	Department of Veterans' Affairs, Australia
HASS	Humanities and Social Sciences
HTAA	History Teachers' Association of Australia
ICT	Information and Communications Technology
IPS	Institute of Policy Studies, Singapore
ISCA	Independent Schools Council of Australia
MBA	Masters of Business Administration
MCEETYA	Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training, and Youth Affairs

MOE	Ministry of Education, Singapore
N(A)	Normal (Academic) Course
NE	National Education
NIE	National Institute of Education, Singapore
NMA	National Museum of Australia
NSW	New South Wales
N(T)	Normal (Technical) Course, Singapore
NT	Northern Territory
NUS	National University of Singapore
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OPAL	One Portal All Learners
PAP	People's Action Party
PD	Professional Development
PSLE	Primary School Leaving Examinations
QLD	Queensland
SA	South Australia
SACIO	Secondary Australian Curriculum Implementation Officer
SAFA	Student Action for Aborigines
SGP	Singapore
SIS	School Information Service, Ministry of Education
SOSE	Studies of Society and Environment
TAFE	Technical and Further Education
TAS	Tasmania
TCH	Teacher in Charge of History
TSLN	Thinking Schools Learning Nation
UK	United Kingdom
USA	The United States of America
VET	Vocational Education and Training
VIC	Victoria
WA	Western Australia
WWI	World War One
WWII	World War Two

## Introduction

In 2008, the Australian Commonwealth Government through the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) began initiatives to redesign and revitalise history as a compulsory subject for all Foundation/Reception to Year 10 Australian students (Rodwell, 2013). The move to an Australian Curriculum: History (ACH) was strengthened in 2010 with the announcement by Julia Gillard, then Minister for Education, that the government intended to make the subject compulsory and national (Ferrari, 2010).

Prior to the establishment of this national curriculum, history education in Australia was determined by each state and territory, with responsibility for the syllabus and its implementation resting in each jurisdiction.<sup>1</sup> While some states and territories such as New South Wales (NSW) and Victoria (VIC) endorsed the implementation of history as a discrete subject in the lower secondary years (particularly since the 1990s), other states favoured history being taught alongside related areas of knowledge in multidisciplinary subjects, such as Social Studies or the Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE), which had been introduced in the 1980s (Maude, 2014; Parkes, 2019; Tambyah, 2008; Taylor, 2012d, 2019; Taylor & Clark, 2006; Taylor & Young, 2003). These Australian states were not alone in their pursuit of multidisciplinary approaches to learning. Other countries, such as England, and Canada, had faced similar issues, with history sometimes disappearing as a discrete subject in the lower secondary years (Ashby & Edwards, 2010; Broom, 2015; Chia & Beard, 2019; Taylor, 2019). However, with greater attention being given to historical concepts and skills in the earlier *National History Curriculum Framing Paper* (NCB, 2008) and *The Shape*

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<sup>1</sup> As indicated in *Style Manual* (1994), published by the Commonwealth of Australia, history will only be capitalised when referring to it as a subject.



*of the Australian Curriculum: History* (NCB, 2009), many committed history teachers and academics considered the announcement of the ACH as an opportunity for the resurgence of discipline-based history teaching (Henderson, 2015).

In fact, as Catherine Hart (2015) has indicated, “the reality” has proved to be “far less auspicious” (p. 58). Although the initial drafts placed renewed importance on the teaching of history, and its content, debates influenced by national and political concerns soon re-surfaced concerning the ideological portrayal of Australia’s past in a way reminiscent of the 1990s Australian History Wars. These subsequent debates over the ACH not only complicated and obscured the purpose of history education in Australia, but also brought challenges regarding how to approach its teaching in the school curricula.

Initially history was regarded as one of the four pillars of Australia’s national curriculum and was one of the first four subjects developed. By version 8.1 (v.8.1) of the ACH, released in December 2015, after the 2014 *Review of the Australian Curriculum* (hereafter the *Review*), the emphasis had shifted to categorising history as a subject under the umbrella of the Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS). This change of status was in part propelled by the implementation of the Australian Curriculum: Geography in 2014 (ACARA, 2014b), which provided the opportunity for schools and jurisdictions to consider other HASS subjects. This led to a reevaluation of interdisciplinary approaches to Humanities learning, as seen in the recommendations of the *Review* for school education (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014), with the possible extension to middle school years. Some schools and jurisdictions have elected to implement a form of social studies into which history is amalgamated, rather than teaching it as a separate compulsory subject, as had been the original aim. With differences in content and teaching approaches once again visible among states, territories and jurisdictions, recent developments have shown some of the same teaching dilemmas seen prior to the announcement that history in the national curriculum

would be a compulsory subject for all students. The root of such dilemmas relates most often to what are considered to be the main purposes of history education.

What are regarded as the purposes of history education represent a complex and contested issue. Two of the possible purposes of history education have already become apparent in the introductory discussion above on the development of the ACH. The academic purpose of teaching history as a discipline area in its own right has been competing with another academic purpose — that of understanding the past more holistically by including knowledge derived from geography, economics, and civics and citizenship. Even within the disciplinary purpose of history, new approaches, which embody new inquiry purposes, have emerged over the last thirty years (Taylor, 2019).

Previously the purpose of history education was associated with rote styles of learning and the acquisition of facts and dates, an approach which is now seen as limiting the potential of history learning at school level. More recently, the disciplinary purpose of history education has been expressed in terms of inquiry approaches to learning, in particular, the skills needed for historical inquiry, and the need for students to achieve historical literacy. In contrast to these academic purposes stand the national and political purposes of governments and political parties which seek to use the learning of history to increase national unity or strengthen a sense of national identity. As Decker F. Walker (2003) explained “what a society should teach their children is one of those nasty but wonderful problems that is impossible to solve and impossible to avoid” (p. xiii).

Over recent years in Australia, the teaching of history in schools has been the subject of debate, reform and change, which have often obscured the actual purpose of history education. Leaders such as John Howard, for example, have spoken out for a school history curriculum that would provide a basis for unifying the diverse strands of Australian society (Howard, 2006). In addition, the current importance being placed on disciplinary approaches

and inquiry processes stands in contrast to the earlier emphasis placed on knowledge and rote styles of learning (Gewertz, 2012; Melleuish, 2010; Roberts, 2013; Taylor, 2012c, 2012d). Tony Taylor and Carmel Young, as early as 2003, argued that Australian history education needed to go beyond previous teaching traditions, anchored in the mere delivery of facts and content. Instead it should develop more relevant, student-centred learning, based on critical thinking and intercultural understanding, which would enable students to become active learners of history and better informed global citizens. Such learning processes underpin the skills of historical inquiry and historical literacy, which they advocated as essential to the way students learn, understand and use history. This has been a common aim for other countries as well, even though different pedagogical methods are often used.

These issues were reflected, for example, in the new Lower Secondary History Syllabuses published by the Ministry of Education's (MOE) Curriculum Planning and Development Division (CPDD) in Singapore in 2013. These documents can be seen to demonstrate a notable change in the country's approach to teaching history, with a new stress on the importance of historical inquiry and critical thinking, designed to develop active and global citizens. Given the emphasis in recent Australian Curriculum documents on globalisation as an integral feature of education in the twenty-first century, a comparison between Singapore's Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses implemented to Secondary 1 students in 2014, and the ACH which was being developed around the same time, seemed appropriate and relevant. This comparison has been seen since to have added point, given the high standards achieved by Singapore students in international test rankings. More broadly, looking at the curriculum of another country can be regarded as a form of globalisation that has the potential to provide insights into the education systems of one's home country and improve the learning of its students (Marshall, 2019; Phillips & Schweisfurth, 2014).

Using Singapore as a point of comparison has allowed the researcher to highlight the distinctive features of the Australian situation, discuss successes and limitations of its implementation, and gain an understanding of what Australia can learn from Singapore's recent experiences in relation to teaching history in the lower secondary years. In fact, the *Review* made explicit comparisons to Singapore's education system throughout the document. Additionally, the two history subject matter specialists appointed, evaluated and compared the ACH with the Singapore history syllabus and the English counterpart. The comparison was made more pertinent because Singapore's 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses were introduced the same year as the Australian Curriculum, including History, was reviewed.

This thesis argues that although the ACH has had advantages for Australian schools and represents an improvement on previous state curricula, a comparison of the ACH to the Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses of Singapore, could enhance the further development of inquiry processes in the ACH and improve the future learning of history for all Australian students. The same opportunity could also be there for Singapore to learn from Australia's approach to history education.

# Chapter One: Developing a History Curriculum/Syllabus in the Twenty First Century

## I. Introduction

The twenty-first century has seen a growing pre-occupation of education authorities in a range of different countries with the development of history education programs that are relevant to the contemporary, globally orientated world (Husbands, 2011; Lee, 2011; Lévesque, 2008; Levstik & Barton, 2011; Retz, 2017; Seixas, 2006b, 2017; Wineburg, 2001). Over the last three decades those responsible for developing history curricula or syllabuses, in different national and social contexts, have grappled with competing pressures from different interest groups in deciding on the nature and scope of the history curriculum/syllabus for the students in their country's schools.<sup>2</sup> They have had to balance the expectations of earlier decades "to defend the disciplinary tradition" (Ashby & Edwards, 2010, p. 41) of history with demands to reconstruct the aims and objectives of the history curriculum/syllabus to reflect twenty-first century attributes deemed necessary for active and informed global citizens, alongside historical themes focused on national and local identity. Furthermore, current assumptions are that a curriculum would be expected to be reviewed and redeveloped within a few years.

At the outset, it is important to recognise what is implied, hereafter, when using the terms: syllabus and curriculum, especially considering a syllabus is not a curriculum (Luke, Woods & Weir, 2013). Curriculum, at the most basic level, refers to what is taught and learned in schools (ACARA, n.d.c; Woods, Luke & Weir, 2010). Curriculum, in Laurie

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<sup>2</sup> This reflects the different terms used in the documents of the countries concerned (i.e. the Australian Curriculum: History; and Singapore's Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses).

Brady and Kerry Kennedy's (2013) view is not only multifaceted, but the field itself is "contentious in terms of definition and delineation" (p. 3). According to Rick Churchill et al. (2011) a curriculum can be viewed as:

The sum total of resources – intellectual, scientific, cognitive, linguistic, textbook and adjunct resources and materials, official and unofficial – that are brought together for teaching and learning by teachers and students in classrooms and other learning environments. (p. 568)

Together, this encompasses the different aspects of the 'official curriculum', including the intended curriculum, the implemented curriculum and the attained curriculum, which all point to different aspects of teaching and learning in schools (Reid, 2015). It also signifies, as Allan Luke, Annette Woods and Katie Weir (2013) show that the official curriculum document does differ from "the lived experience of the curriculum constructed and enacted by teachers and students in classrooms" (p. 10). Despite this, the slice of knowledge incorporated into a curriculum document is a reflection of the group or education authority in power (Apple, 2004; Luke et al., 2013; Reid, 2015), and as a result, possesses considerable weight in shaping students' overall education.

A syllabus can be considered a "subpart" of curriculum (Nunan, 1988, p. 6). More restricted meanings present a syllabus as a course outline (Connelly & Connelly, 2010), or as the *Macquarie Dictionary* states the "subjects to be studied on a particular course, [or] at a school" (Blair & Bernard, 1998, p. 1056). Luke et al. (2010) extended these definitions, stating "the syllabus is a bid to shape and set the parameters of the curriculum" (p. 362), so that it "should act as a guide and detail what is valued in a system's context" (Luke et al., 2013, p. 11). In their work on curriculum and syllabus design, Luke et al. (2010; 2013) use the words *syllabus* and *curriculum document* interchangeably. They argue that:

the official curriculum document or the syllabus should be seen as a defensible map of core skills, knowledges, competences and capacities to be covered, with affiliated statements of standards. These, in turn, need to be visibly aligned with systemic, school and classroom-level assessment practices. (Luke et al., 2013, pp. 11-12)

Luke et al.'s (2013) work concerned the Australian educational landscape, where in the midst of debates on the national curriculum, several education jurisdictions, such as NSW and Western Australia (WA), released their own history syllabuses. F. Michael Connelly and Gerry Connelly (2010), supported this idea, by showing that the names given to “formal curriculum policy documents” vary across different educational contexts, and tended to reflect “a mix of currently popular professional educational language and the language of popular discourse” in that given society (p. 225). A similar approach has been adopted for this thesis, where an official Australian history curriculum document and a Singapore teaching syllabus can be considered comparable as each fits into its national curriculum and education landscape.

This chapter begins by considering the literature on the various, and sometimes competing, purposes of history education. It then goes on to outline developments in history curriculum in Australia since 2006 and in Singapore's history syllabus since the 1990s. The chapter concludes by presenting the research aims, objectives and questions which framed the present study.

## **II. The Purposes of History Education**

At the most basic level, there are two key questions that needed to be answered in relation to the development of a history curriculum or syllabus. The first concerns what content or topics should be included; the second relates to how these topics should be taught

and learned. For the most part, both of these questions are answered by reference to one or more of the purposes of history education proposed by various, often competing groups in the society concerned. The main purposes mentioned and their implications for developing a history curriculum or syllabus are discussed below.

The meanings of three terms that are commonly found in curriculum documents need to be clarified at this point in relation to how they are used in this study. Purpose is taken to refer to the “reason for which something is done or made or for which it exists” (*Shorten Oxford English Dictionary*, 2002, p. 2409). This follows one of the meanings given in the *Shorten Oxford English Dictionary* (2002, p. 2409). In relation to the topic of this research, it refers to a broad underlying reason for the teaching of history as part of the school curriculum. Aims are taken to be statements of more specific ways in which a given purpose can be achieved; thus, the particular teaching approach, knowledge or skill used to achieve a purpose of history education (Oxford Dictionary, 2002). The term outcome is regarded as referring to the “visible or practical” effect or result of a particular course of action (p. 2036). In the context of history education, the action could be a given curriculum, a different approach to teaching or a newly introduced topic and the outcomes could be students’ increased (or decreased) levels of interest in history, higher (or lower) levels of student achievement. The use of the word *outcomes* in education seems to be an extension from scientific and medical contexts where it refers to the consequences of exposure to a particular treatment.

### **1. Academic Purposes of History Education**

Academics in the discipline of history and history education have argued strongly for purposes related to what they believed to be the essential elements of their discipline. As Rosalyn Ashby and Christopher Edwards (2010) put it:



History does need to place some value on knowledge if it is to retain its place on the curriculum. What is crucial, if that knowledge is to have any value at all, is that its nature and status should be understood and the disciplinary approach is essential to this. (p. 40)

There has been no consensus, however, among history academics about what these elements should be. Over the last half century, competing perceptions of the essence of the discipline, and hence the purpose of history education, have led to quite different forms of history curriculum/syllabus. In the past, the traditional view of history as a discipline meant that the purpose of history education was seen as the transmission of historical knowledge. In practice, at school level, this meant content acquisition in the form of facts and dates and rote styles of learning (Harris-Hart, 2008). This approach in many history curricula limited the effectiveness of history learning at the school level. Students often found history lessons of this type to be unengaging and boring (Afandi & Baildon, 2010).

Around the 1970s a rather different configuration of the purpose of history education was advocated by those who developed multidisciplinary or transdisciplinary approaches to student learning in the social sciences (Taylor, 2019). For these academics the concepts of history and its methods were seen as important not because they represented the essential qualities of the discipline. Rather they were valued for their own sake in terms of what they could contribute to a multi-faceted understanding of a particular problem or issue, along with other subjects such as geography, economics and sociology. Multidisciplinary subjects, such as SOSE were often seen as more appropriate for primary and early secondary classes than a concentration on the single discipline of history. They were also seen as more appropriate for primary school teachers whose pre-service education had not given them a grounding in the contributing disciplines of history, economics, geography, or sociology. Nor did they have the opportunity to learn the academic arguments for transdisciplinary approaches which

were more holistic and focused specifically on an issue or problem and its context (Taylor, 2012d). Flinders University, established in Adelaide in 1966, was one of the few Australian universities to introduce a multidisciplinary approach to university curriculum.

## **2. National/Political Purposes of History Education**

National and political leaders have often seen the purpose of history education in very different terms. Their intention has been to use the teaching of history in schools as a means of encouraging unity among different groups in a culturally and racially diverse society. They have hoped to foster the emergence of a sense of national identity which included citizens of all backgrounds. Philip Roberts (2011) has argued that “the main political imperative for history education is the transmission of historical content, fundamental beliefs and understandings about the past, and considerations of how we understand the past in relation to national development and identity” (p. 3). History curricula or syllabuses developed for the purpose of nation building have tended to provide one overarching narrative or story of the nation, from the perspective of the dominant group, in a way that ignores the stories of other groups in the nation and limits different ways of interpreting the nation’s past. In recent times the concentration on historical themes related to nation and local identity within a country’s curriculum or syllabus has become linked to efforts to incorporate globalising influences into the teaching of history in schools. Many countries, with differing social contexts, have been re-orienting the aims and objectives of the history curriculum/syllabus. Their intention is to incorporate what are being called “21<sup>st</sup> century skills” or “21<sup>st</sup> century competencies” (Ananiadou & Claro, 2009, p. 6; Voogt & Roblin, 2012, p. 300), which are considered necessary for active and informed citizens in both national life and global interactions.

History curricula or syllabuses based on national and political purposes have often been criticised by history academics concerned to concentrate on the most recent advances

in the discipline of history. As Suhaimi Afandi and Mark Baildon (2010) explained, in contexts where nation-building has been accepted as the purpose of the history curriculum or syllabus, “alternate accounts and perspectives, interest in historical inquiry and historiography, and more discipline-based or critical approaches to history education are limited or discouraged” (p. 237). Alan Sears (2017) identified “a persistent focus on nation building” as one of the factors that can limit what he regarded as a more effective approach to history education, based on “developing critical skills”. In Australia, these competing purposes of history education have resulted in history, and the teaching of history, becoming “a source of high-profile political and public debate” (Taylor, 2012d, p. 35) and a matter of considerable professional concern among teachers (Roberts, 2013).

Fundamental to the content acquisition approach to history education was the course textbook. Classroom teaching and learning were centred on the textbook which not only defined the scope of the topics studied, but also provided all the relevant facts and figures that students were expected to know. However, textbook presentations of the influence and determining factors on particular historical events and periods were almost invariably written from one perspective only. Contemporary history of education specialists, like Grant Rodwell (2013), have judged that “textbooks obscure issues of agency by presenting the past as the result of abstract and impersonal forces appearing beyond human control” (p. 44). This was often particularly apparent in those topics which were already perceived as irrelevant and boring by the students. In addition, textbook writers have a tendency to summarise historical knowledge in such a way that Rodwell (2013) argued that “it is unlikely ... [students] will ever be able to develop an understanding of issues deeper than those expressed within their textbooks” (pp. 41-42).

### 3. Student-centred Purposes of History Education

Over the last three decades, research in history education has led to the development of more relevant, student-centred purposes for history learning. Based on critical thinking and intercultural understanding, they have enabled students to become more active learners of history, with more positive dispositions toward the subject. A number of scholars (Afandi & Baidon, 2015; Downey & Long, 2015; Kiem, 2012; Lévesque, 2008; Retz, 2017; Roberts, 2013; Seixas, 1993, 2017) have been advocating historical inquiry as an essential purpose for enabling students to learn, understand and use history for themselves. Matthew T. Downey and Kelly A. Long (2015) considered that the new emphasis on historical inquiry reflected history teachers' "own changing assumptions about how students learn and how best to engage students in meaningful learning" (p. 3).

*Historical inquiry.* The inquiry approach to history learning has often been linked to teaching the disciplinary skills of history. According to Tony Taylor and David Boon (2012) the inquiry approach is at the heart of most modern student-centred models of learning. Taylor's (2012c) explanation of inquiry learning, from the time of its initial introduction as discovery learning in the social studies curriculum, stated:

successful discovery learning can lead to genuine creativity and diversity in the development of ... historical understanding. For example, as a practice, the study of history combines diligent research with analysis that leads to open-ended conclusions, presented in an explanatory framework that is transactional, poetic and imaginative. Through this process, the inventive history teacher can encourage creativity and diversity among students. (p. 127)

However, inquiry in the discipline of history has its own conventions and methods of investigation, which Downey and Long (2015) claimed were central to history education.

We believe that we cannot have an effective historical classroom without inquiry at its heart. History is by definition an inquiry into the past ... Inquiry must be an evidence-based investigation of what happened and its significance for us. (p. 29)

Such an historical inquiry approach can foster the attainment of higher order thinking, leading to new levels of historical understanding for students.

One good way to explain how historical inquiry can benefit students' history learning is through the example of the first Harry Potter novel (Rowling, 1997). Simply put, although the characters described their history classes as "boring" (Rowling, 1997, p. 99), in the course of their own extra-curricular investigations into the Philosopher's Stone, they found how the Stone's connections to the past were linked into their lives in contemporary society. In the process, they actually used several inquiry methods that enhanced their ability to make rational decisions. For example, these Hogwarts students were involved in "debating perspectives and interpretations" (Roberts, 2013, p. 16), using evidence, constructing arguments to support theories, and most importantly, learning that they could make connections between the past and the present day (Roberts, 2013). Subsequently they applied this knowledge and understanding to solving problems in their society (Curthoys, 2011; Roberts, 2013).

***Historical literacy.*** The concept of historical literacy can be seen to complement historical inquiry. Even though it has received widespread attention in recent years, there has been no consensus among scholars in explaining what it means. At the most basic level, it would seem to refer to the personal mastery of historical concepts and skills that students need to gain in order to participate in the discipline of history. As Downey and Long (2015) pointed out, the term 'literacy' has an explicit association with every child's mastery of the basic skills of reading and writing, without which they cannot participate in a world that relies on the written word. At the most basic level, historical literacy can be related to the

goal of enabling “students to read history texts, critically, to write thoughtfully, and to engage in meaningful discussions about the past” (p. 8).

Others have defined the concept variously “as a set of *practices* that can be brought into classroom teaching and learning practice” (November, 2015, p. 459); as incorporating “the historical process (the disciplinary skills and procedures that historians use to study the past) and the historical categories of inquiry (the conceptual patterns that historians use to make sense of the past)” (Mandell, 2008, p. 55). Taylor and Young (2003) went further in seeing it not just as “a systematic process with a particular set of skills”, but as including “attitudes and conceptual understandings that mediate and develop historical consciousness” (p. 29). Similar views have been expressed by Mandell (2008), Roberts (2013), and Sears (2017).

To explain and justify this connection, Taylor and Young (2003) drew up an index of 11 key elements involved in historical literacy, all of them oriented towards participating in history as a discipline. They include a certain set of dispositions, as well as the acquisition of skills and an understanding of concepts. The ultimate purpose of historical literacy, according to Taylor and Young (2003), lies in its potential to influence the personal lives of individual students. “Historical literacy is about personal, social and political empowerment. Understanding the past is an important part of life as a whole, not just school life, and all school students are *entitled* to study history” (p. 32).

***Historical thinking.*** Historical thinking has also been regarded as an important purpose of historical education. It is perhaps best understood as one of the outcomes of mastering historical literacy: learning “historical method — *how historians know*”; and in considering “what constitutes evidence about the past and how we assess and construct accounts about the past” (Sears, 2017). This relates to ways of thinking that are pertinent to the discipline of history. Learning to use logic and reasoning in these ways, as well as “the

capacity for argument and a sense of critical analysis” contributes to the cognitive development of students (Taylor, 2012d, p. 47).

Keith C. Barton (1998) contended that it was important to see a student’s abilities to comprehend history and to think historically as “a set of skills educators can nurture, not an ability whose development they must wait for or whose absence they must lament” (p. 54). In the experience of Nikki Mandell (2008), “[a]s students learn about the past using these disciplinary patterns [or historical processes], they are freed from the notion that history is a collection of facts. History becomes a way of thinking about the past, rather than details” (p. 56). In her teaching program “Thinking like a Historian” (Appendix 3.1), she made these disciplinary patterns quite explicit: Change and Continuity; Turning Points; Using the Past; and Cause and Effect.

In establishing the underlying structures of historical thinking, Tim Allender, Anna Clark and Robert Parkes (2019) referred to the work of Peter Lee, Peter Seixas and Sam Wineburg. In his benchmarks of historical thinking, Seixas (2006) outlined six interrelated historical thinking concepts, which were:

- establish historical significance,
- use primary source evidence,
- identify continuity and change,
- analyze [*sic*] cause and consequence,
- take historical perspectives, and
- understand the moral dimension of historical interpretations. (pp. 1-2)

For both Rob Gilbert (2011) and Mallihai Tambyah (2017) these concepts of Seixas reflect those outlined in the Australian Curriculum as historical concepts needed to develop historical understanding. They are also similar to the historical concepts included in Singapore’s Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses. Seixas (2006) has highlighted

that these concepts not only provide the basis for historical thinking, but when “taken together”, connect historical thinking to “competencies in ‘historical literacy’” (p. 2).

***Historical consciousness and empathy.*** Historical literacy can also be seen to foster a second possible set of outcomes: the emergence of a personal orientation and positive feelings toward history reflected in words such as historical awareness, historical understanding, empathy and at perhaps the deepest level, historical consciousness. Jörn Rüsen (2012) outlined what he called a “widespread definition” of historical consciousness as a “mental activity of interpreting the past for the sake of understanding the present and expecting the future” (p.523). For Seixas (2004a) historical consciousness involved “individual and collective understanding of the past, the cognitive and cultural factors that shape those understandings, as well as the relations of historical understandings to those of the present and future” (p. 10). In contrast, Peter Lee (2004) sought to relate historical consciousness more specifically to history education.

In schools, students learn history. That is, they learn ways of thinking about the past that (it might be hoped) will help them to orientate themselves in time, bringing past, present and future into a relation that enables them to cope with living their lives as temporal beings. In short, school history should develop historical consciousness. (p. 2)

This focus on individuals’ personal relationship with time and positioning themselves in time is also evident in Sirkka Ahonen’s (2005) discussion of historical consciousness. Human beings, he argued, have a capacity “to think back and forth in time” (p. 699). Time becomes not just something to be measured but a reality “loaded with human given meanings and moral issues” (p. 699).

These “human given meanings” (Ahonen, 2005, p. 699) point to a second influence on the emergence of historical consciousness in individuals, the reality of collective memory



in students' understanding of the past (Sexias, 2004). This can be apparent outside history education as “the writing of history, and other modes of shaping images of the past in the public mind merge” (Sexias, 2004a, p. 10). In Ahonen's (2005) view, there are societal benefits, in that “a recognition of historical consciousness as an idiosyncratic mental construction of a person or a group helps the acceptance of multi-perspectival orientations in a society” (p. 700). At the national level, there is a collective memory related to what has been shared by all members of the nation. At another level, collective memory, within society is usually related to specific minority or subgroups, such as religions, ethnic, rural, urban, gender and even special interest groups such as sporting and music. More recently, these groups have been given greater recognition as important strands to be included in the school history curriculum. As Sears (2017) pointed out,

History – if funded and taught well – can teach a tolerance for ambiguity. It can provide people with strategies to help them think through complex issues.

War, and war memorials in particular, are central to collective memory. Taught well, war offer [*sic*] windows into the construction of personal and national identity.

In the past, in both Canada and Australia, these minority and subgroups have been given recognition as important strands to be included in the school curriculum (Secombe & Zajda, 1999).

Fostering in students a personal connection to history is most apparent in relation to the concept of empathy. William J. Chopik, Ed O'Brien, and Sara H. Konrat (2017) draw upon Jean Decety and Claus Lamm (2006), to define empathy as “the tendency to be psychologically in tune with others' feelings and perspectives” (p. 23). For Chopik et al. (2017) this highlights that “empathic sensitivities are ... comprised of distinct *emotional* (tendencies to feel concern and compassion for others) and *cognitive* components (tendencies to imagine different viewpoints beyond one's own)” (p. 23). Tyson Retz (2019)

has shown that empathy often refers to “an *emotional* capacity to engage directly with another person’s experience while suspending our own thoughts and feelings momentarily” (p. 90). Within history education, this has often resulted in students’ putting themselves in other individuals’ shoes (Loh & Lee, 2010; Retz, 2019), which ideally helps them understand that people’s beliefs and actions are “grounded in the specific context of their time and place” (Retz, 2019, p. 89).

Empathy in history education, however, continues to remain debatable and contentious, with no singular definition existing (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Foster, 2001; Lee & Ashby, 2001; Lévesque, 2008; Retz, 2019). Jason Endacott and Sarah Brooks (2013) suggest historical empathy as “the process of students’ cognitive and affective engagement with historical figures to better understand and contextualize their lived experiences, decisions, or actions” (p. 41). Similarly for Kaya Yilmaz (2007), empathy can be seen as “the skill to re-enact the thought of a historical agent in one’s mind or the ability to view the world as it was seen by the people in the past without imposing today’s values on the past” (p. 331). Furthermore, Yilmaz (2007) saw that in the process of developing historical empathy students must “engage in sustained effort and thoughtful strategy to suspend their present world views when examining the past in order to avoid a presentist understanding of the past” (p. 334). For Stephane Lévesque (2008), historical empathy relates to historical imagination, historical contextualisation and moral judgement.

Rosalyn Ashby and Peter Lee (1987), as well as Yilmaz (2007), and Richard Harris and Lorraine Foreman-Peck (2004) all consider that empathy in history rests on the *evidential reconstruction* of other people’s beliefs and actions, as well as their consequences. This “intellectual achievement” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 207) places emphasis on the “critical examination of historical evidence” (Retz, 2019, p. 90). Endacott and Brooks (2013) also emphasised that historical empathy “relies upon the tried and true methods of historical

investigation that include source analysis and reasoned judgment” (p. 55). However, Heather Sharp (2014) stressed that whilst empathy should be nurtured in students, “students need to be scaffolded with a variety of sources of information, so that they can engage with empathy in a historically accurate manner” (p. 20). Historical empathy can, thus, be considered an important part of developing students’ historical thinking (De Leur, Van Boxtel & Wilschut, 2017; Lee & Ashby, 2001). However, it can also be viewed as an outcome of both historical thinking and historical consciousness, or “an end in itself” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 208). As Elizabeth A. Yeager and Stuart J. Foster (2001) argued, historical empathy can be viewed as both a “process and an outcome” (p. 15).

Contributing to this, is the use of alternative terms such as perspective recognition, perspective taking and rational understanding (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Lee & Ashby, 2001; Yilmaz, 2007). Lee and Ashby (2001) argued that empathy or rational understanding means:

being able to see and entertain as conditionally appropriate (not necessarily to accept or share) *connections* [sic] between intentions, circumstances, and actions. It is not merely knowing that certain historical agents or groups had a particular perspective on their world, but being able to see how that perspective would actually have affected actions in particular circumstances. This requires hard thinking on the basis of evidence, but it is not a special kind of mental process. It is not any kind of *process* at all, let alone a special *faculty*, but where we get to when we know what past agents thought, what goals they may have been seeking, and how they saw their situation, and can connect all this with what they did. Historical empathy and rational understanding, in this sense, are different names for an *achievement*. (p. 24)

Keith C. Barton and Linda S. Levstik (2004) consider that historical empathy can be defined in two distinct ways. The first relates to caring and “invites us to care with and about

people in the past, to be concerned with what happened to them and how they experienced their lives” (pp. 207-208). The second way referred to as “perspective recognition”, involves an “intellectual exercise” that transpires in history education when students recognise other individuals’ perspectives (p. 208). Barton and Levstik (2004) determine that this approach “requires more than seeing others as they saw themselves. It requires that we see ourselves as others see us” (p. 208). Barton and Levstik (2004) highlight that both types of empathy play important roles in history education, developing separate, but interrelated skills. However, perspective recognition is not dependent upon students’ feelings, “except to the extent that we rationally consider the emotions of people in the past when trying to explain their actions” (p. 228).

Lee and Ashby (2001) show that the term empathy encourages a range of interpretations, impacting upon teachers’ conceptual understanding, as well as the term’s use and function in history classrooms. Endacott and Brooks (2013) also demonstrate that “[s]cholars have employed different, and in some cases competing, theoretical and practical approaches to utilizing historical empathy with students, leading to persistent confusion about the form and fostering of historical empathy” (pp. 41-42). Lévesque (2008), for instance, has asserted that teachers “[t]ypically misunderstand empathy as sympathy” (p. 146). In their attempt to define historical empathy, Barton and Levstik (2004) explained the difference in the following way: “empathy involves imagining the thoughts and feelings of other people from their own perspectives, whereas sympathy involves imagining them as if those thoughts and feeling were our own” (p. 206). Considering empathy in this way not only requires students to evaluate their own perspectives (Endacott & Brooks, 2013), but also stresses the importance of acknowledging that “[t]ime, culture, and individual preferences and experiences produce fundamentally different worldviews” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 206). In Barton and Levstik’s (2004) opinion “[f]ailure to take this basic

fact of human experience into account renders the past incomprehensible, largely because it severs the connection between action and purpose” (pp. 206-207).

Where history learning promotes empathy in the form of a deeper understanding of other individuals and groups in society, it strengthens students’ sense of relationality with those who are different from them. For Barton and Levstik (2004) perspective recognition not only assists a “meaningful engagement with the past” (p. 224), but develops skills related to citizenship “because recognizing [*sic*] our own and others’ perspectives is indispensable for public deliberation in a pluralist democracy” (p. 224).

The discussion above on the purposes of history education has drawn on the writings of historians and history educators, published in journals and books in the English – speaking world, the United States of America (USA), Canada, Great Britain, and Singapore, where English is the language of instruction in schools. Some of the purposes of history education discussed represent alternatives from which a choice can be made in developing a school history curriculum. This is often the case with purposes related to teaching approaches; a curriculum is usually developed either on the facts and rote learning approach, or on the historical inquiry method, although it is possible to envisage some compromise of the two in certain circumstances. Other purposes, particularly those related to the personal development of students, are quite compatible. The main issue of concern is whether the curriculum provides for the full range of purposes in this area, or emphasizes some purposes, at the cost of overlooking others. How far political and national purposes in history education, however, are compatible with students’ personal development in, say, historical thinking and consciousness, is a debatable issue. To what extent, for example, does a curriculum aimed at national development and unity, shape the sorts of personal qualities that the curriculum writers concerned were deliberately seeking to inculcate?

The next two sections consider in what ways, and to what extent, these purposes of history education were evident in the process of developing the new history curriculum syllabus documents for lower secondary students, introduced in Singapore in 2014 and in Australia in 2015.<sup>3</sup>

### **III. Developing a National History Curriculum in Australia**

#### **1. Education as a Matter for the Various States**

From the time public schooling was introduced into the Australian colonies in the second half of the nineteenth century, all aspects of schooling — resources, organization, staffing, as well as curriculum, were the responsibility of colonial state governments (Mackinnon & Proctor, 2013). With the coming of national independence in 1901, the Federal or Commonwealth constitution, which was agreed upon, left the provision of education at all levels in the hands of state governments (Mackinnon & Proctor, 2013). Gradually, over the latter half of the twentieth century, the Commonwealth government began to supply the state governments with special purpose grants to finance new initiatives in primary and secondary schooling (Mackinnon & Proctor, 2013), such as school library grants in the 1960s (Marginson, 1997; Nimon, 2004), new approaches to science teaching and multicultural education in the 1970s (Barcan, 2010; Harrington, 2011), disadvantaged schools grants in the 1970s (Connors & McMorrow, 2015), and languages education in the 1980s (Lo Bianco & Slaughter, 2009).

The Commonwealth government's increased attention and involvement in school and tertiary education was evident through the appointment of John Gorton as the federal

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<sup>3</sup> These dates are based on the publication and implementation of the specific documents used for this analysis.

minister responsible for education and research in the early 1960s (Hancock, 2002). This subsequently led to increased co-operation and common approaches to school structure and curriculum. The financial and functional advantages of such a common approach were beginning to become more highly valued than state control and the need to provide for local and regional differences. In addition, the states used these meetings to pressure the Commonwealth for access to more funding for the ever-increasing costs of primary and secondary schooling.

## **2. Controversy over a National Curriculum**

The challenge to develop a new history curriculum for Australian schools in the twenty-first century has involved the negotiation of a radically different national approach to curriculum. There has been considerable public controversy and academic debate over what content should be included in a national history curriculum (Berg, 2011; Clark, 2008; Collins, 2013; Donnelly, 2013a, 2013b; Harrison & Patty, 2011; Howard, 2012; Macintyre & Clark, 2004; Mason, 2004; Shanahan, 2012; Taylor, 2009, 2012b; Taylor & Collins, 2012; Taylor & Guyver, 2011), alongside academic support for a more student-centred inquiry approach to the learning of history (Cairns, 2018; Gilbert, 2011; Roberts, 2013).

Over the 1990s, a number of history academics and teachers across all education jurisdictions had been caught up in contentious debates about what facts concerning Australia's first Aboriginal inhabitants, the coming of European settlers and relationships between the two should be taught in schools and how these should be portrayed. The emergence of a national Australian identity was another history topic that provoked quite different opinions and teaching approaches. These debates, now commonly referred to as the "history wars" or the "black armband" debate have had a marked influence on what has subsequently been regarded as appropriate content for inclusion in the teaching of Australian history at school level. Lyn Yates, Cherry Collins and Kate O'Connor (2011b) maintained

that the history wars were “a distinctive part of Australia’s recent curriculum debates [in which] history was appealed to as a narrative foundation for our national identity and the ‘wars’, to some extent, were about which story or stories were to be told” (p. 323).

Anthony Mason (2004), in the forward to Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark’s *The History Wars*, explained the connection between these competing interpretations of Australia’s past and today’s society, in terms of political orientations.

Elements of these competing visions of Australia were appropriated by the Labor Party [left-wing] and the Coalition parties [right-wing], respectively, as persuasive means of articulating their political and electoral goals. The present federal government and its supporters have decried the so-called ‘Black Armband’ view of Australian history and have emphasised the successful European settlement, the Anglo-Saxon-Celtic legacy, the monarchy, and the sense of national unity and pride in our achievements. This emphasis ... appears to offer common assumptions based on what was formerly an orthodox account of Australia’s past. But the common assumptions taken from the past are, in various respects, under challenge. We live in a multicultural society which is no longer united, as it once was, by very strong common assumptions. (pp. vii-viii)<sup>4</sup>

For its part, the Australian Labor Party (ALP) has supported the teaching of what happened to Aboriginal peoples — the taking of their land, their decimation by exotic disease, their massacre in a number of instances and the experience of the Stolen Generation children, taken from their Aboriginal families and cut off from their cultural heritage. Some Coalition supporters have referred to this stance as the black armband account of Australian history, following the phrase coined by Geoffrey Blainey (McKenna, 1997; Taylor, 2010b).

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<sup>4</sup> The “present federal government” refers to the Liberal-National Coalition government led by then Prime Minister John Howard.



As a result of this ideological dichotomy, there has been a direct link over recent decades in Australia between politics, and especially politicians in government, and the teaching of Australian history in schools. Clark (2004) has shown that these debates over contested versions of Australia's past, with their associated pedagogical approaches, have caused anxiety among those teaching Australian history at primary and secondary level. Teachers' comments revealed their concern about the teaching of 'controversial' topics, known for their opposing and contested views, or of historical events that are challenging to teach and make understandable to students.

### **3. Moves to a National Curriculum**

Concern that a new cycle of debate on the "history wars" was being ignited came in 2006. The then Prime Minister, John Howard, in his Australia Day address to the National Press Club, expressed views that projected one side of the debate (Howard, 2006). He spoke of the need "to reform and evolve so as to remain a prosperous, secure and united nation." This meant retaining "those cherished values, beliefs and customs that have served us so well in the past" (Howard, 2006). In Howard's view the best way of achieving this vision of the Australian nation was to give history a more prominent role in the curriculum of Australian schools.

I believe the time has come for root and branch renewal of the teaching of Australian history in our schools, both in terms of the numbers learning and the way it is taught ... Too often history has fallen victim in an ever more crowded curriculum to subjects deemed more 'relevant' to today. (Howard, 2006)

Later that same year, Howard convened the National History Summit, which "ended with no substantive recommendation about the teaching of Australian history" (Taylor, 2019, p. 14). The notion of reviving Australian history through curriculum reform was heightened in 2007 when Kevin Rudd, then Labor Opposition Leader, proposed a national curriculum

that would include Mathematics, Science, English and History as compulsory subjects (“Rudd proposes national school curriculum”, 2007). This idea was followed up in 2010, when Julia Gillard, then Labor Minister of Education, confirmed the establishment of a national curriculum, with four compulsory subjects (Ferrari, 2010), including history, which “had acquired importance as the underpinning of national identity and social cohesion” (Yates, 2011, p. 31). In Australia, there had never before been a national curriculum implemented in primary and secondary schools across all states and territories. Placing history at the forefront of education in schools as a mandatory subject for F-10 students, was seen by some as increasing the risk that one particular ideological version of the past would be taught, whilst creating critical public discourse about what had been left out of the curriculum (Yates et al., 2011a).

Once the ACH was allowed to prescribe what was taught to all Australian students, there were fears that the political party currently forming government would have the opportunity to reinforce their underlying ideological base through controlling the development and implementation of the history curriculum. This notion fundamentally changed the history education landscape in Australia and ignited widespread public debate (Berg, 2011; Blake, 2013; Daintree, 2010; Donnelly, 2013a, 2013b; Harrison & Patty, 2011; Howard, 2012; Taylor, 2010a, 2011, 2012a, 2012b, 2013a, 2013b; Swan, 2013). The extent of this controversy is evident in Sue Collins’ calculations that there were 925 articles published in Australian news outlets between 2006 and 2013 on history education (Collins, 2013).

Curricula can be seen as “[d]ocuments written to perform a public political task (of sounding strong, or visionary, or committed to high standards, or a strong Australia in the future)” (Yates et al., 2011b, p. 318). When this is the case, they “are not primarily written for the teachers who will be required to enact them as practice” (Yates et al., 2011b, p. 318).

According to Clark (2004), the “intersection of politics and historiography ... [in relation to] history teaching” (p. 380) can enhance political agendas in a way that politicises history education because political parties are focusing on content and knowledge in the abstract rather than what is actually taking place in classrooms and schools. For example, many primary school teachers’ lack of training in this area raises doubts about how far they can contribute to students’ learning and understanding of Australian history.

The assumption that the party in government in Australia had some measure of control over the curriculum content was further highlighted in the build up to the 2013 Federal election, when Christopher Pyne, then Shadow Education Minister, declared that, if successful, the Coalition would review the national ACH to emphasise Australia’s British heritage, as well as the influence of Western Judeo-Christian culture on Australian society (Blake, 2013; Donnelly, 2013a; Donnelly, 2013b; Kenny & Tovey, 2013). Pyne drew attention to the Coalition’s ideological perspective when he claimed, “[w]e must not allow a confidence-sapping ‘black armband’ view of our history to take hold” (Kenny & Tovey, 2013), or place “undue emphasis on indigenous culture” and Asian history (Blake, 2013), while the importance of Anzac Day and its contribution to Australian national identity were being ignored (Blake, 2013).

The idea of a politically motivated review of the new ACH generated public debate, and in particular angst among critics of the conservative position on Australian history, concerned about political interference in the curriculum. Publicly opposing the Coalition’s pre-election stance, the Labor government continued to emphasize that the history curriculum had not only been developed by experts but also been endorsed by each Australian state and territory (Lane & Maher, 2013). Academic historians like Melbourne University’s Stuart Macintyre, who had played a leading role in writing the initial framing paper for the history curriculum, remained adamant that the existing document did not have

a “left-wing bias” (Hurst, 2014b). For Labor, the proposed review signalled political interference, but for the Coalition it meant the removal of “partisan bias” (Hurst, 2014a; Knott, 2014).

Although the early stages of developing the ACH involved widespread consultation with advisors and teaches at different levels, it still could be seen as reflecting a partisan ideology in relation to how much attention was paid to the consultation and the chain of influences to which it was linked. Overseeing the whole process was ACARA, which on its website (ACARA, 2011b) stated that it was an independent body working in collaboration with various stakeholders to carry out curriculum development work. In addition, however, it was specified that ACARA did receive funding and “directions from Education Ministers and ... [was] supported by a number of advisory groups” (ACARA, 2011a). The process became even more complex when the Government tied the implementation of the Australian National Curriculum to new levels of school funding, such as the Gonski reforms (Burns & McIntyre, 2017; Connors & McMorrow, 2015; “Gonski education reform”, 2013).

#### **4. The 2014 Review of the Australian Curriculum**

When the Coalition won the 2013 Federal election, Christopher Pyne, as the newly installed Education Minister, indicated that the new government would “take a much more hands-on approach to what is taught in the nation’s schools”, vowing “not to outsource his ministerial responsibilities” (Hurst, 2013). The following year he provided a more detailed justification of his stance. “Those who are critical of the review and question the sincerity of the government's motives might be forgetting that incoming governments not only have a right to review their predecessor's policies, they have a duty to do so” (Pyne, 2014).

This review was set up in 2014 under the leadership of two people known for their association with the Coalition: Kevin Donnelly, a former teacher and Coalition advisor, and Ken Wiltshire, Professor of Public Administration in the University of Queensland Business

School. As well as reviewing literature on the curriculum, the review would include “submissions from all members of the public, consultations with state and territory governments who have the main constitutional responsibility for curriculum development and delivery, and also with the key independent and Catholic sectors” (Wiltshire, 2014). The review was able to investigate international comparisons with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) countries, especially those which had recently completed reviews of their own curriculum documents and those in which students had excelled in international achievement testing. Singapore was one of the countries used for this international comparison (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014).

When the *Review* and its recommendations were eventually released in October 2014, the modifications to the ACH were something of a surprise, even an anti-climax. The expected changes in its ideological position, its content and its teaching approaches were few (Cairns, 2018). There were, however, some adjustments that had not been predicted and could be seen as having long term consequences related to the Curriculum’s viability as a national document, as the various state systems of education moved to make modifications to suit their circumstances. The *Review* recommendations made allowances for such adaptations to occur.

The responses to the recommendations form one focus of this study’s investigation which is taken up in Chapter Six. The published views of key academics and history education experts on the *Review* are taken as data to be analysed, along with the personal views of those teaching the new history curriculum in schools.

This outline of the attempts to develop a new compulsory history curriculum for all Australian schools for students from F-10 shows that it had proved to be a long drawn out and contested process. It also demonstrates that the root of most of the public controversy

over the new history curriculum has been ideological, aligned with the various competing positions of the main political parties in Australia and their different interpretations of Australian history. Less controversial, but evident in the changes that emerged after the *Review* were the modifications that State Departments of Education, like NSW and South Australia (SA), were allowed to introduce in the schools they controlled.

## **IV. The Changing History Syllabus in Singapore**

### **1. Developing a National System of Education**

In the case of Singapore, changes in the history syllabus can be properly understood only in the context of changing educational policy for the school curriculum as a whole. After Singapore gained self-government from Great Britain in 1959 and the union with Malaysia broke up in 1965, the People's Action Party (PAP) was in government, under the leadership of Lee Kwan Yew, who became the Prime Minister of the new and separate nation of Singapore. One of the chief concerns of the new government was to change the whole structure and purpose of the education system in Singapore (Lee, M.H., 2015).

Over the years of British colonial administration (1819-1959) the only schools directly funded were those based on English as the language of learning and communication (Lee, 2012). The more numerous Chinese-medium schools established within the Chinese community received no support from the colonial government and were obliged to teach their own curriculum, using material from China (Lee, M.H., 2015). Moreover, the Chinese medium Nanyang University, founded in 1955, was also privately funded (Lee, M.H., 2015). Other vernacular medium schools, associated with Indian and Malay languages, was also given no colonial government funding (Lee, M.H., 2015). The new Singapore government

moved quickly to establish one system of schooling, which included transitioning vernacular languages into English-medium schools, encompassing all children and young people from all ethnic backgrounds. Having established English as the common language of all its citizens, the government ensured that English became the language of learning and teaching (Lee, 2012). Mother tongue learning in all the various home languages of the students was provided as a subject within the curriculum. To ensure the effective implementation of these policies, the government retained direct control of the school curriculum and the publication of textbooks (Lee, M.H., 2015).

## **2. Three stages in Education Policy Development**

Goh Chor Boon and Saravanan Gopinathan (2008a, 2008b), in their analysis of Singapore's education system since independence, recognised three distinct stages of development, driven by what the government saw as the critical issue at the time. The focus of the first period in the 1960s and 1970s was "survival" in political and economic terms. It was important to provide the skilled manpower needed for the development and prosperity of the new nation. The second phase, from 1979 to 1997, was "efficiency" when streaming was introduced to counter the high dropout rate at secondary level and consequent wastage of human resources. By the late 1990s, the emphasis had changed to developing the individual "ability" needed for an innovative economy in an era of increasing globalisation (Afandi & Baildon, 2010; Khamsi & Morris, 2014).

In order to accommodate and manage the new imperatives and potential consequence of globalisation, initiatives such as Thinking Schools Learning Nation (TSLN) and the Masterplan for Information Technology in Education were launched in 1997 (Afandi & Baildon, 2010; Tan, 2013). In particular, new mathematics and science subjects were introduced to give students the knowledge and skills needed for the new industries being

established, in the biomedical pharmaceutical and digital media sectors (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008a, 2008b).

Around the same time, the aim of nation-building was again being seen in more than economic terms and there was a renewed recognition of the need for schooling to reinforce a sense of nation identity and loyalty. According to Yeow-Tong Chia (2015), the National Education (NE) program, which was introduced in 1997 and connected to the TSLN vision, was “more than a curricula subject” in that it constituted “a comprehensive citizenship education framework for the entire education system in Singapore” (p. 126). Michael H. Lee (2015) saw another motive in the introduction of the NE program, considering it “a medium of political education” (p. 147). In Loh Kah Seng’s (1998) opinion initiatives such as the NE program, which drew “selectively from Singapore’s history to formulate sustained themes like the country’s ‘vulnerability’ and the need for ‘communitarian values’” (p. 1), contributed to the creation of an official historical narrative, known as the “Singapore Story” (p. 1). For Goh and Gopinathan (2008b), the NE program was an essential part of the “responsive education structure” that was constantly being developed in Singapore.

The overall objective was to motivate Singaporeans to continually acquire new knowledge; learn new skills; gain higher level of technological literacy; and develop a spirit of innovation, enterprise and risk-taking without losing their moral bearings or their commitment to the community and nation. (pp. 31-32)

During this period, Singapore’s MOE published the *Desired Outcomes of Education*, which was not only interconnected to the TSLN vision (Gopinathan, 2007), but also reflected MOE’s “first official attempt ... to categorise outcomes specifically according to the various



stages of schooling” (Tan, 2013, p. 33).<sup>5</sup> Linda Thompson (2005) indicated that the 1998 document stated:

[F]ormal education must cultivate instincts in our young so that they identify Singapore as their home, a home to live in, to strive to improve and, if called upon, to defend. An educated person is also one responsible to the community and country. (Thompson, 2005, pp. 79-80)

For Thompson (2005), this passage showed that, in addition to emphasising academic success, Singapore’s education system has attempted to “provide a well-rounded education ... where social values such as co-operation, friendship, respect, moral values and a love for Singapore are taught in school” (p. 79). The Desired Outcomes of Education still emphasises many of these qualities and expects students to become concerned citizens, as well as active and informed individuals (MOE, 2018b).

The “ability” driven phase included a shift to promoting creativity and enhancing students’ critical thinking skills (Afandi & Baildon, 2010; Gopinathan, 2015; Khamsi & Morris, 2014; Tan, 2017). Since 1997, education policy in Singapore has stressed the importance of developing “thinking and committed citizens, and an education system geared to the needs of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Gopinathan, 2015, p. 62). This is seen through the Teach Less, Learn More (TLLM) initiative, launched by MOE in 2005, which aimed to “improve the quality of teaching and enhance student learning” (Loo, 2018). It was thought that critical thinking skills would allow students to become more assertive, and develop problem solving skills, which could be utilised later in the workplace (Tan, 2017). This initiative was first seen in Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong’s speech at the 2004 National Day Rally:

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<sup>5</sup> A revised version of the *Desired Outcomes of Education* was published in 2009 (MOE, 2018b; Tan, 2013).

We've [*sic*] got to teach less to our students so that they will learn more. Grades are important – don't forget to pass your exams – but grades are not the only thing in life and there are other things in life which we want to learn in school ... Parents are part of this and they've got to support the efforts of the schools when the schools are trying new teaching methods, or when they are trying to build character, or just toughening them up a little. (Lee, H.L., 2004)

David Hogan (2014) referred to this initiative as a “pedagogical framework”; one which places emphasis on the “quality of learning” rather than the “quantity of learning and exam preparation.”

Whilst initiated at the beginning of the century, these initiatives were implemented (and revised) throughout the following decade. In 2015 then Education Minister, Mr Heng Swee Keat, discussed the “systematic reduction” of content implemented in schools to ensure a stronger focus in class be placed on “critical learning” (Ng, 2015). In their article on this move, Ng (2015) claimed that “up to 20 per cent of content has been reduced from syllabuses implemented across the primary, secondary and pre-university levels.”

This approach is further exemplified through the Framework for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies and Student Outcomes (21CC Framework) developed in 2010, which include “critical and inventive thinking” as necessary competencies for students living in a globalised world (MOE, 2018a). Initiatives such as TSLN, TLLM, and the 21CC Framework, indicate a shift away from rote styles of learning and the acquisition of knowledge, which have previously characterised Singapore's education system, toward more student-centred approaches to learning. Furthermore, the Secondary Education Review and Implementation (SERI) Committee, in 2010, suggested schools provide a “wider range of experiences and opportunities to develop the skills and values”, which students will require for “a productive life” (Gopinathan & Lee, 2013, p. 230). This highlights a new phase

in Singapore's education system, which has emerged over the last decade, and emphasises student-centric approaches to learning and values-driven education (“Minister outlines MOE's plans for holistic education”, 2012; Tai, 2016; Tan et al., 2017).

The curriculum changes associated with the “survival”, “efficiency” and “ability” phases of education were under the direction of MOE, which relied on the academic expertise and pedagogical understanding of education specialists, particularly those from the National Institute of Education (NIE), which is a part of Nanyang Technological University. Oon-Seng Tan, Ee-Ling Low and Jasmine B.-Y. Sim (2017) have highlighted that:

The Singapore education miracle lies in her strategic goal congruence of education policymakers, school leaders and teacher educators. The tripartite partnership of ... [MOE], schools and NIE ensures that the vision (what we hope to achieve for the future), the mission (what we are called do) and the implementation (what eventually happens in the school and classroom) of education are dynamically aligned. (p. 51)

Goh and Gopinathan (2008a) judged that all these curriculum changes had been handled in a way that was beneficial to schools, teachers, students and society at large. The curriculum for schools was being “constantly revisited and revised, whenever necessary, to ensure its appropriateness in the context of Singapore's overall economic and social development” (Goh & Gopinathan, 2008a, p. 104). Whilst there has been debate on aspects of education, the government has retained control of the media (Lee, M.H., 2015). The high level of public acceptance and the almost non-existent critical comment on changes to the Singapore school syllabuses is noteworthy (Afandi & Baildon, 2010; Loh & Jaffar, 2014), especially when it is compared to the widespread public commentary and sometimes acrimonious debate in Australia. Despite this, Gopinathan (2015) considered that what made Singapore's situation exceptional was “how effectively the state dealt with multiple challenges in using education to shape modern Singapore” (p. 8).

At each of these stages of change a specific approach to history education was applied. The result has been that over the almost fifty years from independence to 2014, when the history syllabus being analysed in this investigation was introduced, there have been regular changes and adjustments to the history taught in Singapore's schools (Afandi & Baildon, 2010; Lee, 2012).

### **3. Consequent Modifications in the History Syllabus**

In the years immediately after independence history was seen as of little relevance in a syllabus geared to economic development and the labour market. However, given the importance of nation-building and the need to develop in students collective attitudes that put the needs of the nation ahead of personal aspirations and individual goals, a subject called Education for Living was introduced at primary school level for a number of years (Chia, 2012; Lee, M.L., 2015). It included topics about Singapore's history, but omitted controversial events, such as race riots, which were seen to have the potential to cause discontent and disharmony among certain communities (Lee, M.L., 2015).

During the early 1980s, when the emphasis had become "efficiency" and after the PAP government had suffered the unprecedented loss of the electoral district of Anson in the 1981 by-election (Chia, 2012), a new subject was introduced for the junior secondary years. It was based on a two-volume textbook, *Social and Economic History of Singapore*, which prescribed the teaching of Singapore's history from the time of Sir Thomas Stamford Raffles establishing it as a free trading port for the British East India Company in 1819, to Singapore's achievement of independence in 1965 (Chia, 2012; Lee, M.L., 2015). Teaching was based on students learning the facts and dates from the textbook (Lee, M.L., 2015). The subject was designed to make students of the 1980s more aware of what Singapore had achieved as a nation. In the judgement of Michael H. Lee (2015), it "was aimed at cultivating a sense of national belonging and developing a sense of Singapore identity among students"

(p. 139). This can be seen to link to wider developments in Singapore's education system, where Asian values, as well as shared values, were emphasised in the early 1980s to provide the "basis for a stronger national identity" (Ortmann, 2009, p. 23).

By the early 1990s, new approaches to history education in England and North America began to have some influence in Singapore (Tan, 2004). Drawing from Lee (1999), H. Doreen Tan (2004) showed that thinking, at this time, began to shift "from what content should be taught to ... what history learning is about" (p. 198). Moo Swee Ngoh and Lulie Tan (1999) considered that the emphasis on encouraging higher order thinking skills through history education was introduced in 1993. The revised junior secondary history syllabuses in 1994, taught through a textbook called *History of Modern Singapore*, incorporated the learning of basic historical concepts and the use of historical sources (Lee, M.L., 2015; Tan, 2004). This "new" focus emphasised not only the promotion of "higher order thinking through the acquisition of historical skills" related to the discipline of history (Moo & Tan, 1999, p. 1), but also inquiry learning. Despite the interest in continuing to foster a sense of national identity and an appreciation of Singapore's past, this syllabus still aimed at developing "a broader world view" through the study of regional and world history (Moo & Tan, 1999, p.1).

Once the NE program was introduced in 1997, the teaching of history in the lower secondary years was seen as making an important contribution to its aims. Chia (2012) argued that:

No study of the history curriculum or syllabus can be divorced from its socio-political context. This is because there is a close symbiotic relationship between history and politics. Governments often use history as a tool for legitimization. In instilling a sense of pride in a common past, history can contribute to nationalism, helping legitimize an incumbent regime. (p. 203)

Singapore is a particularly good example to illustrate the general principle enunciated by Chia (2012). As Michael H. Lee (2015) explained, “[i]n order to cater for the needs of NE programme, the ... [CPDD] under the Ministry of Education reformed the history curriculum for the junior secondary level in the late 1990s” (p. 142).

These history syllabus revisions undertaken toward the end of the decade and implemented in 2000 at the Secondary 1 level, also saw the promotion of historical thinking skills, which necessitated changes in assessment, as well as pedagogical practice (Tan, 2005). In addition to being introduced to historical methods and research, Secondary 1 students studied civilisations, empires and politico-socio-economic systems in the Asian region. The focus of Secondary 2 study, however, was the history of Singapore, from 1819 to 1971 through the textbook *Understanding Our Past (Singapore from Colony to Nation)*. More than half the text was concerned with the development of the nation of Singapore in the decades after World War Two (WWII) (Lee, M.H., 2015).

In 2006, another revised syllabus, extended the history of Singapore backward to the fourteenth century to incorporate recently found written records and archaeological evidence. The textbook, *Singapore: From Settlement to Nation, Pre-1819 to 1971*, was designed, according to Michael H. Lee (2015), to cultivate “the sense of being Singaporeans who are willing to sacrifice individual interests for the state of protecting communitarian and national interests” (p. 145). History education, was therefore, a “core component” of the NE program (Lee, M.H., p. 145). Chia (2011) cited *The Strait Times* to point out that the Singapore press recognised the NE program as “a series of national efforts to educate students on Singapore’s history” (p. 18). While aiming to preserve Singapore’s heritage racial harmony and security, the program also ensured that the nation’s youth did not suffer from “historical amnesia” about Singapore’s independence (Chia, 2011, p. 18).

## V. The Present Study

### 1. Aims of the Study

This study aimed to compare curriculum documents developed and implemented around 2014 in two countries that could be regarded as neighbours: the ACH for Years 7-8 and Singapore's Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses for Secondary 1 and 2.<sup>6</sup> The choice of Singapore for an educational comparison with Australia is based on its high standards of education, reflected not only in student performance in international testing, but also in its ongoing attention to syllabus development and pedagogical approaches, as demonstrated in the 2014 history syllabuses for the lower secondary Normal (Academic) (N(A)) and Express courses in Singapore schools. Although no previous studies comparing history curriculum documents from these two countries have been identified, both have placed strong emphasis on teaching approaches and content of the history that is taught in schools. Moreover, the discussion of the 2014 *Review* did include Singapore among its international comparisons, confirmed the appropriateness of this comparison.

The overall aim was to analyse the nature of national history curriculum/syllabus developed in each country and its implementation in classrooms. By complementing the analysis of history curriculum and syllabus documents with opinions from academic specialists and teachers, this comparative study also aimed to provide a deeper understanding of the associated issues in regard to content, teaching approaches and making compulsory history education relevant to students in their early adolescent years. In particular, it was hoped to contribute to the discourse on the nature of Australia's F-10 history curriculum and its status as a compulsory subject in the lower secondary years. It could also lead to a deeper understanding of the current purposes and emerging opinions of the national history

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<sup>6</sup> For this thesis, Secondary 1 and 2, as well as Year 7 and 8, will be provided numerically not in word format. Please note variations made occur in quotations and participant responses.

curriculum/syllabus in both countries, as well as encouraging further research into the effect that history curriculum policy has on students' personal learning.

## **2. Objectives of the Study**

More specifically, the objectives of the study were to carry out a comparative analysis of the ACH for Years 7-8 and Singapore's Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses for Secondary 1 and 2. The specific areas of focus for this comparative analysis were:

- the introductory and rationale statements
- the overview and layout of content
- the discussion of pedagogy, particularly the historical inquiry approach
- the consideration of the new elements — depth studies and Historical Investigation
- assessment procedures

From this document analysis, it proved possible to identify the main purposes of history education, as envisaged by the writers of the curriculum/syllabus documents in each country. In addition, the analysis of the curriculum documents was complemented with a comparative investigation of the views of academic historians and history education experts, on the one hand, and teachers involved in implementing the new curriculum/syllabus in the classrooms of the respective countries, on the other hand.

## **3. Research Questions**

The above aims and objectives led to the following questions:

1. What influences shaped the 2015 version 8.1 of the Australia Curriculum: History for Years 7 and 8, as compared with the Singapore 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses?

2. Which of the purposes of history education are most emphasised in each of the curriculum/syllabus documents and why?



3. From the perspective of academic specialists, media public commentary and teachers, what were the main issues that emerged in the implementation of the new curriculum/syllabus in the lower secondary history classes in Australia and Singapore?

#### **4. Outline of Chapters**

This thesis consists of eight chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic of history education as the focus of this research study. It considers the purposes of history and the justification for the ways it has been taught in schools. In particular, it discusses the change from the traditional emphasis on content and the rote learning of facts and dates to the recent emphasis on inquiry methods of learning, which seek to develop historical literacy, and historical consciousness as these relate to students in the lower secondary years. The aims and objectives of the study as well as the main research questions are outlined at the end of this chapter.

The second chapter outlines the comparative education framework adapted for this thesis, which is focused on the history curriculum documents of two nations, Australia and Singapore. It reviews a number of comparative education approaches to research and considers their varying strengths and weaknesses. The discussion is then focused on the historical, cultural, societal and political factors, relevant to each country's educational system, and the place of history in their lower secondary curriculum/syllabus.

Chapter Three outlines the qualitative research methods used to gather the three sets of data. The thematic analysis of the two curriculum documents was triangulated with related public commentary found in newspapers, and journal articles. The third point of triangulation involved personal responses, in the form of written comments to guideline questions from history academics, curriculum experts, classroom teachers and those in charge of history in the lower secondary levels. This chapter also describes the practical details of the operationalisation of the research.

Chapters Four and Five present the two sets of history curriculum documents: an in-depth analysis of the ACH for Years 7-8 and the Singapore Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses for N(A) and Express courses. The analysis has been separated into two interrelated areas that directly reflect the organisational strands presented in the ACH. Chapter Four focuses on the inclusion of historical knowledge, with a special emphasis on the arrangement of content, the inclusion of national history, and the extent to which the nation's history intersects with global outlooks. Chapter Five concentrates on the place of historical skills, pedagogy and student-centred inquiry processes in the documents.

In Chapter Six the data obtained from public commentary, as well as academic and teacher responses which support and criticise the curriculum documents are analysed. The issues discussed as a result of this triangulation include the politicisation of history education and reflections on the development process of history curricula in both countries. Chapter Seven compares the effectiveness of the curriculum documents' implementation in classrooms as seen through the eyes of academic experts and classroom teachers. This focused on the purposes of teaching history, disciplinary approaches to learning, teaching inquiry methods, the place and use of assessments, time constraints and feelings about the inclusion of particular historical content. The analysis of the teacher participants' responses highlighted direct links to historical literacy, empathy and consciousness, which they brought to their classroom practice.

Chapter Eight concludes the thesis by drawing together the findings of the preceding chapters in relation to the theoretical issues of the purposes of history education. The analysis highlights that the differences in the two curriculum documents, are balanced by important similarities. As a result, there are multiple benefits to be gained from incorporating elements of each other's approach to historical inquiry.

The following chapter focuses on the comparative education approach adopted for this study. The appendices and bibliography are provided in Volume II, all with interactive links. For Appendices 1 and 2, the page numbers of the original document have been kept. Appendices 3 and 4, as well as the Bibliography, follow similar formatting and pagination to Volume I.

## Chapter Two: Comparative Education Research

### I. Introduction

In his work, *Schools at Home and Abroad*, published in 1901, Robert E. Hughes maintained, “[c]omparisons, are, it is said, odious, particularly to the objects compared; nevertheless, the basis of all knowledge is comparison” (p. 52). One way of visualising the advantages of comparative analysis is through using Leonardo da Vinci’s work on colour, as a metaphor (Patton, 2002). As Edwin G. Boring (1942) (cited in Patton, 2002) explained, “in order to attain a color [*sic*] of the greatest possible perfection, one has to place it in the neighborhood [*sic*] of the directly contrary color [*sic*]: thus one places black with white, yellow with blue, [and] green with red” (p. 56). This metaphor of juxtaposed colours can be seen as illustrating the new understandings that can arise through comparative education studies (Patton, 2002).

### II. Delineating Comparative Education

The area of comparative education is surrounded by ambiguity (Manzon, 2011). “One of the difficulties faced by comparative ... education is that it potentially connects with every aspect of education, and thus consistently faces problems of definition and boundary maintenance” (Dolby and Rahman, 2008, p. 684). Another difficulty is that comparative education research has no one accepted approach and can include a variety of subject matter and methods of investigation. At the most basic level, the lack of consensus is due to the fact that education itself possesses a diverse range of research approaches and methods (Manzon, 2011).

During the nineteenth century, comparisons involving national education systems formed the conventional approach to comparative education (Adamson, 2012; Green, 2003). Originally this was undertaken through the comparison of two countries. However, more recent scholarship, combined with different definitions and approaches, have expanded comparative education to the possibility of involving several countries or even, in reverse, one country seen through the lens of more than one perspective (Manzon, 2011). In these circumstances, it has been difficult for scholars to formulate one singular definition for comparative education. Mark Mason and Colin W. Evers (2010) drew from Hirst (1974) to explain the difficulty with defining comparative education. Since comparative education has not been characterised by a common object, does not possess any accepted criteria for research methods, does not have a specific conceptual framework or common outcomes in terms of knowledge, it is not so much a single discipline as a field of study. In Mason and Evers' (2010) view "a field is unified only by common phenomena of study or common material or practical pursuits" (p. 257). The one thing comparative studies have in common is comparison; they vary in content and method and usually on the national contexts, on which they are focused.

### **1. Definitions and Uses**

Attempts to define comparative education have depended upon visualising the field by method or content (Green, 2003; Manzon, 2011). Maria Manzon (2011) pointed to various scholars who had contributed to this debate to produce the following detailed definition.

Extracting diverse elements from the definitions given by several scholars (Cowen, 1982a; García Garrido, 1996; Epstein, 1994), I would provisionally define comparative education as the subfield of education studies that systematically examines educational systems and their relations with intra- and extra-educational

phenomena within and among two or more nations. Its specific object is ‘educational systems’ and the interactions among them, examined from a cross-cultural (or cross-national, cross-regional, cross-societal) perspective through the systematic use of the comparative method. (p. 171)

Manzon’s definition is notable for its attempt to provide an inclusive and comprehensive listing of the objects of study in comparative education. While Manzon (2011) included education systems, educational policies and educational processes, she noted that other scholars included “different aspects” of these objects (p.160). David Phillips and Michele Schweisfurth (2014), for example, defined comparative education as: “[t]he study of any aspects of educational phenomena in two or more different national or regional settings in which attempts are made to draw conclusions from a systematic comparison of the phenomena in question” (p. 23). More concisely, Jean Clarkson (2009) claimed that comparative education was “concerned with the analysis and interpretation of educational practices and policies in different countries and cultures” (p. 4).

In relation to the methods used in comparative education research, the definitions of Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014), as well as Manzon (2011) insist on a systematic approach to the comparison of the objects being considered. However, there is no consensus that one particular method of collecting and analysing data must be followed by those attempting comparative education research. Rather such research has access to the range of methods, with their accompanying conceptual frameworks, which are used in humanities and social sciences, in subjects like history, linguistics, education policy and practice. The particular method chosen usually depends on the specific education objects being compared. The challenge is for the researcher to choose an approach to data collection and analysis which does justice to the object being studied and the comparative interests of the researcher. The one requirement is that the method chosen can be adapted for the analysis of two or more

sets of data from at least two education systems which are needed to make a comparison (Manzon, 2011).

In addition, there has been considerable discussion of the uses and benefits of research in comparative education. Clarkson (2009) considered that “our appreciation of the strengths and weaknesses of our educational system are enhanced when we have a sound understanding of systems in other nations” (p. 5). Michael Farrell (1995) argued that it was “intrinsically interesting to consider the ways in which education systems and practices operate abroad and the extent to which they are similar and different ... such a review can provide ideas and approaches which may have relevance and usefulness in one’s own country” (p. 52).

## **2. Approaches to Comparative Education Research**

Nadine Dolby and Aliya Rahman (2008), drawing on scholars such as Michael Crossley and Keith Watson (2003), have argued that from the early stages of comparative and international education going back as far as the Middle Ages and the Renaissance until the 1960s, there have been four main approaches to this sort of research. Many of the earliest commentaries on other education systems have taken the form of what could be called travellers’ tales. Others have studied patterns of schooling and education in other countries from what has been termed a borrowing and lending perspective, with the idea that much can be learned from observing how people in other places educate the younger generation. A third approach has followed the line of historical and cultural studies, in stressing the importance of understanding the context of a particular education system. A fourth group has pursued comparative education investigations as scientific studies, following the methods employed in the various fields of science (Dolby & Rahman, 2008).

Dolby and Rahman (2008) have explained the second approach, lending and borrowing, as the examination of “other nations’ educational practices, with the objective of

reforming and improving the conditions in education in one's home nation" (p.681). The danger of this sort of approach was well described in metaphorical terms, over a century ago, by Sir Michael Sadler (1900, reprinted 1964, as cited in Adamson 2012). He warned that,

[w]e cannot wander at pleasure among the educational systems of the world, like a child strolling through a garden, and pick off a flower from one bush and some leaves from another, and then expect that if we stick what we have gathered into the soil at home, we shall have a living plant. (p. 647)

In contrast, the historical and cultural studies approach "seeks to understand the particular philosophy, character, and perspectives of a specific national educational system within the context of its own culture and society" (Dolby & Rahman, 2008, p. 681).

The cultural, societal, historical and political factors that provide the foundation for an aspect of a country's education system is of fundamental importance to many researchers in comparative education. Although originally published in 1933, the work of Isaac L. Kandel was pioneering in this area, and like Sadler's, it is still relevant today. Kandel (1970) maintained that the "comparative approach demands first an appreciation of the intangible, impalpable, spiritual and cultural forces which underline an educational system" (p. xix). He went on, however, to place schools at the heart of his explanation, stating:

the forces and factors outside the school matter even more than what goes on inside it. Hence the comparative study of education must be founded on an analysis of the social and political ideas which the school reflects, for the school epitomises these for transmission and for progress. In order to understand, appreciate and evaluate the real meaning of the educational system of a nation, it is essential to know something of its history and traditions, of the forces and attitudes governing its social organisations, of the political and economic conditions that determine its development. (p. xix)



Not only does the knowledge of culture deepen contextual understandings in comparative education studies, but as Farrell (1995) claimed, it is a fundamental element of the whole field's importance. In the judgment of Farrell (1995), "the extent to which systems and approaches are transferable or the degree to which they are culture-bound is a useful area to explore giving us valuable insights into our own and others' capacity for change" (p. 52). Anthony Welch (1992) has argued that a focus on cultural factors is a distinguishing mark of those involved in comparative education research.

If there is a common core to the field designated 'Comparative Education', it is probably centred on various notions of culture, and cultural relations. Overtly crosscultural research, or research into educational patterns of one cultural milieu, can hardly avoid these issues, and much comparative work has to do with the dynamics of cultural transactions and interaction. In a sense, it is that which distinguishes comparativists from many colleagues ... [in fields such as] curriculum and pedagogy. (p. 57)

The culture (or cultures in a plural society) of a country's people is the essence of the way they live together and its expression can be found in its language(s), history, politics, family life, religious beliefs and in its peoples' individual and collective sense of identity. As such, it is an integral part of a country's education, reflected in the value given to education by society and the individual; the organisation of schooling and the curriculum taught; the accepted patterns of learning and teaching; the nature of the relationship between teachers and students; and the history it teaches its children and young people. Understanding the culture(s) of a country enables a deeper analysis of the particular education object being investigated across two or more cultures (Marshall, 2019; Noah, 1984).

The fourth type of comparative education investigations has followed the methods of scientific studies (Dolby & Rahman, 2008; Marshall, 2019). The beginnings of a scientific

approach to comparative education can be found early in the nineteenth century. According to Crossley and Watson (2003) its roots can be traced back to Frenchman Marc-Antoine Jullien's 1817 proposal "that governments should provide statistical information concerning different facets of their education systems" (p. 13). The importance of such statistical/scientific studies in comparative education have become increasingly important as the forces of globalisation have come to influence education policy and practice in many countries across the globe.

### **3. Globalisation and Comparative Education**

Since the mid-1980s, the reality of globalisation, has become increasingly evident in people's lives and society as a whole. Dolby and Rahman (2008) claimed that "[o]ver the past 10 years, the pressure to 'be international' and to 'internationalize' [*sic*] has dramatically intensified in all aspects of education" (p. 676). According to Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014), "the study of education in increasingly globalised contexts inevitably draws us towards comparison" (p. 1). Clarkson (2009) explained in more detail what this involved.

Globalisation has increased the requirement for those in the education professions to understand that many countries are interdependent, economically, technologically, politically and ecologically, and thus we need a deep understanding of how we all inculcate the next generation and educate them for the future we face as global citizens. (p. 4)

Global influences have been evident in comparative education studies. Crossley (2000) argued that "the impact and implications of globalisation" were responsible for the "revitalisation" of comparative and international education from the latter part of the twentieth century (p. 319). Crossley (2000) cited Robert F. Arnove (1999) to claim that "[g]lobalisation has infused the ever-present need to learn about each other with an urgency

and emphasis” not seen before (p. 319). Much of this comparative research has been inspired “by intensified global competitiveness, combined with contemporary preoccupations with assessment, accountability and value for money” (Crossley, 2000, p. 320). As a result, the influence of globalisation is now evident in all the earlier approaches to comparative education that have been discussed.

The influence of globalisation on the study of comparative education has been most apparent in the considerable increase in scientific studies, based on large scale international testing across many countries. These have involved the measurement and statistical analysis of student achievement levels in basic literacy and numeracy skills, as well as in key areas of internationally shared knowledge, such as mathematics and science. The result, according to Bob Adamson (2012) has been “characterised by increased technological information and pedagogical transfer” (p. 641). Similarly, Crossley and Watson (2003) maintained that the results of such global testing were leading to a new recognition of the practical benefits of comparative education.

Planners, funders and consumers of education are, moreover, increasingly expressing keen interest in international and comparative studies as they seek ways of dealing with the implications of competitive league tables, market forces, multiple innovations, and demands for ever more cost effective ways of increasing access and improving the quality of educational provision. (p. 2)

The complexities of the ‘borrowing and lending’ approach to comparative education is evident in the comments of Adamson (2012) that “the use (and some argue abuse) of international comparative studies has become a prominent feature in policymaking and related processes, fuelled by the globalised nature of education” (p. 641). Crossley and Watson (2003) questioned how it was possible to “deal with the ... limitations of the ‘borrowing’, ‘lending’, and ‘imposition’ on the international transfer of educational theories,

policies and practices” (p. 34). Although one definitive answer may not be possible, Crossley and Watson (2003) did provide one answer to their question through their discussion on Sadler’s famous quote. They state: “Sadler always strove to ensure that any comparative study with which he was involved was both sensitive to cultural context and had an emphasis on the practical application of his findings” (p. 15). Crossley and Watson (2003) argued that Sadler’s remarks:

justly deserves re-consideration ... as we increasingly recognize [*sic*] the importance of cultural influences on learning, and assess the future potential of the field as a whole. Indeed, it is especially pertinent in a global era where economic imperatives, neoliberalism, and positivistic assumptions currently dominate much social policy. (p. 7).

In cultural approaches to comparative education, the growing emphasis on globalisation has forced several scholars to reconsider the original parameters of comparative education, particularly the emphasis on nation-states. Drawing from previous work, Welch (1992) considered that “one of the constraints upon research in comparative education has been the excessive reliance upon the nation state as the primary unit of analysis” (p.64). Andy Green (2003) concluded that:

Comparative analysis remains the most powerful tool for (causal) explanation of societal aspects of the educational process. Globalisation does not reduce its usefulness, although in creating educational spaces which belong exclusively to neither nations nor systems, it makes us look to broadening our units of analysis. (p.95)

As Manzon (2007) explained:

A prerequisite for any comparative study is to establish the parameters for initial comparability of the chosen units of analysis. In general, instructive analysis can be made when the units for comparison ‘have sufficient in common to make analysis of their differences meaningful’ (Bray, 2004a, p.248). Thus, rather than a mechanical identification of similarities and differences between two or more places, it is suggested that attention be paid to the underlying context of these commonalities and differences, and to their causal relevance to the educational phenomenon being examined. In other words, any meaningful comparative study should be able to identify the extent and the reasons for commonalities and differences between the units of comparison, examining the causes at work and the relationships between those causes. (p. 88)<sup>7</sup>

Crossley and Watson (2003) had earlier asserted that “any contemporary reconceptualisation must find more effective ways of incorporating difference, and divergent cultural perspectives into the basic canon of comparative and international research and scholarship” (p. 8). Despite these new links of investigation that have emerged under global influences, context has remained central to comparative education, but with a new emphasis on cultural factors.

Concern with context penetrates to the heart of comparative education. It is reflected in much of the early writing within the field, and it remains central to many contemporary intellectual positionings, discourses and developments. Contextual issues are also central to many of the most passionate theoretical and methodological debates that are to be found in the research literature — past and present. Thus questions of context reveal much about the history of comparative education, at the

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<sup>7</sup> Details for Bray (2004a) can be found in the bibliography.

same time as they inspire and shape some of the most challenging research and scholarship at the cutting edge of the field today. (Crossley, 2009, p. 1173)

#### **4. Multilevel Cubic Framework for Comparative Education Analysis**

Researchers have responded to the increased complexity of comparative education research by developing more sophisticated approaches to data collection and analysis. Adamson (2012), for example, has provided an extensive list of 17 possible units of analysis from the broad scope of the field of education that could be used as the basis of comparison. These include “ideologies, goals and purposes of education”, “ways of knowing and learning”, “ways of teaching”, and “curricula” (p. 642), all of which are relevant to this study.

Recently there has been renewed interest in a cubic framework of analysis for comparative education, developed originally by Mark Bray and R. Murray Thomas (1995) and reproduced in *Comparative Education Approaches* edited by Bray, Adamson and Mason (2007). A copy is included as Appendix 3.2, together with the researcher’s application of the cube (Appendix 3.3). It can be perceived to be “a set of dimensions and levels for comparisons” (Bray et al., 2007, p. 7), or as a three dimensional way of mapping the areas of analysis of a given study and comparing the foci of investigation in different studies (Manzon, 2007). Crossley (2009) referred to it as a “three dimensional theoretical model” (p. 1176). The dimensions consist of “geographic/locational”; “nonlocational demographic”; and “aspects of education and society”, with each having different levels to provide for a multilevel, multifaceted comparative analysis of the particular education phenomena in question (Bray & Thomas, 1995, p. 475; Bray et al., 2007, p. 9). Moreover, comparative studies which have involved three dimensions can be mapped on the cubic diagram for comparison with one another (Bray et al., 2007). Manzon (2011) argued the cubic design

offers new understandings of the more established units of comparison – places, systems, time – as well as other units such as cultures, values, policies, curricula,

educational achievements, educational organisations, ways of learning and pedagogical innovations. They encourage multi-level comparative analyses, and portray different models, including comparison of two locations; of a focal location with other locations as appropriate; and of multiple locations. (p. 163)

Her comments highlight the new applications of comparative education in the twenty-first century, as well as the promotion of the use of different units of analyses in addition to those previously considered.

There have been two main criticisms of the cubic framework for comparative education analysis. The first is that it appears to pre-determine, at the beginning of the research, what the levels and dimensions of the study will be (Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2013), as is often the case in quantitative studies. In this sense it is seen as too deterministic to allow for the possibility of new or different levels and dimensions emerging from the interpretation of data, as many qualitative researchers hope they may be able to achieve in their investigations. Researchers like Noah W. Sobe and Jamie A. Kowalczyk (2013) have regarded the pre-determination of levels and dimensions as a limitation, while others deal with this as the identification of worthwhile findings to be incorporated into future research.

The second main criticism is that the dimensions of the cube fail to make context an integral part of the comparative education investigation (Sobe & Kowalczyk, 2013). Certainly, the cubic framework seems to have no way of incorporating dimensions related to the wider social, cultural and educational context. Nor does it provide for the inclusion of context related to modern day realities and contexts which have impacted on comparative education studies since the late 1990s. Sobe and Kowalczyk (2013) went further in elaborating the importance of context. In their view, context is “something that demands researcher’s attention across the entirety of a research endeavour” (p. 6). In this sense, it

“cannot be taken-for-granted nor treated as uncontestable ... [since it] is also heavily—and irrevocably—linked to power/knowledge concerns” (p. 9).

Others have seen the cubic framework as providing comparative education researchers with an opportunity to focus on objects other than the nation-state. According to Phillips and Schweisfurth (2014), smaller units of analysis “are often more revealing and of greater value in our understanding of what is happening ‘on the ground in education’” (p. 21). They considered that “in devising any schemes for comparison of educational phenomena attention should be paid to various equivalences on the basis of which comparison can be sensibly undertaken. These equivalences typically relate to concepts, contexts, and functions” (pp. 21-22).

### **III. Comparing the Contexts**

Australia and Singapore have each developed a curriculum or syllabus to align with its own social and cultural purposes (ACARA, 2015e; MOE, 2013). Hence, a comparative education approach, demands a consideration of the particular historical and societal context of each country and the political, economic and cultural factors at work within it.

#### **1. The Australian Context and Educational Landscape**

Australia, which is approximately 7.7 million square kilometres in size, is comprised of six states (NSW, QLD, SA, TAS, VIC and WA), as well as two territories (ACT and NT).<sup>8</sup> Given its size, Australia possesses environmental, and climatic variations between the different regions of the country, as well as ethnic, cultural and linguistic differences of the people living there. Australia possesses rich natural resources, such as gold, iron ore, opal

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<sup>8</sup> This is in addition to the seven offshore (external) territories such as Norfolk Island, Christmas Island and Australian Antarctic Territory.



and copper, which not only continue to play a vital role in the nation's economy but have previously shaped the country's past and state relations (Morgan, 2012). The search for such natural resources and the attraction of a Great Southland, during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, were reasons which originally drew navigators, such as Abel Tasman and James Cook, acting on behalf of western empires and companies, into the southern hemisphere (Gare & Ritter, 2008).

Whilst the colonisation of Australia started in 1788, with the arrival of Britain's First Fleet and the subsequent establishment of a penal colony at Botany Bay, archaeological evidence has determined that the ancestors of indigenous Australians migrated to Australia from Asia more than 50,000 years prior to Arthur Phillip's arrival (Cooper, Williams & Spooner, 2018; Macintyre, 2009; Veth & O'Connor, 2013). Over the last seventy years, a greater emphasis has been placed on recognising and increasing all Australians' awareness of Aboriginal history, beginning with the foundations of civil rights movements and the likes of William Stanner's 1968 ABC (Australian Broadcasting Corporation) Boyer lectures (Curthoys, 2001). Australia's colonial past remains a contentious issue, not unlike other post-colonial countries like Canada. Although most colonies in Australia attained self-governance in the 1850s,<sup>9</sup> which led eventually to the formation of the Commonwealth of Australia in 1901, Australia still has possessed an undeniable, but complex, relationship with Britain (Bridge, 2013). As Carl Bridge (2013) shows:

Australia still feels very British but the key economic, legal, security and social underpinnings of British Australia were weakened irreparably by the 1970s, almost disappearing with the British Empire itself. It is in the mutual affection, deeper values

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<sup>9</sup> This is with the exception of WA, where self-government occurred in 1890.

and the robust approach to current challenges that the British legacy truly lives on.  
(p. 536)

After 1901, Australia was still considered a part of the British Empire, highlighted through the country's involvement in both wars as allies of Britain. However, the latter part of the twentieth century saw Australia redirect its attention to the Pacific, especially the United States of America, particularly for foreign and economic policy, which can be characterised by the Australian, New Zealand and United States Security Treaty (ANZUS) in 1951 (Akami & Milner, 2013; Bridge, 2013; Gare & Ritter, 2008).

Despite the White Australia Policy, which dictated much of Australia's immigration policy and relationship with the Asia-Pacific region over the twentieth century, Australia in the post-WWII era, redirected its attention to Asia through initiatives such as the Colombo Plan in 1950 (Akami & Milner, 2013; Macintyre, 2009). The twenty-first century has seen Australia continue to consolidate itself as a significant entity within the Asian-Pacific region (Akami & Milner, 2013; Bridge, 2013). However, the country continues to adjust its position in the world, not belonging to Africa, America, Asia, Europe or Oceania, but with geographical and cultural links to all.

Despite its size, Australia possesses a relatively small population at 25.2 million<sup>10</sup> (Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS], 2019b), with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians comprising only 3.3% of the total Australian population (ABS, 2019a; ABS, 2018b; Biddle & Markham, 2017). In regard to cultural diversity, the 2016 Australian Census highlighted that 67% of the Australian population were born in Australia (ABS, 2017), with the United Kingdom (UK) providing the largest group of overseas-born residents (5% of the total population) (ABS, 2017; ABS, 2018c). More importantly, however, "almost

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<sup>10</sup> According to the ABS (2019b), as of 31 March 2019, the estimated resident population (ERP) of Australia was 25,287,400 people.

half of Australians (45% or 10.6 million) were either born overseas (26% or 6.2 million) or had one or both parents who were born overseas (19% or 4.5 million)” (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW], 2018, p. 1). Since 1945, more than 7.5 million people have migrated to Australia (Australian Human Rights Commission [AHRC], 2014; Phillips & Simon-Davies, 2017), which has significantly added to Australia’s multicultural heritage.

Australia’s system of government “operates on a Westminster-derived principle of parliamentary responsible government” (Robbins, 2014, p. 54), with influences from Canadian and Swiss federal systems, and from the written federal constitution of the USA (Gageler & Bateman, 2018; Robbins, 2014). The constitutional monarch of the UK has remained the Commonwealth of Australia’s Head of State throughout its history but is represented in Australia by the Governor General appointed by the party in power and approved by the British monarch. The federal government, however, is led by the Australian Prime Minister (currently Scott Morrison), the chosen leader of the party elected to govern.

Under Australia’s Federal Constitution, education was maintained as the responsibility of the six states and two territories, each of which possesses its own laws, structures and practices relating to education. This has resulted in the national curriculum being received, altered and implemented in various ways, particularly for the compulsory years of schooling. This was in spite of the fact that one of the initial aims of the Australian Curriculum was to achieve greater national consistency in school education (ACARA, 2009). Each state and territory has its own organisation of public schooling, as free, secular and compulsory for all children and young people between the ages of six and seventeen (ACARA, 2018b; Burns & McIntyre, 2017). Even the recent development of a national curriculum has respected the autonomy of each state/territory in relation to how the subjects in the new national curriculum are implemented (Burns & McIntyre, 2017).

Despite the variations in implementation of curriculum and structure, all primary and secondary schools need to comply with other federal government requirements, procedures and regulations. For instance, the Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) provides a robust framework, through the Australian Professional Standards for Teachers endorsed by the Federal government, to underpin teacher registration across all the different Australian states and territories. These standards outline the levels of knowledge and skills, which teachers and school leaders need to demonstrate at the different stages of their career. Teaching standards are designed to provide consistency across education jurisdictions and ensure comparable student outcomes for state and territory education systems.

“Since 2010, it has been mandatory in all States and Territories for students to complete Year 10 and participate full time in education, training or employment, until they are at least 17 years old” (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade [DFAT], 2017, p. 10). Generally speaking, in addition to tertiary and higher education, Australia’s education systems are structured into three stages of learning. Sometimes all three stages are incorporated into the same institution. In other cases, some or all are on separate sites. These stages are:

- **Primary schools:** Students commence this stage at Foundation, which is also referred to as Reception or Kindergarten depending on the state and territory’s terminology. It consists of seven or eight years, thus through to Year 6 or 7. Pre-school, is strongly encouraged in most Australian states and territories, existing prior to commencing primary school at the age of five or six.
- **Secondary schools:** This stage of schooling consists of four years from Year 7 or 8 until Year 10. Depending on the particular school structure and education jurisdiction, secondary school can be broken down further into a middle school structure. The middle years of schooling encompass Year 5-9 (Shanks & Dowden,

2015), however there are variations, as seen through Appendix 3.4. Appendix 3.5 extends this to highlight how the Government of South Australia structures education, with the middle years of schooling being Years 6-9. This includes the last two years of primary school and the first two years of secondary school, thus 11 to 14-year olds. Those schools across Australia with a separate middle school often undergo restructuring of the school's infrastructure and/or approaches to teaching (i.e. class setups, etc.) to accommodate students' needs at this stage of schooling.

- **Senior secondary schools:** These usually comprise the last two years, Year 11 and 12. However this is dependent upon the school's approach to the middle and secondary years of schooling, which may result in school's categorizing Year 10 in this stage of schooling. Attendance in these years can be provided in separate senior secondary colleges, or as a part of a high school that offers the other years of secondary schooling. Study undertaken at this level can lead to tertiary or higher education.<sup>11</sup> Some students commence such studies prior to graduating from high school in Year 12. (ACARA, 2013a; Burns & McIntyre, 2017; Crossley, Hancock & Sprague, 2015; Department for Education, 2016; Department of Education and Training [DET], 2015; DFAT, 2017)

Within this structure, primary and secondary schools are separated into two types, those that are government funded, and those that are privately funded, i.e. government and non-government schools. Each state and territory government owns and regulates government schools through its own Minister of Education and the public service education department she or he heads. These departments also manage other issues, such as teacher employment and the allocation of government resources for these schools (Burns & McIntyre, 2017; Power, 2010). In 2017, 65.6% of students enrolled in schools across

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<sup>11</sup> In Australia, this refers to qualifications gained through universities, private colleges, Technical and Further Education (TAFE) institutes, encompassing Vocational Education and Training (VET) courses.

Australia were at government schools (ABS, 2018a). The ABS (2018a) highlights that this figure has “continued the shift towards government schools observed since 2015. In the 20 years prior to this there was a shift towards non-government schooling.”

Whilst state/territory schools are directed by their respective guidelines, non-government schools remain predominantly autonomous in their funding, and are governed and managed through their own school boards (Burns & McIntyre, 2017; McKenzie & Weldon, 2015; Power, 2010). Despite this independence, all non-government schools still receive some support and funding from the federal government, which supplements minimal state/territory grants and private income (i.e. tuition fees) (Burns & McIntyre, 2017; McKenzie & Weldon, 2015). This differs from government schools, whose funding is mostly derived from their state/territory government (Burns & McIntyre, 2017; Goss, 2018; Harrington, 2011; McKenzie & Weldon, 2015; Power, 2010). Independent schools, must, however, be registered and they must follow state curriculum guidelines, i.e. the current Australian Curriculum, although they can request specific exceptions.

Within the non-government schools’ sector, schools can be further classified into two groups: the independent school sector and the Catholic education sector. The ABS (2018a) statistics show that these sectors comprised 14.5% and 19.9% respectively of student enrolments across Australia, respectively. The Catholic education sector consists of schools founded in the tradition (and based on the ethos) of the Roman Catholic Church, although some have been established by a traditional teaching order and others by the initiative of the local parish. Administratively they are linked to the state’s Catholic Education Office or a particular diocese. In comparison, a wider variety of schools fall under the umbrella of the independent schools’ sector in Australia. Whilst many of these schools possess a religious affiliation, some are secular. The Independent Schools Council of Australia (ISCA) (n.d.) specifies that the types of independent schools within Australia, include:

- Schools affiliated with larger and smaller Christian denominations, for example Anglican, Lutheran, Presbyterian schools
- Non-denominational Christian schools
- Islamic schools
- Jewish schools
- Montessori schools
- Rudolf Steiner schools
- Aboriginal community schools
- Schools that specialise in meeting the needs of students with disabilities.

As this list highlights, schools can be interdenominational or base their teaching and learning on specific education philosophies. Some schools operate within smaller education systems, for example Lutheran or Steiner schools (ISCA, n.d.).

Despite their differences, all these schools are recognised as contributing to the provision of education to all children in Australia. All are required to teach the ACH to students in Years 7 and 8, although schools are able to negotiate some modifications.

## **2. The Singapore Context and Educational Landscape in Singapore**

With a land mass of approximately 721.5 kilometres square, Singapore is a small city-state, situated just north of the equator at the southern end of the Malay Peninsula. Consisting of one main island (Pulau Ujong or Singapore Island), as well as more than sixty smaller islands, such as Sentosa and Pulau Busing, Singapore is in a strategic, but volatile geographical position, closely adjacent to Malaysia and Indonesia (Chia, 2015). Singapore possesses limited natural resources, which has emphasised the need to redefine its hinterland, one that was once based on its “maritime space” (Tan, T.Y., 2019b, p. 85).

Like Australia, Singapore possesses a rich history, which spans several centuries prior to colonial rule. With connections to Srivijaya (650-1377), the Kingdom of Singapura (1299-1398), the Malacca Sultanate (1400-1511) and the Johor Sultanate (1528-1855), the island's location and its people's ability to facilitate trade became a central component to the rise and fall of these kingdoms. Kwa Chong Guan, Derek Heng, and Tan Tai Yong (2009), through their use of archaeological evidence, highlight that the prosperity Singapore experienced, as early as the fourteenth century, can be linked to global trading cycles connected to the Yuan and Ming dynasties.

For the British East India Company, Singapore's location at the end of the Strait of Malacca, which links the Indian Ocean to the South China Sea, was more attractive than Penang,<sup>12</sup> which was positioned too far north to become the centre of sea trade routes between India and China (Barr, 2019). In the midst of a succession dispute following the death of Mahmud III of Johor, as well as the presence of the Dutch in the region, Stanford Raffles, on behalf of the British East India Company, negotiated an agreement in 1819 which saw Singapore become a port and settlement (Barr, 2019). The cession of territory formally occurred in 1824 (Lee, 2008), and in 1826, Singapore, together with Malacca and Penang, formed the Straits Settlements. With the transference of control of the Straits Settlements to the Colonial Office in London, Singapore became a Crown Colony in 1867 (Lee, 1991; Lee, 2008). British rule, however, was interrupted in WWII, when Singapore fell under Japan's rule from 1942 to 1945, with traumatic consequences for its people. Whilst, internal self-government was granted to Singapore in 1959, it remained a colony until 1963, when Singapore merged with the Federation of Malaya, Sarawak and North Borneo (Sabah) to form the Federation of Malaysia.

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<sup>12</sup> The British East India Company acquired the island of Penang from the Sultan of Kedah in 1786 (Lee, 2008).



Britain's rule of Singapore provided the beginnings of Singapore's multiracial society, as Rhodes Murphey (1989) highlights, how "races, cultures and ideas as well as goods from a variety of places jostle, mix and enrich each other" in port cities (p. 225). Singapore's status as a free port, from the beginning of colonial rule, was particularly attractive to the trading community, and by 1850, the island's population exceeded 50,000 compared to the estimated 150 to 1,000 Malay, Chinese and *orang laut*<sup>13</sup> who were residing on the island at the time of Raffles arrival (Saw, 2012; Smith, 2006; Tan, n.d.; Trocki, 2006). As Edwin Lee (1991) puts it:

For the greater part of its history, Singapore lived purely by trade and was an entrepôt built on the enterprise and skills of European business houses, Chinese compradors, Indian money lenders and seasonal traders from China and the Malay Archipelago. The trade of Singapore depended not just on traders but on labourers too, and the labourers were Chinese, Indians and Javanese. The labourers were important as manpower for Singapore but also as a trading commodity handled by firms which accepted orders for Chinese coolies ... [and] Javanese coolies. (p. xiv)

For many, Singapore, during this time, was still a place of business rather than a permanent settlement, a sentiment which was beginning to change in the years before WWII, due to greater stability, an interest in more autonomy and a rise in political consciousness. As a result, individuals residing in Singapore were continuously influenced and connected to events occurring in their homeland, whether it was the nationalist movement in India or the rise of communism in China.

In terms of population, the Chinese quickly became the largest ethnic group on the island under colonial rule, constituting 45.9% of the population in 1836 (Lee, 1991). By

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<sup>13</sup> Refers to sea people or nomads in Malay (Barr, 2019).

1901, this had increased to 72.1% (Lee, 1991), a proportion which has remained largely unchanged. In today's society, Singapore is the only country in Southeast Asia where the Chinese population constitutes the majority (Lee & Li, 2014). As of June 2019, Singapore's total population was 5.70 million, with citizens accounting for 3.5 million; the rest was made up of permanent residents, and non-residents, including foreigners working and studying in Singapore (Department of Statistics [DOS], 2019; Yuen-C & Ang, 2019). According to the 2015 General Household Survey, three quarters of Singapore's resident population<sup>14</sup> is Chinese (74.3%), Malays and Indians comprise 13.3% and 9.1% of the population respectively, whilst the category of Others constitutes the remaining 3.2% (DOS, 2016). This forms the basis of the country's Chinese-Malay-Indian-Others (CMIO) framework,<sup>15</sup> which has been a cornerstone of Singapore's public policy since independence (Cheng & Ting, 2017; Kuah, 2018; Reddy, 2016; Sin, 2017). As Khun Eng Kuah (2018) states:

Under this framework, the four main ethnic groups in Singapore would be proportionately represented based on the composition of the ethnic population ... Thus, within the government, the parliament also has proportionate representation of the main ethnic groups according to this demographic ethnic composition. It is the same in other areas of governance and development. (p. 3)

Importantly, this framework is not only "entrenched in Singaporean life" (Mathews, 2018, p. xxix), but "resonates" with many Singaporeans (Sin, 2017). For instance, a recent study, undertaken by the Institute of Policy Studies (IPS) and Channel News Asia, highlights that Singaporeans "are more likely to accept new citizens as being "truly Singaporean"" if they are Chinese, Malay, Indian or Eurasian (Sin, 2017). These four ethnic groups are also reflected in other policies. For instance, whilst Malay is considered the national language,

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<sup>14</sup> Singapore's resident population is comprised of Singapore Citizens and Permanent Residents (DOS, 2016).

<sup>15</sup> The 2015 General Household Survey classifies the resident population of "other ethnic groups" into the following categories: Filipino, Caucasian, Eurasian, Arab, Thai, Japanese and Others (pp. 83-84).

Singapore has four official languages (English, Malay, Mandarin and Tamil). Although the growing diversity of Singapore society has encouraged calls for a “focus on a Singaporean identity instead of an ethnic one” (Sin, 2017), the CMIO framework, as well as the associated complexities, signifies the emphasis placed on ethnic identity at both the national and personal levels.

After gaining independence in 1965 from the Federation of Malaysia, emphasis was placed on achieving and maintaining economic growth, “social progress, political stability and racial harmony in line with the politics of survival” (Lee, M.H., 2015, p. 131). This was particularly important given the turbulent events leading up to the Separation, involving clashes between Malays and Chinese, such as the 1964 race riots. Singapore’s economic development, after independence, from a “seedy Asian port to a gleaming metropolis and major manufacturing center” (Trocki, 2006, p. 107), largely relates to governance and strategic direction by the PAP (Tan, T. Y., 2019a, 2019b), which has continued to remain the dominant political party in Singapore, securing victory at each successive General Election. Whilst, Singapore’s Head of State, the President, is elected by the people, it is a non-executive presidency. The leader of the political party with the majority of seats in Parliament becomes Prime Minister, who subsequently chooses a Cabinet from the elected members of Parliament (Prime Minister's Office Singapore, 2019; Singapore Parliament, 2019; The Commonwealth, n.d.). Whilst Singapore is a democracy, given the nature of its politics and policies, Hussin Mutalib (2003), has argued that a more appropriate term could be “soft-authoritarianism”, which is showing signs of “opening up” (p. 3).

Since independence, Singapore has developed its own approach to the education of its younger generation under the direction of the MOE, which “is responsible for planning, coordinating, and mandating policy of the formal education system” (Lewis & Gandhi, 2013, p. 463). There are three main types of mainstream schools in Singapore: those are

government schools, government aided, and independent, which cater for primary, secondary and post-secondary levels of schooling (Goodwin et al., 2017; Lewis & Gandhi, 2013). Whilst government schools are funded by the government (Koh & Lee, 2008), government-aided schools have been established by religious organisations (Koh & Lee, 2008; You & Morris, 2016), and “receive about 95% of their funding from the government” (Goodwin et al., 2017, p. 11). What are called independent schools receive “a per capita grant for each student from the government” and are “governed by the MOE approved Board of Governors with the power to appoint and promote staff” (Choon-Yin, 2017, p. 200). Nevertheless, independent schools “have greater autonomy in staff deployment and salaries, determining the enrolment figures, finance and setting of school fees” (Choon-Yin, 2017, p. 200). Despite these differences, mainstream education schools still fall under the purview of MOE.

Greater “flexibility” in Singapore’s education system is particularly evident in the creation, and existence of, independent and autonomous schools (Gopinathan & Mardiana, 2013; You & Morris, 2016). Autonomous schools are government and government-aided schools, which have produced excellent academic results (Choon-Yin, 2017; You & Morris, 2016), offered “a wider range of enrichment programmes” (Koh & Lee, 2008, p. 7), and possess “strong community ties” (Choon-Yin, 2017, p. 200). As Sam Choon-Yin (2017) explained, to be designated as an autonomous school by MOE “remains a well sought after status to acquire” (p. 200). This type of school is also provided, among other things, “more leeway in managing their curriculum” (You & Morris, 2016, p. 889), which can provide the basis for innovative approaches to curriculum implementation (Lee, 2018). Within this structure, most schools are grouped into clusters, with each cluster supervised by a Cluster Superintendent (MOE, 2019f, 2019k), which allows for an “intermediate level of

governance” between MOE and each school (You & Morris, 2016, p. 889).<sup>16</sup> Within this framework, the three levels of schooling are:

- **Primary schools:** In accordance with the Compulsory Education Act, implemented in 2013 (Ng, 2010; Thang, 2019), “a child of ‘compulsory school age’ is one who is above the age of 6 years and who has not yet attained the age of 15 years” (Thang, 2019, p. 181). After pre-school (4-6 years old), children enter primary school, which usually lasts six years (Goodwin et al., 2017). Appendix 3.6 which provides an overview of Singapore’s education system shows that there are two types of schools, which provide full-time education in the primary years: mainstream schools and government-funded special education schools (MOE, 2019e). Whilst assistance is available in mainstream schools, special education schools are tailored to provide specialised support, especially to students with severe disabilities. Most primary school teachers in Singapore, like Australia, are not subject specialists (Tan, 2017).
- **Secondary schools:** Entrance into Singapore’s mainstream secondary education is based on the Primary School Leaving Examination (PSLE). This exam tests student’s knowledge of four subjects: English, Mother Tongue Language, Mathematics and Science (Tan, 2017). A student’s Secondary 1 ‘posting’ to a given school is determined by their PSLE result and school preferences (MOE, 2019j; Tan, 2017). A student’s PSLE result also determines their academic stream for secondary school (Tan, 2017), which usually places them in the Express, N(A), or Normal (Technical) (N(T)) course (MOE, 2019g). Whilst the Express course is designed for high performing students who are academically inclined, students in the N(A) course undertake similar subjects to those in the Express course (MOE, 2019g). The N(T)

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<sup>16</sup> Outside this mainstream system are “private education institutions”, which are required to register with Committee for Private Education. These schools include the Australian International School and the Singapore American School (Choon-Yin, 2017; Government of Singapore, 2019).

course, on the other hand, “adopts a vocational [or technical] focus” (Ho, 2012, p. 112) to “enhance experiential and practice-oriented learning” (MOE, 2019g, p. viii). These courses comprise the basis of Singapore’s education system at the secondary school level and lasts four to five years depending on student’s course.

Although, there is provision for students to transfer from one course to another during their secondary education, this is dependent upon the student’s ability and performance (MOE, 2019g, 2019i). As seen in Appendices 3.6 and 3.7, students undertaking the Express course attend secondary school for four years before sitting the Singapore-Cambridge General Certificate of Education ‘Ordinary’ Level Examination. The N(A) and the N(T) courses also take four years but lead to a GCE ‘Normal’ Level Examination, designed for the specific stream. However a fifth year of study is made available to those students from the N(A) course who performed well in their GCE ‘N’ Levels to sit the GCE ‘O’ Level Examination (Goodwin et al., 2017; Lewis & Gandhi, 2013; MOE, 2019g, 2019i).<sup>17</sup>

In early March 2019, Singapore’s Education Minister Ong Ye Kung announced that the current style of streaming seen in Singaporean secondary schools would end in 2024 (Davie, 2019; “One secondary education, many subject bands,” 2019). Instead, “subject-based banding” would be implemented, allowing students to “take up subjects at higher or lower levels, based on their strengths” (Davie, 2019). Preceding this development, subject-based banding was trialled at selected schools in 2014 and introduced to all secondary schools four years later at the Secondary 1 level (Mokhtar, 2019).

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<sup>17</sup> For more information on alternative pathways, including those programs available in specialised schools or privately funded schools, see Appendix 3. 6 or MOE (2019d, 2019f).

- **Post-Secondary:** After Secondary 4 or Secondary 5, most students undertake further education, known in Singapore as post-secondary or pre-university education, which is carried out at Junior Colleges/ Centralised Institutes, Polytechnics, the Institute of Technical Education or Arts Institutions (MOE, 2019e, 2019g). These lasts from one to three years depending on the pathway (Goodwin et al., 2017). Each post-secondary study area is aligned with a distinct sector or career pathway, with entrance to it dependent upon the certificates obtained at the secondary level. This allows students to align their ambitions and study with future occupations (MOE, 2019h).

For most students, post primary education is separated into two stages, secondary and post-secondary education. Nevertheless, for students who are “academically-strong” and desire “broader learning experiences” (MOE, 2019i, p. 17), there is an alternative pathway in the Integrated Programme. The Integrated Programme runs for six years at selected schools, combining secondary and junior college education. For accepted students, this programme leads to the A-level examination, International Baccalaureate Diploma or the National University of Singapore (NUS) High School Diploma. The program commences in Secondary 1, however there is the option of admittance in Secondary 3, which leads to the same qualification and runs for four years until the end of junior college (Goodwin et al., 2017; MOE, 2019g, 2019i). Although MOE has noted the recent provision of more flexibility in education, the Singapore education system is largely structured by streaming, with curricula appropriate to students’ learning abilities.

### **3. Points of Comparison on Education**

Entrance into mainstream secondary education is more stringent in Singapore compared to Australia and depends on academic performance at primary school. In contrast, admission to secondary school in Australia relates to other facts such as school autonomy, locality, feasibility and parent choice, Singapore’s centres on the PSLE results. Although

there is currently more flexibility in Singapore's education system than has been seen in previous decades, streaming still plays an important part in secondary education, particularly in the lower secondary years. In Australia, streaming plays a much smaller part in schooling. Though rarely used in primary schooling, it does occur in some secondary schools, but usually in the form of subject streaming in key academic subjects like Mathematics and Science, or to provide additional literacy support for those struggling with basic reading and writing skills. At the same time most, Australian schools try to ensure that children spend some learning time in mixed ability groups with children of their own age group to encourage the development of social skills.

Approaches to language learning in schools is also noticeably different. The reality of bilingualism in the everyday life of most Singaporeans is reflected in the important role in Singapore's education system. English and a student's Mother Tongue language are "standard" subjects in primary school and tested in PSLE, along with Mathematics and Science (MOE, 2019d, p. 4). This is subsequently carried through to secondary school, whereby students in all three courses: Express, N(A) and N(T), are required to take English and a Mother Tongue Language as well as Mathematics as compulsory subjects (MOE, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c, see Appendices 3.8, 3.9, 3.10). The N(T) possess Computer Applications has an additional compulsory subject, whereas the N(A) and Express Courses outline Science and the Humanities as their additional compulsory subjects, differing according to the course students take. However it is important to note here that the subjects offered as a 3<sup>rd</sup> Language for the N(A) Course Curriculum includes Malay and Chinese and the choice of languages is extended in the Express Course Curriculum to French, German, Japanese, Malay and Chinese.

Whilst many primary and secondary schools in Australia teach a second language as a part of their curriculum framework/structure, it is not mandatory from F-10 and is



dependent upon individual education jurisdiction policies, as well as state government regulations (Varnham O'Regan, 2014). There is also a lot more variance in these policies in regard to secondary schools, with public commentary also questioning whether the lack of continuity with language education between the primary and secondary has contributed to the situation. Language expert, Tim Mayfield asks “do we view language learning as important as numeracy and literacy? And if so, we need to come up with strategies to fund it appropriately, but also come up with a united approach across all jurisdictions” (Theodosiou, 2017). When comparing this predicament to Singapore’s education system, it is apparent the difference in policy when other language learning is considered equally as important to literacy and numeracy.

It is evident that contextual factors of both countries feed into the structure of each country’s education system. Whilst Singapore delivers alternative education, such as home school or specialised schools for students with disabilities, all education jurisdictions in Australia make provision in the schooling system for students with various forms of disability. In regard to Australia’s context it is important to note the country’s widespread population. This means that not all children are able to attend regular school, which is particularly important in the context of rural and remote communities. In these situations, students can enrol in schools of distance education which assists children in obtaining the relevant high school certificates.

#### **IV. Previous Studies Comparing Education in Singapore and Australia**

The number of academic investigations concerned to compare education in Australia and Singapore has not been very great. The researcher located seven journal articles and two PhD studies (completed since 2000) that were focused on comparing particular aspects of education in the two countries, but none on any holistic consideration of the two systems of

education per se. The topics covered in the journal articles range from Masters of Business Administration (MBA) programs (Goh, 2009); to English Language in an international context (O'Neill & Chapman, 2015); to cultural empathy of Australian academics in Singapore (Dunn & Wallace, 2004); to a comparison on civics and citizenship education in both countries (Neoh, 2017); and to secondary teachers' interpersonal behaviour (den Brok, Fisher, Wubbels, Brekelmans & Rickards, 2006); to secondary students' beliefs about Mathematics (Forgasz, Leder & Kaur, 2001); and changes in early childhood education (Nyland & Ng, 2016). In regard to the two PhD studies, one studied multicultural education (Parsley, 2000), whilst the other looked at the way teachers research experiences, in Singapore and NSW, shaped their own teaching practices (Neville, 2012). Only four previous studies, to be discussed below, seem to have any direct bearing on this current study.

The reason for the scarcity of studies comparing education in Singapore and Australia may be that these two countries appear to be so different in overarching characteristics, such as geographic location, political structure, demography and educational landscape, that it was deemed not possible to make a viable comparison. Manzon (2007) made the point that for an educational comparison to be credible and have meaning, there needed to be "sufficient similarities that are educationally relevant" (p. 118). It can be argued, that in the case of Singapore and Australia, commonalities exist in relation to the importance given to globalisation, higher education, maintaining a multicultural society, in addition to the fact that they are neighbours in the South East Asian region.

The first of the two comparative studies relevant to the present research is the article published by Lesley Vidovich (2004). It studied two secondary schools, one in Singapore and the other in Australia, which were "in the process of actively 'internationalizing' [*sic*] their curriculum" (p. 445). The article was part of a larger project in which "changing

curriculum policy in non-government schools, in a context of globalization, was investigated through a series of case studies in individual schools in different English-speaking, developed countries” (p. 445). In this sense, it could be regarded as “a single snapshot of curriculum policy development towards internationalizing the curriculum at a particular point in time” (p. 445). Only one independent school in each country was investigated with the emphasis on “curriculum policy processes within these schools rather than details of the curriculum structure and content” (Vidovich, 2004, p. 444). The research findings discussed commonalities and differences between the schools. After considering the level of global influences on the curriculum frameworks of the two schools, Vidovich (2004) concluded,

[i]n comparing influences on the two schools, it was global and international influences which were identified as having the greatest impact. Singapore High actively seeks more —and more diverse—international influences on curriculum development than Australia College from both educational and non-educational (especially business and industry) sources. (p. 449)

Vidovich’s (2004) study was criticised by Manzon (2007) who used it to exemplify the limitations of interpretation imposed when researchers chose units of comparison that were not completely comparable. In this case Manzon considered that Vidovich had ignored important differences in the way independent schools operated in each country. In Singapore, so-called independent schools still fall under the jurisdiction of MOE. In Australia, independent schools are required to meet state and federal regulations, particularly in relation to curriculum, but have autonomy in the way they are organised and funded. Decisions rest ultimately with a school board or council. Although it is possible to argue that contextual details about how independent schools function in both countries could have been made more explicit in the paper, Vidovich has in fact pointed out the background differences in her discussion of the data. In her comments on the results of her investigation, she stated

clearly that in the case of ‘Singapore High’ “the main national influence was identified by respondents as the MOE [and] the school ... comes under the ultimate control of the MOE and still operates within the national CF [Curriculum Framework]” (p. 448). In contrast, the ‘Australian College’, which at all time was implementing the state-mandated curriculum framework, had made its own independent decision to make IB the primary focus of its curriculum reform, because this “would distinguish the school in the local educational landscape” (p. 447).

Manzon’s (2007) argument that “meaningful results” may only be gained if researchers can “dispel the ‘illusory differences’” (p. 118), or at least that the differences are not significant, is proven in the second of the relevant comparative studies. Although Yeow-Tong Chia and Jia Ying Neoh, have published studies on Singapore and Australia separately (Chia, 2014, 2015; Chia & Beard, 2019; Neoh, 2017), their work in *Civics and Citizenship in Australia* (2017), is a direct comparative analysis of civics and citizenship education in Singapore and Australia. Chia and Neoh (2017) stated:

[w]ith recognition of the different political ideologies in both countries, [it] ... discusses how education, and in particular character and citizenship education in Singapore and civics and citizenship education in Australia, aims to prepare students for their role as responsible and active citizens within the context of a highly uncertain and challenging future in the twenty-first century. (pp. 264-265)

Chia and Neoh (2017) went on to highlight the importance of recognising that “the character of civics and citizenship education is dependent on the world view in which it is embedded” (p. 269). This understanding enabled the authors to establish that “the form of governance in Singapore aligns most closely to a civic republican model of citizenship, while Australia’s most closely aligns with a liberal democratic approach” (p. 269).

These authors went on to analyse the way in which critical thinking and skills related to citizenship competencies were factored into curriculum initiatives such as Singapore's 21CC, on the one hand, and into Australia's general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities, on the other. Consideration of these features allowed Chia and Neoh (2017) to analyse the ways in which aspects of the subject were integrated throughout the school curriculum, whilst recognising the responsibility of teachers, as well as the complexities and sometimes anxieties, linked to civics and citizenship education in the classrooms. Ultimately, they advocated the development of "cohesive and holistic approaches to civics and citizenship education within schools" (Chia & Neoh, 2017, p. 274). This would require commitment from government, leaders and teachers to implement particular approaches to learning that "firmly embed it with the whole school culture, the curriculum and communities" (p. 275), but could lead to the success of the subject in both countries.

Following the 2014 *Review*, ACARA did in fact institute a study on comparing Australia and Singapore's national education system, which included a focus on History and Social Studies. This was for the purpose to examine "international trends and developments in curriculum design" (ACARA, 2018a, p. 8). However, a comparative analysis on the two approaches to lower secondary history was not undertaken. Whilst there are differences in regard to implementation and content, a commonality can be found in the historical inquiry teaching approach for the respective curriculum documents. This coincides with similar national education initiatives and curriculum features for the study of history. Most importantly it highlights how similar decisions, curriculum content, and teaching approaches are irrevocably connected to the success and value of history education in the future.

Anna Clark's (2008) work on history education in Canada and Australia, concentrates not only on the teaching of history in classrooms, but more importantly "explores the ways students and teachers think about their nation's history", amid the debates

and ideological “wars” that take place in the public arena. As Clark (2008) contended, “wider historical contests fill media space and capture public attention but do little to explain how history is *taught* and *learnt* in schools” (p. 1). Her statement has implications for the subject’s viability in the future. Clark (2008) claimed that,

[s]tudents are sick of repeated topics and boring material; they want engaging teachers who love what they do and can bring imagination to their lessons. For their part, teachers and curriculum officials also want the subject to come alive in the classroom, and to be as relevant and interesting as they feel it can and should be. (p. 10)

She concluded that “for students to connect with their nation’s past, it has to be taught well” (p. 10). Four of Clark’s key findings, from a decade ago, still resonate in Australian society.

They are

- There is little point mandating national history if does not engage students and teachers.
- For students and teachers alike, it is the history teacher (even more than the content) that determines whether the subject works or not.
- It is critical that teachers have appropriate training and expertise in history method in order to counter those problems of repetition and rote learning.
- Students and teachers want to learn history in a way that allows them to be critical, to reconcile different points of view, and to use their imagination—rather than recite ‘what happened’. (p. 10)

These could be better understood and responded to through further comparative studies.

## **V. Conclusion**

Although there are no previous studies comparing recent lower secondary history curriculum for Singapore and Australia, these two countries both place strong emphasis on teaching approaches and content in history. Despite their considerable differences, the choice of Singapore for an educational comparison with Australia is based on its standards of education. This is reflected not only in student performance, but also in its ongoing attention to syllabus development and pedagogy, as demonstrated in the 2014 history syllabuses for the lower secondary N(A) and Express courses, at a time when Australia was implementing its first national curriculum.

The following chapter discusses the qualitative research methods which were applied to the comparative analysis of the two curriculum documents. In addition, the application of space and method triangulation in the collection of opinions from history teachers, heads of history and history academics/specialists, as well as related public commentary, provided a third source of comparative data. By complementing the analysis of history curriculum and teaching documents with the other sources of data, this comparative study provided a deeper understanding of how the two countries were approaching the teaching of their national history at lower secondary level in the second decade of the twenty-first century.

## **Chapter Three: Qualitative Research Methods for a Comparative Education Study**

### **I. Introduction**

The term ‘qualitative research’ is “an umbrella heading covering various research approaches” (Flick, 2014, p. 80). This view reflects the reality that qualitative research does not have any set practices, theories or paradigms that are distinctively its own. Rather researchers are left free to take advantage of various qualitative conceptual frameworks and methods, taking into account their particular implications for data collection and analysis (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). Researchers can also study issues from multiple angles, allowing them to gain a deeper understanding of a topic by tapping into the personal experiences, thoughts and feelings of individual participants in the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011). The pursuit of a heightened awareness and in-depth understanding of the research problem through the minds or consciousness of participants who have themselves experienced the issues, remains one of the most important features of qualitative research. In its most basic form, qualitative research has been applied to studies where “trends and explanations need to be made” (Creswell, 2012, p. 19); where “little-understood phenomena” require investigation (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 69); and where the research problem possesses unknown variables which need to be explored at greater depth (Creswell, 2012).

### **II. Features of Qualitative Research**

One commonality of qualitative research approaches is the importance placed on inquiry methods (Creswell, 1998), which are used to understand the meanings that



individuals give to their lives, in the particular realities of their varying contexts. As Robert Burns (1997) asserted in relation to educational research:

[i]n current research [compared to the late 1960s and 1970s], movements towards humanness are based on a recognition of the need for critical inquiry and meaning in educational action ... The qualitative researcher attempts to gather evidence that will reveal qualities of life, reflecting the ‘multiple realities’ of specific educational settings from participants’ perspectives. (p. 291)

Similarly, Marilyn Lichtman (2013) considered that the central “purpose of qualitative research is to describe, understand, and interpret human *phenomena*, human *interaction*, or human *discourse*” (p. 17). As Anselm Strauss and Juliet Corbin (1998) explained “qualitative methods can be used to obtain the intricate details about phenomena such as feelings, thought processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (p. 11).

Many scholars have also commented on the tendency for qualitative studies to be small scale (Creswell, 2012; Hammersley, 2013; Lichtman, 2013), and hence not representative of the full range of a research problem. This is one of the points emphasised by Martyn Hammersley (2013), who described qualitative research as tending

to adopt a flexible and data-driven research design, to use relatively unstructured data, to emphasize the essential role of subjectivity in the research process, to study a small number of naturally occurring cases in detail, and to use verbal rather than statistical forms of analysis. (p. 12)

Despite these common underlying assumptions, how qualitative research is applied depends upon the research problem under investigation, as well as the particular methods selected.

The most pertinent features of qualitative research were listed by John W. Creswell (2012), as follows:

- Exploring a problem and developing a detailed understanding of a central phenomenon
- Having the literature review play a minor role but justify the problem
- Stating the purpose and research questions in a general and broad way so as to [allow for a range of] the participants' experiences
- Collecting data based on words from a small number of individuals so that the participants' views are obtained
- Analyzing [*sic*] the data for description and themes[,] using text analysis and interpreting the larger meaning of the findings
- Writing the report using flexible, emerging structures and evaluative criteria, and including the researchers' subjective reflectivity and bias. (p. 16)

In addition to this list, Creswell (1998) had previously commended qualitative research for the way it permitted studies to commence with a “single focus on an issue or problem rather than a hypothesis or the supposition of a causal relationship of variables” (pp. 20-22). Taking these points as a guide, the researcher's approach to this investigation was derived from the research problem was derived from the research problem of seeking to compare the new ACH being introduced into Australian schools over 2012-2016 (see Appendix 1.4: ACARA, 2014b), with the introduction of a new history syllabus for lower secondary years in Singapore around the same time. From 2010 to 2014, media and academics alike in Australia devoted attention to publicising, discussing and debating issues regarding the content of history education and its implementation, following the government's decision to make history compulsory and national for the first time in Australia's history. At the inception of

this thesis study, most schools were at the preliminary stages of implementation, with the effects of mandating history in schools remaining uncertain, particularly in relation to historical inquiry methods. For this reason, a qualitative approach seemed to align best with the study as the variables at that point remained unknown but needed to be explored in order to provide practical suggestions for the future (Creswell, 2012; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

If history education within both the Australian and Singaporean contexts were to be responsive to pedagogical developments suited to twenty-first century learners, the history curriculum needed to become more relevant and engaging to students. It was important for this study to collect data which could help identify themes that could lead to practical suggestions for the future. In this respect, this PhD did not attempt to provide a comprehensive analysis of the implementation of both sets of curriculum documents in all schools of both countries. Nor did it seek to report on the overall implementation of the ACH from F-10 in Australian education jurisdictions generally. Instead it chose to focus only on the lower secondary years in some Australian states. It was recognised that a small-scale qualitative study would provide fewer insights into the research problem, but what it lacked in scope, it could compensate for in the depth of exploration possible. It was also considered that this inherent limitation of qualitative research would be lessened in significance if a triangulation of research methods was used. In this study school data were not the primary source of information but the main emphasis was on the curriculum documents, triangulated with public commentary and written responses collected from those who were seniors in history, or teachers of history in schools, or experts in history education.

Written responses to guideline questions formed the second main source of data. From a qualitative perspective, giving participants the chance to write their personal responses to open-ended questions enabled them to decide what issues were of significance to them and write about them. Their comments provided the researcher with the opportunity

to “explore”, “explain” and “describe” the research problem in a more personalised way (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, p. 68).

Such an open-ended approach is not possible in a quantitative survey where participants are forced to respond in ways prescribed by the researcher. Despite the application of different methods, quantitative research is based on the use of numbers, measurement, scales and statistics to identify trends across the respondents. In most cases, this approach draws attention away from any one individual among the many, since the chief interest is generalising findings across one or more groups of respondents (Flick, 2014). Even when interview and observational data are included, quantitative research necessitates the calculation of measures for response categories prior to data collection so that scores can be recorded on pre-set scales. In this way “quantitative data are collected on closed-ended questions based on predetermined response scales, or categories” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 177). In contrast, in qualitative research “the participants provide information based on questions that do not restrict the participants’ options for responding” (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011, p. 177), where the basic elements of the data are words not numbers. This demonstrates the way in which humanistic qualities are integral to qualitative research approaches.

As participants’ identities and interaction with the research problem in this study were grounded in different localities, contexts and occupational groups, the ability for qualitative research to take into account the “human experience” and “human discourse” in a range of contexts allowed for greater range of personalised understandings of participants’ opinions and viewpoints (Lichtman, 2013, p. 17). Since human opinions differ, influenced not only by societal, economic, cultural, historical, and political factors, but also by locality, occupation and experiences, the researcher needs to give consideration to groups’ in different contexts or levels. According to Creswell (1998) the ability to analyse data at different

“levels” constitutes one aspect of a dynamic qualitative study (p. 21). In this case, the context or “levels” of groups are, in ascending order, individual participant, school, education jurisdiction, state/territory, as well as the country as a whole.

### **III. Historical Research in Education**

Historical research involves researchers studying an aspect of the past, such as an event, movement, idea, period of time, an individual or group that is of interest to them. Furthermore, they seek to understand this piece of history through the use of data or sources that already exist in the form of official or personal documents, books, artefacts, photographs and films (Anderson & Arsenault, 2005; Burns, 1997; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2000; Goodwin & Goodwin, 1996; McCulloch & Richardson, 2000; Tamboukou, 2012; Wiersma, 1995). Burns (1997) extended this definition by discussing the capacity of historical education research to “help understand, explain, predict through the systematic collection and objective evaluation of data relating to past occurrences in order to explore research questions ... concerning causes, effects or trends that may help to explain present or anticipate future events” (pp. 387-388). William Wiersma (1995), on the other hand, stated that historical research “involves much interpretation and a projection of results and interpretation onto current issues, problems, procedures, and the like. In the context of education, historical research deals with educational ‘matters’ of the past” (p. 16). All of these conceptualisations require a level of critical inquiry in the reconstruction of the past being studied from the pre-existing sources available.

The most common question posed in historical research is *what happened?* (Cohen et al., 2000). This relatively simple notion gets to the heart of the reason for including this approach in this study. In particular, what happened over the years of developing and implementing the ACH and, from a comparative perspective, how did this differ from what

happened in the development and implementation of Singapore's 2014 history syllabus for lower secondary years.

Burns (1997, p. 388) identified three reasons that illustrate the relevance of historical research. In the first place, historical research as applied to education can reveal or unravel “complex interactions [of individual] ... actions and situations [in explaining] ... past and present” structures of education and the development, for example, of a new curriculum. Secondly, it “throws light on present and future trends” and the way educational ideas can re-emerge over time in different forms (p. 388). Historical research can also contribute to “understanding ... the relationship between politics and education, between school and society, and between pupil and teacher” (p. 388). For example, this study investigates the interactions between their respective curriculum documents, as well as media and public commentary with the realities of implementing a new curriculum. The relationship between pupils and their teacher was touched on, albeit briefly, through history teachers' responses to their implementation of their country's respective curriculum document and their classroom practice.

Historical research is particularly important in education to contextualise research problems that exist in contemporary society but may be grounded in the past, in the sense that they have their roots in past education theories and practices. Garry McCulloch and William Richardson (2000, p. 6) used the example of schooling, highlighting “[o]ur current notions of school and education, then, are historical creations that came into being and became established for specific reasons that have much to do with their cultural surroundings.” Using an historical approach to education can be particularly useful in comparative education research. Drawing upon Sweeting (2001), Aisi Li (2013) explained, to “stretch comparisons across places with little or no attention paid to time is likely to create a thin, flat, quite possibly superficial outcome, while historical perspectives are likely to

enhance sensitivity to content” (pp. 17-18). In contrast to the advantages discussed above, Li (2013) has drawn attention to four limitations or difficulties with historical research. These are the availability of documents; the two-fold bias, of writers on the one hand, and researchers’, on the other; quality of the documents in terms of their validity and reliability; and the interpretation of these sources. The first two of these are particularly relevant to this research and discussed below.

The issue that many historical researchers would regard as a pressing concern relates to the number and availability of relevant documents that were created in the past. There are various constraint factors that can limit the availability of documents that are vital to a piece of historical research. These include their location, the time of their creation and the accessibility of the sources. The language in which the document is written can be another constraint if it is necessary to make a translation before the research analysis can even begin. In the case of comparative education research, the issue of accessibility can be very real, as in this study. Certain documents, such as resources in this study, may be accessible locally or by citizens of the country concerned, but may not be available to international researchers from other countries. Although this applies most specifically to published documents, those available online present their own set of challenges, with many requiring authentication or proof of identification, and with access to those individuals not in a given profession or industry being strictly controlled and monitored. In addition to this, when a document, used as the basis of analysis, is published on the internet, it is liable to be replaced and no longer available one or two years later.

The second limitation of historical documents according to Li (2013) relates to bias. Properly understood this operates at two different levels. The first is the bias, derived from the original author(s), existing in documents from the past, which researchers are using for analysis. Burns (1997) explained this concern:

Since the data was not created in a controlled way as part of the research process, but created in the past for a variety of purposes, then much of the data such as diaries, letters and newspaper reports will be biased. (p. 394)

This sort of bias can be seen in the data sources used in this study, but with a different dynamic at work in each of the sets of data. For example, the outlooks of school teachers and academic experts, reflected in their personal responses, were influenced by their own experiences and thoughts; the position they held at school, the jurisdiction/state they operated under; as well as the contemporary political events occurring at the time. In the case of journalists and scholars responsible for the second set of data, the public commentary, their bias would have been influenced by similar factors, but also by the newspaper or publishing company they were working for. At the collective level, bias can also be visualised as possible in the development of curriculum documentation, as was apparent at the time of the history wars in Australia and the changing attitudes of governments and Education Ministers toward national history, at the time of the development of the ACH. In the case of Singapore, since independence, there has always been close links between the PAP and MOE.

At the second level, there is the possibility of the researchers' own bias influencing their analysis and interpretation of the documents. When using documents grounded in the past, it can be difficult for researchers not to impose contemporary and modern-day outlooks onto past events. Researchers need to be mindful of these predispositions, as well as their own beliefs and values, in addition to the contextual factors influencing the sources of data. Nevertheless, it is very likely that a double level of bias exists within many pieces of historical research, when researchers make their own biased judgments of documents in which it is not difficult to detect evidence of the bias of the writers from the past.



The discussion so far has presented one approach to the issue of bias in historical research. Researchers like Burns (1997) and Li (2013) consider bias as a negative quality in documents, both personal and public, that needs to be recognised and taken into account in order, to reach an objective assessment of a particular documents' facts and interpretation of events and people. Similarly, bias is regarded as an undesirable feature that students and academics are urged to avoid in their own writing in favour of more objective accounts of events and more balanced judgements of situations and people.

Another approach to the issue of bias starts with the assumption that documents of every kind — personal, family, literary, historical, government, or media —are written for one or more particular purpose(s), with one or more particular audience(s) in mind. The understanding and interpretation of a document is only credible and justified when it takes account of the purposes and audiences for which it was intended. This orientation to a particular purpose and audience is not seen as a highly undesirable or negative quality, but rather as a natural, even inevitable, and integral aspect of all documents. It applies even to a PhD thesis that a student writes, first to satisfy supervisors and secondly to convince examiners, both of whom may have a different orientation from the student's in relation to the topic. As Creswell (2013) put it in discussing the writing up of qualitative research with reference to Richardson's (1994) work, "all work has 'subtexts' that 'situate' or 'position' the material within a particular historical and local specific time and place" (p. 215).

Creswell's point is illustrated by all three sources of data used in the present study. The two curriculum documents, the examples of public commentary, and the various personal responses for teachers and academics, were each formulated under its own set of circumstances within differing political, economic, social, and cultural contexts. In this sense, each source of data can be seen to have its own unique context in the past. This is evident particularly in the case of newspaper and online newspaper articles which were

written for an immediate purpose, generally in response to an event or issue. These were of particular value to this study because they allowed the researcher to capture public and academic responses to matters that affected society, thus providing insights into the political, social, cultural and economic factors of the time. Additionally, newspaper articles, which are written for a public audience aim to provide clarity and readability of language and to be short and concise rather than offering a more academic understanding or comprehensive picture of the issue in question (Bates, 2016).

#### **IV. The Use of Triangulation**

Triangulation as a research approach is distinctive in using multiple data sources and methods to study a particular phenomenon or issue (Ball, 1997; Cohen et al., 2011; Denzin, 1997; Flick, 2014; Miller & Fox, 2004; Patton, 2002; Taylor, 2001). The main aim is to provide researchers’ “with more comprehensive knowledge about the object” (Miller & Fox, 2004, p. 36). As Norman K. Denzin (1997) explains further:

what is sought in triangulation is an interpretation of the phenomenon at hand that illuminates and reveals the subject matter in a thickly contextualized manner. A triangulated interpretation reflects the phenomenon as a process that is relational and interactive. The interpretation engulfs the subject matter, incorporating all of the understandings the researcher’s diverse methods reveal about the phenomenon. (p. 319)

Embedded in this triangulation approach are the theoretical advantages for interpretation in contrast to a single method based on one conceptual framework. Triangulating sources strengthens the validity, reliability and credibility of a study and its findings (see Cohen et al., 2007; Marshall & Rossman 1989, 2011; Patton, 2002). The use of multiple sources

strengthens the credibility of a study, since its findings are not the product of a single method or obtained from a single data source (Patton, 2002). Triangulation “can compensate”, in Patton’s (2002, p. 306) words, for the limitations or weaknesses to be found in each of the conceptual approaches, methods and sources used in a way that heightens the validity of the study (Marshall & Rossman, 1989).

Denzin (1997) quoted the views of Lincoln and Guba (1985) who argued that “no single item of information (unless coming from an elite and unimpeachable source) should ever be given serious consideration unless it can be triangulated” (p. 321). A second advantage of triangulation concerns the possibility of overcoming, or at least reducing the effect of bias present to some extent in every source (Ball, 1997; Cohen et al., 2007; Denzin, 1997). Louis Cohen, Lawrence Manion and Keith Morrison (2011) claimed that “[e]xclusive reliance on one method [leading to one type of source], therefore, may bias or distort the researcher’s picture of the particular slice of reality being investigated” (p.195). Supporting this, Patton (2002) noted that “because each method reveals different aspects of empirical reality, multiple methods of data collection and analysis provide more grist for the research mill” (pp. 555-556). Patton (2002) also identified that document analysis “provides a behind-the-scenes look at the program that may not be directly observable and about which the interviewer might not ask appropriate questions without the leads provided through documents” (p. 306). As a result, the researcher is able to gain a more comprehensive picture of the phenomenon being investigated.

There is a third form of triangulation which has particular reference to this research. According to Cohen et al. (2011), “[s]pace triangulation attempts to overcome the limitations of studies conducted within one culture or subculture” (p. 196). Drawing on Herman W. Smith (1975), they found that the tendency to focus on just one cultural group was commonly found in research related to the behavioural sciences (Cohen et al., 2011). This point has

direct application to comparative education studies which rely upon identifying cultural factors at work in each country, in order to ascertain their influence upon the research topic being investigated. Those adopting a comparative education approach are “concerned in their research with the individual, the group and society” (Cohen et al., 2011, p. 196) and how these factors or forces interact with one another in a particular societal context.

### **1. Use of Triangulation in this Study**

The first and foremost point of the specific triangulation approach used in this study was the comparative analysis of Singapore’s Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses for N(A) and Express Courses with the ACH for Years 7-8. The second point of the triangulation related to what might be called public commentary of the respective new curriculum documents. This discussion of the history curriculum to be taught in schools could be found in newspapers, journal articles and books, which had been published over the period when the curriculum documents were being developed and subsequently released. In contrast, the data that made up the third point of the triangulation were specifically gathered by the researcher for the purposes of this study. They consisted of a small collection of personal responses from history academics, curriculum experts, classroom teachers and those in charge of history at the lower secondary level. Their responses were in the form of written comments to guideline questions where they could provide illustrative examples of curriculum implementation as they had seen or experienced it in classrooms. Appendix 3.11 provides a visual image of the triangulation approach used in this study, with each point of the triangle representing a data source used for analysis.

In the writing up of this triangulation strategy, the comparative analysis of the two sets of curriculum documents took precedence. It has been presented in detail in Chapters Four and Five. Evidence from the second and third sources, the public commentary and the personal responses from academics, curriculum experts and teachers has been incorporated

into the discussion to support, explain, quantify, or critique the curriculum documents. These views have been especially important in considering the implementation of the curriculum documents in Chapters Six and Seven. In particular, the personal data from the teachers have enabled particular slices of reality from schools in both countries to be explored and studied (Cohen et al., 2011), leading to new levels of understanding of the development and implementation of new history syllabus/curriculum in Singapore and Australia.

## **V. Operationalisation of Research**

The previous sections have discussed the qualitative and historical research methods that were considered the most appropriate for fulfilling the aims of this comparative education study. The sections that follow outline the practical steps taken to carry out the research in an academically and ethically acceptable manner. The first section describes the steps taken to gain the approvals to conduct the research and gather the data following ethical protocols. The sourcing of the curriculum documents and the public commentary is discussed next, in reference to the top and left-hand bottom points of the triangulation diagram. Both of these consisted of already existing documents. The gathering of the data for the bottom right point of triangulation, the views of academic experts and history teachers, required a great deal more time and effort from the researcher.

From the beginning, the decision was taken to gather data from teachers in Singapore and only three Australian states. This was mainly because of the time-consuming complexities involved in negotiating approvals from the various school systems and subsequently interpreting the data in terms of state and jurisdictional differences. This limitation was consistent with the research intention to carry out a qualitative, exploratory study, which did not require a large number of participants, representative of the total Australian population of lower secondary history teachers. The three states chosen were

NSW, as one of the most populous and economically secure states, SA as the researcher's home state and TAS as one of the smallest states in relation to population and economic resources. The process involved in gaining school approvals to conduct the research, followed by the efforts to contact individual teachers in these schools and ask for their participation proved most time consuming. A summary of the amount and type of data follows. Finally, there is a discussion of how all the different types of data were analysed.

### **1. Ethics Approvals**

Before the study could proceed, it was necessary to gain approval from the University of Adelaide's Human Research Ethics Committee (Low Risk) and Singapore's Ministry of Education. A copy of each of these approvals can be found in Appendix 4. In Australia, additional approvals were needed in order to undertake research with teachers in schools under the varying regulations stipulated by the relevant education jurisdictions, state departments and authorities in the three chosen states.

Approvals were sought successfully from Catholic Education South Australia, Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta in NSW, the NSW Department of Education, and the Department for Education and Child Development (SA). Requests to undertake research were declined from three jurisdictions: The Catholic Education Office Sydney, the Department of Education (TAS) and the Tasmanian Catholic Education Office, mainly because their schools were already involved in other research projects. In order to maintain the planned number of participants, adjustments were made by seeking approval from an additional education authority, the Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta and by selecting a larger number of schools from other jurisdictions. In the case, of the independent school sector, the negotiations took place with individual school principals in order to make contact with their history teachers.

## 2. Sourcing the Curriculum Documents

The two key sources of data in this comparative education study were the curriculum documents for lower secondary classes referred to at the top of the triangulation diagram, from Australia and Singapore respectively. Although the Australian Curriculum originally mandated history as a subject for the first eleven years of schooling from F-10, the focus of this study was placed on the compulsory history curriculum for the middle school years of schooling, in particular Years 7 and 8. There were a number of reasons for this. Firstly, a concentration on these year levels allowed for a more direct comparison with Singapore, which implemented its compulsory national history education in the equivalent year levels.<sup>18</sup> Secondly, for many education jurisdictions, including Singapore and parts of Australia, such as NSW, Year 7 is the first year of secondary schooling.

The other important issue was selecting which documents to use for the analysis. It was easy to identify the Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses, published in 2013 to be available for implementation in 2014, as the definitive and only version of the syllabus to be the Singapore text used in analysis. For Australia, there was an issue of which version of the ACH curriculum for Years 7 and 8 to use. As shown in Appendix 1.4, from 2014 all Australian states and territories had begun to implement History from F-10. However, since then, successive versions of the curriculum document were released. V.8.1, released in December 2015, was used for analysis in this study because of its timing in being released following the 2014 *Review*.

## 3. Sourcing Public Commentary

A second set of existing documents, found in newspapers and journals, provided the evidence for the second point of the triangulation at the bottom left of the diagram. This

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<sup>18</sup> Lower Secondary History in Singapore is a one-year study normally undertaken across two years. After Secondary 2, students must select to continue studying the subject in the upper secondary years.

source of data can be divided into two sub-categorises: media, and academic commentary. Media commentary takes into account articles published from news and media outlets, in-print or online, which includes websites where content has been written by academics and researchers, such as *The Conversation*. Academic commentary, on the other hand, has been published in journals, which are subject to a peer review process. A list of both types of public commentary can be found in Table 1 for Australia and Table 2 for Singapore (see below). Any publications referred to in Chapters Four to Seven, but not included in these tables, have been used to provide context, but are not considered commentary for this analysis.

For Australia, the media and academic public commentary collected was published between October 2014 and 2015 (see Table 1). These dates correspond with the publication of the *Review*, the publication of v.8.1 of the ACH in December 2015, and the time taken to collect data from teachers and academic participants from 2015 to 2016. An exception was made for Grace Koelma's May 2014 article published on News.com.au. Koelma, a journalist and former teacher, conducted her own separate analysis on the Australian Curriculum, concentrating on the implementation of history in Queensland, NSW and Victoria. Although the number of newspaper articles reporting on history education in Australia drastically reduced after the *Review's* release, several still reported on issues related to the *Review* and its recommendations. However, these articles tend to report on issues affecting several subject areas and thus do not concentrate on history alone. Only those deemed most pertinent to topics raised in the curriculum documents and participant comments have been included in the lists. In the case of academic public commentary, articles were only selected which responded to key developments taking place during this time or related to the implementation of the ACH in Years 7 to 8. An example of this was volume 35 of *Curriculum Perspectives*, published in April 2015, where academics and researchers responded directly to the recommendations made in the *Review* (released in October 2014).



Year of publication	Name of author, scholar or expert	Title
2014	Marie Brennan	Will the curriculum review make it in to schools? It's a political waiting game
2014	Justine Ferrari	Paring back 'overcrowded' national curriculum a government priority
2014c	Daniel Hurst	History wars: Pyne needs evidence to build a case to change the curriculum
2014	Daniel Hurst Katharine Murphy	School curriculum is 'overcrowded' and neglects western heritage, review finds
2014	Grace Koelma	Why the Australian history curriculum has gaping holes in its coverage of world history
2014	Alaric Maude	Paring back the curriculum would be a difficult and unnecessary task
2014b	Tony Taylor	Pyne curriculum view prefers analysis-free myth to history
2014c	Tony Taylor	Pyne's curriculum review should have learnt from history
2015	Misty Adoniou Bill Loudon Glenn C. Savage	What will changes to the national curriculum mean for schools? Experts respond
2015	Catherine Hart	The preferable and probable future of Australian Curriculum: History (Years 7-10)
2015	Deborah Henderson	Introduction to Point and Counterpoint: What does the Review of the Australian Curriculum mean for History?
2015	Mallihai Tambyah	What does the Review of the Australian Curriculum mean for History in the primary years?

**Table 1: Academic and media public commentary 2014-2015 collected from Australia**

The media and academic public commentary concerning Singapore incorporated a slightly wider date range from 2013 to 2015 (see Table 2). There are two reasons for this, first, this syllabus document, unlike the ACH, is a published PDF document. As a result, the document remains unchanged during the course of its implementation. Secondly, given the significant changes made to the 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabus document in comparison to its 2006 counterpart, the media and academic public commentary published in 2013 produced insights into the development of 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabus. This also occurred a lot closer to the collection of personal responses from teacher participants than in the case of Australia. The media commentary incorporated for

Singapore, also takes into account, opinions in the form of parliamentary replies and MOE's forum letter replies, which highlighted the presence of history education in Singapore's wider educational landscape.

Year of publication	Name of author, scholar or expert	Title of public commentary
2013	Suhaimi Afandi	The New Inquiry-Based Approach
2013	Chua-Lim Yen Ching	Forum letter replies: the teaching of Singapore history in textbooks
2014	Rachel Au-Yong	Parliament: Trails, new curriculum to help students appreciate Singapore's 50th year
2014	Ng Jing Yng	New history syllabus covers S'pore's very early years
2014	Jane A. Peterson	In new textbook, the story of Singapore beings 500 years earlier
2014	<i>The Straits Times</i> editorial	More to history than just recalling
2014	Tan Tai Yong	Parliamentary replies: appreciation of Singapore history
2015	Kwan Jin Yao	Review what students are taught in history class
2015	Lee Teck Chuan	Important to learn the lessons of history
2015	Teh Chee Siong	Significant changes in how history is taught
2015	Toh Yong Chuan	History teaching under review: Heng
2015	Yik Keng Yeong	Historical narratives must foster unity, strength

**Table 2: Academic and media public commentary 2013-2015 collected from Singapore**

During the collection of the data, three official documents (ACARA, 2015a, 2015b, 2015d), were deemed relevant as official statements highlighting modifications to the ACH. Although these documents cannot be considered public commentary, they drew attention to the implementation of history after the *Review*, with its associated modifications. The researcher was unable to access comparable documents in Singapore. However, Teo Hui Lin Lena, as part of her 2014 presentation at the *1st Singapore Heritage Science Conference*, held at Nanyang Technological University, contextualised the development of the lower

secondary coursebooks and syllabus, which revealed the work of the CPDD. This was used in conjunction with an unpublished paper by Teo (n.d.), which outlines similar topics.

#### **4. Developing Guideline Questions for Personal Statements**

The third data triangulation point related to personal views and comments of two groups with a special interest in history education — history teachers and seniors in schools, on one hand, and academic experts in the area, on the other. A set of open-ended questions was emailed to them individually as a more effective way to gather their views than face to face interviews. Using email minimised the distance and timing difficulties of arranging interviews, as well as giving the participants greater flexibility to fit their participation in the research into their busy schedules. The guideline questions were derived from a preliminary analysis of the other two sources of data, the curriculum documents and the public commentary.

In the case of the teachers, it was considered necessary to ‘customise’ the guidelines to suit the different responsibilities of the teachers participating. In this way it was possible to tap into the particular experiences of those who were classroom teachers only, as against those who were Senior History teachers or Teachers in Charge of History (TCH), who could be expected to know about schoolwide issues in the teaching of history. School Principals or Deputies, on the other hand, would be concerned with the organisational issues of introducing the ACH or the Singapore Syllabus in their school as a whole, and any particular difficulties or successes associated with it. To cater for all these possibilities, four variations of these personal responses were developed for school participants (see Appendix 4). One was intended for teachers in Australia, another for teachers in Singapore. The third and fourth variants were designed for Principals or Deputies or History seniors (i.e. TCH) to answer. Originally intended for School Principals or Deputies, these guideline questions were extended to include specialist staff members that could provide a more detailed

understanding of the organisational structure and management of history at the school. This enabled them to make the executive decision of which set of questions were most appropriate to their particular role as they were the most knowledgeable apropos their own school organisational structure, some of which decided to provide answers to this set of questions instead of those designed for teachers. As a result, two History seniors elected to complete this set of questions, whilst another three TCH still elected to complete the teacher's questions. In comparison, all the Heads of Department in Singapore elected to complete the Senior Staff questions, which is one way that the differences in school structure and how teachers/senior staff perceive themselves is made apparent. The four sets of questions for school stakeholders were derived from preliminary analysis conducted on the first and second sources of data — the curriculum documents and public commentary.

To test their effectiveness, the guideline questions prepared for Australian teachers in this study were trialled informally in 2014 by a colleague. The answers given within the 30 to 40-minute time frame stipulated were very insightful and beneficial. In addition, the respondent followed the advice given in the guidelines and did not answer each dot point provided, but highlighted the issues considered important, as well as discussing successes and difficulties related to implementation and delivery, based on personal experiences with history classes and schools. This trial proved very valuable, demonstrating the need to reshape some of the questions to be more user friendly and provide clarity.

The guideline questions for history academics and curriculum experts were developed along similar lines. The only difference was that the formulation of the questions was also influenced by the data which, by this stage, had already been collected from teachers. One set of questions was formulated for history academics and curriculum experts in Australia and another for their counterparts in Singapore. In this group of participants there was one special case, the President of the History Teachers' Association of Australia

(HTAA), Mr Paul Foley. In the researcher's judgment, he was in a position to provide very valuable insights not only into the developed of the ACH, but also in relation to its implementation in school. He was not only considered one of the experts in history curriculum, he was a teacher of History, as well as holding the role of a History Senior. To make the most of this range of experience, a special set of questions was devised for him. He preferred, however, to be interviewed, so additional ethics amendments were gained to enable this to occur. Whilst a History Subject Chapter exists in the Academy of Singapore Teachers (Academy of Singapore Teachers, n.d.), the necessary approval from MOE had not been sought.

## **5. Recruiting Teachers as Participants**

The process of recruiting history teachers as participants in this study began with seeking permission from school principals in the Australian states and jurisdictions that had previously given approval for the study to take place in their schools. At the school level, principals needed to give permission for their history staff to be involved in the study. A range of schools teaching history in Years 6-9, with an emphasis on Years 7 and 8 were contacted; these included secondary schools under MOE in Singapore and schools in state and Catholic jurisdictions as well as independent schools in the three Australian states selected for the study (NSW, SA and TAS). Emails were sent to the principals of the schools, explaining the nature and importance of the study and outlining what would be involved, if the school agreed to participate (see Appendix 4).

From the 124 schools contacted in Australia and Singapore, only 17 schools agreed to take part — 12 in Australia and 5 in Singapore (see Table 3). Some of the schools that declined to participate noted other research demands that teachers were responding to, or particular school circumstances that made participation difficult. Those schools that did agree to take part were of different types, situated in a range of socio-economic areas. In the

end, the teachers who actually completed the guideline questions came from 4 schools in Singapore and 8 in Australia. From this total, 2 of the Australian schools were from the independent sector, 2 from the Catholic and 4 fell under the purview of the government department in the participating states. The 4 participating Singapore schools encompassed all three types of mainstream operating under MOE — Government, Government-Aided and Independent. Two of these were autonomous.

Once the principal had given permission for the school to be involved, a staff member, nominated by the principal as the most appropriate person in the history area, circulated the information sheet (see copies in Appendix 4) to history teachers in the year levels concerned and to History seniors, as they deemed appropriate. Those teachers who showed an interest in the project were asked to send an email to Rachel Bleeze, as the researcher, conveying their readiness to participate. When those who were willing to complete the guideline questions had returned their signed consent forms, the questions were forwarded to them, with the request that they complete the written responses and return them via email to the researcher.

<b>Country/State in which schools situated</b>	<b>Approval from Principals</b>	<b>Actual personal responses received</b>
Australia (Total)	12	9
- NSW	3	3*
- SA	6	4
- TAS	3	2
Singapore	5	5*
<b>Total Responses</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>14<sup>×</sup></b>
<p>* Two of these responses came from one school  <sup>×</sup> These came from a total of 8 schools in Australia and 4 in Singapore</p>		

**Table 3: School background of teacher participants**

Although the number of teacher participants is small and depended on the willingness of those contacted to take part in the study, there was no intention to select two representative samples of the teachers that could be used to generalise to the population of history teachers in either country. Rather this point of the triangulation was intended as an exploratory qualitative investigation, where a small number of teachers was asked to provide information about how the new history curriculum was being taught at Year 7 and 8 levels, as well as an evaluation of how effective it had proved in their own classrooms. As the responses were received, each was assigned an identifying code which began with SGP in the case of the Singapore participants and with the initials of the states from which participants came in Australia. It was decided that it was not appropriate to use the abbreviation AUS for the latter group because education in Australia is organised and administered by the states and territories. Since the implementation of the ACH rested in the hands of the states, it was important to find out how far the states' implementation diverged from the national line. The

country or state abbreviation was followed by a number reflecting the chronological order in which the participants' responses were received. Table 4, provided below, indicates each participant details, including their role at school, as well as the assigned identifying codes.

<b>Participants</b>	<b>School Identifying Code</b>	<b>Role at School</b>
P1	TAS 1	Teacher
P2	NSW 1	TCH
P3	NSW 1	Teacher
P4	TAS 2	Teacher
P5	SGP 1	Curriculum Specialist
P6	SGP 2	TCH
P7	NSW 2	Teacher
P8	SA 1	TCH
P9	SGP 2	Teacher
P10	SA 2	TCH
P11	SGP 3	Teacher
P12	SA 3	TCH
P13	SA 4	TCH
P14	SGP 4	TCH

**Table 4: Identifying codes for school participants.**



## **6. Recruiting Academic Experts as Participants**

Academic experts in this context refers to those who were academic teachers and researchers in the area of history either in Australia or in Singapore universities. Also included were experts who had published research on history curriculum and pedagogy either in Australia or in Singapore, or individuals who were known for holding influential positions relating to history education in schools, such as Paul Foley. Emails inviting participations in the research were sent to nine individuals who fitted the criteria for this category of participants in Singapore and Australia. For a number of different reasons, just under half of those contacted were prepared to participate in the study, one from Singapore and four from Australia. Unlike school stakeholders, academic experts were given the option of personal identification, with three electing to be identified by their name and position (Paul Foley, Stuart Macintyre, Tony Taylor), one selecting to be acknowledged by their name only (Greg Melleuish), and one preferring to remain anonymous. This individual will be referred to as a staff member at NIE.

## **VI. The Analysis of Data**

The approach to analysis varied with the different types of data. In the case of the curriculum/syllabus documents, it took the form of a comparative educational analysis, in juxtaposing the sections of each document that fulfilled a similar function, even though the headings used were rather different. For this comparative analysis, the researcher used NVivo software, which helped identify central and meaningful themes in both curriculum documents, as well as their underlying purposes. For instance, this software provided the ability to analyse the use of language, which drew attention to the wider social contexts of both countries.

Examples of these themes are the sections setting out aims or content or historical skills. Chapter Four focuses on introductory statements, aims, content, knowledge and historical concepts included in the curriculum/syllabus documents, while the Chapter Five analysis is concerned with pedagogy, and historical skills. Such a juxtaposition enables the recognition of points of similarity, as well as identifiable differences in the various aspects of the curriculum statements. Seeing the two versions side by side provides an invaluable opportunity for researcher, and reader, to gain a new level of understanding of ways to approach history education and to critique previously taken for granted approaches to history education.

Where appropriate, comments in the data from the other two points of triangulation have been used to confirm or challenge statements in the curriculum documents; to explain or justify the approaches adopted; or to point out omissions or pedagogical difficulties with implementation. The questions devised for school stakeholders were partially based on the thematic analysis undertaken on the curriculum documents, discussed above, but also on the issues raised in the public commentary being gathered simultaneously. The data from the personal statements were considered in two groups, the academic experts and the teachers, and analysed by the themes identified and reflected in the sub-headings used. Chapter Six reflects the analysis of development issues, while Chapter Seven is focused on issues of classroom implementation. To some extent, these themes were derived from the dot points that were provided as possible points for discussion in the personal statement guidelines. It was clear from the statements, however, that participants had been selective in the points they chose to discuss, focusing their comments on issues they had encountered in their teaching and making no comment on aspects that had been of little or no concern in their experience. A number of quite different aspects were also considered. The data from the public commentary point of triangulation were fed into the thematic discussions of the teacher's personal statement data where they were relevant and insightful.

## **VII. Conclusion**

By complementing the analysis of history curriculum and teaching documents with opinions from history teachers, heads of history and history academics/specialists, this comparative study provided a deeper understanding of the associated issues in regard to teaching approaches and content in a national history curriculum. The written responses from school stakeholders, especially teachers, evoked their school classroom experiences and their assessment of the strengths and limitations of the curriculum documents as they stood in 2015-2016, after no more than five years. These teacher insights not only proved fundamental to the research but were also most useful in pointing to ways of refining and improving the current curriculum documents and their approaches to teaching history. In particular, it contributes to the discourse on the nature and the importance of Australia's R-10 national history curriculum and its status as a compulsory subject.

The comparison of both sets of curriculum documents, commences in the following chapter, and concentrates on their statements of purpose and content. This leads onto the historical inquiry approach to learning which is further elaborated on in Chapter Five.

## **Chapter Four: Comparing the Curriculum/Syllabus**

### **Statements: Introduction, Aims and Knowledge**

#### **I. Introduction**

The chapter is focused on an in-depth analysis of, the ACH for Years 7 and 8 compared to the 2014 Singapore Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses for N(A) and Express courses. The analysis pertaining to the ACH concentrates on v.8.1, dated 15 December 2015, to ensure compatibility with the period of time when the majority of teacher responses were collected. At times alternate versions of the curriculum, as well as NSW's own syllabus document for Years 7 and 8 (Stage 4) are woven into the comparison to heighten the significance of the argument made and in Chapter Six and Seven correlate with teacher's responses. Although there are online components of the Singapore teaching syllabuses available to Singapore teachers/educators, the print version published in 2013, which is available on the MOE website, is utilised for this analysis. A copy of both documents can be found in Volume II, where the page numbers of the original document have been kept.<sup>19</sup>

The comparison of the ACH for Years 7-8 and Singapore's Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses considers the statements made on purpose, aims and content. The discussion of pedagogy and student-centred inquiry processes is in Chapter Five. In the

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<sup>19</sup> In the following chapters, v.8.1 of the ACH is referred to as ACARA (2015e) but can be found in Appendix 1.1. Singapore's 2014 Lower Secondary History Syllabuses is identified as MOE (2013) and is reproduced in full in Appendix 2.1.

sections that follow, the comparative analysis of the two documents is presented under headings, which reflect the thrusts of the two documents in relation to these themes.<sup>20</sup>

## **II. Content Overview and Presentation**

In order to understand this analysis and in turn the curriculum/syllabus documents themselves, it is pertinent to first touch on the differing layout and presentation of the respective documents. This section provides a brief description on the structure of each document, as well as where the focus is placed in regard to historical content.

### **1. The Australian Curriculum: History**

Overall, the ACH endorses a world history approach to learning in Years 7 to 10, where world history is used as a lens to examine and introduce Australian history in various ways. It is subsequently organised as “two interrelated strands: historical knowledge and understanding and historical inquiry and skills” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10). This material is presented to educators through an interactive website, and although this outline possesses user flexibility regarding presentation and layout of content, it is still organised vertically, and a lot of effort is required from the teacher to find and comprehend all information provided.

The curriculum document is separated into four sections: an overview pertaining to the HASS learning area in the school curriculum generally; a specific overview for history in Years 7-10; the content for each year level; and lastly a glossary of related terms and concepts for teachers’ reference. In regard to year level content, for each there is a general description, which possesses individualised key inquiry questions. The subsequent historical

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<sup>20</sup> Due to differences in structure and presentation, title case has been used for the titles of significant sections and components in either documents. The title of each depth study, in the ACH, has also been italicised.

knowledge and understanding strand then provides an outline of the content as a whole, referred to as the overview, and the complementary depth studies. This is followed by the historical skills strand, with its own content descriptions. Both these sections fall under the heading of Content Descriptions; however, they are presented separately, with little attempt to suggest ways of intertwining the two. The respective Achievement Standard is provided at the end of each year level.

Beginning with Year 7, the ACH focuses on history as a subject with its own distinctive discipline. The introduction of depth studies provides the means for presenting the basic concepts and inquiry skills central to history. In the lower secondary years, students undertake studies regarding ancient civilisations, the Preclassical Era and the Early Modern Period. Specifically, Year 7 concentrates on the ancient world, studying “history from the time of the earliest human communities to the end of the ancient period” (ACARA, 2015e, p.15). Year 8 covers “history from the end of the ancient period to the beginning of the modern period, c.650 — 1750AD (CE)”, under the heading: the ancient to modern world (p. 25). By the end of Year 8, students are prepared to continue studying world history chronologically for another two years, with the focus in Year 9 placed on the modern period from 1750 until 1918.

## **2. Singapore’s Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses**

The 91-page PDF version of the Singapore Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses contains nine sections, which are outlined in the two content pages at the beginning. The sections are:

1. Introduction
2. Thinking Behind the Syllabus and Implementation
3. Recommended Pedagogy
4. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies in History Education

5. Scope and Sequence Chart for the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses
6. Assessment
7. Specimen Questions and Mark Schemes
8. Amplification of Syllabuses
9. Recommended Reading List. (MOE, 2013)

The syllabus centres entirely on Singapore's national history. Outlined chronologically, it is designed to be undertaken by all Secondary 1 and 2 students in the N(A) and Express courses. Although it represents two semesters of class learning, it is programmed in many schools to span two years of study i.e. Semester 2 of Year 7, followed by Semester 1 of Year 8. The syllabus document prescribes four units of study, Unit 1 commences with a focus on Singapore's maritime origins in the fourteenth century, then introduces the importance of trade to Singapore and the region between the fourteenth and nineteenth centuries. Unit 2 centres on colonial life and the role of immigration in Singapore's development during the nineteenth to early twentieth century. In Unit 3, the focus shifts to Singapore's journey towards independence and life in the mid-twentieth century, which includes studies on people's experiences during WWII and post-war British rule. Unit 4 focuses on Singapore's independence from Malaysia and extends the study into the succeeding decade. Each of these units is framed by its own overarching inquiry question. Together these units provide the foundation for students, who wish to continue with history, to explore world history, concentrating on the period 1870 to 1991 in subsequent year levels (MOE, 2016b).

### III. Comparing Foundation/Introductory Statements

The introductory sections of both documents provide the theoretical underpinnings for history education in the lower secondary years. For the ACH, this includes the HASS Overview placed in front of the Year 7-10 History subject outline (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 4-8); as well as the specific rationale for each year level subject (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10). In comparison, the analysis of Singapore's Lower Secondary Teaching Syllabuses includes its Introduction (MOE, 2013, pp. 1-2), as well as the Design of the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses (MOE, 2013, p. 3). Both draw attention to the ideas underpinning the implementation of history within a broader context of the respective countries' education systems.

#### 1. The Australian Curriculum: HASS Overview

The ACH for Years 7 and 8 is preceded by an introductory statement relating it to the HASS learning area within the Australian Curriculum as a whole. Through explanation and diagram, it outlines the four key ideas of this learning area.

- Who we are, who came before us, and traditions and values that have shaped societies?
- How societies and economies operate and how they are changing over time.
- The ways people, places, ideas and events are perceived and connected.
- How people exercise their responsibilities, participate in society and make informed decisions. (ACARA, 2015e, p. 4)

Each of these key ideas is then specifically worked out in relation to the subjects included within the HASS area of the Australian Curriculum. This includes History; Geography; Civics and Citizenship; Economics and Business. For History, there are three dot points for each key idea. These are:



- *Who we are, who came before us, and traditions and values that have shaped societies?*
  - Family, local and Australian history; and celebrations and commemoration;
  - The longevity of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' histories and cultures;
  - The legacy of Ancient Greece and Ancient Rome. (ACARA, 2015e, p. 5)
  
- *How societies and economies operate and how they are changing over time.*
  - The social structure of ancient societies and their legacy;
  - The impact of the significant periods on societies (Industrial Revolution, Renaissance, Scientific Revolution, Enlightenment, British imperialism, nationalism and globalisation);
  - The development of democracy in Australia. (ACARA, 2015e, p. 6)
  
- *The ways people, places, ideas and events are perceived and connected*
  - Different perspectives on the arrival of the First Fleet and the colonial presence
  - The causes of and relationship between events such as World War I, World War II and the Cold War
  - Global influences on Australian culture. (ACARA, 2015e, p. 6)
  
- *How people exercise their responsibilities, participate in society and make informed decisions*
  - The development of rights in Australia for women, children, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and other groups;
  - The participation of people in human rights and environmental campaigns in Australia;

- The contributions and achievements of individuals and groups to Australia’s development. (ACARA, 2015e, p. 7)

These specific points are intended to enhance student’s development, knowledge and understanding in the HASS. The ways in which the key ideas are “represented” in each of the subjects does vary (p. 4), although they are connected. For instance “global influences on Australian culture” (p. 6), interlinks with the Civics and Citizenship points on “the influence of global connectedness and mobility on Australian identity” (p. 6), as well as “Australian’s rights and responsibilities towards each other and Australia’s international obligations” (p. 6). All of these are seen under the key idea — the ways people, places, ideas and events are perceived and connected (pp. 6-7). This highlights the direction and wider orientation of the HASS strand, which also intersects with the purpose and aims of the history curriculum, through including the wider purpose of studying Australian history through the lens of world history.

## **2. Rationale for the Australian Curriculum: History**

The Rationale for the ACH is placed at the beginning of the 7-10 History Overview preceding each year level’s individualised aims. Here, history is presented as the study of human experience in the past, using the methods and procedures which are distinctive to history. The understanding of ourselves and others which comes through the study of history is important both for individuals and societies. As previously mentioned, the ACH “takes a world history approach within which the history of Australia is taught” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10). This is in order to better prepare young people for living in the world at local, regional and global levels. The world history approach is intended to enable a better understanding of Australian history, particularly its Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, its position in the Asia-Pacific region, wider global orientations, and the culturally diverse people that make up Australian society.

### 3. The Australian Curriculum: Concepts for Developing Historical Understanding

The ACH outlines seven historical concepts that are provided to facilitate historical understanding. These are: evidence; continuity and change; cause and effect; significance; perspectives; empathy; and contestability (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 11-13). The ACH claims that “these concepts are the key ideas involved in teaching students to think historically” (p. 11). These concepts are first referenced in the ACH’s Aims within the overview for teaching history in Years 7-10 but are elaborated upon in a section introducing and covering the structure of the curriculum. Despite their connection to historical skills, these concepts are placed in the historical knowledge and understanding strand of the curriculum document (pp. 10-13). Here, a paragraph is provided for each concept, which includes a definition, and examples of how the use of the particular concept is linked to the process of historical inquiry. For example, the concept *evidence* includes the statement:

To find evidence in a source, a number of processes can be used, beginning simply and becoming more sophisticated. They include comprehending explicit information, interpreting any implied meaning, analysing patterns and themes, evaluating the usefulness of the source, and weighing up if and how the source’s evidence helps answer the inquiry/research question being pursued. (p. 11)

From the example above, these definitions and discussion can be seen not as requirements but rather possibilities for inclusion in history classrooms. Apart from these explanations, the ACH at the beginning of each year level provides the statement: “[t]he content provides opportunities to develop historical understanding through key concepts, including evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, perspectives, empathy, significance and contestability” (pp. 15, 25). Not every concept, however, is highlighted for implementation in the historical knowledge and understanding, or the historical skills strand, which is elaborated upon in Chapter Five.

#### **4. Introduction to Singapore's Whole History Syllabus**

The introduction to the history syllabus as a whole, discusses the purpose of history education, as well as its correlation with Singapore's overarching educational aims and the Qualities of a History Learner (MOE, 2013, pp. 1-2). The initial remarks made are not an introduction to history or its value but relate directly to what are regarded in Singapore as the Desired Outcomes of Education in general. These are summarised in terms of four attributes each student should personify in being a confident person, a self-directed learner, an active contributor, as well as a concerned citizen (see MOE, 2013, p. 1). The immediacy of this initiative in regard to its placement in this section, as well as the use of language, signifies the extent to which educational aims are associated with the sort of society envisaged for Singapore.

The introduction subsequently moves to a description of the way the Desired Outcomes of Education are linked to history education. This discussion is pitched to educators in their role of guiding history learners, whereas the attributes of the desired outcomes listed above appears to be pitched more at policymakers, students themselves and the general public (MOE, 2013, p. 1). The relationship between history and Singapore's wider educational aims continues to be stressed in the ensuing paragraphs of the Introduction. This is undertaken in steps, working first from the Value of Learning History to the elaboration of a philosophy for history learning, to Qualities of a History Learner (MOE, 2013). Throughout this section emphasis placed on social history and understanding human experiences.

The section, Value of Learning History captures the importance of History education through singling out the relevance history has in today's society.

In a world where attention is often divided between concerns over the present and the future, the relevance of History is often questioned. Learning to manage the

present and anticipate the future would not be possible without knowing the past. (p. 1)

The discipline's inherent characteristics and intended purpose are briefly explored. This is used as a basis for the syllabus document to consolidate the relevance of their Desired Outcomes, as well as to acquaint readers with terms which are elaborated upon later in Qualities of History Learner (MOE, 2013, p. 2). It directly correlates the qualities (or attributes) outlined, with student achievement and contribution to society. These additional details act as outcomes of history education, which leads to a discrete definition of history seen through a generated philosophy.

The Philosophy of History Education statement is separated into two interconnected sections. The first expands upon the purpose of history discourse and what the subject should encompass. This appears to be underpinned by research that encourages each student's personal involvement in history. The second outlines Singapore's own distinctive approach is Singapore's: "History education in Singapore seeks to develop in students an appreciation of past human experiences, critical awareness of the nature of historical knowledge, and the ability to make connections between the past and present" (MOE, 2013, p. 2). This philosophy has been derived from the earlier discussion above, and expressed the main ideas in the Introduction, neatly captured in one sentence.

Thus, the document works from overarching ideas and general beliefs regarding the role of history to reach a point in the discussion that is centred on the student, as represented visually in the circular diagram: Qualities of History Learner (MOE, 2013, p. 2). This diagram outlines seven qualities, each with a short accompanying explanation. In clockwise order, these are: inquiring, discerning, balanced, knowledgeable, empathetic, methodical, and reasoned (p. 2). Each of these are intended to be developed in history "learners" from the lower secondary to pre-university levels of schooling (MOE, 2013, p. 2). The emphasis

on learner qualities, in this format, personalises the curriculum and places the emphasis on students' development of understanding and skills, as well as fostering specific values and qualities. It generates the perception that history education is a process of induction into a way of thinking, knowing, understanding and valuing life in Singapore.

## **5. Design of Singapore's Lower Secondary History Syllabuses**

The Design of the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses constitutes the first component of Section 2 of the document. This draws attention to the conceptualisation of this new history syllabus and as a result reflects the reasons supporting the release and implementation of a revised history syllabus document. These include ensuring the continued relevance and value of history education, producing in students the skills necessary for completion of history at senior levels of schooling, making connections to various education policies, and to assist with more flexibility in their implementation in schools (MOE, 2013, p. 3). It moves into a summary of the historical knowledge outlined for lower secondary history, which is centred on “developments from the 14<sup>th</sup> century to the 1970s” (p. 3). The stress is on imbuing a sense of national identity, being aware of global forces, as well as acknowledging the opportunities Singapore offers and the vulnerabilities that it faces as a nation-state (MOE, 2013). It thus places the study of Singapore within national, regional and global contexts.

Content and historical concepts are outlined to underpin historical understanding and learning in these years (p. 3). The syllabus document highlights that content concepts include, but are not limited to, “archaeology, history, colonial rule, migration, sense of belonging, independence and sovereignty” (p. 3). The historical concepts outlined in this section are “chronology, evidence, diversity, historical significance, and change and continuity” (p. 3). This section ends with a reference to the *Teaching and Learning Lower Secondary History Guide*, an additional resource devised by the MOE to support teachers in

their implementation of the history syllabuses. This guide is intended to assist teachers with more discussion of the syllabus and history education in general, providing examples of effective history teaching and offering more teaching and learning resources for the history classroom (p. 3).

## **6. Key Points of Comparison: Introductory Statements**

The comparison of the introductory statements of the two curriculum/syllabus documents which follows focuses on two issues raised in the research questions. The first relates to the differences and similarities evident in this introductory section of the documents (Research Question 1). The second concerns the evidence they provide concerning the envisioned purposes of history education (Research Question 2).

The most fundamental difference apparent in these introductory statements is in the overall approach to what is the most appropriate history for lower secondary students to learn. Singapore has adopted a national history approach. In MOE's overall pattern of study for its schools, the lower secondary years are the only ones where the study of history is compulsory. The intention is to ensure that in this period all students are given a thorough grounding in the history of Singapore in order to strengthen their sense of identity as Singaporeans and their commitment to its ongoing development. Students who chose to study history as an area of special interest in the upper secondary years move on topics of regional and world history (MOE, 2016b).

The Australian Curriculum works on an opposite pattern. Since the introduction of the ACH, history has been a compulsory subject for all students up to Year 10. The curriculum for Years 7 to 10 "takes a world history approach, within which the history of Australia is taught" (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10). This approach is designed to help "students to appreciate Australia's distinctive path of social, economic and political development, its position in the Asia and Pacific regions, and its global relationships" (p. 10). The result is

that the history of Australia does not appear in the curriculum until Years 9 and 10, and even then, not as the single focus of study, but incorporated into a consideration of the world history of the time. Thus, all students in Australian schools have had their first two lower secondary years of compulsory history study focused on world history prior to modern times. The “knowledge and understanding” gained from the world history learning approach was seen by those who created the curriculum as “essential for informed and active participation in Australia’s diverse society and in creating personal and collective futures” (p. 10).

Another striking difference is the way in which the introductory statements of the two documents engage with and use the word *education*. This difference in usage draws attention to differences in the conceptualisations of knowledge, the position of history in the wider curriculum and assumptions underlying the teaching of history in each country. In Singapore, the lower secondary syllabus document demonstrates an undeniable link to the experience of education, which MOE seeks to provide to all its students. In all sections in the documents Introduction, as well as its section on the Design of the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses, specific references to education are made. This is seen especially in the part called the Desired Outcomes of Education and History Education in Singapore (MOE, 2013, p.1); the Philosophy of History Education statement (pp. 1-2); and the reasons given for the conceptualisation of the new syllabuses (p. 3). These sections not only consider students’ learning and history, but most importantly establish where the teaching of history fits into the wider picture of educational development for the students in the schools. In fact, in this part of the Singapore syllabus the word *education* appears fifteen times.

In comparison, the ACH does not mention the word *education* at all (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 4-10). There is no reference to education, educational values, or the learning outcomes for students in regard to the broader context of education. Instead the ACH is focused almost entirely on history as a discipline and explains the school curriculum in terms



of the theoretical components of history as an academic subject. It is premised on understanding the discipline aspects of history in terms of content and skills and conceived in terms of its theoretical and academic qualities as a subject in the academic area of the HASS.

In contrast, there is no statement linking the Singapore history syllabuses with the academic discipline within the HASS. Rather there is a single-minded focus conceptualising history's place in the school setting and its contribution to the educational development of students. In fact, Singapore differentiates between history as a discipline and a subject, as seen in the Philosophy of History Education statement, which specifically situates history as a subject within the school curriculum, concerned ultimately with the "learning outcomes" of the students (MOE, 2013, p. 2).

The last statement above points to a third difference apparent in the two documents: the outcomes that each expects from its students' learning of history. The Singapore syllabus is concerned with outcomes, but the learning outcomes for history are conceptualised in terms of values as these are expressed in the Desired Outcomes of Education section. This is extended to the related personal attributes and the actual behavioural patterns that students should manifest by the end of their education. The assumption would seem to be that students' involvement with history should ensure their active participation in, and their contribution as citizens in Singapore society. The desired outcome then is "concerned" citizens, who are "rooted in Singapore", whilst possessing "a strong civic consciousness" and a readiness to better the "lives of others" around them (MOE, 2013, p.1). It is these personal qualities and actions which are seen as the desired outcomes of history learning rather than evidence of mastery of historical concepts or demonstration of historical skills. In this way the study of history is linked directly to students' learning of the desired attributes and their eventual contribution to society.

Despite these considerable and important differences, there is one commonality that curriculum/syllabus documents of Australia and Singapore share. They both reveal a commitment to a pedagogical approach for history based on historical inquiry and students' achievement of historical literacy. This includes an understanding of historical concepts and the mastery of historical skills, and the ability to use both in the critical analysis of historical documents. However, the historical concepts outlined differ in both documents, as does their structure. The ACH uses the introductory section to provide in-depth explanations on the use of these concepts, which are briefly referred in other sections of the document. Singapore, on the other hand, highlights the inclusion of historical concepts in the Design of the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses, but leaves their rationale to their scope and sequence chart.

The historical concepts noted for developing historical understanding in the ACH, seen in Table 5, can be divided into two categories. The first three — evidence; continuity and change; as well as cause and effect can be seen to relate to the discipline of history and assist its meaning. The remaining four — significance; perspectives; empathy; and contestability, relate more to interpretation, in fact that can be seen as a response to the other set of historical concepts. In comparison, a defining characteristic of Singapore's inclusion of concepts is the distinction made between historical concepts and content concepts. The Design of the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses draws attention to only twelve historical and content concepts, out of the thirty-four mentioned in other components of the document such as Amplification of Syllabuses. Table 5 below provides an overview of the different concepts found in both documents. In this table, black text represents those historical and content concepts found in the introductory sections discussed above, whilst those in blue are only mentioned as concepts after these initial sections. The inclusion of content concepts can be seen as MOE dictating the content to be covered in class, they can also be perceived as an acknowledgement of the key ideas, terms and overarching themes prevalent to the study

of lower secondary history. Many can be seen to be directly linked to the document's learning outcomes and MOE initiatives.

<b>Australia's Concepts for developing historical understanding</b>	<b>Singapore's Historical Concepts</b>	<b>Singapore's Content Concepts</b>
Evidence Continuity and change Cause and effect Significance Perspectives Empathy Contestability	Chronology Evidence Diversity Historical significance Change and continuity Sources Causation	Archaeology History Colonial rule Migration Sense of belonging Independence Sovereignty Trade Maritime kingdoms Colonisation Community Livelihood Past times Living conditions Government Defence Propaganda Citizenship Diplomacy Identity Constitution Election Self-government Merger Economy Development Housing

**Table 5: Concepts provided in Australia and Singapore's lower secondary curriculum documents**

It is important to note in this context that whilst the likes of empathy and perspectives are not outlined as official historical concepts, similar ideas are visible in the introductory sections of Singapore's Lower Secondary History syllabus, particularly through the

Qualities of a History Learner and the document's learning outcomes. The Qualities of a History Learner encourages students to become "empathetic" and "balanced" (MOE, 2013, p. 2), whilst several learning outcomes categorised under the heading of Values and Attitudes strengthens their importance and connection to society. These include:

- show sensitivity to how people's views and perspectives shape their interpretation of events, issues or developments in any specific time and space;
- show openness to and respect for diverse, and sometimes opposing, viewpoints;
- recognise, question and refine the value system which provides a moral compass in governing their actions as citizens; [and]
- empathise with people from different social, cultural, economic and political backgrounds. (MOE, 2013, p. 5)

A further comparison regarding the historical and content concepts in both documents can be found in Chapter Five.

The history documents of both countries point to student-centred purposes as being central to the history education envisaged for students at lower secondary level. Some of these relate to mastery of the historical concepts and skills which form the basis of historical literacy and hence the possibility of the students' future participation in the discipline of history. Others relate to the personal attributes and qualities that students are able to develop for themselves once they have achieved historical literacy. These qualities may start at the level of personal curiosity, greater understanding, and awareness of historical features around them. Students may then move on to high levels of historical thinking and historical consciousness. The emphasis on developing the personal significance of history is more evident in the Singapore syllabus, however. The document has worked from the presentation

of overarching ideas and general benefits of history at the lower secondary level to a point where the discussion is centred solely on the students and fostering the qualities of a history learner in them. The purpose of personal development for students is elaborated in more detail, as the curriculum documents unfold.

A good example of the subtlety of understanding needed in comparative educational analysis can be seen in relation to the statements on the scope envisaged for lower secondary students' study of history. Singapore's Philosophy of Education statement points to the role of history "in developing students' own identities through an understanding of history at the personal, national and international levels" (MOE, 2013, p. 2). A comparable statement in the ACH's Rationale statement argues that the world history approach adopted in the Australian Curriculum is designed "to equip students for the world (local, regional and global) in which they live" (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10).

The two statements seem to be making a similar point about widening the circles of students' understanding from their own immediate situation through to a wider world view. However, the words chosen to express this thrust reveal differences in fundamental assumptions that arise from their very different social, cultural, and historical contexts. In other parts of its introductory statement, the Singapore syllabus makes clear its strong commitment to national identity and development, as well as the fostering of a direct reflection of this in the personal identity of students. This is seen as essential, given the comparatively short history of Singapore as an independent nation. Understanding the history of Singapore's international connections can be seen to strengthen the students' personal and national identities. *Personal* is preferred to *local* as the term to define the innermost circle of historical understanding.

In contrast, the word *national* does not appear in the comparable Australian statement. In the Australian context, what constitutes *national* is contestable, both from the

point of view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, as well as in relation to the two levels of government — federal and state. In addition, both the terms *local* and *regional* can be seen as ambiguous in the Australian context. Does *local* refer to Australian history, or to the history of the various states or to community level history? While *regional* in the Singapore context is usually taken to mean external relations with neighbouring countries, in Australia it could be taken either to mean the Asia-Pacific region, and Oceania, or to refer to the many distinctive geographical, industrial or agricultural districts within the Australian continent, each with their own distinctive communities and histories.

#### **IV. The Aims and Learning Outcomes**

The aims and learning outcomes outlined in each country's curriculum documents are important for understanding the purpose of history envisioned for schools. This section concentrates on comparing the ACH's aims, which are placed immediately following the curriculum's Rationale (discussed above), with Singapore's aims and learning outcomes outlined after the previously discussed section, Design of the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses.

##### **1. Aims of the Australian Curriculum: History**

The main thrust of the ACH's Rationale is picked up in the specification of Aims. There are four aims that the ACH stipulates for all Years 7 -10 students in Australia undertaking History. The qualities that the ACH seeks to develop in students are:

- interest in, and enjoyment of, historical study for lifelong learning and work, including their capacity and willingness to be informed and active citizens;
- knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the past and the forces that shape societies, including Australian society;

- understanding and use of historical concepts such as evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, perspectives, empathy and contestability;
- capacity to undertake historical inquiry, including skills in the analysis and use of sources, and in explanation and communication. (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10)

These aims reiterate several ideas outlined in the introductory sections of the ACH. In particular, the first two aims draw upon the curriculum's rationale, whilst the third restates the historical concepts which promote the development of students' historical understanding; and the fourth relates to learning the processes linked to historical inquiry.

## **2. Aims and Learning Outcomes of the Singapore Syllabus**

Aims for history in Singapore's lower secondary years are provided under the heading of Aims and Learning Outcomes found within the second section of the syllabus document entitled *Thinking Behind the Syllabus and Implementation*. The initial six aims (MOE, 2013, p. 4) are extended more explicitly under the sub-heading Learning Outcomes (pp. 4-5). These aims and their extension in the Learning Outcomes can be seen to have close links in ideas and language with the syllabus itself, the broad, general statement of the Desired Outcomes of Education and the very specific, Qualities of a History Learner diagram (p. 2). The fact that they also mirror those stipulated for the study of history at the Upper Secondary level, ensures that teachers are aware of the continuity of history learning across year level.

The six aims appear to be scaffolded, increasing in complexity. The first two aims represent the two main features of history education — the first focusing on historical inquiry and skills, and the second on the acquisition of historical knowledge and understanding. They provide the basis for the next three aims to stipulate examples through which students can deepen their historical understanding and inquiry skills. The third aim is concerned with

the construction of the past, so that students become aware not only of the ways in which events and occurrences have been “interpreted, represented and accorded significance”, but also the “reasons and purposes” that prompted them (MOE, 2013, p. 4). The fourth focuses on the analysis of sources within their particular historical context. It details the skills needed in this process, such as asking questions and the need to examine “a range of sources” (p. 4), in order to formulate and develop substantiated opinions about past events and occurrences. In this way, it highlights the level of responsibility which needs to be given to students, if they are to benefit from history education. The fifth aim relates to the organisation and communication skills necessary for the presentation of students’ opinions, research, analysis, and findings of their history learning. The culminating sixth aim emphasises the personal connection between the subject and each individual student, through fostering the dispositions that will enable them to make use of history in a way meaningful to them.

Following these six aims, the syllabus document proceeds to outline twenty Learning Outcomes for history education. These outcomes which are categorised under three headings: Knowledge and Understanding; Skills; and Values and Attitudes refer directly to the attributes students should have acquired by the end of their history course (MOE, 2013, pp. 4-5). The Knowledge and Understanding section concentrates on the ability to understand historical content such as the key characteristics of the periods of time studied; important individuals, groups and events, with their connection to today’s society; and the process of change through these periods (p. 4). The Skills section focuses on developing skills, such as the ability to ask questions, “acquiring” and “interpreting” evidence; the organisation and subsequent communication of findings; establishing continuity and change, as well as historical significance; and the causes of events and situations (pp. 4-5).

Lastly, the Values and Attitudes section expects students to demonstrate “the internalisation of key values and mind-sets associated with History learning” (MOE, 2013,



p. 5). Those outlined include independent thinking; tolerating ambiguity; empathising with people; understanding the contexts which shape an individuals' actions; embracing connections between themselves and their communities; and recognising how their actions can impact upon others (p. 5). The main concentration is on the ability to consider multiple perspectives, ranging from showing sensitivity toward other people's views, and recognising that their own perspective shapes their interpretation of issues and events, to displaying respect for opposing points of view. Within these aims and learning outcomes there is a strong emphasis placed on historical inquiry, as well as ensuring a link between acceptance of the past and learning from the past for application in the future. In addition to these aims and learning outcomes, Section 5 of the syllabus document titled Scope and Sequence Charts for the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses, produces a further 52 learning outcomes, which are connected to the original aims and learning outcomes identified in Section 2. The learning outcomes provided in Section 5, are discussed in the following chapter, and are tailored to suit the lower secondary years, as well as the specific units of work outlined.

### **3. Key Points of Comparison: Aims and Learning Outcomes**

The presentation of aims provided in each curriculum document is very different in the amount of elaboration provided. The six aims of the Singapore syllabus seem to be quite focused in scope but explained in greater detail than is found in the Australian statement of aims (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10; MOE, 2013, p. 4). Furthermore, the aims are followed by an outline of as many as twenty Learning Outcomes of history education, categorised under three headings: Knowledge and Understanding; Skills; and Values and Attitudes (MOE, 2013, pp. 4-5). These are reinforced in later sections of the syllabus: The Scope and Sequence Chart, which provide teachers with a basic template for teaching their classes, and the Amplification of Syllabuses to be considered in Chapter Five. Teachers of lower secondary history classes in Singapore are left in no doubt about how to interpret the full implications of the syllabus and how to implement it in their classrooms.

In contrast, the four aims outlined in the ACH appear complex and multi-faceted, although each can be seen as a concise but comprehensive listing of the key elements related to the dot point in question (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10). No further explanations are given in that section of the document. The amount of subsidiary elaboration provided to lower secondary school teachers in Australia seems minimal in comparison to the detailed discussion of examples provided to Singapore teachers within the syllabus. There almost seems to be an assumption that teachers in Australia need to be left free to do their own elaboration of the curriculum topics for themselves, on the basis of their personal understanding of levels of interest, ability and special needs among the students within their class. Perhaps, given the very wide variety of contexts in which Australian schools are situated, from cosmopolitan cities, to regional centres, small and widely scattered rural towns and remote outback townships, the assumption of teacher responsibility for developing the curriculum in the way that is best suited to a given school and the particular students in the history class is justified.

A closer look at the actual wording of the aims, however, reveals substantial similarity on many aspects of the broad thrust of learning that curriculum writers were hoping that lower secondary students would achieve through their study of history. This is despite the very different content being taught to Year 7-8 classes in the two countries. For example, the third aim in the Australian document and the second in the Singapore syllabus are both concerned with understanding and knowledge, through the focus of each is different, with the ACH stressing the understanding and use of concepts and the Singapore syllabus, the interpretation of events. The fourth aim of the ACH relates to learning the skills needed for historical inquiry, while the Singapore syllabus spells out specific historical inquiry skills in the first, fourth and fifth aims active engagement, analysis, and communication of findings. The second Australian aim, as well as the second and third of the Singapore syllabus both point to students learning to understand the forces in history that shape

societies. Moreover, the first aim of the Australian Curriculum appears to be quite comparable to the sixth Singapore aim, in pointing to the potential personal reference of history learning to students' in their later life. In this regard, both mention active participation as citizens.

What emerges as the most significant difference in the aims and learning outcomes as they are outlined in the curriculum documents is in the areas of values and attitudes, or dispositions as they are sometimes referred to. Although it can be argued that a number of the attitudes outlined relate directly to some of the key history concepts in the Australian aims, discussed in Structure under the historical knowledge and understanding strand section, there is no inclusion of values and attitudes in the ACH's content descriptions.

The commitment to the purpose of nation building, which featured so prominently in Singapore's introductory statements, appears only once, in the sixth aim, and is comparable to the reference in the first Australian aim to students becoming active citizens. However, references to nation building appear strongly in Singapore's learning outcomes. There is no elaboration of history learning for participation in the nation in the Australian document.

## **V. The Historical Knowledge to be Learned**

The historical knowledge sections outlined in the two sets of documents as the basis of the study of history for students in Years 7 and 8, are very different. The knowledge outlines reflect two very different purposes of history education as suggested at the end of Section III. In Australia, the fundamental concern is to provide the foundation for an academically orientated chronological study of human beings from the earliest times. In contrast, the purpose of the history syllabus for Secondary 1 and 2 students in Singapore is

to give them an appreciation and understanding of the history of their own country, Singapore, and its significance for them.

### **1. Australian Curriculum: History — Historical Knowledge and Understanding Strand, including Depth Studies**

History as a disciplinary subject in v.8.1 of the ACH commences in Year 7, when depth studies are introduced into the curriculum. For the first two years of high school, students undertake studies regarding ancient civilisations grouped under the title “the ancient world” for Year 7 and “the ancient to modern world” for Year 8 (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 15, 25). These studies are intended to prepare students for two more years of a chronological study of history, with the focus in Year 9 placed on the modern period from 1750 to 1918.

The curriculum for each year level begins with an introduction to the period being studied, the ancient world, in the case of Year 7 (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 15-24). The two strands of the curriculum: 1) historical knowledge and understanding (which are discussed in this chapter), and 2) historical skills (which are discussed in the next chapter). The commentary then goes on to emphasise that history teachers in schools are the ones responsible for integrating the two strands in ways that best suit the local situation. In the end, “the order and detail in which they [the strands] are taught are programming decisions” (p. 15). A reference to historical concepts is subsequently provided, listing the seven historical concepts which are linked to heightening historical understanding (p. 15). The same seven concepts are given for all the year levels from 7 to 10. However, the key inquiry questions, which are subsequently provided, are designed to frame the students’ studies for a particular year level (see ACARA, 2015e, p. 15). For Year 7, the inquiry questions are given as:

- How do we know about the past?
- Why and where did the earliest societies develop?

- What emerged as the defining characteristics of ancient societies?
- What have been the legacies of ancient societies? (p. 15)

The Year 8 curriculum outline follows the same configuration (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 25-36). However, the description pertains to the period of time “from the end of the ancient period to the beginning of the modern period, c.650 – 1750 AD (CE)” (p. 25). Consequently, the four inquiry questions are:

- How did societies change from the end of the ancient period to the beginning of the modern age?
- What key beliefs and values emerged and how did they influence societies?
- What were the causes and effects of contact between societies in this period?
- Which significant people, groups and ideas from this period have influenced the world today? (p. 25)

For both year levels, a detailed listing of the topics for study follows with the two strands, historical knowledge and understanding, and historical skills, organised vertically under the heading Content Descriptions.

The historical content pertaining to each respective year level is outlined in the historical knowledge and understanding strand, which separates this content into two components: the overview, and the depth studies. The overview section is first presented to provide students with an overall summary of the historical period to be covered (ACARA, 2015e). This is intended to promote discussions pertaining to “broad patterns of historical change” (p. 13). The ACH stipulates that this section is “not intended to be taught in depth” (p. 13) and can be supplemented or integrated into the implementation of depth studies. Despite this, the content outlined in the overview “can be used to give students an introduction to the historical period; to make the links to and between the depth studies; and to consolidate understanding throughout a review of the period” (p. 15).

*Depth studies.* The main thrust of the historical knowledge and understanding strand is conveyed through the depth studies, which can be viewed as the curriculum document's main source of historical content. This component outlines three depth studies for each year level. A list of these depth studies is provided in Appendix 3.12. Most of the depth studies allow for schools and teachers to choose from electives focused "on a particular society, event, movement or development" (ACARA, 2015e, p. 13), related to the depth study title or theme. Thus, if Year 8 is taken as an example, the three themes outlined are *The Western and Islamic World*; *The Asia Pacific World*; *Expanding Contacts* (ACARA, 2015e). Overall, these depth studies can be perceived as a way of structuring content and topics to ensure a chronological approach, which establishes a level of standardisation across jurisdictions, whilst allowing for some degree of teacher choice.

A level of standardisation is also evident through the use of content descriptions to outline the necessary historical knowledge and skills for each year level. These content descriptions which exist in the overviews, depth studies and the historical skills strand are exemplified in Appendix 3.13, whilst a way to interpret them is presented in Appendix 3.14 (Board of Studies, 2012). In essence, these content descriptions specify what "teachers are expected to teach" (ACARA, 2014c). Nevertheless, version 7.1 of the ACH is careful to articulate that although they outline what students are "expected" to learn, they do not "prescribe approaches to teaching" (ACARA, 2014c). It thus allows content pertaining to both strands to be "appropriately ordered" (ACARA, 2014c).

Although these depth studies do not prescribe assessment tasks, the ACH's content elaborations, featured in a column on the right hand side of the printed ACH document (Appendices 1.1 and 3.13), they assist in briefly describing possible approaches to use in developing students' understanding of the historical topic. Version 7. 1 of the ACH stated that content elaborations were not "intended to be comprehensive content points that all

students need to be taught” (ACARA, 2014c), but rather to generate common ground and basic ideas for all teachers. In this sense, they are optional. So too, is the presentation of these content elaborations in the online version of the ACH available on the ACARA website. They are only displayed when teachers select to view this column. For the purpose of this thesis, it was considered important and relevant to analyse their inclusion. Therefore, the print version of the ACH provided in Appendix 1.1, presents these in the right-hand column of the strands. Despite this, the inclusion of this type of content does enable individual teachers to select or modify the curriculum to suit their classroom settings, provided they have time to go through all the information available in this way.

An overarching feature bridging the outline and presentation of content descriptors, as well as the content elaboration, are the ACH’s cross-curriculum priorities (ACARA, n.d.a). These outline three key areas that can enrich learning across all subjects, whilst assisting students’ understanding and engagement with the world around them, in particular Australian society. These are: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures, Asia and Australia’s engagement with Asia, and lastly, sustainability. Derived from the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (ACARA, 2014c; MCEETYA, 2008), these are intended to be implemented only when relevant, but should be developed across all subjects throughout students’ learning. The *Melbourne Declaration* not only highlighted the need for active and informed citizens in the twenty-first century but reflected the joint Commonwealth and Australian states decision to proceed with a national curriculum. Reference to these priorities are made throughout the historical knowledge and understanding strand using an “icon-tagging system” (ACARA, n.d.c), which is placed as symbols underneath relevant content descriptions in v.8.1 of the ACH.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> For the list of icons representing the cross-curriculum priorities and general capabilities see Appendix 3.15.

Accompanying this initiative are the ACH's general capabilities, which "encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions" (ACARA, n.d.b). All of these are present in the history curriculum document: literacy, numeracy, information and communication technology (ICT) capability, critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding, intercultural understanding (ACARA, 2015e). Unlike the cross-curriculum priorities, the icons pertaining to the general capabilities, in v.8.1 of the curriculum document are only placed underneath the content descriptions. However, the latter 8.2 version of the ACH extended this referencing of general capabilities to the content elaborations (ACARA, 2016), as well as the content descriptions, which ensures their viability for teachers' classroom practice. Nevertheless, a more extensive discussion on their inclusion can be seen in the comparative analysis section of historical knowledge. Overall, these features not only provide assistance and direction to teachers regarding the implementation of historical content, but also promote continuity across all subject areas in assisting students "to live and work successfully in the twenty-first century" (ACARA, n.d.b).

## **2. Singapore Syllabus — Historical Knowledge**

In contrast to the ACH, historical knowledge for the lower secondary years in Singapore is focused on national history. Given the structure of Singapore's lower secondary syllabuses, an analysis of the historical content included in this document has been derived from several sections. Apart from a brief reference to the attainment of historical knowledge in the Design of the Lower Secondary History Syllabuses, which has already been discussed, the main sections are Syllabus Content, in particular the Content Overview for Lower Secondary History Syllabuses included in Section 2: The Thinking Behind the Syllabus and Implementation (MOE, 2013, pp. 6-9), as well as Section 8: Amplification of Syllabuses (pp. 60-75). The document's Scope and Sequence Chart (pp. 31-36) is also an important



source, but is brought into the discussion in Chapter Five, when the process of historical inquiry outlined in the Singapore syllabus is considered alongside its content.

The Syllabus Content provides an outline of historical knowledge in the Content Overview (MOE, 2013, pp. 6-7). It also acknowledges the respective “instructional materials” (p. 8), which predominantly refer to the two coursebooks for Lower Secondary History, as well as the Historical Investigation (HI) (p. 9), an investigative assessment task introduced with the syllabus document. Whilst emphasis remains on the Content Overview (pp. 6-7), the relevance of the instructional materials and the HI are explicitly woven into this section’s discussion on historical content in the lower secondary years because this is the way the Singapore syllabus envisages it.

The content overview first commences with the title Singapore: The Making of a Nation-State, 1300-1975, which is also the title of the coursebooks. The syllabus document then provides a brief description of the historical content covered across the four units of study. These are “framed by four inquiry questions” that “seek to weave a meta-narrative that captures the forces and individuals that shaped Singapore into a nation-state” (MOE, 2013, p. 6). The content is further amplified on pages 6 to 7 of the syllabus document, which combines the outline of each unit with the four key inquiry questions, as well as the HI question that supports the implementation of the assessment task.

Unit 1 concentrates on maritime trade from the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries, with particular reference to Singapore’s connections with the world. Also included in Unit 1 is the way history as a discipline is “constructed” (MOE, 2013, p. 6). This not only looks at the nature of history, but focuses on the ways in which historians, as well as archaeologists, understand and interpret the past, and the role of history itself in society. The following unit, Unit 2, highlights life in colonial Singapore from the nineteenth to early twentieth century. It additionally stresses the importance of immigration and communities to Singapore’s

history, and stipulates a consideration of “their quality of life” before WWII (p. 6). This emphasis on the human experience carries on to Unit 3, where the Japanese Occupation of Singapore in WWII and its impact up until 1959 are framed around questions that promote the consideration of people’s perceptions and “aspirations” (pp. 6-7) and concludes with the “search for independence” (p. 7), which provides the basis for Unit 4 to extend the discussion of independence and the effects of Singapore’s separation from Malaysia. The importance placed on examining human experience is once again seen through examining the extent to which people’s lives were “transformed after independence” through the decade of development that followed (pp. 6-7). These connections ensure that a “meta-narrative” exists in the study of Singapore’s history in the lower secondary years (p.6).

Each unit is framed further through two sub-questions placed underneath the key overarching inquiry question (MOE, 2013, pp. 6-7). Under each of these the document provides a mixture of statements and questions as dot points which indicate content inclusion. Across all four units, two of these dot points have been italicised with an asterisk preceding the statement/question, which refers to the implementation of content in the N(A) course.

Section 8: Amplification of Syllabuses (MOE, 2013, pp. 60-75) also draws attention to differences between the Express and N(A) courses. Instead of presenting amalgamated content, as seen earlier in the document, this 16 page section first outlines the historical knowledge to be covered in the Express course for both Secondary 1 and 2 (pp. 60-67), then proceeds to deliver similar information for the N(A) course (pp. 68-75).

Each unit is allocated two pages, which consists of five boxes placed underneath the unit title and its key inquiry question. The first two boxes, entitled Overview, and Making Connections, are presented horizontally. Although the Overview offers a summary of the historical content to be covered, the Making Connections box highlights the importance of

these events, especially in regard to developing students understanding of Singapore's history, society and place in the world. The information provided in these boxes is the same for both courses. Three columns, entitled Key Knowledge, Learning Outcomes, and Concepts, are subsequently provided below. Whilst there is no explicit reference to coursebooks, the inquiry questions provided in the Key Knowledge column reflect the titles of coursebook chapters. Overall, this section brings together information on historical knowledge and skills, previously covered in other sections of the syllabus document, in an easy to read format. A more detailed discussion of historical knowledge, as it is linked with the historical inquiry process in the Singapore syllabuses, is continued in Chapter Five through a consideration of the Scope and Sequence Chart.

### **3. Comparing the Historical Knowledge**

In regard to historical knowledge per se, it would be hard to image a greater difference than that between Singapore's Lower Secondary History syllabus and the national Australian Curriculum for Year 7 and 8 students in all states. The magnitude of the difference is most striking in regard to the time range and geographical focus of study.

The Singapore syllabus is designed to provide Secondary 1 and 2 students with an overview of the history of Singapore as a comparatively small island state from the fourteenth century, a period of about six centuries. The Australian Curriculum for all Year 7 students covers the history of the ancient world, those parts of the globe where the earliest evidence has been found of groups of people developing into societies. Year 8 takes this study up to the start of the Modern period. Those countries listed in the Year 7 overview are Egypt, Mesopotamia, Persia, Greece, Rome, India, China and the Maya (ACARA, 2015e, p. 15). This list covers most, but not all, the continents of the world. The content descriptions for the depth studies focus on Australia, Egypt, Greece, Rome, India and China. Those societies listed for the Year 8 overview are Byzantine, Celtic, Anglo-Saxon, Viking,

Ottoman, Khmer, Mongols, Yuan and Ming dynasties, Aztec and Inca. Whilst the corresponding depth studies outline the Vikings, Medieval Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Renaissance Italy, Angkor/Khmer Empire, Shogunate Japan, the Polynesian expansion across the Pacific, the Mongol expansion, the Black Death in Africa, Asia and Europe or the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs and Incas as possible areas of study. The time span of the ancient world is defined in the curriculum document for Year 7 as sixty six and a half centuries from 60,000 BC (BCE) to 650 AD (CE). An additional eleven centuries is covered in Year 8, which concentrates on the period between 650 AD (CE) and 1750.

Such a striking difference in content pinpoints immediately two very different purposes for Year 7 and 8 students' learning of history. In Singapore, one very important purpose of those responsible for developing this history syllabus, perhaps the over-riding purpose, was to give Secondary 1 and 2 students in all Singapore schools the knowledge needed to understand and appreciate the history of the nation they were growing up in and expecting to live and work in after they left school. The expectation was that this understanding would lead to their identification as Singaporeans and a willing commitment to their nation.

In contrast, the purpose that ACH writers had in mind was that Year 7 and 8 students should gain a grounding in the discipline of history and be introduced chronologically to the evidence for the very beginning of human history and societal development up to the beginning of the modern period. In this sense the curriculum lays the groundwork of the world history approach which was intended to be the central feature of the ACH.

Despite this great difference in historical knowledge to be learned, there are recognisable similarities in the two history documents. One important commonality is the emphasis placed on students developing an understanding of history as a discipline. This includes the way in which historians construct and interpret knowledge of the past, as this

relates to the knowledge required in the two history curriculum documents: the earliest evidence of human history in the ancient world for Australia; and the earliest contact with other countries during the thirteenth century in the case of Singapore. In addition to this, Singapore students are also encouraged, in these years, to study the maritime kingdoms which existed in Southeast Asia from the first to the fourteenth centuries, and their connection to Singapore (MOE, 2013, pp. 60-61, 68-69). This provides a foundation in both documents to commence the outline of the relevant historical knowledge chronologically. However, in regards to identifying content related to history as a discipline, Singapore takes this approach one step further through outlining specific skills linked to the acquisition of historical understanding and inquiry, such as “making inferences”, “importance of chronology to history and historians”, and ‘providing evidence to support conclusions’ (MOE, 2013, pp. 60, 68). ACH in comparison leaves the identification of such related historical processes to be outlined in the subsequent historical skills strand.

Singapore’s syllabus document provides much more explicit guidance for teachers in its outline of historical knowledge. Specific dot points for the content are given to direct teachers towards the foci of learning. This is reinforced through the use of content concepts, which enhance the historical knowledge being outlined. An example of this can be seen in Unit 1, which concentrates on the study of Singapore’s history from the fourteenth to the early nineteenth century, together with the sources that substantiate its existence at this time (MOE, 2013, pp. 60-61, 68-69). The content concepts identified within this unit of study are archaeology, history, colonisation, trade, and maritime kingdoms. In addition, historical concepts such as chronology, sources, evidence, have an important link to history as a content concept, intended to help students in their understanding of history as a disciplined process of inquiry. The ACH, however, relies much more on teachers’ initiative in developing explicit points of learning to suit their particular students.

The scaffolding of historical content in each curriculum document provides an important contrast. In the Singapore syllabus document, scaffolding is achieved through the use of inquiry questions together with the constant re-iteration of themes that underpin the conveyance of historical knowledge. Each unit of study in the Singapore syllabus document is framed by an overarching inquiry question. Furthermore, additional questions are placed under these, and are later posed as chapter headings in the respective coursebooks, as indicated in the Scope and Sequence Chart discussed in the next chapter. The outline of more historical knowledge is subsequently placed under these questions which emphasises their importance in the conveyance of historical knowledge, as well as the promotion of historical inquiry processes.

In contrast, the ACH uses the content descriptions and the corresponding language to scaffold students' learning. Despite the apparent lack of connection between the ACH depth studies in the various year levels, a similarity exists in the content descriptions outlined for each depth study elective in Year 7. In the case of Year 7, regardless of the differences within the countries named, each elective provides the same basic five content descriptions, although some modifications do point to specificities of the society being investigated. These content descriptions provide much needed structure for the ACH, as well as highlighting the reliance which is placed on the content elaborations accompanying the historical content, to convey the required information. At times, the ACH's content elaborations could even be perceived as a method of navigating sensitive and difficult topics, pertinent to the conveyance of national history.

Despite the overview section for each year level, which is meant to provide students with a summary of that period to be covered (ACARA, 2015e), little exists in the ACH to connect the content outlined in the historical knowledge and understanding strand. For example, Year 7 students could complete an in-depth study on ancient Egypt, as well as one

on India, without devoting any attention to China, Greece, or Rome (see Appendix 3.12). Despite some commonalities, the content descriptions in each depth study differ, especially in Year 8. This enhances the perception that each depth study appears as its own entity, with distinct content descriptions. Although a single conceptual narrative would be difficult to integrate into the current orientation of the ACH, such a structural change could promote more continuity between the depth studies, especially since little emphasis is now given to the overviews in classrooms (see Chapter Seven).

For Singapore, the promotion of interconnectedness is seen through Section 8: Amplification of Syllabuses and the use of inquiry questions. For example, Unit 1: Tracing Singapore's Origins begins with the inquiry question: how is knowledge of Singapore's early past constructed? The following question relates to determining the value of historical evidence in analysing and understanding Singapore's past, in particular its connections with the world prior to the nineteenth century (MOE, 2013, pp. 60-61, 68-69). This regional emphasis is used as a foundation, throughout Unit 2, to examine migrant communities in colonial Singapore and their reasons for immigrating to the island. This extends to cover a comparative study on the differences regarding living conditions, employment, entertainment, etc. of these various communities in Singapore before WWII (pp. 62-63, 70-71). Unit 3 subsequently asks: Did the Japanese Occupation change the way people viewed Singapore? The use of the word *change* requires students to reflect upon the studies undertaken in the previous unit, whilst taking into consideration views in post war Singapore, also signifies the impact of war (pp. 64-65, 72-73). It is the reference to "people's experiences" that connects this study to content previously outlined (pp. 64, 72); students are required to understand people's experiences during the Japanese Occupation, and how their lives changed compared with the earlier colonial period. Lastly, Unit 4 asks two questions: what did independence mean for Singapore?; and how far were people's lives

transformed after independence? The focus in this topic is “challenges to Singapore and her people” (pp. 66, 74).

In these ways, the Singapore syllabus presents *human experiences* as an overarching theme for the study of history in Secondary 1 and 2. Examples of sub-themes are home, housing, and colonial heritage. The theme of housing is first presented in the unit on colonial Singapore but features even more in the Secondary 2 coursebook for Unit 3 (MOE, 2015). Later the topic of housing is found again in both the coursebook and the syllabus document in relation to its transformation after Singapore’s separation from Malaysia.

At the same time, there is a focus on the theme of home, both in terms of housing as a physical feature and home as the place where people feel safe and comfortable, as well as a sense of family and belonging. This is seen in the transition Singapore encountered over the course of a century from a trading post, where people, in many respects, still considered home to be another country, into a nation with citizens concerned with the wellbeing of the nation-state. Along the same lines, there is an emphasis on themes, which either connect communities together or represent a common feature to be found in all communities, such as education. Although this example is expanded upon in Chapter Seven, Unit 3 encourages students to look at the reasons why many children, similar in ages to themselves, did not return to school after WWII, and the subsequent effects. This has a direct connection with modern day society and students’ personal experience of attending school.

The overarching narrative and framework identified above feeds into Singapore’s concentration on providing students with an understanding of their national history. Topics, associated with MOE initiatives and objectives, such as social cohesion and racial harmony are addressed throughout the syllabus document and connected by larger themes and inquiry questions. As the previous paragraph demonstrates, these themes and inquiry questions relate to aspects of social history rather than political and economic history that has usually been



the focus of the national histories of western countries, as well as previous national history documents in Singapore. Social history is emphasised through the study of multiple perspectives within Singapore society. The intention seems to be to enhance social harmony through structuring the learning of history to include the various experiences faced by different ethnic groups. Although the official narrative within a strong Chinese framework is still present, the ‘Singapore Story’ is modified to take some account of the perspectives of other communities.

Since the ACH for Years 7 to 10 uses world history as a lens to examine and introduce Australian history, it is globally orientated in its approach to teaching history. There are times when this approach places some of Australia’s key developments and historical events in a wider content, allowing themes to flow implicitly through the structure of historical content. However, centring the content around global themes and events can also result in the exclusion of key events in Australia’s past, because they do not correlate with world occurrences outlined on a global map.

Examining the foundations of Australian history of indigenous societies from the perspective is a good example of this process. A mention of Australian history, linked directly to indigenous history, can be found in the first part of the Year 7 curriculum in the overview to the historical period, and as two brief content descriptions to be incorporated into the first depth study: *Investigating the Ancient Past*. However, overview content can be incorporated into depth studies (ACARA, 2015e). In contrast, Australian history is not mentioned at all for Year 8, where the curriculum document focuses on the ancient to modern world. With regards to the Year 7 overview, in spite of the identification by ACARA that the first content description can include the study of Australia when exploring the expansion of human civilisations in 60,000 BC (p. 15), the corresponding content elaborations do not provide links to the study of Australia’s Indigenous or Torres Strait Islander populations.

This issue is heightened given the presence of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories and cultures as a cross-curriculum priority, which is further shown when comparing the overview component with the general introduction for Year 7. In the year level's introduction, the ACH identifies Australia as a part of a range of societies that can be studied, as well as Egypt, Greece, Rome, India and China (ACARA, 2015e, p. 15). However, in the corresponding overview when providing a list of countries included in the ancient world, Australia is not listed (p. 15). Inconsistencies regarding the inclusion of Indigenous (Australian) history extends to the content descriptions in the Year 7 depth studies. The content description ACDSEH148, categorised under the depth study: *Investigating the Ancient Past*, specifies "the importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past, including the heritage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples" (p. 17). This could include examples pertaining to Uluru or the Land Heritage Act, involving specific processes involving state legislation and consultation with traditional owners. However, the content elaboration for ACDSEH148 refers to Pompeii and the temples of Abu Simbel (p. 17). It is important to note that the NSW K-10 History Syllabus has provided an elective depth study for Year 8. This study promotes the comparison of colonisation in Australia alongside another Indigenous community in the world (Board of Studies, 2012, p. 55). Whilst emphasising both Australian and world history, it also presents an implicit conceptual framework, with topics that can be picked up in Year 7 and 9 but are otherwise absent in the present ACH document.

As a result of the chronological approach to national history, as well as the historical content included, Singapore requires students to learn difficult and sensitive topics at a young age. It could be for this reason that the content dot points outlined in the syllabus document are specific. Another approach is through the use of themes, as well as topics which relate directly to students' own experience, such as education. Its inclusion appears throughout the mandatory coursebook and as a result in discussed in Chapter Seven. The

relevant coursebooks look at how historical events were manifested in schools, and in turn how these education institutions were involved in events, such as the Japanese Occupation of Singapore or the Anti-National Service riots in the 1950s. This type of inclusion promotes discussions on change and continuity, where students can connect historical events not only to today's society, but also to their own, as well as their families', experiences of schooling.

In comparison, *universal education* is acknowledged in the ACH, not in the lower secondary years of schooling, but in Year 9, which centres on the making of the modern world, a period specified as 1750-1918 (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 37-46). However, there is no acknowledgement of education, or the importance of universities or schools in Year 10. This is despite Year 10 including a mandatory depth study on Rights and Freedoms (1945-present), which asks students to study the methods used by civil rights activists in Australia. Only one content elaboration encourages a study of Charles Perkins, the president of SAFA [Student Action for Aborigines], but this neglects to include other individuals who participated in the likes of the Freedom Ride, such as Ann Curthoys, now a prominent historian, or Jim Spigelman, who later became Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of New South Wales (National Museum of Australia [NMA], n.d.). An inclusion of additional names/identities would have recognised Australia's cultural diversity, as well as the fact that the SAFA was based at the University of Sydney (NMA, n.d.). The way in which issues, such as multiculturalism and activism, manifested in universities changed the course of Australian history at varying times was distinctive compared to other sections of the community.

Although this analysis of Year 10 is not explicitly related to Years 7 and 8, it highlights two issues in the context of Singapore pertinent to the transmission of national history, and history in general, in the lower secondary years. Firstly, the expectations which teachers and the MOE have of students, and secondly, the assumption that students of this

age group in Singapore can handle sensitive and contentious issues related to events in recent history. Not only did these events contribute to defining the nation, but they could have impacted students' families and still be present in the living memory of individuals residing in Singapore.

*Place of Global and Regional History.* The ACH is structured for emphasis to remain on the world and Australia's place in it. Allowing Australian history to be incorporated as the teacher sees fit, enables other issues that may be more pertinent to the class to take precedence. This could relate to local issues, although the introductory and supplementary material to the Humanities curriculum under which History is positioned, highlights 'the global' (ACARA, 2015e). This is visible in the key ideas presented in the curriculum document, which enhance student's development, knowledge and understanding in Humanities subjects (ACARA, 2015e). We can take one of these: *The ways people, places, ideas and events are perceived and connected* as an example (pp. 6-7). Apart from the Economics and Business component (p. 7), the explanations or pointers provided present the notion of how global realities effect Australia, rather than Australia's effect on the world (ACARA, 2015e), despite mentioning national and local contexts in the original explanation. Interestingly, the explanation given to the key idea: *Who we are, who came before us, and traditions and values that have shaped societies* mentions Australia's identity, without attempting to define it (pp. 5-6). Under Civics and Citizenship (p. 5), however, it does describe how the media influences the conception of identities (ACARA, 2015e). Whilst these sections include local contexts, it focuses the orientation of content and emphasis globally—how did these issues, concepts effect Australia. This method promotes intercultural understanding within Australian society but tends to lessen the significance of Australia's contribution to the world. The emphasis seems to be the world in Australia, not Australia in the world.

Australia promotes regional consciousness through identifying Asia as a cross-curriculum priority—an area of focus that should be included in all subjects and which can offer students an acute awareness that will benefit them abroad and whilst in Australia (ACARA, 2015e). Australia, geographically speaking, has closer neighbours not categorised in the group of countries to which Australia gives attention to as a curriculum priority (ACARA, n.d.a). However, Australia can be considered to be a part of the Asian region and in terms of trade, economics and immigration, the region has a considerable influence on society. Therefore, it is understandable that focus is given to the region, not only in supporting education policies, but also in history curricula content.

Nevertheless, whilst a broad range of regions, such as Oceania, the Americas and Africa are covered in the depth study electives (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 26-34), more attention is given to Asia. Whilst, European history can also be seen as a constant feature in the depth studies outlined for the lower secondary years; unlike other regions, aspects of Asian history are either explicitly referred to, or integrated, into at least one depth study in Years 7-10, and every single depth study elective for Years 7-8.<sup>22</sup> Year 7 and 8 studies do provide a foundation for several depth study electives outlined for Years 9 and 10, whereby aspects of Asian history are indisputably emphasised in depth studies and their content descriptions. These include topics, such as non-Europeans experiences in migrating to Australia in 1900s, or Asian contributions to Australia's film, and music industry in the post-war era. Therefore, Asia and the world, becomes not only an isolated depth study in Year 9, but an example of an underlying theme, which teachers and schools can pursue throughout the ACH.

It is important to reflect that many diverse peoples are included in Australian society, including those from Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Their presence intensifies the

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<sup>22</sup> This is based on the researcher's consideration that during this time, Egypt could be considered apart of Asia or at least Eurasia.

importance of including content in history education to ensure that other nations' histories, students' heritage, as well as Australian history, are explored, as a means of fostering intercultural understanding. A history curriculum needs to possess global contexts, but this should be balanced with an in-depth understanding of the history of the nation into which students were born, or have come to live in.

Although framed against local and national history, global and regional contexts are assimilated not only into Singapore's syllabus document, but most predominantly in the units of work. All units include these themes in varying amounts, whilst also projecting a global awareness that can lay the foundations for more detailed studies regarding international history in the upper secondary years.

Through topics such as maritime trade, the first unit allows for the breadth and depth of early Singaporean history to be conveyed. Unit 2 subsequently identifies how modern Singapore was established as a result of various communities and includes an examination of "the background and cultural roots of the people that make up Singapore community" (MOE, 2013, pp. 62, 70). It centres on developing an understanding of these communities in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, while substantiating links to today's society (MOE, 2013). It also demands discussion on community ties before WW2, thus "relations within the community and relations with other communities" (MOE, 2013, pp. 63, 71). This type of intercultural understanding is valuable in students of this age. This unit is not unlike what is expected in the ACH through studying topics such as migration, both of which allow students to attain an appreciation and a level of empathy for migrants' and communities experiences during these periods of time (ACARA, 2015e; MOE, 2013). However as pointed out earlier, the topics are not presented at comparable year levels.

Although framed within a particular narrative, the most explicit incorporation of global and regional contexts in the Lower Secondary History syllabuses can be found in the

last two units, which concentrates on events such as WWII and Singapore's independence from Malaysia. For instance, Unit 3's Making Connections states:

Singapore can be affected by external ideas, people and events and in turn, what happens in Singapore can also impact other parts of the world. This is particularly important given that students today live in a highly globalised and connected world. (MOE, 2013, pp. 64, 72).

The learning outcomes accompanying this unit also refer to Singapore within a “global arena” (pp. 65, 66-67). This phrase is used when emphasis is placed on developing students' appreciation for the distinct vulnerabilities Singapore faces (pp. 65, 66-67). This projects the “global”, or world, and the nation as equal interconnecting entities, in turn enhancing the interconnectedness between the themes of local, national and global, and how they cannot be separated when discussing this period of time or today's society.

Focusing on the common features that unite and connect societies together can be seen as one way of discussing global events, issues and historical forces. The concept of trade is one of these which is seen consistently in the ACH's content descriptions and their elaborations for Years 7 and 8 (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 16-21, 26-34). These references identify trade as a key feature of several ancient, medieval, and early modern civilisations. This includes the importance of trade routes, the wealth acquired through trade and how it relates to expanding contacts and empires (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 16-21, 26-34). Similarly, when considering Singapore's connection to the world from the fourteenth to the nineteenth century, the syllabus document in Unit 1 highlights that trade has occurred “across time and cultures” (MOE, 2013, pp. 31, 61, 69), noting it as the “earliest connection among countries” (MOE, 2013, pp. 31, 61, 69).

Whilst attention has been given to the role of trade in the culturally diverse civilisations covered in the overviews and depth studies, its inclusion is inconsistent. Despite

the inclusion of Indigenous (Australian) history in Year 7, there is no mention of the trade or contact which existed between communities and nations, for instance, the trade that occurred with parts of South-east Asia, such as Indonesia. In fact, the first mention of the word *trade*, alongside Australian history emerges in the mandatory Year 9 depth study on World War One (WWI), when students are asked to study the impact of this war (ACARA, 2015e). For this component of the depth study, a content elaboration recommends “identifying the groups who opposed conscription (for example, trade unionists, Irish Catholics) and the grounds for their objections” (p. 43).

The Year 9 elective depth study, *Making a Nation*, on the other hand, does provide students with the opportunity to study the main features of industry when concentrating on the “[l]iving and working conditions in Australia” during the early twentieth century. However, there is still no explicit reference to the role trade played in Australia’s history, particularly the exportation of wheat and wool to England in the nineteenth century. This draws attention to a limitation with the structure of the ACH, particularly the chronological approach endorsed, whereby the ability to pursue topics which defined a nation are not present in the curriculum document.

In comparison, the emphasis on trade in the Singapore syllabus document can be seen as one opportunity for teachers and schools to access national history, alongside global developments, which highlights a different orientation to the topic. The first two units of Singapore’s syllabus document enables local, national, regional and global factors to be discussed through the identified content concept of trade. Instilling in students an understanding of how the past and present are intertwined, with their growing awareness of the reliance and importance that needs to be placed on trade in today’s society. The syllabus document not only draws attention to a connection between Singapore and the world through trade, but also outlines the study of Singapore and the “Asian trade situation” prior to the



fourteenth century (MOE, 2013, pp. 31, 61, 69). Nevertheless, these examples provided for Unit 1 are “[o]ptional and non-examinable” for N(A) course (pp. 31-32, 61). Despite this, in Unit 2, the topic of trade is developed alongside the introduction of migration and related to the “business opportunities” available in Singapore during the nineteenth and early twentieth century (pp. 33, 62, 70).

## **VII. Conclusion**

Despite their structural differences, Australia and Singapore both use history in these year levels to align with their own purposes and priorities framed by national and local interests. One similarity can be found in the explicit effort of both countries to include global contexts and perspectives in their respective curriculum documents in order to assist students’ wider development and deepen their understanding of their present-day society. This is visible through national initiatives purported to instil characteristics, dispositions and skills in students that would assist them in becoming active, informed and global citizens (ACARA, 2015e; MOE, 2013), supported and intertwined through their respective history curriculum. Both countries in their own way leave certain national events out, one as a result of a narrative, the other due to the lack there of. However, both incorporate what is regarded as the significant past of each nation, which suits the individual national contexts of each country. These findings suggest that national, state and local concerns tend to impact on the way global issues are included into the ACH, while Singapore’s syllabus document has sought to consolidate its national identity through focusing on its intersection with varying global outlooks.

The following chapter continues to analyse these history curriculum documents, but in relation to pedagogy and the inclusion of processes related to historical inquiry. V.8.1 of the ACH and the 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses were introduced at

similar times in response to the same international influences in reconfiguring history education as a way of enhancing students' interest and developing historical consciousness.

## **Chapter Five: Comparing the Curriculum/Syllabus Statements: Historical Inquiry Processes, Skills and Assessment**

### **I. Introduction**

The second part of the comparative analysis of the Australian and Singapore curriculum documents, presented in this chapter, is focused on the way each document deals with the “how” of history, the teaching and learning needed to “do” historical inquiry. The previous chapter was concerned with the “what” of history — its subject matter, the facts, events and people that needed to be known and understood. This chapter compares how the two documents deal with the historical inquiry processes and how students’ learning of these processes and skills is assessed.

### **II. The ACH (Years 7 and 8)**

The main sections of the ACH analysed in this chapter are the historical skills strand, the achievement standards for Years 7 and 8, the assessment and the work samples provided to guide teachers’ assessment (ACARA, 2015e).

#### **1. The Historical Skills Strand**

The historical skills strand is the second of the two strands in which the ACH is structured and is presented after the outline of the historical knowledge and understanding strand. The skills referred to are those used “in the process of historical inquiry” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 13). The five groups of related skills designed for Years 7 and 8 are presented as statements of what students are expected to do with these skills. The accompanying elaborations, also, provide examples of how students could use the skills in relation to the

specific content being learned at each year level. The first five historical skill groups are: chronology, terms and concepts; historical questions and research; analysis and use of sources; perspectives and interpretations; explanation and communication. To take an example, the first set of historical skills is labelled “chronology, terms and concepts” (pp. 21, 34). There are two content descriptions, which indicate what students are expected to do, the first being “sequence historical events, developments and periods” (pp. 21, 34).<sup>23</sup> The content elaboration for this content description relates to Year 7 students “identifying the approximate beginning and end dates of ancient societies and the periods of time when they co-existed” (p. 21). For Year 8 students, the corresponding content elaboration for this content description is further elaborated; “placing historical events in sequence to identify broader patterns of continuity and change (for example, the Polynesian expansion across the Pacific; the stability of the Angkor/Khmer Empire over many centuries)” (p. 34). The second content description for “chronology, terms and concepts” relates to the use of “terms and concepts” (pp. 21, 34).<sup>24</sup> At the Year 7 level, the elaborations refer to “defining and using” terms such as BC, AD, BCE and CE, as well as history and pre-history (p. 21). This is in addition to the way concepts like slavery, divine right, source, and evidence need to be defined and used in the classroom (p. 21). For Year 8 students, the elaboration refers to “understanding the different meanings of particular terms and concepts when viewed in their historical context, such as feudalism in medieval Europe and Japan” (p. 34).

## **2. The Achievement Standards**

Achievement Standards in the ACH are provided for each learning area or subject. In the case of history, each year level has its own Achievement Standard placed after the historical skills strand, as the last section in the document for each year level. These

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<sup>23</sup> Year 7 (ACHHS205) and Year 8 (ACHHS148)

<sup>24</sup> Year 7 (ACHHS206) and Year 8 (ACHHS149)

standards are described as “the learning expected of students at each year level or band of years” (ACARA, n.d.c). For history in Years 7 to 10 each Achievement Standard consists of two paragraphs. The first relates to historical knowledge and understanding, thus “what students are expected to understand” (ACARA, n.d.c). Year 7 students, for example, are expected to “suggest reasons for change and continuity over time” and “describe the effects of change on societies, individuals and groups” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 24). The second paragraph pertains to the skills that students are expected to have developed through the learning of the curriculum content. As an example, Year 8 students “sequence events and developments with a chronological framework with reference to periods of time and their duration” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 36). They are perhaps best seen as “a broad sequence of expected learning” that aims to provide a level of standardisation in history learning across schools and jurisdictions in Australia (ACARA, n.d.c).

No further details or explanation of the intended use of Achievement Standards is given. Version 7.1 of the curriculum, however, contained a definition which is presented in Appendix 3.16. Currently, the Australian Curriculum website is the only source of a more concrete understanding of its use. The website account of Achievement Standards makes four main points. The first is that the Achievement Standard for a given year level needs to be “read as a whole” (ACARA, n.d.c), that is taking into account both the understanding and skills paragraphs. Secondly, as these standards provide “a clear description of student learning” (ACARA, n.d.c), they can be seen as “a useful starting point or driver for the development of teaching and learning programs” (ACARA, n.d.c), as well as enabling teachers to “monitor student learning and to make judgements about student progress” (ACARA, n.d.c). Lastly, in order to provide illustrative examples of the “expected learning for each year level” (ACARA, n.d.c), the ACH includes portfolios of samples of student work, annotated to highlight key points of the assessment.

The last sentence of the website account of achievement standards is significant in highlighting the way in which the state-federal relationship plays out in practice in the Australian Curriculum generally and history, in particular. In the area of reporting students' achievement, the power of decision making remains with the reporting authorities for each Australian state, territory and jurisdiction. At the lower secondary level, the decision rests with senior staff or staff implementing guidelines from their particular jurisdiction. For this reason, differences in interpretation and reporting of Achievement Standards are evident in the various states, territories and jurisdictions.

### **3. Sequence of Content and Achievement Charts**

Among the resource and support materials for the ACH, mentioned as available in PDF form on page 13 of the curriculum document, are two separate charts: History: Sequence of content 7-10 (Appendix 1.2), and History: Sequence of achievement 7-10 (Appendix 1.3). Both of these charts represent a consolidation of material provided in the curriculum for each year level. Their chief use is enabling teachers, as well as parents and other interested members of the public, to gain an overview, of all the content and skills covered over the Years 7 to 10, as well as the levels of knowledge and skills students are expected to have achieved over the last four years of history in the Australian Curriculum. In other words, the charts present no new information or approach, but bring together in one place key information that has already been presented.

However, the two paragraphs about the Achievement Standards outlined at the end of each year level in the Sequence of Achievement Chart represent the only part of the current document where the sequential content and knowledge that students need to learn, on the one hand, and the historical skills, concepts and processes they are expected to acquire, on the other, are highlighted alongside each other and drawn together. The chart

thus presents teachers with examples that help them to visualize how the two strands of history learning can be integrated in classroom teaching and learning.

### **III. Singapore's Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses**

In regard to the Singapore syllabus, the key sections relevant to this chapter are the Recommended Pedagogy, the Qualities of a History Learner, 21CC and the Scope and Sequence Chart.

#### **1. Recommended Pedagogy**

A new feature of Singapore's 2014 Lower Secondary Teaching Syllabuses was the introduction of historical inquiry as the syllabus document's recommended pedagogy. Although the 2005 syllabus document included a section dedicated to suggested teaching approaches, with some activities pointing towards historical inquiry, this type of pedagogy was not acknowledged as the foundation of history teaching. Historical inquiry is presented, in the 2014 syllabus, as a new approach to the teaching of history in Singapore schools. In this sense, it can be regarded as the cornerstone of the 2014 lower secondary syllabus document. The section consists of two pages, which describes the Cycle of Historical Inquiry (MOE, 2013, p. 19) as a process of "doing history" (MOE, 2013, p. 19). In a footnote, this is acknowledged to be an adaptation from Peter Doolittle, David Hicks and Tom Ewing, *The Historical Inquiry Project*, 2004-2005. The four stages outlined in the diagram are similar to those discussed in Chapter One through the example of *Harry Potter* (Rowling, 1997). Historical inquiry is portrayed as:

a cyclical process ... that begins with the asking of guiding questions. This is followed by locating and analysing historical sources to establish historical evidence.

The historical evidence is then used to construct historical interpretations that seek to answer the guiding historical questions. (MOE, 2013, p. 19)

The comments following the Cycle of Historical Inquiry describe the use of inquiry questions in each unit and the way they are linked to the particular historical content being studied. These are designed to provide a “focal point for students to investigate, extract, order, collate, and analyse information” (MOE, 2013, p. 19), as they make their own response to issues raised in the syllabus.

The table, Amplification of the Inquiry Approach (MOE, 2013, p. 20), strengthens this approach so that teachers know how to structure a lesson using inquiry-based learning. This table contains four rows, one for each of the stages identified in the Cycle of Historical Inquiry, which are correlated vertically, in column 2, with the Qualities of a History Learner, outlined in the introduction of the syllabus document. The third column which is headed Purposes, details the steps or activities teachers and students should be undertaking during that stage of the inquiry process (p. 20).

Although the amplification can be seen to be structured to the point of being prescriptive, it does set out clearly the benefits to students’ learning that are to be derived from historical inquiry. Since the Amplification of the Inquiry Approach is directly related to the Qualities of a History Learner, it continues the emphasis on student development, while also highlighting the benefits in terms of personal values and societal attitudes which can be seen to be embedded in Singapore’s approach to the historical inquiry approach to in the classroom. In this sense, the Amplification of the Inquiry Approach gets to the heart of what historical inquiry involves while providing concrete details for teachers of what they can do in the classroom. A note explains that inquiry lesson packages are available for teachers to download through the Lower Secondary History Teaching and Learning Guide on the MOE website OPAL (One Portal All Learners) (MOE, 2013, p. 20). Although brief,



this section enables teachers to think about their approach to history teaching, before the historical knowledge to be taught and other issues pertaining to implementation become the focal point of the syllabus.

## **2. 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies**

As Chapter Two explained, the 21CC Framework was developed in 2010, as part of a series of education reforms in Singapore, which began with TSLN initiative in 1997.<sup>25</sup> The Framework is explained in a public document (MOE, 2018a), which appears on the MOE website and seems to be pitched at the wider Singapore community generally, and parents of children attending school, in particular. Its purpose was to nurture “future-ready” Singaporeans through the guidance of educators with a strong focus on “capacity building”, particularly in relation to “complex communication, civic literacy and global awareness, as well as critical and inventive thinking” (MOE, 2013, p. 21). The 2014 syllabus document for Lower Secondary History explains how these capabilities are developed through the learning of Secondary 1 and 2 History (MOE, 2013, pp. 21-30).

The Framework for 21CC and Student Outcomes can be seen as an extension of the Desired Outcomes of Education, which underpin MOE’s conceptualisation of the purpose of education. The outcomes are expressed in terms of the values, the attitudes and the skills that all students in Singapore schools in the first decades of the twenty-first century are expected to achieve through their years of learning. At the centre of the circular diagram are the core values that “define a person’s character” and “shape the beliefs, attitudes and actions” of that person (MOE, 2018a). The middle band represents the person’s “attitudes and mindsets” (MOE, 2018a), which can be considered as social and emotional capabilities. These provide the basis for the person to understand and manage emotions, learn how to care

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<sup>25</sup> For more information see: MOE (2018a), Poon, Lam, Chan, Kwek and Tan (2017), as well as Tan, Choo, Kang and Liem (2017).

for others, “make responsible decisions, establish positive relationships” and deal efficiently with “challenging situations” (MOE, 2019). The outer rim of this diagram lists the competencies which have emerged as essential for those learning and working in the twenty-first century. The competencies, their components and learning outcomes for Lower Secondary History are listed in Table 6 (MOE, 2013, pp. 22-30).

<b>21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies</b>	<b>Components</b>	<b>Learning Outcome</b>
Civic Literacy, Global Awareness and Cross-cultural Skills	Active Community Life	Actively contributes to the community and nation, possesses an awareness of and the ability to analyse global issues and trends, and displays socio-cultural skills and sensitivity (MOE, 2013, p. 24).
	National and Cultural Identity	
	Global Awareness	
	Socio-Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness	
Critical and Inventive Thinking	Sound Reasoning and Decision-Making	Generates novel ideas; exercises sound reasoning and reflective thinking to make good decisions; and manages complexities and ambiguities (MOE, 2013, p. 25).
	Reflective Thinking	
	Curiosity & [sic] Creativity	
	Managing Complexities and Ambiguities	
Information and Communication Skills	Openness	Manages and uses information effectively and ethically; communicates information and ideas clearly and collaborates effectively (MOE, 2013, p. 28).
	Management of Information	
	Responsible use of information	
	Communicating Effectively	

**Table 6: 21<sup>st</sup> Century Competencies, Components and Learning Outcomes.**

The way in which the twelve components of the 21CC are intended to be worked into the teaching of the Singapore syllabus is illustrated in the case of Lower Secondary History. There are links to the historical knowledge content, the skills and values outlined in the various sections of the syllabus document. This is seen particularly in the Making

Connections section provided for each unit in the Amplification of Syllabuses (MOE, 2013, pp. 60-75).

Another example from the first row of the 21CC in Table 6 is Socio-Cultural Sensitivity and Awareness. The Singapore Lower Secondary History syllabus particularly targets an understanding of other groups in society and their different groups in society and their different experiences in the difficult time of the Japanese invasion and establishing Singapore as an independent nation. Such learning of history within their own society encourages students' ability not only to understand, accept and empathise with other social and cultural groups, but also to interact appropriately with individuals from these groups within Singapore and in international situations.

These examples provide an indication of the way in which the study of history in Years 7 and 8 was seen to contribute to students' competency in skills that are highly regarded and sought after in the contemporary world. There is nothing quite comparable in the Australian situation. The category of general capabilities has a rather different focus and has no particular link to the present and future social, technical, and intercultural needs of society. Whilst icons are provided to indicate where the general capabilities relate to content descriptions and elaborations, no benchmarks or learning outcomes are infused explicitly into the curriculum. In more recent versions of the ACH, more detailed explanations have accompanied selected icons. These additions are still very broad and do not provide further contextual information.

### **3. Scope and Sequence Chart**

The Scope and Sequence Chart for Singapore's 2014 Lower Secondary Syllabuses forms the fifth section of the document and precedes the presentation of exemplars of assessment tasks.

This section spans six pages, five of which display the chart itself, whilst the last presents a reference list of six academic sources. The pages of the chart are divided into seven columns, each relating to a particular point of reference. Across the chart, eight rows represent the units of content knowledge which need to be completed in Secondary 1 and 2. According to MOE (2013), the Scope and Sequence Chart “explicates the historical content, concepts, outcomes and MOE initiatives that the new 2014 Lower Secondary History Syllabuses aim to deliver” (p. 31). Historical content is outlined in the first two columns: Unit and Key Knowledge. The outcomes listed in column three are Learning Outcomes drawn from the Amplification of Syllabuses. The various concepts and historical skills are the focus of columns four to six. The last column lists MOE initiatives which are relevant to the content in each row. Thus the Scope and Sequence Chart draws together, in an easy to read format, what Singapore’s MOE regards as the most important components of history education at the lower secondary level.

The format of the chart highlights the strong correlation between the historical knowledge content outlined in the syllabus document, as discussed in the previous chapter, and intended classroom practice through the use of historical concepts and skills. The differentiation in historical content taught for the different streams of Singapore’s Secondary 1 and 2 is also noted on the chart with an asterisk to indicate the difference in the depth to which some issues and events are explored. Nevertheless, the intention is that the outcomes in terms of historical knowledge and skills, as well as broader benefits, should be much the same for all students.

The expected Learning Outcomes for each chapter are presented in the third column, under two headings: Knowledge and Skills; and Values and Attitudes. These are derived from the Thinking Behind the Syllabus and Implementation section but are not simply reiterated in the chart. Rather each unit lists the outcomes related to the particular chapter of

the coursebook being studied. These aims and learning outcomes encompass the capabilities, dispositions, values, skills, as well as the historical knowledge students should be able to “demonstrate”, “employ” and “internalise” by the end of the course (MOE, 2013, pp. 4-5). The outcomes often point to activities for teachers to pursue, and processes which are helpful in attitude formation in an inquiry-based approach to history learning. In general, these learning outcomes demonstrate how theoretical conceptualisations in the syllabus document can be effectively implemented in classroom teaching and learning. These outcomes are also reiterated in the Amplification of Syllabuses, but are incorporated into one list, with two headings, knowledge and skills, and values and attitudes, per unit of study.

The focus of the fourth column is the content concepts used in the syllabus, as outlined on pages 31-35 of the syllabus document (MOE, 2013). Concepts such as maritime kingdoms, colonial rule, self-government, and independence, outlined previously in Table 5, all draw attention to the focus on national history in this syllabus document, for the purposes of nation building. Some also appear to intersect with themes of national and local identity, as well as globalising influences.

The fifth column of the Scope and Sequence Chart deals with the seven historical concepts: chronology, sources, evidence, causation, diversity, change and continuity, and historical significance (MOE, 2013, pp. 31-35). In much the same way as the content concepts, one or sometimes two of the historical concepts are listed for each coursebook chapter. Each of the historical concepts has its own Rationale, or summary which is partly an explanatory definition and partly a pointer to its intended meaning in the chapter concerned. Some historical concepts, like diversity, are referred to in relation to more than one chapter and are given a rather different rationale and meaning in each case.

Historical skills are the focus of the sixth column. At least one practical historical skill is given for each chapter. Together these final columns are categorised under the heading of Practising History.

Overall, the Scope and Sequence Chart rests on the assumption that students who attain these outcomes at lower secondary level, should have the basic skills and knowledge for studying history at more senior levels. Section 2, Thinking Behind the Syllabus and Implementation, specifically points to the way the aims and outcomes of Upper Secondary history subjects build on the foundation of historical knowledge and skills achieved in the lower secondary history classes.

## **IV. Assessment**

### **1. The Australian Curriculum: History — Work Sample Portfolios**

The only consideration given directly to assessment in the ACH is through the discussion of types of assessment tasks, on one hand, and the provision of Work Sample Portfolios,<sup>26</sup> on the other. Although these are not referred to in either the historical knowledge and understanding, or skills strand of the curriculum document itself, they are provided as additional resources that can be accessed through the Australian Curriculum website.

*Types of Assessment Tasks.* The types of assessment tasks for Years 7 and 8 are outlined in a way that demonstrates the higher level of tasks expected of Year 8 students. While Year 7 students are expected to provide descriptions and develop specific research skills, as part of the process of learning to write an essay, the actual analysis of primary and

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<sup>26</sup> Instead of providing each portfolio, which would total 120 pages, two examples are provided: Above Satisfactory for Year 7 (Appendix 1.5), and Satisfactory for Year 8 (Appendix 1.6).

secondary sources is encouraged in Year 8. For instance, the sample assessment tasks at both year levels tend to ask students to develop, organise and present findings; to use appropriate terms and concepts; and to acknowledge sources through a bibliography or reference list. Whilst these skills are fundamental to the curriculum, there is no suggestion of assessment tasks designed to develop attitudinal concepts and mindsets in relation to history.

***Work Sample Portfolios.*** There are three files of samples of student work for each year level, labelled according to the assessment criteria as: Satisfactory, Above Satisfactory, and Below Satisfactory. Each file can be considered a portfolio of “authentic samples of work” (ACARA, 2014a, p. 1), annotated in relation to how far the student’s work has reached the year level’s Achievement Standard. Through ACARA (2014a) making these illustrative examples available, the intention was to assist “teachers to make on-balance judgements about the quality of their students’ achievement” (p. 1). ACARA (2014a) also noted that each portfolio was “selected, annotated and reviewed by classroom teachers and other curriculum experts” and would “be reviewed over time” (p. 1). These documents have only recently been revised.

Each portfolio begins with a summary of the knowledge, skills and historical concepts expected to be acquired and demonstrated in the various samples of work (ACARA, 2014a, pp. 1-2). These are linked implicitly to the content descriptions outlined in the historical knowledge and understanding, and skills strands of the curriculum document. Overall, these details remain largely unchanged across the specific year level’s three portfolio examples, but they are altered slightly to reflect the category. An example of this is seen in the portfolios for Year 7. Whilst Above Satisfactory suggests the student can provide *specific reasons* for change and continuity, it is suggested that a student at the Satisfactory level only offer *reasons* for change and continuity (MOE, 2014a). The samples of student work occupy the remainder of each document.

Under the heading of each work sample, the year level's achievement standard is displayed, and the aspects targeted in the particular assessment task are highlighted. By the end of the document, all the specific tasks of the year level's achievement standard have been highlighted in varying ways. A summary of the task is also provided in terms of the aims, assessment instructions, the depth study through which it was completed and the designated time frame for the task. The student's response is then shown with brief annotations in the right-hand column, on the student's level of achievement. Although Years 7 and 8 follow the same organisational structure, Year 8 includes at the end of each work sample 1-2 sentences, which briefly describe what the students were actually able to do.

## **2. Singapore Syllabus — Assessment Provisions**

Assessment in Singapore's Lower Secondary Syllabuses is delineated in two consecutive sections, entitled Assessment; and, Specimen Questions and Mark Schemes, respectively.

*Outline of Assessment.* Section 6 on assessment has six parts, with the first emphasizing that the “purpose of assessment must be understood beyond the context of examinations” (MOE, 2013, p. 37). Assessment in the “new” 2014 syllabus document includes both *Assessment for Learning* and *Assessment of Learning* (p. 37). This distinction appears comparable to formative and summative assessment tasks, which are commonly used in Australian school contexts, as *Assessment for Learning* “takes place during teaching and aims to help students improve their learning” (p. 37), whereas *Assessment of Learning* denotes those assessment pieces usually undertaken at the end of “a unit or term” (p. 37). Together, these enable “meaningful learning in History”, which is “developmentally appropriate and caters to students' varied needs”, including the acquisition of 21CC (p. 37).

Three assessment objectives are outlined: 1) “deploying knowledge”, 2) “communicating historical knowledge and constructing descriptions/explanations”, and 3)



“interpreting and evaluating source materials” (MOE, 2013, pp. 37-38). The newly introduced HI assessment task incorporates all of these. Under the heading of Assessment Modes, the syllabus document encourages the use of different assessment tasks, which “encourage independent learning, foster the spirit of inquiry and develop collaborative and communication skills as well as lay a strong foundation of historical knowledge and skills in our students” (p. 38).

Subsequent details are provided through the use of a table, which highlights the four main types of assessment tasks: Chapter Task, Source-Based Question, Structured Question, and Historical Investigation, which are outlined in the syllabus document and the official coursebook. The purpose of each assessment is explained, together with examples of what each task entails and/or the activities through which it can be implemented. Apart from the HI, these assessment tasks are intended to be used regularly rather than at the end of the semester.

The recommended arrangement of assessment tasks, for each year level and stream taught (N(A) or Express Course) in the course of students’ lower secondary history learning is outlined in eight tables, which include information on each assessment task’s design, weight, duration, and assessment objectives, as well as type of marking to be undertaken (i.e. LORMS,<sup>27</sup> point marking, or rubric). They also include expectations and provisions for differentiated approaches at the school level. For instance, Tables 9 and 10, in the syllabus document, outline the arrangement of assessment tasks, including Source-Based and Structured Questions for lower secondary Express classes which do not require an exam (MOE, 2013, pp. 39-41). However, these tables use tests based on the assessment modes entitled: Source-Based Question and Structured Question, which are discussed below. These

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<sup>27</sup> Stands for Level of Response Mark Schemes

stand in comparison to Tables 11 and 12, also provided in the syllabus document, which highlight the specifications for an exam (pp. 41-43).

In addition to the specific details on the Source-Based Questions and the rubric for the HI (MOE, 2013, pp. 48-49, 50-52), further information is provided through a glossary and discussions on marking schemes. Teachers are also directed to an online portal (OPAL) and the Lower Secondary History Teaching and Learning Guide for more information.

***Specimen Questions and Mark Schemes.*** The outline of Specimen Questions and Mark Schemes, works from the Marking Scheme in Section 6 of the syllabus document discussed above. Samples of Source-Based Question and Structured Questions are provided to demonstrate how to structure and mark these assessment tasks in class exercises, as well as examination and test formats.

The first example relates to Source-Based Questions for Secondary 1 and 2 students completing either the Express or N(A) course. Three sources on life in Colonial Singapore, with explanatory captions, are provided for students to analyse. These sources are arranged A to C, with the following captions: a photograph, a description of life for Chinese immigrants from the National Library Board's website and an excerpt from a history book (MOE, 2013, pp. 53-54). Although each source has its own particular question, all are related to the key inquiry question for the unit: *What was life like for people in Colonial Singapore?* (p. 53). Students are encouraged to support their answers with explanations and details they gain from the sources.

The syllabus document goes on to outline the allocation of marks for each such-question, using the standardised marking scheme of LORMS.<sup>28</sup> The mark scheme for each

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<sup>28</sup> This stands for the Levels of Response Mark Scheme. Ng, Chan & Tan (2009) highlight that LORMS is often used by teachers when grading source-based skills, involving "inference, comparison, critical analysis and reasoned judgment" (p. 128).

question ranges from one mark awarded for basic responses to the high mark given to developed answers. These responses demonstrate the use of complex historical skills, such as a valid inference or comparing sources to determine a valid similarity and subsequently supporting this statement with evidence derived from both sources. Examples of student responses at different levels are provided.

### **3. Comparative Highlights on Assessment**

The above overview of the assessment process for students in lower secondary history in the two countries, Singapore and Australia, reveals a fascinating mix of similar approaches to the questions asked and the tasks required of students to evaluate their learning and very different processes of grading and assessing each student's level of achievement.

*Based on Historical Inquiry Pedagogy.* The sorts of questions asked, and the tasks students are expected to complete are very much based on historical inquiry, which is acknowledged in the curriculum documents of both countries as the recommended pedagogy for the teaching of history. The Singapore history syllabus indicates in Assessment Objective 3 that students should be able to “understand, examine and evaluate ... a range of source materials as part of an historical inquiry” (MOE, 2013, p. 38). The ACH's introduction to the portfolios of sample student work explains that the examples of the different levels of achievement demonstrate how each “student identifies and selects a range of sources and locates, compares and uses information to answer inquiry questions” (ACARA, 2014a, p. 2). From the study of their respective history curriculum or syllabus, students have learned historical skills, such as asking questions, gaining relevant information and interpreting it in terms of key concepts, like evidence, change and continuity and significance, which are found in both documents.

There are differences, however, in the way these historical skills are developed and implemented, seen particularly in the rather different formulations of assessment questions

and tasks. Singapore's assessment tasks rely on specific questions to be answered in two to four sentences. The Australian assessment is based more on students completing a particular task or making a presentation on a given topic. The wording of the task or presentation usually provides an indication of what students are expected to cover in their response. There is evidence also of different expectations for students at different levels. Whereas Singapore students are expected to be able to compare and contrast evidence from different sources in both Secondary 1 and Secondary 2, comparison questions are only introduced at the Year 8 level in Australia.

***Comparing the ACH Depth Studies with Singapore's Historical Investigation.***

Within their own particular curriculum structures, both countries use in-depth investigations of historical topics related to the year level knowledge as a means of developing inquiry skills and critical thinking. This is undertaken in Australia through depth studies and is carried out through the HI, which is a prescribed as an assessment task, in Singapore. Overall, the HI equates to about eight hours of curriculum time that students complete once in each lower secondary year (MOE, 2013, p. 9). Students undertake a research investigation, applying inquiry processes that resemble the work of a historian, and intended to result in the "real-world application of historical knowledge and skills" (p. 9).<sup>29</sup>

In contrast, in the ACH, there are three depth studies outlined for each year level. If we take Year 8 as an example, there are three themes outlined: *The Western and Islamic World*; *The Asia Pacific World*; *Expanding Contacts* (ACARA, 2015e). Within each, teachers are usually given two to three electives (see Appendix 3.12), from which they are allowed to select one topic that they wish to focus on. For instance, the electives for *Expanding Contacts* are *Mongol expansion*, *The Black Death in Asia, Europe and Africa* or

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<sup>29</sup> Suggested inquiry questions for Historical Investigations can be seen on pages 6 to 7 of the syllabus document. (MOE, 2013)

*The Spanish conquest of the Americas* (ACARA, 2015e). Each of these promotes historical inquiry and awareness, with some content elaborations briefly describing possible approaches or processes to use in developing students' understanding of these events. However, as the ACH does not prescribe assessment tasks, these depth studies can be perceived as merely a way of structuring content and topics to ensure a more chronological approach that establishes a level of standardisation across the jurisdictions in Australia, whilst ensuring teacher choice. Activities and tasks that facilitate historical inquiry need to be organised and implemented by teachers. Despite this, at the state level, the NSW syllabus mandates a site study for Stage 4, which can be undertaken online and appears comparable to the HI in Singapore (Board of Studies, 2012).

***Provision of Resources.*** The Singapore syllabus document recommends that the Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses be used in conjunction with the coursebooks, as well as the Teaching and Learning Guide, which was created as an additional, supplementary resource to support the teaching of history in Secondary 1 and 2. This guide not only provides additional learning resources, but also examples of effective teaching practices. In addition to this, each school received a source kit supplied by MOE's CPDD for Lower Secondary History. This kit provides primary sources and artefacts for all four units, including porcelain, earthenware, a map of early Singapore (1798), a letter of employment for a Chinese teacher (1835) and the Proclamation of Singapore's Independence (9<sup>th</sup> of August 1965) (MOE, n.d.). The existence of these sources is reflected in both coursebooks (MOE, 2014, 2015) and helps to validate the new historical inquiry approach to learning history.

In addition to this, the syllabus document provides a recommended reading list (MOE, 2013, pp. 76-91). All sixty-three sources identified possess bibliographical information, a call number for the National Library of Singapore and a brief description,

varying in length, which outlines a variety of information, such as the book's purposes, intent audience, potential value, and whether the text contains primary sources. Through these accompanying descriptions, a clear impression is provided in regard to each text's connection to the historical knowledge outlined earlier in the syllabus document. For instance, the description provided for *Singapore; The Unexpected Nation* by Edwin Lee, draws attention to Lee's (2008) analysis on "national service, economic development, education, housing, and national identity" (p. 76), which implies a correlation with several units but, in particular, Units 3 and 4. Furthermore, the sources are also not arranged alphabetically, but categorised under General References, or by the most relevant coursebook chapter, with headings provided to indicate relevant issues and themes. Although many of these texts could be considered Singaporean centric, the list does include international sources, as well as those presenting multiple perspectives. The inclusion of a reading list, like this, provides a strong foundation, which is grounded in academic, scholarly sources available to the public, so that teachers can expand their own historical knowledge and understanding.

The ACH, in contrast, does not provide an official academic reference list or resources to guide teachers' comprehension of historical topics being studied. In its current format, the ACH places emphasis on the use of external resources, such as those created by associations, individual teachers, the schools themselves or through tapping into resources provided by external organisations, such as museums or the HTAA. Some of these resources can be accessed through Scootle, an online learning repository, which is aligned with the Australian Curriculum.

*The Examination in the Singapore Process.* At the same time the assessment processes in the two countries differ in two fundamental ways, reflecting important differences in the social, cultural and educational contexts of each country. Whilst

examinations are not mandated for Lower Secondary History, it is present in the syllabus document. The Singapore syllabus provides sample questions for teachers to use in their classroom assessment in preparing students for the Source-Based Question and Structured Question assessment tasks. There is also an explanation of how marks are to be allocated to a range of possible student responses. Although the decision regarding examinations and assessment tasks is school based, there is much more of an assessment framework in Singapore.

*Assessing and Reporting Achievement Levels in Australia.* At Years 7 and 8 Australia's process for accessing students' achievement levels under the ACH is school based, while the reporting of results is a matter for the various state or jurisdiction authorities. The setting of assessment questions and tasks is the responsibility of the Year 7 and 8 history teacher and directly reflects the decisions made by the teacher on particular content to be taught and the pedagogical approach chosen. In most schools, however, they would work under the supervision of a senior history teacher. History teachers are also responsible for the assessment of the students' work into one of the bands of achievement levels under the ACH: Above Satisfactory; Satisfactory or Below Satisfactory. To do this, they follow the portfolio examples of student work provided.

However, in the lower secondary years, the reporting of the students' levels of achievement is not a matter covered in the ACH. Although all schools: state, catholic and independent are required to follow the ACH, the reporting of results is a matter of each state department of education, in the case of public schools, or the particular jurisdictions the Catholic Education Office or Lutheran Education authority for a given region, in the case of non-government schools. For schools that are completely independent, in that they control their own structure and organisation, the decision on reporting results rests with the School Council or Board of Governors, usually on the advice of the Principal and Senior Staff. Most

use a grading system from A to F, similar to that used for Year 12 assessment. In this scheme D represents a base pass, C a good pass, B a pass with credit and A a pass with distinction.

This arrangement of national control of curriculum, but state and jurisdiction control of reporting of results at lower secondary level is a direct reflection of the history of the balance of powers between federal and state governments in relation to schooling. In Australia up until the WWII, all aspects of schooling — establishment, maintenance, staffing, organisation, and curriculum — were the responsibility of the states (Campbell & Proctor, 2014). Since then the Commonwealth has used its growing control of funding to introduce a single national curriculum. However, up to now the establishing and maintenance of school buildings and the day to day organisation and running of the schools, including the reporting of results remains in the control of state governments, or the various jurisdictions and governing bodies.

## **V. Comparative Highlights**

### **1. A Central Commonality**

The analysis of the two sets of curriculum documents in Chapter Four and Five points to an important finding that requires further investigation and explanation in the chapters that follow. Chapter Four noted the great differences in relation to the ACH and the Singapore syllabus for the compulsory study of history in the lower secondary years, on issues such as the presentation and scope of the respective documents; the aims or purposes envisaged for history education in Years 7 to 9; and the very different content that the students in Australia and Singapore were expected to learn. In contrast, the analysis in Chapter Five points overwhelmingly to a commonality that is of central importance to the teaching of history in both countries at the present time. The emphasis for teaching in both curriculum documents is on the historical inquiry process and students' acquisition of the



skills needed for historical investigation. How this one commonality can occur, in the midst of so many differences, is a question that needs to be explained in the course of succeeding chapters.

As tantalising evidence of the complex interplay of difference and commonality, however, this chapter also demonstrates two main points of difference in relation to the way the commonality of the historical inquiry process was actually implemented in Australian as compared to Singaporean history classrooms in the lower secondary years. One relates to the way the two strands in the curriculum documents, the content and the skills, are linked in teaching. The second refers to the differing approaches to assessing students' learning of content and skills and in the case of Singapore, attitudes/dispositions as well.

## **2. Different Approaches to Linking Content and Skills**

In the ACH the two strands of the curriculum historical knowledge and understanding, on the one hand, and historical skills, on the other, are presented separately. There is little attempt to suggest ways of intertwining or combining the two in teaching, even though they are described as “interrelated strands” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 7). In the printed version for Year 8, where the content is arranged with elaborations, see Appendix 1.1, there is the equivalent of almost ten pages for historical knowledge and understanding content, and only two pages for the historical skills strand. The inclusion of so much content does have a purpose in enabling teachers to select curriculum to suit their individual classroom setting and provide greater diversity in the way students can carry out historical inquiry. It is thus clear that the Year 7 and 8 ACH relies heavily on teacher initiative and choice, as well as teacher interpretation to ensure the two strands of content and skills are linked most effectively for student learning.

Historical inquiry and its related concepts/processes are discussed explicitly in Singapore's syllabus, and what is more, discussed in terms of student development. As

mentioned in Chapter Four, this discussion is incorporated into the syllabus as introductory material preceding the content. This lays a solid foundation to enable discussion on historical inquiry to subsequently interlink with all other syllabus components throughout the entire document. As a result, once the prescribed content components of the syllabus document are presented, teachers have a concrete understanding of what is required to guide students' learning of higher levels of historical understanding and critical thinking. This process is made visible through the presentation of three diagrams: 1) Qualities of a History Learner; 2) Cycle of History Inquiry; and 3) an Amplification of the Inquiry Approach (MOE, 2013, pp. 2, 19, 20).

The Qualities of a History Learner diagram outlines the seven qualities that are intended to be developed in History “learners”, from the lower secondary to pre-university levels of schooling (MOE, 2013, p. 2), in a way that personalises the curriculum and places the emphasis on student development. In detailing specific values and attitudes, also seen elsewhere in the documentation, it generates the perception that History is a process and a way of thinking. This is supported by the Cycle of History Inquiry, described as a process of “doing history” (p. 19). Amplification of the Inquiry Approach then identifies the individual qualities of a history learner to be achieved in each stage of the inquiry, alongside its respective purpose. These “purposes” can be seen as key pointers for teachers on how to “facilitate a lesson using structured inquiry-based learning” (p. 20). Although this process is more prescriptive and “structured” than anything presented in the ACH (p. 20), it does directly establish the benefits to students' learning that can be derived from historical inquiry.

This foundation is subsequently supported in the Scope and Sequence Chart, which places historical concepts alongside historical skills under the heading of Practising History, which is discussed later in this chapter. Furthermore, historical skills are reflected as learning

outcomes in both the Scope and Sequence Chart, and the Amplification of Syllabuses. As mentioned earlier, these outcomes differ from those outlined in Section 2 of the syllabus document and reveal the integration not only of content, skills, concepts, but also the attitudes and values that students should acquire. This is a unique feature of the Singapore syllabus document which provides directions to ensure that outcomes are tailored to the cognitive and social development of students in these years.

In regard to the ACH, the historical skills strand reflects the process of historical inquiry. Each of the skills has its own content description under the following headings: chronology; terms and concepts; historical questions and research; analysis and the use of sources; perspectives and interpretations; explanation and communication (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 21-23, 34-35). The on-going use of these headings ensures a level of continuity between the historical skills strand for each year level.

On their own, these content descriptions are basic, in that they are expressed in very general terms to provide the possibility of applying them to the study of varying issues, events and themes. For instance, the ACH outlines that students in Year 7 and 8 should “identify and describe points of view, attitudes and values in primary and secondary sources” (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 23, 35). In contrast, a comparable outcome in Singapore’s syllabus document is expressed in terms of a specific historic context, asking students to “interpret people’s opinions about the policy changes in Singapore to deepen understanding of the adjustments people had to make after independence” (MOE, 2013, pp. 35, 66, 74). Attention is thus drawn to the concepts of change and continuity, as well as diversity through the seeking of various opinions. This allows for the possibility of using central themes to underpin learning, whilst the skills are structured and scaffolded to suit the unit of work.

Another example of the integration present in Singapore’s syllabus document can be seen in Unit 2, Chapter 4 of the Scope and Sequence Chart. Based on the inquiry question:

*How was life different for the various people in colonial Singapore before World War Two?*, the chart identifies diversity and causation as the two key historical concepts for this unit. The rationale for diversity states that “the diversity of people’s experiences can be discovered by identifying similarities and differences in their experiences” (MOE, 2013, p. 33); as well as explaining that “a common basis or criterion needs to be used to make a valid comparison of these similarities and differences” (p. 33). The criterion for this comparison can be seen in the content concepts outlined for this unit: community, pastimes, and living conditions. It also reflected in the learning outcome which expects students to “appreciate the rich cultural diversity of the people in Singapore” (p. 33). The Amplification of Syllabuses, makes this more explicit in its Making Connections section.

Exploring the concept of communities is important in helping students make sense of the factors and forces that shaped Singapore’s society. Students will also recognise and appreciate the human agency in shaping the cultural, political and economic context of a country. This would help students appreciate the importance of the community in ensuring the sustainable growth and development of Singapore now and in the future. (p. 70)

An additional learning outcome categorised under the heading of values and attitudes relates to the development of “empathy for the past and present migrant communities in Singapore by understanding the reasons for their decision to settle in Singapore and/or how they have adjusted to life in Singapore” (p. 70). Additional learning outcomes for knowledge and skills relate back to the overarching inquiry question. For instance, “identify and understand the key words in the inquiry question” or “gather, select and examine sources to extract relevant information as evidence to support the response to the inquiry question” (pp. 33, 70).

This type of integration evident in Singapore’s syllabus document is not present in the ACH. The inquiry questions for the ACH are positioned at the beginning of each year

level, and not referred to in the historical skills strand. Arguably, integration of the two strands is only apparent when the content descriptions for the respective strands are taken into consideration alongside their accompanying elective content elaborations. For instance, for the content description ACHHS209, students are asked to “identify the origin and purpose of primary and secondary sources” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 22). A content elaboration recommends the study of the Kimberley Bradshaw paintings (p. 22), which would seem to be very appropriate in the content descriptions in the historical knowledge and understanding strand, particularly in the mandatory depth study *Investigating the Ancient Past*. However, this possibility is not mentioned in the content descriptions or their elaborations for this depth study. The perception that the two curriculum strands are structured as two separate entities is thereby reinforced.

Although the Australian Curriculum does outline concepts and historical skills, these are placed in different parts of the document. As mentioned previously, historical concepts are identified at the beginning of each year level through a generic statement, which states:

The content provides opportunities to develop historical understanding through key concepts, including evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, perspectives, empathy, significance and contestability. These concepts may be investigated within a particular historical context to facilitate an understanding of the past and to provide a focus for historical inquiries. (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 15, 23)

In the ACH documents the conveyance of historical knowledge and content appears to take precedence over discussion of the processes that constitute historical inquiry. This is in part due to the amount of historical content needing to be outlined in order to provide teachers and schools with choice, but the comparative lack of discussion on the processes related to historical inquiry tends to make the skills in this strand of the curriculum more

implicit than explicit for teachers. This is demonstrated through the explanation of *evidence*, one of the historical concepts identified as a “key idea involved in teaching students to think historically” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 11). This is included in the introductory information detailing the structure of the curriculum; and later in the Year 7 Achievement Standard, which follows the sequential content for that year.

The December 2015 v.8.1 of the concept provides a more elaborated definition than in 2014 (v.7.1) that only included an elaboration on *evidence* in the glossary section (Appendix 3.17). However, it is still presented as a definition, proposing tentative possibilities and examples that a teacher may or can explore if they wish, and it is very carefully structured so as not to appear to prescribe content. This characteristic can be seen throughout the entire document, especially in the historical skills strand. This generalised form has been used whenever the varying processes are stated (highlighted in blue) in the form of electives. However, all of these processes are usually regarded as integral to historical inquiry. In comparison, if we look at Qualities of a History Learner and the Amplification of the Inquiry Approach in Singapore’s syllabus document, all of these ideas and processes are included as key attributes to be developed in history learners through the specific content of the various units.

In the case of the Australian Curriculum it is only in the Achievement Standards at the end of each year level that the historical skills, concepts, and processes are highlighted and drawn on together more clearly. As mentioned above, all seven concepts are included at the beginning of each year level and “may be investigated” if the teacher chooses. However, the Year 7 Achievement Standard provides no reference to the concept of empathy, whilst the inclusion of contestability, as well as cause and effect are implicit (ACARA, 2015e, p. 24). The concept of cause and effect, however, becomes visible in Year 8’s Achievement Standard, but contestability remains implicit and empathy is still not mentioned (ACARA,

2015e, p. 36). There is no link to where the students currently stand or history's link to present society (i.e. religious or community affiliations, etc.) in the ACH's Achievement Standards. In spite of this, the Achievement Standards have been identified as a way to "indicate the quality of learning that students should typically demonstrate by a particular point in their schooling" (ACARA, 2014c). In this way, it makes the assumption that these skills are assessable, and included primarily for credential and assessment purposes. They are not associated in any way with educational values or the personal benefits to be derived from learning history. The discussion thus ignores the process of developing students' historical consciousness and instead emphasises the achievement of outcomes required for accreditation.

## **VI. Conclusion**

The curriculum rationale from both countries claims that studying history promotes students' awareness of important issues and historical events, whilst instilling greater understanding, empathy and appreciation of different groups, cultures and societies (MOE, 2013; ACARA, 2014c; ACARA, 2015e). In particular, it allows students to develop an understanding of the past and its connection to present society (ACARA, 2015e; MOE, 2013). Relative to this is each country's approach to instilling the necessary skills in students that can assist them to effectively interact with the world around them; and develop the historical skills that are integral to history education. There is no denying, however, their varying approaches not only to content structure, but also to implementation results in differing perceptions of the subject and where emphasis is placed.

## **Chapter Six: Responses to the New Curriculum/Syllabus Documents**

### **I. Introduction**

In their different ways, the ACH in v.8.1 used as the basis of analysis in this thesis, and the 2014 Singapore syllabus for the lower secondary years introduced important changes to content, as well as new approaches to the teaching of secondary history in their respective countries. This chapter investigates the range of responses in the years immediately following the release of the two sets of documents. Various individuals and groups in Australia expressed their views on the content included in the ACH. A number made comments through the media, wrote academic articles or were involved in online discussions, particularly in relation to the controversy which emerged in relation to the content of the ACH. More extensive public commentary came in the form of submissions to the review of the Australian Curriculum; some of these were published as supplementary material to the *Review*. In Singapore, the inclusion of pre-colonial history extending back to the fourteenth century aroused some public commentary, even internationally. The views of academic history and history education experts, as well as teachers of history and History seniors, in both Australia and Singapore were gathered specifically for this investigation (see Appendix 4). For Chapters Six to Eight, the comments from these participants has been italicised.

### **II. Responses to Changes in Content**

The new curriculum/syllabus documents incorporated significant changes in content for lower secondary students in both countries. The new world history approach of the ACH



involved the introduction of new content, drawn from Asian history, for example, as well as adjustments to the Australian content of the state's curriculum document. The new 2014 Singapore syllabus was notable for its inclusion of five centuries of history prior to the 1819 proclamation of Singapore as a British trading post.

### **1. Public Controversy over Content in Australia**

In Australia, the 2013 federal election campaign revived the earlier heated public debate, particularly in relation to what a number of people considered was content that had been omitted or not sufficiently stressed. As outlined in Chapter One, much of the public discourse centred on the way that the ACH's emphasis on indigenous and Asian perspectives had led to a failure to deal adequately with the history of Western civilisation and its continuing importance in underpinning Australian society. This criticism was taken seriously by Donnelly and Wiltshire who were appointed by the newly elected Coalition government in 2014 to head a review of the Australian Curriculum as a national initiative (Hurst, 2014c; Taylor, 2014a).

In the *Review*, Donnelly and Wiltshire considered that the most important criticism of the history curriculum was its failure "to properly acknowledge and include reference to Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage and the debt owed to Western civilisation" (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p.177). This was seen most clearly in "the lack of a balanced and comprehensive treatment of the significance of Western civilisation and Christianity in the content descriptions and elaborations" (pp.177-178).

A number of submissions published in the *Review* from individuals, associations and jurisdictions highlighted these concerns. The Catholic Education Commission of NSW, for example, argued that the Australian Curriculum "needed to be amended in order to [in the words of the submission]: *More fully reflect the role, both past and present, of faith traditions generally and Christianity specifically in the development of Australia*" (Donnelly

& Wiltshire, 2014, p. 178). Associate Professor Stuart Piggin, Director of the Centre for the History of Christian Thought and Experience at Macquarie University, considered that “the role of Christianity in world, Australian and Aboriginal history is seriously underplayed in the curriculum as it stands” (p.178). Noting the failure to make any mention of Ancient Israel in the Year 7 content, Piggin suggested it be included in the depth studies (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014).

The *Review* also referred to submissions that considered that the Australian Curriculum was “balanced and free of bias” (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p.179). Most of the *Review* submissions expressing this view were from education associations and jurisdictions, including the HTAA, the History Teachers’ Association of NSW and Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta. The then Vice-President of the History Teachers’ Association of NSW, Toni Hurley, declared “I reject the idea that the syllabus reflects or presents an ideological bias” (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p.179). In Hurley’s view, there was “an absence of evidence for change at this point in the development and implementation of the Australian curricula” (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p.179). The submission from the Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta, gave a similar response, but backed it up with evidence it had collected.

The submission for Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta, on the basis of carrying out a survey of teachers, concludes that ‘there is significant support for the robustness, independence and balance of the current AC’ and, in relation to the history curriculum, notes that 85 per cent of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the history curriculum was independent and balanced. (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p. 179).

In fact, the discussion on Australia’s Judeo-Christian heritage and the inclusion of Western civilisation in the *Review* significantly outweighed other issues relating to history education.

Three out of the four recommendations for history education in the *Review* were on this issue (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p.182). Writing after the release of the *Review*, Taylor (2014b) claimed that the review “summarises two sides of an argument and favours one over the other without any analysis.” He pointed out that:

The review promised to be balanced, but a simple word count reveals some interesting biases. There are 111 cited or authored references to ‘religion’ or ‘religious’, 57 references to ‘spiritual’, 63 to Christianity, 26 of which are references to the mythic ‘Judeo Christian heritage’, 123 references to ‘values’, 55 references to ‘moral’ and 93 references to ‘Western’. In contrast there are only 73 references to ‘pedagogy’ ... and 42 references to ‘inquiry’. (Taylor, 2014b)

In a response that appears to correlate with the opinions of Taylor (2014b), Hart (2015) believed that not only were the recommendations put forth in the *Review* “disappointing” (p.58), but more importantly:

The reliability and validity of the *Review* is ... questionable given its over-reliance on a small number of select review submissions. It also appears to lack a framework for analysing these submissions and as a result commentary on history appears ad hoc and/or too anecdotal in nature. (p.60)

The history subject specialists, Clive Logan and Gregory Melleuish, were invited to contribute to the review. The papers they were asked to contribute were published as the *Review*’s Supplementary Material (Logan, 2014; Melleuish, 2014).

After the publication of the *Review*, several of the teacher participants contacted by the researcher made similar remarks to those expressed by education jurisdictions above. P3 commented that such discussions were no longer relevant *to the NSW curriculum as we have nuted out a slightly different strategy*. P10 reported that:

*One criticism that I have heard in many conversations, and which I agree with, is the push to have a greater inclusion on the role of religion, especially Christianity, in the making of Australia as a nation. Although this is important and should be covered, I question the validity of it being an integral part of the curriculum. It is understandable that the Catholic Education Sector would like to see more of this, but in a secular school such as ours it isn't necessary [sic] a high priority.*

In regard to the Catholic sector, submissions like the one above from the Catholic Education Diocese of Parramatta highlighted the range of responses regarding this inclusion. Two participants from differing Catholic contexts illustrate this point. P7 wrote:

*The point made about the lack of reference to Christian and Jewish heritage I find a little odd. There is not enough time in the day to teach all topics of history so to choose a variety of topics is important. I do believe that there is sometimes a political issue with ensuring students learning the aboriginal history of Australia, which I also feel is relevant. This curriculum, however, does allow for a range of religious history and units from a range of civilisations and areas of the world so I personally don't feel there needs to be too much of a change other than perhaps adding in Israel as an option for an ancient case study.*

In contrast, P13 referred to topics from the Year 9 level, to argue for more balance in the curriculum.

*Currently the National Curriculum has both positive and negative aspects. The inclusion of Industrial Revolution and Imperialism is vital to students understanding our modern world but the authors have also over emphasised many political points that may contain particular political biases. The almost total lack of reference to the British Empire and its impact (positive and negative) upon Australia is disappointing. The only sustained reference is to Frontier Conflicts and White*

*Australia policy. Whilst these are important facets of British influence the legacy of British innovation, technology, exploration, language needs to be addressed. Please don't feel im [sic] a right wing Imperial apologist, I am anything but. What I ask for is balanced historical discussion so that students may be able to reflect critically on the presented information and then formulate their own opinions about such historical events, people and institutions.*

More generally, in relation to the accusation of bias, P4 stated:

*I don't see any bias in the History Curriculum ... I like the way the curriculum is structured and I think it has been well tested before implementation. To me, the criticisms seem to come from academics who feel the need to have a differing point of view just to be controversial.*

*I don't think that they have clarified issues at all!*

These comments from teacher participants do not show the sort of concern over content that was being expressed in the public domain.

## **2. Singapore Commentary on the Inclusion of Pre-colonial Content**

Many comments made in Singapore, following the release and implementation of the 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabuses, related to the extension of the period for the compulsory study of Singapore's past back to the fourteenth century (Ng, 2014; Peterson, 2014). Although Ng Jing Yng (2014), a journalist for *Today*, noted, some events in the fourteenth century had been mentioned in previous syllabus documents and their accompanying textbooks, the 2014 syllabus has a much greater focus on the earlier period, including information on the fall of the Srivijaya Kingdom, a maritime kingdom which existed between the seventh and thirteenth centuries in parts of modern day Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia and Thailand. The study of fifteenth century archaeological artefacts

found in the Old Parliament House has provided new knowledge and understanding of other topics in this early period (Ng, 2014).

Ng (2014) referred to the opinions of three individuals, Shinderjeet Kaur, Chua Ai Lin and Kho Ee Moi, who considered that important progress had been made in understanding the history of Singapore before British colonial rule. Shinderjeet Kaur, a history teacher from Juying Secondary, highlighted the direct benefit to students, of being able to visit historical sites through the introduction of the HI. Kaur considered that “[s]tudents will be stretched to think differently about Singapore’s early history – one that does not only feature our colonial past” (Ng, 2014). Similarly, the comments of Chua Ai Lin, a historian from the National University of Singapore; and Kho Ee Moi, an educator from NIE, drew attention to the developments in historical content in the 2014 syllabus (Ng, 2014). They agreed with the view expressed by Kaur that the study of Singapore history before the nineteenth century enabled students to learn that the modern nation of Singapore was not simply a result of colonial rule (Ng, 2014).

Singapore’s 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabus attracted international attention, when Jane Peterson, writing in *The New York Times* in early May, of the same year, asserted that Singapore had “rewritten” its history. Peterson (2014) largely credited John N. Miksic, an American archaeologist at NUS, for the development, through his work in the Southeast Asian region and the archaeological evidence uncovered. She referred to Miksic’s opinion, that the recent syllabus changes were the effect of former students obtaining “positions of authority in academia” and the MOE (Peterson, 2014). In specific relation to education, Miksic believed that the 2014 syllabus, with its emphasis on use of primary sources, was “designed to repair Singapore’s educational image,” in particular “the stereotype that Singaporeans are not good at creativity” (Peterson, 2014).

Peterson (2014) questioned the reasons behind waiting thirty years to change “the story”. Various reasons were provided by the academics she consulted. Kwa Chong, an adjunct associate professor at NUS, believed “[u]ntil a connection could be made, the tons of archaeological shards Miksic excavated remained of antiquarian interest” (Peterson, 2014). Brian Farrell, a professor at NUS’s Department of History, considered that “[i]f Singapore before 1800 was a sleepy backwater, the Chinese majority could say, ‘We built Singapore; before it was a blank slate’” (Peterson, 2014). The opinions of Derek Heng, a history professor at Yale-NUS College, were also referred to; he considered the delay in recognising Singapore’s pre-colonial history was influenced by “the government’s fears of communal conflict in the 1960s and ‘70s” (Peterson, 2014). Heng also commented that there was “a need to develop a collective social memory,” which in his opinion had become “a political issue” (Peterson, 2014). In comments that corresponded with Chua Ai Lin and Kho Ee Moi’s above, Heng believed Singaporeans “will feel more rooted if they see their early predecessors as part of a longer regional legacy” (Peterson, 2014). Peterson (2014) quoted Kwa’s belief that “[e]very generation has to rewrite its history”.

Interest in Singapore’s historical heritage was becoming more evident in the community. In October 2014, the government announced the creation of a series of historical trails and exhibitions, the “SG50 trails”, to commemorate the anniversary of Singapore’s independence. In her report to *The Straits Times*, Rachel Au-Yong (2014), referred to the comments of Indranee Rajah, then Senior Minister of State (Education and Law), in making an explicit link between these commemorative trails and the implementation of the Lower Secondary History syllabus. At the time, it was anticipated that these trails would increase student’s engagement and appreciation of the nation’s past. This wording directly reflected the aims of the Lower Secondary syllabus introduced in classrooms earlier that year (Au-Yong, 2014). In addition to providing a direct reference to the new Secondary 1 coursebook and the history source kit, Rajah stated that in the syllabus there “is an emphasis on people

and their experiences. This allows our students to draw personal relevance to the history and develop empathy” (Au-Yong, 2014). Furthermore when asked by Tan Tai Yong, then a Nominated Member of Parliament, about the strategies employed at schools to develop students’ appreciation of the nation’s past, Rajah stressed the importance of schools utilising museums and other sites to ensure students “go beyond the textbook” (Au-Yong, 2014).

As seen above, the publication of commentary concerning history education in Singapore often appears to occur when historical events are being celebrated. This was seen in 2019 through Singapore’s bicentennial celebrations for its establishment as a British trading port (Tan, C.-J., 2019). Public recognition of the importance of Singapore’s history was considerably reinforced in the years immediately following the introduction of the new lower secondary history syllabuses by two important events – the death of Singapore’s first Prime Minister, Lee Kwan Yew, and the Golden Jubilee celebration of Singapore’s achievement of independence, after the separation from Malaysia (“More to history than just recalling,” 2015; Tan, 2014; Toh, 2015). A member of the public wrote to MOE, enquiring about what strategies schools were implementing, in the lead up to Singapore’s Golden Jubilee, “to help students develop a better appreciation of Singapore history” (Tan, 2014), and in what ways the Lower Secondary History coursebooks “addressed” this concern. This letter was almost identical to one published in the MOE’s Forum Letter Replies only sixteen months earlier (Chua, 2013), except in this case a Nominated Member of Parliament, Tan Tai Yong, referred to the “new” 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabus document.

In addition, Tan (2014) drew attention to commemorative days, such as Racial Harmony Day or National Day, which he considered were not only important in reinforcing “learning experiences” at school, but showed the ways in which students could “apply their learning to contribute as active citizens” (Tan, 2014). Within his response, Tan (2014) emphasised the benefits of the Secondary 1 coursebook, and the ways in which the history



source kits provided by MOE complemented learning, in an inquiry-based approach to studying history. In reference, to inquiry-based learning, Tan (2014) claimed that students were not only “encouraged to reason and draw meaningful inferences using historical sources”, but through the emphasis on individual experiences, students could “develop empathy and an understanding of history.” Tan (2014) also added that the “stories” included in the syllabus “reveal the shared memories, life experiences and hopes of Singaporeans. Through all these educational activities, students will develop a keener appreciation of Singapore’s history”.

Less than two years after schools began implementing the “new” Lower Secondary History syllabus, then Education Minister, Heng Swee Keat, announced in August 2015, that MOE would review how national history was taught in schools. According to Toh Yong Chuan (2015), the journalist covering the event, this was largely a response to the “public outpouring of grief after the death of founding Prime Minister Lee Kuan Yew.” Heng (Toh, 2015) commented that MOE was considering “several ideas”, which would ensure schools could “relate the past better, and relate it not just as a matter of historical facts, but also the implications for our future” (Toh, 2015). Although an updated version of the 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabus was published in 2016 (for implementation in 2017), this document, apart from additional figures on the responsibilities of students when conducting inquiry, can be seen as simply a condensed version of the 2014 document, as the main content, pedagogy and material remained the same (MOE, 2016a).

An editorial, produced by *The Straits Times*, highlighted Minister Heng’s comments in stressing that the aim of history education “should be to bring the past alive and help students see how today is shaped by events from yesterday, and tomorrow might depend on the choices we make” (“More to history than just recalling,” 2015). This approach was favoured over “socialising the young into roles based on normative and ideological views of

the nation's development and challenges", which in the view of the editorial, was reinforced through the "'national education messages' of schools' character and citizenship programmes" ("More to history than just recalling," 2015). Through substantiating its argument, this editorial piece emphasised that "enlightened teachers" did use historical inquiry, which assisted in developing students' critical thinking skills, but that this approach requires students to examine historical evidence to "probe different interpretations of history" ("More to history than just recalling," 2015).

Following the publication of this editorial, *The Straits Times* published four significant replies within the next seven days, each presenting a different outlook on the situation. The first letter, from Kwan Jin Yao, commented that whilst classroom pedagogies did impact upon learning, in Kwan's opinion content was "more important" (Kwan, 2015). Kwan (2015) argued that MOE should "review the content taught to the young", particularly since, "common criticisms include an over-emphasis on the purported success of post-independence Singapore, with little said about ancient or even modern Singapore; [and] the absence of diverse narratives, especially with the most controversial episodes." One of Kwan's (2015) recommendations for changing the "current discontent" was to "engage former students and current educators in discourse, to gather feedback on their experiences in the classroom", which could lead to the sharing of productive and effective teaching practices.

Kwan's (2015) letter, particularly the emphasis on including alternate historical perspectives, drew several responses, which were subsequently published on *The Straits Times* website. One letter, written by Teh Chee Siong (2015), emphasised "recent changes" in pedagogy and the content covered. Drawing upon personal experience teaching history in Singapore, Teh (2015) noted that although "the post-independence period is weighed more towards nation-building", the new history syllabus does highlight Singapore's involvement

in trade prior to 1819. In response to Kwan's (2015) concern over MOE consultation processes, Teh (2015) noted that not only did MOE "periodically" involve students and current educators in focus groups to "gather feedback on how the subject is delivered in school"; but "regular workshops" were also held to "provide the platform for practitioners to acquaint themselves with the latest pedagogical trends." Teh (2015) concluded that:

many history lessons today are increasingly underpinned by an inquiry-based approach, as educators continue to make the learning of history not only enriching, through the delivery of content, but also pivotal in the development of critical thinking skills, which will prove valuable in the 21st century.

On the same day, August 21, *The Straits Times* published Yik Keng Yeong's (2015) reply, in which it was argued:

until there is a revision of historical narratives, what is taught will have to stand, for what it is worth, partially objective and partisan, malleable and manipulated as the truth often is ... It is important to know our history, but it is far more significant to discern and discriminate how and why it is written ... Still, national history must foster unity and strength in togetherness ... Perhaps it is not so important to derive a multi-angled perspective of our nation's heritage, which is fraught with as much inaccuracy and partial truth as a unified version is ... What is more essential is for us to recognise our common future destiny and our need to pull in one direction, despite different interpretations of the past.

The last response to Kwan's (2015) letter, was published one day later by Lee Teck Chuan. Whilst acknowledging processes linked to historical inquiry, Lee Teck Chuan's (2015) response also connected with collective memory.

It is difficult to generate discussions without hearing out subjective viewpoints ...  
The nature of history as a subject precludes it from being apolitical. One cannot just write or teach history without interpreting it ... History gives a people their collective memory. We cannot ignore history. It tells us who we are.

It should be noted that MOE has since released another history syllabus for the lower secondary years (MOE, 2016a). The syllabus document does not include modifications in approach or content, thus this commentary to not only coincided with the time in which the data was collected but reflects what is happening in today's society.

Whilst both the main editorial piece ("More to history than just recalling," 2015), and Kwan's (2015) letter, make reference to historical consciousness, in articulating their argument, all three authors discuss historical inquiry and critical thinking. These topics, even in the context of discussing content, were seen as crucial talking points and integral to the effective implementation of history in the lower secondary years. These inclusions in a major national newspaper, highlight a major difference in the public commentary, compared to Australia. Apart from selected articles written by academics and experts, which appeared in *The Conversation*, the majority of articles, published by Australian media outlets, relating to history education at the secondary level, centred on the content to be covered and politics. They content did not involve inquiry processes or students' engagement in history classrooms. This is strengthened when the articles and parliamentary replies discussed above are taken into consideration (Au-Yong, 2014; Ng, 2014; Peterson, 2014). All of this commentary, in varying ways, not only made reference to the new history coursebook (Au-Yong, 2014; Ng, 2014; Peterson, 2014; Tan, 2014); but discussed approaches and strategies that were being applied in lower secondary classrooms. This included the use of artefacts (Ng, 2014; Peterson, 2014; Tan, 2014), inquiry-based learning (Ng, 2014; Tan, 2014), the history source kits supplied by MOE (Au-Yong, 2014; Tan, 2014), or the emotions that can

be encouraged through the study of history, such as empathy (Au-Yong, 2014; Tan, 2014). This could be considered a marketing strategy, to convince the public of the new developments or even to overcome previous stereotypes, but nevertheless, it has succeeded in shifting the conversation from one based on content and political ideology, to student-centred learning and heightening students historical understanding and awareness.

### **III. The Extent of Politicisation**

Public debate on the ACH was at its height in the lead up to the 2013 federal election and the subsequent publication of the 2014 *Review*. As the previous section explained, the chief criticism related to the supposed neglect of Western civilisation, in particular what was referred to as Australia's Judeo-Christian heritage (Ferrari, 2014; Hurst, 2014c; Taylor, 2014a). When this criticism was supported by the incoming Commonwealth Minister for Education in the newly elected Coalition government, Christopher Pyne, fears were expressed that the national history curriculum of Australia had become a political issue.

The debate between academics of conservative and progressive views were becoming aligned with political parties on the left and right of the ideological continuum. The *Review* itself noted the potential politicisation of the curriculum, by claiming that: “this whole issue also raises a question for the future as to whether it is sound educational practice for politicians and policy makers to be continually ordering contemporary themes into a national curriculum” (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014, p.102). When several of the history experts involved in the development of the new curriculum agreed to take part in this research study, the opportunity was taken to ask them how far the process of developing the ACH, as they had experienced it, had been politicised. This group of participants was made up of two academic historians, a specialist in history education, and a representative of the HTAA. Similar questions about the nature of the process of developing the Singapore

syllabus were given to the one history expert from Singapore who had agreed to participate in the study.

Adjunct Professor Tony Taylor from the University of Technology Sydney, provided a brief description of the group established by ACARA to guide the Australian Curriculum development process. He, himself, was appointed *as history education consultant* in late 2008. Over the period

*2009-20012, a small and highly capable History Advisory Group of which I was a member did most of the curriculum design. There were others who came in later but the core Advisory Group members were Stuart Macintyre as academic historian, Paul Kiem as HTAA representative and as a history teacher and me as history education person.*

In his reflections, Professional Fellow Stuart Macintyre from the University of Melbourne, remembered that:

*The writing of the curriculum involved individual writers of varying ability, presenting their drafts for discussion by meetings of the reference group that were usually rushed. The ACARA officers responsible for this process were also of varying levels of expertise, and the curriculum committee of ACARA made some unilateral decisions (about the organisation of the curriculum, its length (there was a lack of clarity about the number of classroom hours to teach it) and even some particular studies.*

His comments are consistent with Taylor's description of the early years of the Advisory Group. When asked how far he considered that the curriculum development process had been 'politicised', Macintyre provided a clear account of how, and at what point, there was an attempt at politicisation, and what the eventual outcome was.

*The development process was almost entirely free of politics or 'ideology'. The States and Territories agreed to develop a national curriculum. Those involved in preparing the history curriculum were drawn from the historical profession and experienced history teachers; and their work was exposed systematically to wide consultation.*

*The contrast with the attempt by John Howard to impose a course of Australian history could not have been greater.*

*There was an attempt to politicise the Australian curriculum, principally by organisations such as the Institute of Public Affairs and some Coalition politicians. Their argument was couched in terms of the need to affirm the superiority of Western civilisation (thus they criticised cultural relativism) and the Judeo-Christian tradition (a term imported from the New Right in the USA).*

*These criticisms were taken up subsequently by Christopher Pyne and the review he commissioned, but that review provided no evidence that either historians or educators agreed with such criticisms and it had very little impact.*

Taylor made a similar judgement on the extent of politicisation of the process. *Hardly at all 2008-2013 apart from ACARA management treading carefully in an effort not to offend interest groups.* Taylor also mentioned *the farcical review of 2014.* In his view it came to *nothing*, at a time when he considered *most jurisdictions were well advanced with their implementation.*

Associate Professor Gregory Melleuish, who was appointed as a subject matter specialist for the 2014 *Review*, considered that the political influence on the development of the ACH was *less than one might have thought.* In his view, the *curriculum was much more influenced by bureaucratic inertia and a lack of knowledge about the current state of*

*historical knowledge. The whole process tended to be bureaucratic and determined by some odd bureaucratic principles. The danger he saw was that [o]nce things are in place they can be very difficult to change.*

The topic of bureaucracy also emerged in Paul Foley's response, who expressed that during the development of the ACH, it was

*highly consultative at different levels and then the writers went to work, I think there was some frustration between different drafts of writers' work and what came back from ... [b]ureaucracy. So, at times there was an interesting relationship between writers and bureaucracy, I was not a part of that, but this is what ... was conveyed.*

Foley also stated that *you can't eject politics from curriculum development. And we've seen that come and go in different stages and forms. You know there have been different ministers who have had different interests in the curriculum.* These comments directly reflect his role as a teacher involved in several rounds of ACARA's consultancy process.

In contrast, the staff member at NIE in Singapore, provided a clear outline of the process involved in the development of a new history syllabus for given year levels. As described, the process was essentially an educational and administrative function carried out by MOE and reporting to the Director General of Education. There was no mention of any external political influence.

Despite these conclusions, Michael H. Lee (2015) has demonstrated that the "political nature of history education in Singapore can be vividly observed" (p. 150), particularly since the subject has been "manipulated by the PAP-led government to consolidate its political mandate" (p. 150). This is partly for the "sake of national and political interests" and to ensure important messages are "propagated in the society" (Lee, M.H., 2015, pp. 147; 150). An example of this is the study of racial riots that occurred in the



1960s, which highlights the importance of racial harmony “for public order and social stability” (Lee, M.H., 2015, p. 150).

As with many countries teaching their national history, Singapore’s history education intersects with wider aims of Singapore’s education system, including the National Education program. The staff member at NIE states that *[t]he lower secondary history curriculum lends itself well to fit in NE and CCE. Teachers can reinforce NE messages and values covered in CCE.* Michael H. Lee (2015) highlighted that “History education, together with the NE programme, as a political propaganda is not effective in making more young Singaporeans to support the ruling party, but they are more patriotic and proud of being Singaporeans without necessarily being affiliated with the PAP” (p. 150). Despite this, there have been recent changes, especially in regard to the implementation of the NE program, which would make it “more interesting and relevant for students” (Teng, 2018).

As outlined in Chapter One, Singapore’s education system has constantly been reviewed to respond to new needs in society. In March 2018, after “a year-long review by the National Education Review Committee” it was announced that the National Education program would be “refreshed” (Teng, 2018). Lianne Chia (2018) reported that Janil Puthuchery, Senior Minister of State for Education, had acknowledged that there were individuals that felt “the storyline is worn or tired, or, as MP Ang Wei Neng pointed out, that NE is propaganda.” Whilst the program would still “centre on nurturing a sense of belonging to the country and community, a sense of Singapore’s realities and challenges, and a sense of shared hope and aspirations as a nation” (Chia, 2018), the modifications were driven by “changing global social, economic and political contexts” (Teng, 2018). Puthuchery acknowledged that the program needed to “empower” its “students to discover what being Singaporean means to them personally – not because the syllabus says so, but because they themselves know so” (Chia, 2018).

In contrast, public debate in Australia on the content of the ACH, the establishment of the *Review* and fears about the politicisation of the curriculum had largely died out by 2015. After 1600 submissions (Hurst & Murphy, 2014; Tudball, 2014), numerous proposals and counterproposals on topics such as cross-curriculum priorities, general capabilities and the cause of overcrowding in the history curriculum (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014); two different proposals for paring back the content (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014), were released with the final report, which outlined 30 recommendations (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014). The *Review* eventually *came to nothing* in Taylor's opinion, or *had very little impact* in Macintyre's view. As Taylor put it, the *Review* seemed to *have calmed things down on the ideological front*. Some academics have considered that the *Review* had been completed too prematurely (Hart, 2015; Reid, 2015).

Misty Adoniou, as one of the panel of experts whose views were published by *The Conversation* (Adoniou, Loudon, & Savage, 2015), pinpointed the structural change which could be seen as ending the immediate fears of politicisation. In 2015, there was a change in leadership within the federal Coalition government, with Malcolm Turnbull replacing Tony Abbott as Prime Minister. The ministerial reshuffle that followed saw Christopher Pyne become the Minister of Defence and Simon Birmingham the new Education Minister. Birmingham whose personal experience was in the area of TAFE, had no special interest in the national history curriculum.

The final stages of the national curriculum development process were completed with little fuss on public outcry. The final approval of the curriculum document rested with the Education Council, formerly the Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs, made up of all the Commonwealth, state and territory ministers of education. Only four of the *Review's* 30 recommendations were approved and

ACARA was directed to incorporate these changes into the curriculum document (Brennan, 2014). These recommendations were:

- Reduce curriculum crowding
- Increase parent accessibility
- Address the needs of students with intellectual disabilities
- Increase phonics in the curriculum (ACARA, 2015c; Adoniou et al., 2015)

In the political power vacuum left by Birmingham's appointment, the Education Council succeeded in re-affirming the rights of the states and territories to adapt and modify the curriculum to suit their particular needs and structures. This move was to be expected in a constitutional context "where states and territories retain control of the curriculum for their schools" (Brennan, 2014). In practice, the states and territories, as well as many school jurisdictions, wanted the flexibility to implement the ACH in ways that suited their particular school and local context. This proved to have important implications for the history curriculum to be discussed in the next section. Overall, according to Glenn Savage (Adoniou et al., 2015), in *The Conversation*, there is "a good argument to be made that Australia doesn't [*sic*] really have a national curriculum yet. Instead, our federal system of governance has ensured multiple interpretations and enactments of the curriculum have emerged across states and territories."

#### **IV. Resurgence of Multidisciplinary Approaches to Learning**

It appears that one of the reasons contributing to the diverse approaches to implementing history at school level was the difficulties some states had to encounter in order to implement history as a standalone subject. Adding to the complexity of the issue, was the most recent curriculum development that emerged from recommendations outlined

in the Review, which was the implementation of a HASS subject in primary school. This decision technically “scraps” the teaching of Geography and History as individual subjects, instead amalgamating them with Civics and Citizenship, Economics and Business studies. In theory this reverts back to the teaching of SOSE. Adoniou (2015) noted, one year after the release of the *Review*, that “[t]he curriculum has become “uncrowded” by combining history, geography, civics and citizenship, and economics and business into one subject - which is what everybody had been doing anyway. So not much innovation there, just a bit of smoke and mirrors” (Adoniou, Louden, & Savage, 2015). This curriculum model is only one approach being utilised in an attempt to rebalance the curriculum and solve its overcrowded nature (ACARA, 2015b, 2015d).

This development has now progressed allowing provisions, particularly for smaller jurisdictions, to implement a Year 7 Humanities subject instead of the disciplinary alternative. This is despite the notion that History is still a compulsory subject in Years 7 to 10. This change occurred as part of “the Education Council request ... [to ACARA to] ... provide advice on the four themes outlined in the Australian Government’s initial response to the *Review*” (ACARA, 2015b, p. 5). During this process ACARA’s draft changes “were distributed to an identified group of key stakeholders for consultation [in April and May this year. They were also] provided with ... online surveys and invited to respond” (ACARA, 2015b, p. 5). Nevertheless, as Alaric Maude (2014) highlights a “reversion to SOSE is at odds with the final report’s support of a more rigorous curriculum based on discipline knowledge.”

Although “there was moderate to strong agreement for the redesigned [Year 7] curriculum by [some educational jurisdictions] ... professional associations did not support the redesigned curriculum” (ACARA, 2015b, p. 69). In the June ACARA Consultation Report (2015b), when detailing concerns and subsequent proposed future directions, it was

noted that “53% of respondents did not support a combined HASS [subject] for Years 7–8” (p. 70). Despite this it has been placed on ACARA’s website for implementation in schools.

Although referred to as a Year 7 to 8 curriculum, a Year 8 curriculum alternative has not been established for implementation. Some of the other concerns listed relate to the curriculum being overcrowded, the need for “academic rigor” and disciplinary skills in certain parts of the Year 7-8 HASS redesign. Despite the emphasis on these issues, in the new curriculum document little development has been made to handle these concerns. Prior to the release of the consultation reports, several academics commented that they believed the *Review* valued knowledge over disciplinary approaches to learning, the acquisition of skills. In regard to the proposed future directions, which expressed concerns at “loss of discipline specificity in the combined set of skills” (ACARA, 2015b, p. 70) with the recently released Year 7 HASS Curriculum. Several elements were seen to be lost in the transition, including historical skills and the concurrent use of inquiry skills, integral to the processes of historical inquiry. One noticeable concern with this approach is the lack of preparation needed in these year levels in order for students to have the capabilities and skills for effective learning at Year 9 and beyond.

This R-6 development in HASS does raise questions about its influence on the middle school years, and also the distinct problem facing many South Australian schools who still situate Year 7 in primary school. Tambyah (2015) considered “returning history in the primary years to an integrated humanities subject is a retrograde step unlikely to deliver the conceptual foundation necessary prior to Year 7 History” (p. 54). Paul Foley’s personal response pointed out that *most History teachers around Australia saw that as a retrograde step and it challenged the concept of the Australian Curriculum because it made it an even more difficult process*. This issue was discussed several times by Foley, who also acknowledged that *most history teachers, the voice across the nation, was that they regarded*

*that step as no longer History, independent History, as an unfortunate outcome.* Foley also expressed empathy toward primary school teachers, who had embraced the ACH, stating *I feel for colleagues that have had to deal with those changes ... my opinion would be one of absolute empathy with the frustrations that some of my colleagues have had to experience.*

Documents, released in 2015 (ACARA, 2015b, 2015d), which detailed the changes proposed by ACARA at the time, presented the alternative Year 7 SOSE subject, as one that could be utilised in “smaller schooling jurisdictions” (ACARA, 2015b, p. 7). Although “there was moderate to strong agreement for the redesigned [Year 7] curriculum by [some educational jurisdictions] ... professional associations did not support the redesigned curriculum” (ACARA, 2015b, p.69). Additionally despite the fact that “53% of respondents [involved in the consultation process] did not support a combined HASS for Years 7–8” (ACARA, 2015b, p. 70), and the acknowledgement (in the same report) that this revised subject needed to possess modifications to clarify and enhance discipline-specific skills and processes to ensure students were prepared for further learning (ACARA, 2015b, p. 70), a Years F–6/7 HASS curriculum has been outlined under the title of *Sustainable pasts, present, futures* and has been showcased in further ACARA documentation. Arguably these subject teachers can draw from Year 7 topics related to the ancient world to ensure discipline specificities, such as concepts and skills, are encouraged in their classroom. However, this relies on teacher interpretation and capacity. The difficulties that prompted the R-6 curriculum reform would still be applicable to some Year 7 teachers.

This R-6/7 HASS development does raise questions about its influence on the middle school years. Students coming into Year 7 History from Humanities R-6, or Year 8 from the Year 7 alternative would possess content knowledge related to history, but would have likely experienced little introduction to history literacy skills and no experience of actually using them in practice, even in a small way. This ensures differentiation to student knowledge in

these years, but also in their level of comprehension and historical understanding. This development highlights, not only the pedagogical security found in teaching SOSE for many teachers, but also that the thrust of the national curriculum is negotiated against state priorities, helping to continue the status quo.

## V. The View from the Schools

The written comments by teacher participants in both Australia and Singapore on how the new curriculum/syllabus had been received by fellow teachers, students and parents, made little mention of any political influence in the development of the new documents. The concerns discussed were more practically orientated to classroom teaching: how to become familiar with the new demands, master the new knowledge and skills required, and help students understand the new expectations and assessment procedures.

When asked how they thought the ACH had been received in their schools, several Australian participants noted a generally positive reception, although in some cases it had taken time to adjust to the new curriculum and recognise its benefits. P8 commented that the ACH had been received *[q]uite well by all groups*, elaborating that *[t]eacher's initially had a 'been there, done that' approach during the initial years. However, the focus on historical skills and concepts changed these opinions*. P7 stated:

*Overall I think it has been received positively once teachers moved on from the fact that it would require a large amount of planning. Schools and teachers get very set in their ways and this made changes meaning teachers had to change their resources and programs significantly.*

A broader view was taken by P10 who claimed that *[t]here are some teachers who love it and there are some teachers who hate it. Generally those who hate it are the older teachers who are set in their ways about what they want to teach.*

Teacher participants from Singapore reported a similar response from teachers there. P6 explained that *[a]lthough my teachers were initially worried about the changes as they were not initially used to the demands of the inquiry, they are now more comfortable with it and are able to deliver the lessons with ease.* P11 asserted that:

*For some teachers, it is a welcomed change and [a] move away from the traditional, top-down approach of history teaching, where the emphasis was not so much on encouraging students to ask questions, but merely receive historical knowledge from teachers themselves.*

Although the implementation of the new history inquiry approach was seen positively, particularly in regard to the renewed emphasis placed on critical thinking, P9 did raise potential limitations and concerns:

*I think there's mixed reactions from the teachers with regards to the 2014 history syllabus. I think the teachers appreciate that the syllabus encourages an inquiry approach, with the aims to inculcate critical thinking skills in the students as well as the desired outcomes of a 21st CC learner. However, teachers also feel stressed as they need to complete the syllabus.*

When asked how they thought the ACH had been received by students in their history classes, several participants noted a positive reception overall. P8 considered that his group *have had a largely positive view towards the curriculum.* P2 explained that *students [were] challenged by the topics [in the Australian Curriculum], but noted their increased engagement,* and the fact that students were *enjoying the topics.* P3, from the same school



NSW 1, reported a similar response, claiming that her *classes have enjoyed the changes*. As a teacher, she wrote that: *I have enjoyed the ability to create a school developed depth study when we move to year 10 that is supported by learning in earlier years.*

In regard to the way in which Singapore students had responded to the 2014 syllabus, P5 noted that *[s]tudents certainly enjoy it more because it allows them to construct and discover*. However, P14 highlighted the limitations that still exist in the syllabus document, since it results in students considering that their nation's history is *uninteresting*. P14 did consider that this situation could be attributed to the study of Singapore history in the primary years – an opinion similar to views of some Australian participants on aspects of Australian history taught in primary school.

A number of Australian participants drew attention to the fact that response from parents had been minimal. Whilst P8, as mentioned above, indicated that the ACH had been received *[q]uite well* on the whole, he added that *[p]arents have not provided feedback*. P7 stated: *I ... do not feel that students [and] ... parents have much awareness of the change. Especially the current students and parents who have no knowledge of what is different*. P4 supported this view but went on to explain that *[a]s with students, I have found that parents have little understanding of the progressive nature of the curriculum, but once they know, they are also more engaged. I have only had positive responses*. However, P2 indicated that parents were involved in the teaching of history at her school and were *interested in the new topics*. Such comments show that the involvement of parents in the teaching of history varied according to school contexts. P12 exemplified this through discussing the differences between attending a school in the city versus a rural location. She explained the different responses at her school. The new curriculum there had been received,

*[m]uch more favourably by students and parents than teachers. Most parents appreciate that SA is aligned with other states as they can feel confident that their*

*students in our small rural school are gaining the same skills as those in a large private school. Many older teachers, however were sceptical of 'yet another' curriculum change.*

P10, also from a school in South Australia, found that both parents and students had difficulties in understanding the new patterns of assessment in the new Australian Curriculum.

*Parents have found it difficult to adjust to the assessment criteria. Whereas a 'C' grade means that a child is achieving at a level which we expect from them, and against tough criteria, many parents still see a 'C' grade as a bare minimal pass. Many students have this same view too and get frustrated that they are not achieving A[']s even though they are not showing the skills required against the achievement standards.*

This highlights that parents only seem to factor into participants' responses when it involves issues that affect children's performance at school. Therefore, whilst assessment does not factor predominantly into Australian teacher responses, this issue appears to come across when discussing parents' wider interests.

A connection to student performance was also evident in the responses of Singapore participants, all from different schools, regarding the way in which parents perceived the new syllabus. P14 stated that parents *have been concerned that they are unable to tutor/coach their children as the current syllabus focusses on source-based skills which they are not familiar with*. P11 recognised the involvement of parents in the teaching of history by stating that for this group, the new approach *can be a little unsettling as some prefer the more familiar teaching approach of getting students to absorb information and regurgitate them for assessment purposes because it appears a more secured way of ensuring that their children score well*.

The desire of Singapore parents to be involved in their children's learning of history, was so considerable that P5 mentioned that in her school *[w]e hold talks for our parents to help them understand the changes to the History curriculum so that they do [not] impose their experience of studying History on their children*. P5 went on to add that, once they understand it, the *emphasis on thinking is valued by the parents and the community*. These responses demonstrate how parents and the wider society can come to value the academic skills that Singapore students are now able to acquire through history.

## **VI. Reflections on the Whole Process**

In this section the views of those who were in a position to be involved in and able to observe the whole process of developing the curriculum/syllabus documents for Australia and Singapore are discussed. The small group of history experts, four in Australia and one in Singapore, who accepted the invitation to participate, were asked to write, about their reflections on the development process.

In the case of Australia, this spanned the hopes and frustrations of the earliest meetings in 2008-2009 to the disappointments and concerns about the ACH, which included the amendments from the 2014 *Review*, and the evidence of its actual implementation in history classrooms. The process in Singapore was viewed much more as a regular routine procedure of revising an established syllabus. In contrast, in Australia a national curriculum for all schools in all states was being developed for the very first time.

When the national curriculum was first announced, teachers and academics, alike, were excited at the prospect of being included in Phase One of implementation (Henderson, 2015). Foley expressed being *overwhelmed with excitement* at this development. With reference to the Australian Curriculum, in general, he highlighted that *people generally*

welcome[d] the concept of an Australian Curriculum. Explaining that *I think most people still ... to this day regard the Australian Curriculum as an excellent not only concept, but a sensible thing to do and it should be. When you think about our size and population it makes sense and remember some of the reasons for it was other nations with greater populations than ours have a national curriculum.*

One of the history experts from Australia was quite negative to the whole process and its end result. Melleuish considered that from the beginning the *curriculum was a dog's breakfast and as far as I can tell it has not changed a great deal ... 'Too many cooks spoil the broth'*. He did acknowledge, however, that

*History curricula have always been contentious ... Australia is more heterogeneous now than it was then so there will be critics who feel left out or that their viewpoint is not given enough attention. This can perhaps be resolved by having a core in the curriculum and allowing flexibility in the options.*

In contrast, Taylor's overall judgement, based on his extensive involvement in the first four years, was positive, with a few reservations.

*Considering that this was the first serious attempt in Australian history to draw up a nationally-agreed curriculum and that ACARA was finding its feet 2009-2010, I thought it was handled reasonably well. There were a few exasperations along the way, chiefly a tendency by the unseen hand of the ACARA Curriculum Committee (which we knew nothing about until mid-2010 by the way) to meddle with the Advisory Group's drafts.*

Taylor paid tribute to the work of the project officer in this achievement.

*One thing that was a huge plus was the appointment of Darren Tayler as project officer 2009 onwards. He was an experienced teacher and an assiduous and*

*knowledgeable official who held things together brilliantly and had the complete confidence of the Advisory Group members.*

For Taylor, one of the great disappointments was the change in the allocated teaching hours for history.

*[O]ne of the major issues for the Advisory Group was the change in the indicative teaching hours from 80 pa (secondary) and 40 pa (primary) to zero. The whole curriculum framework was predicated on those hours and when the hours were slowly reduced and then dropped altogether, it placed the implementation of the 2010 design in a difficult position because of content overload and because it effectively edged history out of its 2008/9 core status. I think the indicative hours issue is ACARA's biggest failing as far as the history curriculum is concerned. What it means is that timetablers can squeeze the subject into a small corner of the curriculum.*

The reduction in the hours allocated to history has been a constant source of difficulty for teachers trying to cover all that is required in the “overcrowded” ACH (ACARA, 2015b, 2015d), as is shown in the implementation chapter that follows.

From his perspective as the National President of the HTAA, Foley expressed that the development of the ACH was *highly consultative at different times*. Whilst he noted that the *Review was not a consultative process*, he also showed that *we have been through different waves of experience ... in terms of how ... [we] were consulted*. In fact, Foley's remarks regarding the development of the ACH intersected with all other academic and expert views, shown above and below, on this process.

Macintyre mentioned the same issues in relation to the workings of the Advisory Group mentioned previously by Taylor, such as the interference of ACARA and especially the *lack of clarity about the number of classroom hours to teach the history curriculum*. He

also recognised the uncertainty of the final outcomes at the school level since implementation rested with the states.

*The national curriculum was restricted to an agreement by States and Territories to teach the curriculum and report outcomes; it was left to the States to determine how it would be taught, by whom, with what support and for what number of hours.*

For Macintyre, the result at the end of the process was *a sub-optimal curriculum*, a long way from his hopes and expectations in conceiving the original design of the curriculum as a discipline-based world history approach, which incorporated the history of Australia. His main concern related not to *those changes made to accommodate Christopher Pyne's review*. These were much more limited in his opinion than the *far more radical change* made by grouping history with Civics, Geography and Business Studies in ways that failed to align the content and outcomes of these subjects, and attenuated the historical content. This change had come, almost unannounced at the end, as a result of the re-affirmation of state and territory rights through the Educational Council in 2014-2015 (Adoniou et al., 2015; Brennan, 2014). A number of states have revealed to relevant to a multi-disciplinary approach in primary schools by including History with HASS. Macintyre saw this *multi-subject framework as by far the most damaging later change to the ACH* since it involved the loss of the disciplinary approach to the teaching of history from R-12, as had been envisaged in the original Shape Paper for this new compulsory subject (NCB, 2009). The consequences of this change at school level are considered in the next chapter.

The process of developing a new history syllabus in Singapore, as described by the staff member at NIE was very different.

*The process is rather thorough as there is a series of consultations with academics and history teachers through focus group discussions. The officers in the Curriculum will conduct a mid-term review of the current syllabi which is on-going now. First,*

*there will be an internal review by the officers based on feedback from teachers. Second, the officers will hold focus group discussions at cluster and zonal levels to seek feedback on the new syllabi. After getting all the feedback from the ground, the officers will form a syllabus review committee inviting academics, teachers, assessment officer and other branches at MOE. Once the syllabus review committee endorses the revised syllabi, it would then be reviewed the Curriculum Development Committee (CDC) comprising the Director General of education and the Divisional Directors. When CDC clears the revised syllabi, then the curriculum materials will be prepared.*

*The whole process takes into account the sentiments of the history teachers teaching the syllabi. It is not a top-down approach where teachers have no say in the development of the syllabi.*

There was another dimension to the development of any new history syllabus in Singapore. Provision was automatically made students in pre-service education programs to know and understanding the new syllabus. In-service courses were provided for teachers in schools to update them on the content and skill requirements of the new syllabus. The role of NIE was acknowledged in the statement that:

*At NIE, we prepare the pre-service teachers to understand the history syllabi, the assessment format and teaching approaches.*

*We support MOE in ensuring that our history teachers are well-equipped in their skills in order to deliver the syllabi in class. We also conduct in-service courses at the request of the History Unit to support teachers in the content area as well as pedagogy.*

## VII. Conclusion

In the case of Singapore, the inclusion of its pre-British origins and the introduction of inquiry based approached to history learning have been recognised as significant achievements of the 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabus (Lee, M.H., 2015). In Australia, however, the process of developing the ACH as a new national subject proved to be contentious on a number of fronts. Its reception was therefore likely to be positive from some groups and individuals and more negative for others.

Singapore's media commentary on the release of the 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses aroused considerable comment. In Australia, the intense media interest in the ACH around the time of the Coalition coming to power in 2013 and Pyne's announcement of the 2014 *Review*, faded to almost nothing once the *Review* was released. Only a few astute observers note the re-adjustment in the balance of powers in curriculum matters between the states and territories and the Commonwealth that emerged at the implementation stage. It remains to be seen how far this represents a change in the politicisation debate, from one based on the ideological divisions between the left and the right in the academic field of history and in political life, generally, to politicisation based rather on debate over federal and state rights and interests.

For some of the history experts in Australia, their hopes of what could be achieved through making history a national subject, taught through all levels of schooling in the spirit of history as a discipline in its own right, were dashed. Taylor's comments, however, suggest that although the 2015 revision of the ACH fell short of what its designers had hoped for, it had achieved some worthwhile changes, which good teacher could take advantage of.

In the case of the teacher participants both in Australia and Singapore, their comments were initially rather mixed, as they tried to come to grips with the new requirements expected of them and their students. The experiences of teachers in



implementing the new curriculum/syllabus documents are explained in more detail in the chapter than follows.

## **Chapter Seven: Comparing Issues of Implementation in Schools**

### **I. Introduction**

This last chapter of data analysis focuses on the experiences of the fourteen teacher participants, nine from Australia and five from Singapore, in using the new curriculum/syllabus documents in their history classrooms. Chapter Six presented the initial response of the teachers to the new history documents. This chapter concentrates more on the teachers' comments on their new features, those they liked and those they had some difficulty in implementing. The discussion also incorporates statements from the public commentary and the reflections of the history experts, as well as reference to the curriculum documents themselves, where these are directly relevant to a point made by the teacher participants. Tables 1 and 2, provided in Chapter Three, gives an indication of the public commentary sources used as the basis of discussion for this chapter.

The open-ended guideline questions (see Appendix 4) allowed the teacher participants to write their personal responses in their own way and in their own time yielded very insightful responses. It was evident from their comments that although the fourteen teachers who chose to participate in this study had varying amounts of experience, they all appeared to be well informed and confident in teaching history. Those who were history seniors (i.e. TCH) at their school possessed a broader understanding of teacher capacity across all history classes taught in their own and comparable schools. Many of these participants wrote at length in responding to the questions.

## II. Teachers' Views on the Main Purposes of History Education

One of the guideline questions asked the teacher participants what they considered the main purposes and aims of history education to be. Many discussed this in detail, their responses often reflecting statements in their respective curriculum documents, but often revealing their own personal thoughts and feelings which went beyond anything the documents stated. While there were some purposes and aims that were common to teachers in both countries, on the whole the range of purposes and aims discussed by Singapore teachers was somewhat narrower than their Australian counterparts, although it must be noted that the teacher participants from Singapore were fewer in number than those from Australia.

The various purposes and aims of history education discussed by the teacher participants could be grouped under eight broad categories. These were derived initially from the discussion in Chapter One. Other purposes and aims emerged from the curriculum/syllabus documents and also from the written comments of the participants themselves. The purpose categories were:

- National
- History in general, seen as non-national, in that it focused on the history of a number of groups and individuals, not just one's own country
- Global
- Discipline of history
- Personal
- Historical concepts and skills
- Historical investigations
- Cultural diversity

The main thrust of the history in general purpose was well explained by Melleuish, one of the academic experts in this study and a consultant in the *Review*. He considered that in Years 7 and 8, history should be *non-ideological in nature [and] used to tell stories about the past and individuals in the past which encourage students to think imaginatively about history, the human condition and what life was like in the past.*

Each teacher's comments have been analysed according to those categories. Table 7, below, maps the responses of each of the Australian and Singapore participants against the broad categories of the purposes and aims of history education. This analysis leads to a discussion of the similarities and differences across all participants from both countries. The Australian participants are discussed first.

***Australian teachers.*** P1 saw the purpose of history education as *ensuring they [the students] understand important dates or events that have shaped our nation.* She was the only participant to refer to Australia as a nation. This was matched, however, with the statement of a more generalized purpose, *to educate students on the past.*

For P2, the main purpose of history education was to foster in students *a love of history*, which would help in their development as *lifelong learners*. She also considered that *teaching them [students] how to think critically* was an important purpose of history education. P3, too, considered that fostering *a love of history* was an important purpose of history education. In addition, she went on to emphasise *an understanding of how we got here and what makes us what we are.* She also believed that developing *highly inquisitive minds and outstanding research skills* were important purposes of history education.

Teacher Participants	F/M	National	History in General*	Global	Discipline of History	Personal	Cultural Diversity	Historical Concepts and Skills	Historical Investigations
<b>Australia</b>									
P1 (TAS 1, Teacher)	F	X	X						
P2 (NSW 1, TCH)	F					XX		X	
P3 (NSW 1, Teacher)	F		XX			X		X	X
P4 (TAS 2, Teacher)	F	X	XXX	X		X		X	X
P7 (NSW 2, Teacher)	F		XX	XX		X			
P8 (SA 1, TCH)	M		X					XX	X
P10 (SA 2, TCH)	F	X	XX	XX		X	X	X	X
P12 (SA 3, TCH)	F	X		X			X		
P13 (SA 4, TCH)	M		X					XX	X
<b>Total mentions (43)</b>		<b>4</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>No mentions</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>Singapore</b>									
P5 (SGP 1, Curriculum Specialist)	F	XXX			X			X	
P6 (SGP 2, TCH)	F	XXXX		X	X				
P9 (SGP 2, Teacher)	F	XX						XX	
P11 (SGP 3, Teacher)	M	XX				X			
P14 (SGP 4, TCH)	F	XXX		X	X	XXX	X	XXX	X
<b>Total mentions (31)</b>		<b>14</b>	<b>No mentions</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>6</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Key</b>									
X Mention of one specific example or feature of the purpose concerned. There is one cross for each separate feature/purpose mentioned									
* Focus is on history of any group and individual, generally not exclusively one's own country.									

Table 7: School participants' main purposes and aims of history education.

P4's discussion concerned most of the eight categories of the purposes and aims of history education. In her view, the study of history can help students *have an understanding and appreciation of past events as they will be the ones who will influence our future, hopefully they will prevent the mistakes of history being made again. It makes students far more informed.* Her discussion continued,

*If things are taught well, with historical skills being embedded in engaging tasks, then these skills develop naturally and knowledge and understanding are enhanced.*

*I think our students need to become global citizens and without some general knowledge of world history then we become very parochial and inward looking. This is not what our country needs!*

The statement of P7 included the history in general, the global and the personal purposes. In addition to noting that fostering *a love of history* was a main purpose in history education, she wrote

*An understanding of the past particularly those events which have shaped this world is crucial for students to understand why the world is the way it is at the moment. This leads to students who are more aware of the world and can make informed decision later in life.*

For P8, studying history was important *for learning/making connections with the past.* Another important purpose was *[d]eveloping critical learners who are capable of analysing the facts and drawing their own conclusions to the causes/outcomes of these.*

P10's statement also concerns most of the purposes of history categories. She wrote, *[O]verall History is all about getting students to think about the past and reflect on how it helped shape the world they live in today. It is to help them gain understanding*

*of the world they live in, to learn from the past, and to become global citizens who have empathy and acceptance of different cultures and the way people live.*

She also commented on the importance of inquiry process which can develop skills like *recognising bias in sources such as the media* in a way that can assist students to become active and informed citizens.

In her statement, P12 wrote that in history education, *to produce active and informed citizens is the main goal. It is also important for students to develop understandings of multiculturalism, intercultural perspectives and Australia's place in a globalized world.*

For P13, the main purpose of history education had many facets, which he brought together in a statement, which went beyond the subject of history. He maintained that *[w]e want informed, critical thinkers that are able to discern truth from fiction. We also emphasize the skills of literacy so that communication can become improved for all learners.* He pointed to factors in the out-of-school lives of students that inhibited the achievement of these purposes.

Overall, the 43 mentions of the purpose in the comments of Australian teachers were clustered around three purpose categories: History in General was mentioned 12 times; Historical Concepts and Skills eight times; and Doing Historical Investigations five times. These last two represent a total of thirteen mentions from Historical Inquiry. Together these three purposes of history education, representing the two main thrusts of the ACH, received well over half the mentions, 24 out of 42, of the purpose categories. However, there were as many as another 18 mentions (more than a quarter) across four other categories of purpose.

***Singapore teachers.*** Among the Singapore participants, P5 considered that one aspect of the aim of history education was

*to provide [the students with] ... historical perspectives but more importantly, is the ability to assess what is happening using historical lenses. ... [A]s a citizen of the country, [it is] important that they learn about the country's history so that they can understand what we are today.*

The historical lenses are what students gained as they learned historical concepts and skills through the Lower Secondary History syllabuses.

Most Singapore participants expressed the view that the main aim of history education was to provide students with an understanding of their national history. P6, for example, listed five aims, three of them related to the way the learning of history could contribute to the building of the Singapore nation. Of the other two, one related to understanding global interconnections and the other to understanding the nature of history as a discipline, open to new information and interpretation. P6's response stated that history at the lower secondary level is *taught to make students:*

- *Understand the Singapore narrative*
- *Appreciate the contributions of our forefathers to Singapore's nation building*
- *Understand how events in the past can have an impact on Singapore's current or future events*
- *Understand how countries around the world are very much interconnected politically, economically and socially*
- *Understand that History is [not] a fixed narrative for it is open to various interpretations and is constantly evolving with the revelation of new information.*<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Since the sense of the statement does not make sense without "not" it has been added, even though it was not actually written in the text.



P11 explained the purpose of emphasising Singapore history for lower secondary students in terms of its influence on their sense of identity.

*One of the main aims would be to inculcate in students a sense of belonging to Singapore, a place that they may or may not be born in. Through learning its history, they may also come to appreciate the past contributions of various groups of people in Singapore and build in them a sense of importance of being resilient as a nation.*

The importance of students learning to appreciate Singapore's past was reflected in a number of other participants' responses. The inclusion of the word *appreciate* indicates the recognition that needs to be given to the impact that previous events, actions and attitudes have on present day society. P9, for example, considered the aim of history education related to students gaining an understanding of *the struggles that Singapore had before it got to where it is today*. In this teacher's opinion, the students at lower secondary level were *able to emphasise well, especially when topics such as Japanese Occupation are taught and the wrongful killing of the Chinese are mentioned*. Another important aim was *inculcating the critical thinking by encouraging them to take multiple perspectives*.

The main detailed discussion of the purpose of history education came from P14. In all, there were 14 distinct features mentioned in a concise few lines, including three in the category of personal purpose and the only mention of the cultural diversity purpose among the Singapore participants. She saw the purpose of history education, in terms of

*equipping them [students] with the necessary historical knowledge, understanding, dispositions and skills to understand the present, to contribute actively and responsibly as local and global citizens, and to further study and pursue their personal interest in the past. This also involved developing in students an inquisitive mind, and the ability to ask relevant questions about the past and examine a range*

*of sources critically in their historical context to reach supported responses about our nation's past and history in general.*

In P14's opinion, the learning of history should also help students to *[u]nderstand and appreciate their cultural and religious roots and take pride of how our diversity has made us unique*. The use of the word *roots* suggests a direct link between the Lower Secondary History syllabus and the students' own culture and heritage.

In marked contrast to the Australian teacher participants, almost half of the total 31 mentions of the Singapore participants referred to the National Purpose. There were six mentions of Historical Concepts and Skills and one relating to Historical Investigations, making a total of six in the Historical Inquiry area, approximately a fifth of the total Singapore mentions. Together, the National and the Historical Inquiry Purposes represented almost two thirds of the purposes mentioned by the Singapore teacher participants. There were no mentions of the History in General purpose that had been given a relatively high number of mentions by the Australian participants. The remaining four categories received a total of 9 mentions from Singapore participants, with four of these coming from one participant, P14.

***Comparative Discussion.*** A check of the ACH Rationale and the Singapore's Statement of Philosophy in Chapter Four, as well the statements of historical inquiry in Chapter Five, with the personal comments of teachers in both countries shows evidence of the public statements on purpose influencing the way the teachers expressed themselves. The Singapore teachers' comments, in particular, revealed wording and phrases that were very close to those found in the official documents. This indicates the degree of familiarity that the teachers who chose to participate in this study had with the curriculum and syllabus. They were well-informed and knowledgeable but had thought out for themselves, what their purposes and aims were in teaching history in lower secondary classes.

Table 7 shows that the teachers' responses in both countries were scattered across most of the categories of purpose. The most obvious difference was the concentration on national identity among the Singapore teachers compared to History in General for the Australian participants. The next most frequently mentioned area among both groups was Historical Inquiry, although the Historical Investigation purpose was mentioned more often by the Australian, compared to the Singapore, teachers. These responses show close alignment to the main thrusts of each country's curriculum documents.

### **III. Teachers' Responses to New Features of Curriculum/Syllabus**

The majority of Australian participants in this study responded positively to the new Australian history curriculum. This was consistent with the finding Taylor reported from his longitudinal study conducted over 2011-2016, the period of the development and introduction of the ACH. This study involved *surveying secondary teachers in Queensland, NSW and Victoria*. He found that *the overall response has been that the AC [i.e. the Australian Curriculum] is an improvement on what went before*.

The staff member at NIE, summarised concisely the main changes introduced into Singapore's 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses. Apart from the option to spread the course over Secondary 1 and 2, he pointed out that the most important innovations were *the introduction of historical investigations* and historical inquiry as *the main teaching approach*. In his assessment, *though teachers generally welcomed the new history syllabi, there are some who felt that there should be more content*.

#### **1. Features Australian Teachers Liked**

Responses from all Australian teachers provided an understanding of what aspects they most appreciated. Some teachers saw continuity between the old curriculum or syllabus

document as they taught it and the new ACH. P2, for example, stated *[w]e had a smooth transition from our old syllabus, many of the skills etc [sic] were easily adapted*. This is supported by Paul Foley who believed, in Years 7 to 10, *that there was continuity, it just meant re-shuffling*. When discussing the conceptualisation of the curriculum, Foley even pointed out that *the Australian Curriculum, [is] ... a package you can pick up and walk with*.

The new features of the ACH were appreciated by several participants. P2, for example, claimed that *she enjoyed teaching new topics, change has forced 'refreshing' of topics, skills and approaches*. P3, from the same school, also recognised the change in the topics she was teaching, noting that there was *plenty of choice* in the depth studies. P1 also saw the positives of the ACH in its *range of topics*, and the resulting *variety to allow the teacher some choice*. The amount of 'freedom' provided in the Australian Curriculum regarding the topic selection and choice was commented on by others in this study, mirroring opinions seen in public commentary. Responding to comments in the *Review* of too much freedom in topic selection, P10 declared:

*I ... don't agree that there is too much choice within the curriculum. Every class you teach is different and they have different skills and interests and there needs to be some flexibility to be able to adapt a course to suit their needs and be able to engage their interests.*

From her experience, P7 commented, *I like the structuring of the curriculum. The idea of a core subject and then options for the various depth studies allows freedom for schools while also ensuring all students Australia wide study common themes*. P12 also wrote of *the scope for teacher choice in specific topics*.

Additional features mentioned positively in P12's comments were *connections with other learning areas (e.g. English)*, as well as *[s]ignificant benefits as the curriculum is much more focused and chronological, which negates issues of overlap between year levels*.

From another perspective, P4 appreciated that *the curriculum is sequential as it does tie in with students developing maturity levels as they move from years 7-10*. The same participant also reflected on the benefits associated with the ACH being a national document.

*I very much appreciate the National Curriculum as the consistency across year groups means that I can increase my depth of knowledge of every topic each year, which is vital. It also means that if I have students arriving from other schools – interstate or from within the state, with some questioning I have a very good idea of which topics they have already covered.*

The world history approach was the defining feature of the ACH, which was new to many teachers. Taylor explained the significance of this, in his personal comment, that *[o]ne of the major points of AC History which distinguishes it from other non-Australian programs is its integrated world history perspective*. The world history approach to studying history was well received by Australian participants and received attention in public commentary (Koelma, 2014). P8 considered that:

*Students need to be able to contextualise Australia and its history with the world to get a true understanding of History. Based on this, it is very important to have a world history approach. The ... [Australian] Curriculum allows this to happen and provides a good framework for schools to do so.*

As P3 put it, *the benefit of a broader world view is good. Students are placing Australia within its context*. P4's statement highlights the same point: *I agree with this [world history approach] wholeheartedly and think it means that our students become far more global citizens*. Similarly, P3 commented *I like it, Australia shouldn't be studied in isolation as it was previously. This creates more well-rounded scholars, who have the ability to transfer these skills to other aspects of their lives*.

In contrast, P7 highlighted a limitation in regard to the world history approach in the lower secondary years of schooling, *I don't feel that this [the integration of Australian history into world history] is true for years 7-8. Their topics can easily be taught with no mention of Australia. They certainly cover a world view, but do not tie in [with] Australia well.* As seen in Chapter Six, this is a persuasive argument and intertwines with the researcher's analysis of the curriculum document. This comment came from a participant in NSW, which as mentioned previously, includes more Australian history in the lower secondary years than the ACH used in other Australian states. This issue is briefly reflected in Foley's interview. Whilst acknowledging that *teachers welcomed the opportunity to place specific history in the global context*, he also stated that *[i]n terms of the content, say for example Year 8, it's a challenge.* Despite this, Foley believed,

*there is a balance across years ... you move through your Ancient civilisations in Year 7, and in Year 8 you're [sic] doing Medieval history, so you have a global context, a consistently global context with also the opportunity to look at Indigenous histories all the way through, all the way through in Year 8.*

In his response to guideline questions about the way in which the ACH prioritises global contexts, Macintyre argued that *[t]he world history approach was not properly realised in the primary curriculum, but remains in Years 7-10 ... Within those years, the treatment of Australian history in years 9 and 10 is clumsy.* His concern was that *[t]he primary curriculum is far too limited and parochial, and fails to introduce students to Australian history within a broader context.* Melleuish pointed out that *the curriculum has always struggled with getting the balance right, but then it never seemed to be interested in getting experts in global history on board.*

## 2. Features Australia Teacher Found Difficult

The comments provided by Australian participants indicated that there were certain features of the new ACH that some teachers found difficult to implement in their history classes. P7 acknowledged that there were considerable changes to be made.

*The introduction of the Australian curriculum ... meant a big shift in the planning of unit's [sic] of work as well as resources used, which involved a lot of extra time to look at what the changes [were] ... as well as programming whole new units of work.*

The comments of P10 provided insight into the difficulties faced by one South Australian school in their implementation of the ACH. P10 explained:

*The main issues revolve around the development of the required historical skills and the achievement standards. When the curriculum was first introduced it was felt by many teachers in South Australia that the content and skills had jumped ahead a year level. For example, what was generally being taught at Year 8 was now being taught at Year 7. This meant that what was being expected at Year 9 was now being expected at Year 8. For many students the skills and achievement standards were unrealistic given the fact that [the ACH for Years 7 and 8 was] designed for students who had been studying History every year at primary school and had a sound base of those skills already. Many students [in South Australia] had done little to no History at primary school so to get them to reach the [new Year 7] achievement standard at the end of a semester was sometimes too difficult of a task. This has eased slightly but continues to be an issue.*

Three participants noted concerns with the suitability of the overviews within the current structure of the ACH (P2, P7, P8). P2 considered that the *overviews are a distractor, not particularly effective in isolation*. P8 indicated that within his particular school context *[o]verviews have been abandoned in Year 8 as the time allocation to teach both the History,*

*Geography, Civics and Economics in ONE [sic] semester is insufficient and unrealistic.* P7 stated:

*I personally do not like the introduction of Overviews for each topic. These sometimes feel like teaching students a bunch of random facts so that they will eventually understand something. I think these could be incorporated into the topics instead of a separate thing to teach.*

Taylor, in this personal response, expressed *disappointment* that:

*the original split between the Overviews and Depth Studies was not kept. What we have now is an improvised arrangement brought about by pragmatic grassroots changes and that's OK but we shouldn't [sic] really have had to do that in the first place ... [t]he Overviews having been reduced to 10% of teaching time, that was always going to be a problem. Originally the design was about 30% Overview and the rest Depth Studies.*

The overviews do possess benefits, by establishing, for instance, connections between depth studies. Otherwise, the lack of an overarching framework, could produce a fragmented understanding.

### **3. Features Singapore Teachers Liked**

The comments of the Singapore teachers were consistent with the judgement of the staff member at NIE in the opening paragraphs of this section, in that all appeared to welcome the introduction of the new syllabus, with its emphasis on historical inquiry and the skills this encouraged. P6 wrote:

*Generally, I find that this syllabus is much better than the previous one as the information is more focused hence enabling us to spend more time focusing on skills and conducting the inquiry rather than trying to complete teaching the content.*



P14 considered that it was *a move in the right direction. The syllabus allows the teaching of critical thinking to the students.* According to P11, the fact that the 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabuses could be implemented over a period of two years allowed *a more in-depth study.* He went on to explain that the various parts of the document, such as the Desired Outcomes of Education, the Scope and Sequence Charts, and the Specimen Questions and Mark Schemes, *helped frame ... [his] teaching in class, and serve[d] as [a] useful reference for the kind of assessment that teachers come up with.*

The staff member at NIE noted that Singapore *[s]chools are given flexibility in adapting the history curriculum ... to cater to the academic abilities of their students. There are schools that do not cover entirely the whole history syllabuses.* Several participants illustrated this in describing variations in the document's implementation.

P5 provided insight into the way in which the syllabus document had been adapted to suit a particular school context, particularly at the Secondary 2 level.

*Sec Two 2016 continues with the teaching of Singapore History but it follows a personalised curriculum approach. Core syllabus is taught in the first semester and in the second semester, the students will be offered modules to choose from. At Secondary Two students learn about unrest in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and the political changes that eventually brought about the independence of Singapore.*

P6 also explained that:

*[w]e complete the entire syllabus but we choose which aspects of the syllabus we should focus more of our attention on while skimming through the others. Narrowing our focus to certain aspects of our syllabus helps us to focus more of our attention of the teaching skills and inquiry.*

These examples suggest that at school and classroom level in Singapore, there is a degree of flexibility and room for adaptation to suit a school or class's needs.

#### **4. Features Singapore Teachers Were Concerned About**

Only two Singapore teachers commented on difficulties they had encountered in the teaching of the new syllabus. Both of these comments related to the area of assessment. The first related to the analysis of primary sources and the introduction of *source-based questions* as a means of assessment. The experience of P11 led him to the recognition that the sorts of questions given as examples in the syllabus and used in school assessments, *do not allow a wide variety of interpretations, and are therefore not always reflective of a historian's work, which often involves analyses of many sources at one time.*

P9 had a more general concern about the limited range of history assessment for Secondary 1 and 2 under the new syllabus. She explained the *2014 syllabus only test students on selected skills in secondary 1 and 2. While this gives teachers more time to ensure students have a firm foundation in these skills, the students do assume that history is easy to score.*

### **IV. Implementing the Historical Inquiry Process**

The introduction of historical inquiry to complement the historical knowledge and understanding strand in the ACH and as the recommended pedagogy in the Singapore syllabus made the teaching of historical concepts and skills a fundamental priority in the lower secondary years. Teacher responses from both countries showed that participants were using a variety of activities, student and teacher centric, designed to heighten students' historical understanding and critical thinking skills. These included source analysis (P1, P7), creating artefacts (P4), and using a collaborative approach to research (P3). Participant

responses from Singapore indicated similar activities, particularly in regard to source analysis (P9, P11). The staff member at NIE referred to the evidence of historical inquiry activities and hoped there would be *[m]ore opportunities to do hands-on activities in the classroom by means of collaborative learning* in future syllabuses.

The curriculum/syllabus had introduced new requirements specifically designed to give students the opportunity to make use of historical concepts and skills in some form of investigation. This is undertaken in Australia through depth studies and is carried out through a HI in Singapore.

### **1. The Historical Investigation in Singapore**

In the Singapore context, as previously mentioned, the HI is a prescribed assessment task, equating to approximately eight hours curriculum time that students complete once a year at the lower secondary level (MOE, 2013). It involves students undertaking a research investigation, applying inquiry processes that resemble the work of a historian. The result is a “real-world application of historical knowledge and skills” (MOE, 2013, p. 9).

P9 considered that *[s]tudents who kinaesthetic learners enjoy the HI very much as they get to collaborate with their friends and create a final product*. As P14 explained, the *Historical Investigation projects enable students to work together and shift history assessment from solely pen-paper mode*.

Despite this, limitations were noted in comments from several academic and teachers. The staff member at NIE identified that *[t]ime is a constraint even though there are 12 to 14 periods set aside for HI*. P14, similarly noted that *there was not enough time to cover skills, content and Historical Investigation projects. For historical investigation projects the students especially [those in Secondary 1] ... needs a lot of guidance to complete the project*. P9 raised a similar concern, noting that *[s]tudents need much guidance from the*

*teacher from every stage before they can comprehend the question and stages. This removes some form of self-directedness that we wish to inculcate in them.*

P11 drew attention to another difficulty with the implementation of this component of the syllabus, stating:

*The different stages prescribed in the process of inquiry sometimes overlapped one another and made the process of HI work more cumbersome than necessary. Stages 2 and 3, for example, could easily be combined into just one stage to simplify the nature of the task so as to make it more accessible for students.*

P6 contextualised the implementation of this assessment task by stating that *[i]n term 3, we introduce the Historical Inquiry Package to the students and we dedicate around 6-7 weeks of the term to answering the inquiry.* The staff member at NIE also commented that teachers *find it difficult to take students out of school for the purpose of gathering evidence due to manpower and other issues. Some teachers ask students to search online for sources and evidence.*

## **2. Depth Studies in the ACH**

In contrast, in the Australian Curriculum both in Year 7 and 8, there are three depth studies outlined. This new initiative in the ACH was well received by several participants. P7 commented, *I have found that students really enjoy the depth studies. Particularly ... [Year] 7 who are very enthusiastic they enjoy learning about a topic in great detail and then moving onto another topic.* The importance of the link between the in-depth topics also referred to in P1's response. She saw *[e]nsuring a smooth transition ... [and] link to the new topic area, from the previous unit* as a benefit of the depth studies.

There were varied opinions about the content of depth studies, whilst P12 considered that *[t]he depth studies are very good, although heavily biased toward Australia and Asia.*

*This seems very political.* Other participants, however, highlighted the absence of Australian content, which is an issue for Year 7 and 8 in the ACH.

Some participants drew attention to the way in which the inclusion and structure of depth studies in the ACH contributed to time constraints in the lower secondary years. P4 stated that *[o]ne of the difficulties I have had is that for a year 7 student, sometimes the depth studies seem to go on for too long.* The same participant highlighted the complexity with this component of the ACH, commenting that the depth studies may seem to *create a fragmented understanding of historical events, but I think students are more likely to retain the information if they have studied it more in depth.* Two additional participants addressed the issue of fragmented understanding, which was identified in the *Review* (Logan, 2014; Melleuish, 2014). In the opinion of P12, *[i]f taught in isolation, they can produce a fragmented understanding of historical events, but this is where universities need to focus on developing pre-service teachers' abilities to combine ideas and teach in themes rather than isolated events.* The third participant to comment on this issue, P8, provided an explicit context for the difficulties of implementing depth studies in Year 8, stating: *[t]ime allocation in Year 8 only has led to fragmented understanding of historical events. However, this is not the case in Years 9 and 10.*

As they do not prescribe assessment tasks, these Depth Studies could be perceived as merely a way of structuring content and topics to ensure a more chronological approach to history teaching that establishes a level of standardisation across jurisdictions and Australia. This can be seen through the set content descriptors and elaborations. P4's response stated *I have found the year level descriptors to be very useful, as are the content descriptors and elaborations. The depth studies have also been useful starting points.* However, as P8 highlighted, *schools decide on the Depth Studies to be taught, it can be inconsistent across the state.* Nevertheless, this can also be seen to ensure teacher choice. In

P2's response was that the *depth studies are good, plenty of choice and inclusion of Indigenous history.*

To help teachers engage with depth studies to promote historical inquiry and awareness, the content elaborations and do describe possible tasks or processes teachers can use to develop students' understanding. P8 stated:

*Depth Studies cover a variety of concepts and provide the opportunity for students to develop their historical skills. This has been a big change from pre-Aus Curriculum when curriculum often led to more narrative responses rather than developing historical skills such as critical thinking, source analysis and so on.*

Although, activities and tasks still need to be organised and implemented by teachers to facilitate historical inquiry, the ACH laid the foundation for this to occur, but to what extent it is actually happening is unknown. P4's response above highlights that these depth studies were *starting points*, but were being implemented in varying ways in school, depending upon the skills of the teachers themselves.

### **3. Two Expert Opinions**

Two history education experts have written about the implementation of the historical inquiry process in schools. One, in Singapore, was published in the period of promoting the current historical inquiry process before its introduction into Singapore schools in 2014. The other, in Australia, was written as part of a collection of academic articles published in response to the 2014 publication of the *Review*.

Afandi (2013)'s commentary in *HSSE Online*, provided his "personal thoughts" on adopting an inquiry-based approach for school history. In his view the new Lower Secondary History syllabus aimed, on the one hand, to develop "students' disciplinary thinking in history" (p. 21) and appreciation of "the underpinnings of the discipline" (p. 22). On the

other hand, it introduced an inquiry-based approach to learning that required “students to take ownership of their learning by purposefully seeking information and constructing their own knowledge within the norms and standards set by the disciplinary nature of the subject” (p. 21), without the need for direct instruction. According to Afandi (2013), adopting an inquiry-based approach to teaching history, worked into the larger curriculum framework, which policy-makers and curriculum planners in the CPDD saw as the “key” feature in “transforming the teaching of the Humanities” (p. 21). This approach would help in “deepening students’ understanding of historical concepts ... [so that] students’ critical facilities may be enhanced, their perspectives broadened, and as a result, they may be able to subsequently make better sense of historical events and the world around them” (p. 22).

In achieving these aims, Afandi (2013) saw three “challenges” for history teachers in Singapore. The first was “how to improve teaching with inquiry in mind”; the second was “how to facilitate discovery learning in the classroom” and the last was “how to manage the development of historical understandings amidst assessment imperatives” (p. 26). Overall Afandi (2013) argued that by itself “the use of inquiry as a pedagogical approach may not be adequate in helping students develop deeper conceptual understandings in history” (p. 23). Teachers also need to develop an

awareness of, and knowledge about, student cognition, for example, knowing how students think, what prior ideas they have, how they make sense of new knowledge, and what teachers need to do to move students’ ideas forward. Specifically, this would mean that history teachers need to fully understand students’ prior ideas and have a strong grasp of the conceptual nature of the discipline. (p. 23)

In other words, teachers need to view the content and skills to be learned from the perspective of the students. Afandi (2013) acknowledged that this could be difficult for non-specialist teachers or those that lack disciplinary expertise. Unless strategies were put into place to

help such teachers, the benefits associated with historical inquiry would remain minimal (Afandi, 2013). Afandi (2013) argued that:

If inquiry-based learning is indeed about developing students' ability to construct knowledge and to think in disciplinary terms, teachers would then need to have sufficient opportunities to reflect upon their practice, think about ways to approach history lessons by actively engaging with students' preconceptions, and be given adequate support to develop their own expertise and familiarity with both inquiry and the conceptual aspects of the discipline. (p. 26)

In the Australian context, Hart (2015), in an article published in *Curriculum Perspectives*, recognised that the historical inquiry process is explicitly mentioned in the historical skills strand of the lower secondary ACH. However, she drew on Ditchburn (2015) to highlight that pedagogy, as such, was “unacknowledged” in the ACH (p. 58). Moreover, the “breadth” of content to be covered in the ACH encouraged at Year 7 and 8 levels “pedagogies of speed” (p. 59). In her opinion, whilst the ACH “does not have a clear pedagogical framework (nor was it intended to), the scope of prescribed content limits pedagogical possibilities” (p. 59). As a result, Hart (2015), like Afandi (2013), drew attention to the importance of the level of teachers' professional development in ensuring that the implementation of historical inquiry remained effective. Rather than a summary and judgment on the dispute over content in the ACH, Hart (2015) considered that there needed to be an “in-depth evaluation of how AC History influences history teacher practice and more importantly, student learning within the scope of the Australian Curriculum in its entirety” (p. 60). Taylor's search and count of key words in the *Review*, referred to in Chapter Six, also pointed to its failure to address the practical teaching elements of the ACH.

The adaption of the historical inquiry process can be seen as the main point of commonality between the Australian and Singapore Lower Secondary History documents. It is not surprising therefore that experts from both countries studied revealed a similar



evaluation of what was need for the successful implementation of this new and important emphasis in Year 7 and 8 students' learning of history.

## **V. Historical literacy as a basis for historical consciousness and empathy**

Historical literacy can be seen to foster the emergence in student of a personal orientation and positive attitudes toward history, which result in their increased empathy, historical awareness, historical understanding. At perhaps the deepest level, students can achieve historical consciousness, which enhances their understanding of the present and awareness of possibilities for the future. P12 commented, in regard to her experience of teaching Year 9, that '*[h]istorical consciousness' is most likely the most challenging to teach*. Some indeed would argue that historical consciousness cannot be taught directly – it is developed as students master the concepts related to historical literacy.

### **1. Teaching the concepts of historical literacy**

When asked what successes and difficulties they had experienced in introducing concepts related to historical consciousness, such as empathy, multiple perspectives, historical thinking and understanding, into the teaching of history in Year 7-9 classes, several participants, in both countries, drew attention to the complex practicalities and classroom realities experienced in attempting to introduce and develop students' use of these concepts. Three out of the seven participants responding to the Australian teacher guideline questions expressed the view that the concepts need to be introduced carefully at the Year 7 stage, to allow students' understanding to develop over time. P7 reflected:

*I have found as a whole many of these concepts are difficult for ... [Year] 7. Their history background from the primary years is very different to the structure in secondary school. The idea of [m]ultiple perspectives comes easily to some, depending on the situations used as examples. Like with anything the teacher needs*

*to make it relevant for the students ... At [m]y current school[,] success has been found when we start introducing these skills in the early terms of year 7, having found that they are better able to use these concepts in later years.*

P12 also affirms the possibility of teaching these concepts over time.

*From year 9 experience, I think these are all concepts which can be explicitly taught. In my first couple of years, I found that students were coming to my classes without any knowledge of these, as they weren't [sic] being sufficiently developed in younger year levels. However, as teachers are becoming more confident in developing historical skills and teaching to the curriculum, this issue is declining.*

P4 described a similar experience at her school:

*The teaching of inquiry skills are well embedded in our primary school so this has been a natural progression in the middle school ... With all topics, it is quite possible to teach the skills of historical literacy and these skills are much more embedded by the end of year 8.*

P7 later explained the increased importance of this in the Australian context, where history remains a compulsory subject to the end of Year 10.

*More is expected of students in ... [Year] 9 [especially] ... of their writing and higher order thinking skills. I have found personally that the skills needed [to] have begun to be developed in years 7-8 so are present in ... [Year] 9 to ensure they finish the year with very advanced skills as in ... [Year] 10 teacher[s] are already thinking about preparing students [for studying history at senior level].*

In contrast, P1 explained *[t]hese skills are learnt through the content in my class, not taught specifically*. She also pointed out that *[m]ost students need History to be linked to present examples so they can relate [to and] ... understand the concepts*, while P7

highlighted the difficulty some students have in relating *to medieval or ancient history*, as taught in Years 7-8.

Teacher participants in Singapore also commented on difficulties of teaching concepts associated with historical literacy. P9 considered that the *[m]ajority of these students are unable to grasp concepts such as multiple perspectives, historical interpretation. This is reflected clearly when questions are posed to students and they give a linear perspective*. P11 expressed concern about a related issue in the teaching of historical concepts in the lower secondary years.

*One difficulty in introducing concepts is in how one assesses that students have grasped these concepts. At the same time, a balance between covering content knowledge and conceptual knowledge has to be struck, particularly with the constraint of time, especially when the time for assessment draws near and teachers need to ensure students are well prepared for it.*

When history and history education experts were asked about the use of the terms “inquiry skills” and “historical literacy”, they expressed differing views. Macintyre stated quite clearly, *I would not use either term. History is a way of understanding the past through a process of inquiry that provides both knowledge and appreciation of the way that knowledge is achieved*. Foley, on the other hand, expressed that these terms were *absolutely critical*. He elaborated by saying that:

*[T]hey are not mutually exclusive of each other, they work together. The skills of inquiry are the ability to look with depth, with analysis, to examine with care, to use different sources to look at primary and secondary sources, to be ruthless in your devouring of the past. Your literacy is your ability to express it in multi-formats, not just the essay, the source analysis, the written responses are important, but the*

*beauty of historical literacy is that it can be through visuals, it can be through images, it can be through art, it can be through music.*

The staff member at NIE also made a distinction between the two terms. Inquiry skills *involved doing inquiry – asking a good inquiry question; collecting evidence; interpreting evidence and drawing conclusions*. Historical literacy, on the other hand, meant *accessing historical writings, sources, texts, etc.*, a version of the term that is much more oriented to academic history than to the meaning of the term in teaching history, as understood by Downey and Long (2015), as well as Taylor and Young (2003) (discussed in Chapter One). Melleuish provided a third perspective, considering that historical literacy was *a relative thing*. What was important for him was that *[s]tudents should at least appreciate how humanity has been transformed over the past 10,000 years and that living in the past would be quite different to living now*.

The seven out of nine Australian teacher participants and the three out of five Singapore teacher participants who responded to this question on the concepts of historical literacy were not as detailed and forthcoming in their comments as they were when writing about the purpose of history education, or what they liked or disliked about the new curriculum/syllabus. This difference suggests that they did not find the question as immediately relevant or meaningful as the others. Certainly, none of the comments revealed any appreciation of the way the processes and skills, “activities and conceptual understandings” of historical literacy “mediate and develop historical consciousness” (Taylor & Young, 2003, p. 29). However, there were two particular facets of historical literacy that emerged as important in this comparative investigation – collective historical consciousness and personal historical consciousness. These are considered in the following two sections.

## 2. Collective historical consciousness

Collective consciousness refers to experiences, memories and meanings that are shared by members of a group or nation and underpin their sense of identity with the group concerned. National and political leaders in some countries have seen history education in terms of developing a shared collective memory among children and young people over the course of their schooling. The intention has been to use the teaching of history in schools as a means of encouraging unity among different groups in a culturally and racially diverse society. They have hoped to foster the emergence of a sense of national identity which includes citizens of all backgrounds. History curricula or syllabuses developed for the purpose of nation building have tended to provide one overarching narrative of the nation, from the perspective of the dominant group, in a way that often ignores the stories of other groups in the nation and limits different ways of interpreting the nation's past. However, the Singapore history syllabus has introduced an emphasis on the different experiences of groups in society in various shared events, like the Japanese occupation or the independence of Singapore. Michael H. Lee (2015) explained his as follows "[t]he government aims to sort out viable means of making people, regardless of race, language or religion, becoming Singaporeans who are inculcated with a sense of national belonging and national identity towards Singapore as a new nation" (p. 131). The personal response of the staff member at NIE pointed to the important role played by the teaching of history in schools,

*[b]y studying the history of one's country, students should be able to appreciate national identity, culture and collective memory. History should play a bigger role in fostering national identity. The current topics in the syllabus are relevant and appropriate. I guess it's [sic] dependent very much on the teachers to make it more explicit.*

As the responses presented in Section I of this chapter show all participants from Singapore noted the development of a greater understanding of the nation's history as an aim of history at the secondary school level. Their use of concepts relates to national identity, such as nation building and national culture reflected their formulation in Singapore's syllabus document. P11 noted that *[u]sually, these concepts are briefly touched upon in class, [and] where the content covered presents an opportunity for the teacher to do so. They are not discussed in great detail.* Others like, P14 noted that:

*[T]hese concepts are easily linked with the current syllabus. However, most of these concepts lend themselves well with the Sec 2 syllabus. These can be linked to the topics beginning from Singapore in WWII, Japanese Occupation, constitutional developments to independence of Singapore in 1965.*

Similarly, P6 remarked that *[g]iven that the Lower Secondary History syllabus is on the History of Singapore, it has been easy to incorporate these concepts especially when teaching the Secondary 2 syllabus which focuses mainly on Singapore's nation building experience.* P5 observed that *[t]hese concepts are very natural given that the lower secondary history deals with the history of Singapore. When teachers and students discuss Singapore history, these concepts can easily be reinforced.* Thus, even though, according to a word count, there is no specific mention, in the document or teacher comments, of the term collective historical consciousness, the content presented and the specific content concepts used for analysis in the syllabus document legitimises and drives their implementation in the classroom.

In regard to Australia, the portrayal of Australia's past is a highly contentious issue, particularly in relation to school history and which strands of knowledge need to be imparted to students as young citizens of the nation (Clark, 2006; Donnelly, 2013; Henderson, 2015; Howard, 2012; Macintyre & Clark, 2014; Rodwell, 2013). In contrast to Singapore, the

curriculum in Years 7 and 8 is not focused on Australian history, but rather on the history of the ancient and early modern world. Only in Years 9 and 10 is Australian history included in the ACH. Given the contentious nature of what constitutes collective memory and national culture in Australia, the chronological world history approach was seen to have advantages. The comments of a number of Australian teacher participants showed their appreciation of the world history approach (P3, P4, P8). Australian participants generally showed a real awareness of the complexities of including national identity as a topic in the lower secondary years. There were three main issues mentioned: the politicisation that has been evident in the Australian Curriculum; the content of the ACH for Years 7 and 8; and doubts about the capacity of the student to comprehend the meaning of national identity at that point in their lives. The following comments of five participants illustrate these points:

- *I am opposed to teaching nationalistic approaches to history that fulfil a political agenda (P2);*
- *The subject of History is a perfect vehicle for informing students about their national identity. However ... we need to be mindful that various forces don't [sic] exert an undue pressure upon the final curriculum content (P13);*
- *These are all very valid issues particularly cultural identity, however for students in years 7-8 this is not as relevant for their depth studies (P7);*
- *National identity is an important concept but hard for students in Yr 7 [and] ... 8 to understand as they are only 12 or 13 (P1).*

In regard to the second and third points, Melleuish, in his personal responses as a history specialist, argued that Years 7 and 8 should be *non-ideological in nature* and instead be *used to tell stories about the past, and individuals in the past, which encourage students to think imaginatively about history, the human condition and what life was like in the past.*

P3's comments correlate with that of P7 indicating that *[t]he 7-8 syllabus doesn't [sic] address this in NSW and it really isn't [sic] appropriate for the current curriculum. That is dealt with later on.* P4 shared a similar view, *I have not found this to be at all relevant in the year 7-8 curriculum as we are looking at world history and as such these ideas have not come up, apart from teaching about civics and citizenship in relation to Ancient Greece.* P13's comment, in regard to the Year 9 curriculum, drew attention to *material produced by the DVA [Department of Veterans' Affairs] for the Anzac story*, expressing concern that it was *strongly biased toward a particular conservative interpretation.* P12 indicated in her response that concepts, such as collective memory and national culture in Australia, *are relevant but all are heavily politicized [sic].* She added the question, *[i]n whose opinion/view are we teaching what the 'national identity' is?* This last question, alone, epitomises the contentious nature of Australian history and its implementation in schools. P8 pointed out that *[n]ational identity is covered reasonably well within the Year 8 HASS curriculum (part of Geography) and also in Year 9 History (Australia's involvement in WWI).* However, P8's response drew attention to the fact that most of these topics are *electives*, with the result that the pattern of study *can be inconsistent across the state.* P10 highlighted the importance of concepts, like national identity, collective memory, national culture and cultural identity, being included within Australia's particular historical context. Although this participant acknowledged that they did not *necessarily need to be an integral part of every year level*, that their inclusion *is very important, especially in a country such as Australia that has such as racist past and, in many ways, doesn't [sic] acknowledge and celebrate that we have the oldest living culture in the world!*

On the topic of national identity, Melleuish stated: *I don't [sic] think that any history curriculum should preach about 'national identity' which perhaps would be discussed more fruitfully in a civics curriculum. That said, neither should a curriculum attach ideas about*



*national identity*. When asked how far the ACH should be concerned with national identity, national culture, collective memory and cultural identity, Foley answered:

*Well it's [sic] going to be impacted on and impacted by all of those. But ... embrace all of it but critically. ... [I]t would be naïve to think that they don't [sic] exist and don't [sic] play a role in history, and they always have and always will.*

In responding to the same question, Taylor replied, *[b]y and large, as long as these elements are not politicised can be analysed using AC Understandings and Skills, I don't [sic] have a problem unless there is undue emphasis in the year level programs and unless Australian exceptionalism becomes a feature of program emphasis*. Taylor provided both WWI and WWII as examples of content where this could become noticeable. In his view, *social, political, economic, and military achievements and failures should be given a balanced representation*. Macintyre stated that he believed *a history curriculum using a world history approach should steer clear of national identity and national culture*, adding that *both terms are vacuous*. He continued to state that *[c]ollective memory has a place, as does the understanding of the past provided by memory studies, but it needs to be distinguished from historical understanding*.

This is consistent with the wording of the whole thrust of the historical knowledge and skills outlined for the Years 7-10 curriculum. The Rationale states:

An understanding of world history enhances students' appreciation of Australian history. It enables them to develop an understanding of the past and present experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, their identities and the continuing value of their cultures. It also helps students to appreciate Australia's distinctive path of social, economic and political development, its position in the Asia and Pacific regions, and its global interrelationships. This knowledge and understanding is essential for informed and active participation in Australia's diverse

society and in creating rewarding personal and collective futures. (ACARA, 2015b, p. 10)

However, a word count reveals that the phrase ‘historical consciousness’ occurs only in one of the Australian teacher comments and not in the Australian Curriculum at all. This finding stands in contrast to Sears’ (2017) view that “history education must include attention to historical consciousness.”

### **3. Personal historical consciousness and empathy**

In both countries, the curriculum documents provide evidence that the personal dimension of history learning is recognised and encouraged, although a word count shows that the term “historical consciousness” is not actually used in either set of curriculum documents. The Australian Curriculum mentions the ‘personal’ occasionally throughout the document, for instance in reference to personal and family history. However, the connection to establishing students’ personal interest in history is limited to the statement of one aim. The ACH states the intention of developing students’ “interest in, and enjoyment of, historical study for lifelong learning and work” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10). Despite this acknowledgement, the details of content and the historical inquiry pedagogy outlined provide few mentions or examples of how this personal level of historical consciousness is to be fostered in classroom learning. In much the same way, the Australian teacher comments in discussing the purposes of history education, reveal some quite strong statements in relation to teaching the *love of history* to students, but this has not been expressed in terms of personal historical consciousness.

A counterpart to the ACH statement is found in Singapore’s syllabus as a comparable aim in the introductory section of the document. In addition, the Philosophy of History Education statement that precedes the setting out of the syllabus includes the encouragement of students’ personal involvement in history. It notes that:

History ... plays a critical role in developing students' own identifies through an understanding of history at the personal, national and international levels. The learning of history should spark their curiosity and inspire them with the beliefs, decisions and dilemmas of people in the past. (MOE, 2013, p. 2)

The importance of students' personal interest in history is acknowledged also in the document's aims and learning outcomes where the six aim involves encouraging students, among other things, to continue with "further study and pursue their personal interest in the past" (MOE, 2013, p. 4). One of the Singapore participants (P11) specifically referred to the personal connection to history, when he spoke of helping students *to pursue their personal interest in the past*. However, as with the Australian Curriculum and teacher comments, there is no specific mention of personal historical consciousness.

In the case of both Australia and Singapore, the fostering of students' personal connection to history is most evident, in relation to the concept of 'empathy'. This is not only discussed in both sets of curriculum documents, but also some teachers in both countries have commented on how they incorporate it into their teaching.

Although the ACH's Glossary, explains the terms as "engaging with past thought and feelings through a historical inquiry" (ACARA, 2015e, p. 49), a more detailed explanation is provided in the introductory material, where empathy is described as a concept used to develop historical understanding. The ACH states:

In historical inquiry, the term 'empathy' is used to describe engagement with past thought. The re-enactment of past thought and feeling is a greater challenge than constructing descriptions and explanations of the past. It requires an understanding of the past from the point of view of a particular individual or group, including an appreciation of the circumstances they faced and the motivations, values and attitudes behind their actions. Empathy encourages students to overcome the

common tendency to see people of the past as strange and incomprehensible.  
(ACARA, 2015e, p. 12)

In addition, an example is provided to show teachers how they can support this type of engagement through classroom practice. Importantly, the ACH warns against using it in a simplistic and ahistorical way. Thus “empathy is not authentically achieved if later standards, customs, values and truths are used to judge other times, potentially creating wild and unhistorical imaginings. Empathy promotes deeper understanding of ‘difference’ in the past and – where appropriate – tolerance and acceptance in the present” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 12). This statement reflects ideas expressed in the work of Ahonen (2005) and Sears (2017), pertaining to the development of historical consciousness. Empathy is thus seen to go beyond recognising multiple perspectives and studying different opinions and viewpoints to making positive personal and interpersonal connections with particular people and events in history (Chopik, O’Brien & Konrath, 2017).

The rest of the curriculum document provides little support for the concept of empathy. There is no specific reference to it in the historical knowledge and understanding, and historical skills strands of the ACH for Years 7 and 8. It is mentioned only in a list of the seven historical concepts regarded as key factors in developing students’ historical understanding in both Year 7 and 8. Moreover, neither the content elaborations nor the Achievement Standards make any mention of empathy or the attributes attributed to it in the earlier paragraph of explanation.

The Achievement Standards are linked predominantly to classroom actions, and what students can demonstrate that they are able to do, such as describe, identify, and explain. They detail the actions that describe the level of achievement expected of students as a result of that year’s learning. They are not associated with the students’ development of educational values or their personal response to learning history. As a result, it can be considered that the ACH is more concerned with presenting and evaluating the concepts,

content and skills related to the discipline of history, than with identifying and mapping out the personal educational development of individual students (ACARA, 2015e, pp. 11-13).

Several Australian teachers, however, gave evidence of their commitment to empathy in their teaching. P4 stated that fostering empathy *assists students to have a much better understanding of events as they are encouraged to think emotionally and logically about how and why people acted as they did*. She considered it was necessary to find a point of personal connection or a present context to relate to, as the most effective way for students to respond to a topic with empathy. *For example, in the last year, I completed some study with year 7's on The Silk Road and some of the stops along it. Not long after this some of the amazing historic landmarks at Palmyra were destroyed. This meant that the students directly related to these events and their empathy for what had been lost to humanity was much greater*. P10 considered that history teaching involved *getting students to think about the past and reflect on how it helped shape the world they live in today*. From this they learn *to become global citizens who have empathy and acceptance of different cultures and the way people live*. Another teacher (P8) described his use of what he termed *empathy essays*. Paul Foley, also saw empathy as the *critical thing in history*, stressing that what sets apart *great pieces of work by students in history, is their ability to empathise with their fellow citizen before them*.

Singapore's Lower Secondary History syllabus also includes a definition of empathy, but places this in the Qualities of a History Learner diagram under the quality of "empathetic" (MOE, 2013, p. 2). Through developing this quality, it is anticipated that students will understand "the reasons behind past developments without imposing judgement using present day norms" (p. 2). Whilst this definition is quite brief, it is consolidated through references made to the historical concept in the document's discussion of 21CC. For the competency, Civic Literacy, Global Awareness and Cross Cultural Skills, MOE (2013) identifies, in the present tense, that a student "actively contributes to the

community and nation”, and among other things, “displays socio-cultural skills and sensitivity” (p. 24).

One benchmark for this learning outcome relates to students’ demonstrating empathy toward other social and cultural groups, in terms of “goodwill and sensitivity” (MOE, 2013, p. 25). This is further strengthened through an aim in the introductory section of the syllabus document, which expects students to “empathise with people from different social, cultural, economic and political backgrounds” (p. 5). This idea is subsequently picked up in the learning outcomes pertaining to historical knowledge for Secondary 1 and 2 students in the document’s Scope and Sequence Chart. Under the heading of Values and Attitudes, these include:

- “develop empathy for the past and present migrant communities in Singapore by understanding the reasons for their decision to settle in Singapore and/or how they have adjusted to life in Singapore” (p. 32); [and]
- “show empathy for the hardships faced by the people in the past” (p. 34).

In their responses, Singapore teacher participants (P14, P5, P9) showed the importance of understanding dispositions and skills, as well as an appreciation of cultural and religious roots. P9 stated that *[s]tudents are able to empathize well, especially when topics such as Japanese Occupation are taught and the wrongful killing of the Chinese are mentioned*. This was the only Singapore participant to actually use the word *empathy*. However, the Singapore coursebooks for Secondary 1 and 2 History, discussed in the next section, provides examples of incorporating empathy into classroom teaching.

#### **4. Overview**

Historical consciousness relates not to facts or interpretation of concepts but rather to personal dispositions and attitudes, which are not easily included in school learning contexts. For this reason, they are often overlooked in curriculum statements. This

comparison, between the ACH and the 2014 Singapore Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses, has attempted to investigate this attitudinal dimension from a comparative dimension. In regard to the Australian context, the findings of this section point to the benefits that might follow from giving consideration to re-balancing historical literacy and historical consciousness, by recognising that the latter is fostered through the former. It appears that this has been more easily achieved through the context of Singapore, which still accepts and thinks of school syllabuses in terms of attitudes and values as the qualities of learners, in addition to the knowledge and skills that they gain through their learning of history at school.

## **VI. Use of Textbooks and Coursebooks**

The basic difference between the commercially prepared history textbooks available to teachers in Australia, as compared to the coursebook developed by MOE for the use of teachers in Singapore. An insight how this difference influenced the teaching of history in the classrooms of Australia and Singapore is given in the comments of the teacher participants. In both countries, teachers were quite explicit in describing the way they made use of the books available to them and, for the most part, provided justification for the approach they adopted.

### **1. Responses of Australian Teachers**

In responding to the teacher guideline questions, all the Australian participants acknowledged the use of history textbooks in their classrooms (P1, P2, P3, P4, P7, P8, P12). Their comments drew attention to the potential benefits of using textbooks for classroom preparation and learning. Most participants indicated that they used or purchased textbooks from more than one company. Furthermore, the responses indicated variations in the way teachers made use of them. In some cases, they were used as a way of providing for

differentiated learning (P4). P7 explained that such texts *allow for some student centred learning; when students are away or are looking for additional work, it is easy for a teacher when there is a textbook available.*

Overall, the main uses identified by Australian participants included providing students with contextual or background information (P7, P8); or as a way of teachers understanding the *expectations* of the ACH (P4). Some teachers used them mainly to view and devise their own learning sequences (P4). Others saw textbooks as a tool to be utilised at the beginning of a unit of learning (P3, P4), as well as for accessing the online resources that accompany such texts (P1, P4, P7). P4 considered that textbooks,

*are useful for planning activities which employ higher order thinking skills and also for a clear sequence of lessons, although I tend to use a mixture of books and my own ideas to create my own sequence. So I guess whilst I use textbooks as a tool when planning, I don't [sic] always refer to them in the classroom.*

Similarly, P8 explained,

*They [i.e. textbooks] are useful as a source of content, however, less useful for engaging activities. Teachers have developed insightful, engaging activities that have proven to increase student involvement, interest and achievement in History. Given the nature of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century learner, moving away from the textbook and developing these activities are crucial for moving forward. Textbooks vary greatly in quality of content ... I tend to use textbooks for providing students with the necessary background knowledge for upcoming tasks. Some teachers, however, use them to a much greater extent.*



P3 provided an example of students comparing details given in various textbooks – an activity that would appear to be extremely valuable, given P12’s comments below regarding the errors noticeable in some textbooks.

There was one Australian History senior (P12), however, who reported that her school rejected the use of any of the available textbooks. Her response stated,

*We didn’t purchase [textbook] sets, as there were errors contained within each book and most ‘tasks’ focused on simple fact and knowledge recall, as opposed to critical thinking and intellectual stretch, which should be the focus of an HASS curriculum. Even in the sections labelled ‘critical thinking’, there was little room for students to actually delve into a question.*

These comments reveal the extent to which the matter of textbooks was regarded as a matter for the teacher’s interpretation and understanding of the historical events being taught.

## **2. Responses from Singapore Teachers**

The Singapore teacher participants used the MOE’s specially written coursebooks, *Singapore: The making of a nation-state, 1300-1975* for Secondary 1 and 2 (MOE, 2014, 2015). However, their comments revealed that their use of the coursebook in teaching was similar to the way Australian teachers used textbooks. For instance, P11 stated that it was *used for students’ reference on primary and secondary sources that serve to frame and reinforce their understanding of content covered in the lesson*. P9 described a similar approach to the coursebook in her teaching: *[w]hen going through a concept, I would get students to refer to the pages in the history textbook. Other than that, I would be using my powerpoint [sic] slides*.

The use of the coursebooks alongside other teaching strategies and activities was also mentioned in learning processes related to historical inquiry skills. As P6 explained,

*We have created our own skills package for both levels [Secondary 1 and 2] to supplement the textbooks that we were given. The skills package consists of slides and worksheets that covers all the skills that must be taught throughout the years. The skills package is arranged in a progressive manner, with worksheets getting increasingly more challenging as we go along.*

One Singapore teacher (P9) commented that it was necessary to go beyond the content of the new coursebook to give students the full picture.

*The syllabus has greatly reduced the amount of content we need to go through with our students. However, it is impossible to paint a picture/story if we merely teach the content in the textbook. Therefore, I would still need to go through some content that was removed to the students.*

### **3. A Comparison of Textbooks**

In many ways the overall issues and limitations, as well as the strengths of particular textbooks, raised by participants draws attention to the impact of contextual factors, not only in Australia, but also Singapore. This can be seen to stem from the fact that MOE's CPDD are responsible for developing *Singapore: The making of a nation-state, 1300-1975* through Star Publishing (MOE, 2014, 2015; Teo, 2014); whereas commercial publishers produce history textbooks in Australia (Henderson & Zajda, 2015; Moore, 2017). Although the textbooks generally are designed to complement the key ideas seen in the ACH, they do vary in quality and structure (Henderson & Zajda, 2015). Deborah Henderson and Joseph Zajda (2015) elaborated by explaining that:

Some texts reduce significant periods of history into glossy double-page spreads with a survey approach and scant attention to detail. Others present extracts from primary and secondary sources for students to investigate but provide little introductory narrative to contextualise these sources. Furthermore, history texts are expensive and

because of this sometimes texts of lesser quality are purchased simply because they are less costly. (p. 30)

In Sharp's (2014) analysis of the representation of the Gallipoli Campaign in selected Year 9 Australian History textbooks, she highlighted that the type of sources provided and the explanations given resulted in misleading information or "significant gaps of information" (p. 20), which could result in an "ahistorical understanding" of events (p. 20).

Whilst, some of the textbooks published for Years 7 and 8 have included aspects of Australian history in interesting ways, an analysis of selected Australian textbooks (see Table 8), indicates that several textbooks are a direct reflection of the inclusion of Indigenous Australian history in the ACH. *The History Alive 7 Workbook* (Harnwell et al., 2012) or *Cambridge University Press History 7 Workbook* (Wollacott et al., 2012a), for example, provides limited references to Australian history in the chapters specifically dedicated to the overview or the first depth study (*Investigating the ancient past*). Instead this content is structured around broad themes that link to ideas picked up in the content descriptors, such as early human evolution and experiences (Wollacott et al., 2012a). The only mention of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander histories is in one activity devoted to the importance of oral history (Wollacott et al., 2012). In general, when more specificity is warranted, for instance art or religion in ancient societies (Wollacott et al., 2012a, pp. 8-11; pp. 15-17), preference is given to the ancient societies identified within the respective depth studies (i.e. Egypt, Greece, Rome, China and India), rather than exploring Australian art.

<b>Year of publication</b>	<b>Name of author or editor</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Publisher</b>
2011	Penny Addison Sharon Betridge Christian Bickham Valerie Bourke Patrick Burke Bob Engwerda Ron Keith Shirley Melissas Eileen Sedunary Rawiri Taonui Judy Wood Kaye De Petro Sharon Ottery	<i>Pearson History 8: Student Book</i>	Pearson Australia
2011	Shirley Melissas	<i>Pearson History 7: Activity Book</i>	Pearson Australia
2012	Cassandra Andison Shirley Melissas	<i>Pearson History 8: Activity Book</i>	Pearson Australia
2012a	Robert Darlington John Hospodaryk Nick Ewbank Richard Smith	<i>History Alive 7: For the Australian Curriculum (Textbook)</i>	John Wiley and Sons (Jacaranda)
2012b	Robert Darlington John Hospodaryk Ashley Wood Terry Hastings Tom Hawkins Luke Jackson Graeme Smithies Anne Low Ian Keese Angela Dawson Alan Wiggs	<i>History Alive 8: For the Australian Curriculum (Textbook)</i>	John Wiley and Sons (Jacaranda)
2012	Kaye De Petro Lorraine Frederiksen Catherine Jones	<i>Pearson History 8: Teacher Companion</i>	Pearson Australia

2012	Galit Dresden Catherine Jones Shirley Melissas	<i>Pearson History 7: Teacher Companion</i>	Pearson Australia
2012	Elizabeth Harnwell Maureen Anderson Meredith Donaldson Ian Keese Anne Low Elizabeth Tulloh	<i>History Alive 7: For the Australian Curriculum (Student Workbook)</i>	John Wiley and Sons (Jacaranda)
2012	Elizabeth Tulloh Stuart Harridge	<i>History Alive 8: For the Australian Curriculum (Student Workbook)</i>	John Wiley and Sons (Jacaranda)
2012a	Angela Wollacott Stephen Catton Judy McPherson Stephanie Price James St. Julian Luis Siddall Alan Thomas Nicholas Vlahogiannis	<i>History 7 for the Australian Curriculum (Workbook)</i>	Cambridge University Press
2012b	Angela Wollacott Stephen Catton Judy McPherson Stephanie Price James St. Julian Luis Siddall Alan Thomas Nicholas Vlahogiannis	<i>History 8 for the Australian Curriculum (Workbook)</i>	Cambridge University Press
2013	Bruce Dennett Stephen Dixon Angela Wong	<i>Oxford Insight History 7: Australian Curriculum for New South Wales (Stage 4)</i>	Oxford University Press
2013a	Ken Webb Angela Wollacott Michael Adcock Margaret Allen Helen Butler Christopher Cunnenn Raymond Evans Jenny Gregory Alison Mackinnon Judy McPherson Richard Malone James St. Julian Luis Siddall Robert Skinner Alan Thomas Nicholas Vlahogiannis	<i>History 7 (Stage 4): NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum</i>	Cambridge University Press

2013b	Ken Webb Angela Wollacott Michael Adcock Margaret Allen Helen Butler Christopher Cunnenn Raymond Evans Jenny Gregory Alison Mackinnon Judy McPherson Richard Malone James St. Julian Luis Siddall Robert Skinner Alan Thomas Nicholas Vlahogiannis	<i>History 8 (Stage 4): NSW Syllabus for the Australian Curriculum</i>	Cambridge University Press
2014	Cassandra Andison Shirley Melissas	<i>Pearson History 8 New South Wales: Activity Book</i>	Pearson Australia
2014	Bruce Dennett Stephen Dixon Angela Wong	<i>Oxford Insight History 8: Australian Curriculum for New South Wales (Stage 4)</i>	Oxford University Press
2014	Shirley Melissas	<i>Pearson History 7 New South Wales: Activity Book</i>	Pearson Australia
2014	Shirley Melissas Galit Dresden Sharon Szczecinski	<i>Pearson History 7 New South Wales: Teacher Companion</i>	Pearson Australia
2015	Shirley Melissas Jenny Cas Rebecca Stephens Sharon Szczecinski David Van Tol	<i>Pearson History 8 New South Wales: Teacher Companion</i>	Pearson Australia

**Table 8: Australian textbooks used for analysis**

The same ideas can be applied to the organisational structure of historical skills in comparison to historical knowledge in these textbooks. Several textbooks reflect the format of the ACH separating the historical knowledge and understanding strand from the historical skills strand (Darlington et al., 2012a; Darlington et al., 2012b; Dennett, Dixon & Wong, 2013). Despite this, textbooks published by Pearson Australia and Cambridge University Press for NSW, demonstrate unique approaches to mapping historical content, which

includes the presentation of new inquiry questions. There is a clear emphasis placed on historical inquiry, as well as the development of historical skills and how these can be integrated into the implementation of historical knowledge (Dresden, Jones & Melissas, 2012, pp. 7-8). For instance for the Year 7 first depth study, *Investigating the Ancient Past*, Pearson's History Student Book, provided in the Teacher Companion, is comprised of two chapters: What is History?, and Investigating Ancient Australia, each with its own set of inquiry questions (Dresden, Jones & Melissas, 2012, pp. 54, 88). For Investigating Ancient Australia these are:

- What different beliefs and theories are there about how Aboriginal people first came to Australia?
- What does archaeology tell us about how Aboriginal people lived before Europeans?
- What did the first Australians trade and how did trade influence the way they lived?
- What role did laws play in the lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people? (Dresden, Jones & Melissas, 2012, p. 88)

Pearson Australia has published a series of texts designed specifically for several Australian states, which have been known to produce their own syllabus document such as NSW. Whilst the general layout of the Teacher Companion for NSW can be seen to resemble the general Teacher Companion for Year 7 (Melissas, Dresden & Szczecinski, 2014), additions have been made to this specific, individualised version. For example, at the beginning of each chapter, sections such as Preparation for Teaching, as well as Teaching and Learning Strategies (see Appendix 1.7), which provide practical suggestions on conducting a primary source analysis and various ways to introduce the topic in a classroom environment. From the researcher's analysis of selected textbooks, differentiation in approach, layout and content is evident. This is not only seen among publishing companies,

but between textbooks published by the same company for different states/jurisdictions. One commonality is that the textbooks reflect broader educational contexts, in particular the syllabus for which the textbooks are prepared.

In comparison, both the Singapore Secondary 1 and 2 Lower Secondary History coursebooks can be considered important supplementary resources which complement the syllabus document and are necessary for its implementation. Accordingly, the cost of these coursebooks is kept relatively low at approximately SGP\$6 from major bookstores (OBS Education, n.d.; Teo, 2014). Although most textbooks for the national curriculum are produced by commercial publishers under MOE's Textbook Authorisation process, the Lower Secondary History coursebooks is produced by MOE's CPDD (Teo, 2014). As a result, the ways in which Singapore's history is depicted and represented in the two lower secondary coursebooks can be arguably considered the "de facto voice of authority in classrooms" (Henderson & Zajda, 2015, p. 26).

Teo Hui Lin Lena, as part of her 2014 presentation at the *1st Singapore Heritage Science Conference*, held at Nanyang Technological University, contextualised the development of the lower secondary coursebooks, largely from the perspective of the CPDD. In a related unpublished paper, Teo (n.d.) explained that whilst officers in the History Unit of the CPDD spent approximately eight months "researching and locating relevant memories and archival records", the translation of sources was difficult, primary due to the use of vernacular languages. This unfortunately resulted in the exclusion of some, otherwise useful, sources. Perhaps for this reason, emphasis was placed on using sources written in English. Teo (n.d.) stated:

Besides oral accounts, there are many interesting documents such as maps, employment papers and letters that were not written in English. These also became an issue for use because unless there is an English version, students will not be able



to understand these documents. In the end, much of what we featured in our coursebook were accounts and documents that were already in English and these could be used with minor adaptation to ensure that the language was accessible and appropriate to 13 and 14 years olds in our schools.

This shows that the research process undertaken to create the coursebooks played a fundamental role in shaping the nation's approach to history education. This can also be seen through the CPDD's reliance on the work and guidance of historians (Teo, n.d., 2014). Their influence is evident in the historical content selected, but most interestingly, as Teo (2014) has argued they "revised what we know about Singapore's history". In other words, their work considerably influenced the new approach taken in the lower secondary years, along with the source and centuries studied. For instance, Kwa, Heng & Tan's (2009) *Singapore: A 700 year history*, which was provided in the syllabus document's Reference List, which provides evidence to support the study of Singapore in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries.

Among other issues identified, such as copyright and time constraints, Teo (2014, n.d.) highlighted the difficulties which occurred when sources were deemed inappropriate. Primary sources, in general, often reveal issues pertaining to gender, ethnicity, or other socio-cultural contexts of the time. Therefore replacing, when necessary, these types of sources can prove difficult. As Teo (2014) states:

We found a clear photograph of some Indian labourers building a road. Unfortunately, one of the labourers was ... more revealing than the others and we decided that it was not appropriate to feature the source. The officer in charge of the chapter searched everywhere but could only find one other similar photograph as a replacement. The replacement photograph was one that has been featured in previous versions of the Singapore History textbooks but we had no choice.

It could be for this reason that the coursebooks use a large number of illustrations, which paint the picture of the historical content in the way desired by the CPDD. These illustrations, discussed below, also provide the necessary links between written primary sources, photographs, exercises/tasks and historical information. Despite this “each chapter of the coursebook features at least eighty to a hundred sources” (Teo, 2014).

The new coursebooks for Lower Secondary History in Singapore can be considered an improvement upon previous instructional materials (MOE, 2014, 2015), particularly given the increased emphasis on historical inquiry and the development of students’ historical skills. Inclusions such as the Chapter Task, Understanding the Inquiry Question, and Think Like a Historian (see Appendix 2.2), work into an investigation of the inquiry question given as the title of the respective chapter in the coursebook. This question is reiterated in the Chapter Task, which is framed around a set scenario. For Chapter 5, the scenario involves the creation of a webpage for Humanities Week (Appendix 2.2: MOE, 2015, p. 8). These tasks are broken into more than one “part”, which scaffolds the activity to ensure its completion by the end of the chapter.

Think Like a Historian, on the other hand, focuses directly on historical concepts and the acquisition of historical skills. The syllabus document highlights that this particular section “provides guidance on how students can understand and deploy both concepts and skills throughout their learning process” (MOE, 2013, p. 8). The content accessible through Think Like a Historian correlates with the rationales for each historical concept in the syllabus document’s scope and sequence chart. Both the Chapter Task and Think Like a Historian are new inclusions for this edition of the Lower Secondary History coursebook.

Whilst these concepts are taught through historical content, their organisational structure in Think Like a Historian identifies the need to devote explicit attention to the study of historical concepts (Appendix 2.2). For instance, the study of change and continuity in

Chapter 5 first involves defining the concepts as separate entities, with attention only given to what they mean to the discipline of history not their relationship to the Japanese Occupation of Singapore (MOE, 2015, p. 9). When the historical concepts remerge in *Think Like a Historian Part 2*, a deeper analysis of “change” is encouraged, which is not only supported by a review of Part 1 (p. 9), but also the formation of “criteria” which assists students in determining the existence of “continuity”. The criteria encouraged for Chapter 5 includes Singapore as “home”, British as rulers of Singapore and Singapore as an “impregnable fortress” (p. 21). Ideas which are closely linked to the country’s cultural, political and societal structure. This approach towards the conveyance of historical concepts appears to be absent from many of the commercially produced textbooks available in Australia. This not only supports Singapore’s new approach to history learning but highlights the importance of developing students’ understanding of historical concepts, in addition to historical skills.

The explicit attention given to historical concepts, as well as inquiry questions, in Singapore’s Lower Secondary History coursebooks can be seen as one way of working through difficult and sensitive topics. When taking into consideration other chapters, it can be argued that the historical content is directed to students through not only highlighting the way in which historical issues effected children of a similar age, but also concentrating on relatable factors, such as the environment and communities students engage with. Education can be seen as one overarching theme that correlates with these criteria and offers an invaluable lens through which to explore student outlooks and opinions. This is seen in the study of the Japanese Occupation of Singapore during WWII, which highlights the type of activities primary school students completed during the Occupation, as well as the closure of secondary schools (MOE, 2015, pp. 30-31). Chapter 5 continues to explore this theme by incorporating the difficulties encountered when school recommenced, as well as the reasons

why some students choose not to return to secondary school and the impact of these decisions (p. 46).

The use of illustrations represents an important tool utilised by the CPDD to navigate sensitive topics. Chapter 5 provides two useful examples, which are provided in Appendix 2.2. Firstly, the Kempeitai and Operation Sook Ching, one form of social cleansing directed toward the Chinese population which occurred during 1942 in Singapore (Ho, 2013), is only covered through illustrations, primary sources and short explanations (MOE, 2015, pp. 34-36). Adapted from Heng Chiang Ki's account of the Sook Ching (MOE, 2015), the illustrations enable the content to be pitched at a younger audience, whilst also highlighting the severity of the situation, which might have featured in student's own family history.

This pattern continues in Chapter 6, where illustrations depict Chinese middle school students protesting the British colonial government's stance on national service, which is now commonly referred to as the 1954 National Service Riots (MOE, 2015, pp. 79-80). At the time, the policies meant that students, whose schooling had been previously disrupted due to the Occupation, were eligible for National Service. In the Secondary 2 coursebook, this event is used to highlight the growing distrust shown towards the British in the aftermath of WWII. Whilst this event, on one hand, is referred to as a peaceful demonstration, it is later juxtaposed with illustrations highlighting the involvement of police, which left several students injured (pp. 79-80). Interestingly, this event can be seen to symbolise the power that resides with students, especially in cultivating active and informed citizens. Photographs, in addition to written accounts and short explanations, accompany these illustrations. However, British colonial government or police officers' perspectives are noticeably absent from this depiction of the riots. If one of the issues affecting the development of the lower secondary coursebooks was the preference given to sources written in English, it does raise questions as to why other perspectives were not included for this historical event.

#### 4. Differences in Approach

Comments from both the Australian and Singapore teachers confirm the judgement of Henderson and Zajda (2015) that “history textbooks continue to play a role in shaping the development of historical consciousness” (p. 29). There is an important difference, however, in the way history textbooks are used in the lower secondary classrooms of the two countries. In Australia, where teachers are expected to make their own interpretations and implementation of the curriculum, they also choose which of the available textbooks they use for their own teaching. In Singapore, there is only one authorized coursebook (for each year level), specifically written for the Lower Secondary History syllabus under the direction of the MOE’s CPDD. As a result, the ways in which Singapore history is depicted in the lower secondary coursebooks can arguably be considered to represent the “de facto voice of authority in classrooms” (Henderson & Zajda, 2015, p. 26). Both of these circumstances, however, point to the way historians can use history textbooks to understand what aspects of a country’s history are considered important enough to teach to the young people of the rising generation. Sharp (2014), for example, has asserted that “[t]extbooks, as a curriculum tool that constructs history in particular ways, are used widely by teachers and can provide a historical insight into what History is currently taught to school students” (p. 14).

These responses indicate that teachers from both countries have employed other teaching strategies alongside their use of textbooks. The responses, in particular, demonstrate how teachers and educators in Australia are beginning to reconsider the role textbooks possess in history classrooms. Instead they “are looking increasingly to alternative and more engaging teaching/learning strategies” (Rodwell, 2013, p. 29).

## VII. Factors facilitating and impeding implementation

Both the teacher participants and the history/history education specialists commented at some length on a range of factors that either facilitated or impeded the implementation of the respective curriculum/syllabus documents in Australia and Singapore. What their responses demonstrated were important differences in implementation between the two countries and, in the case of Australia, significant differences among and within the three states studied. Three main sets of factors are considered in the discussion that follows: availability of support and assistance; time constraints from an overcrowded curriculum for the limited teaching time available; and the vital importance of those teaching the new curriculum/syllabus having qualifications in history.

### 1. Support and assistance available

The comments of Australian participants reflected a variety of experiences regarding the amount of support they received in implementing the ACH. In some cases, it proved to be limited and teachers initiated their own forms of support. What complicated the situation in Australia was that, although the ACH was a national initiative, the constitutional balance of federal and state powers meant that its actual implementation was a matter for each of the states and territories, as well as education jurisdictions. This was confirmed by Foley who stated that in regard to schools seeking approval for their approach to history, it is *mainly left to the states and territories*.

This dimension is further reflected in the personal responses of school participants. For example, P8 noted that an overall benefit of the introduction of the ACH was the *good direction in what to teach and [the] resources available ... ACARA Exemplars have been very useful in guiding task design. However, the high standard shown in these exemplars could be considered unrealistic, especially regarding time constraints and level of teacher intervention*. However, he went on to indicate that *[r]esources ... [were] slowly being*

*developed. As a teacher in SA, he noted: [w]e have referenced resources from the QLD [Queensland] curriculum substantially. Another teacher from SA, P12, when asked whether she had received sufficient support and resources, explicitly stated [n]o. She commented, that [t]eacher training workshops seemed to be few and far between and also offered only in capital cities. There was little consideration for rural teachers. P12 noted several concerns, particularly in regard to level of support given to rural schools.*

*There has been significant individual learning and curriculum design. Schools were given a number of pupil free days to assist with AC implementation, however paid SACIOs [Secondary Australian Curriculum Implementation Officers] were largely inefficient in helping teachers to design learning programs due to the slow and fragmented implementation of the curriculum, with different learning areas at different times. Many questions were answered with ‘we haven’t [sic] got a conclusive answer to that yet’. The exemplars and work samples posted online were largely unhelpful as there simply wasn’t [sic] enough different samples to really gauge [sic] an idea of achievement standards and marking criteria. There was also no set marking rubrics published, therefore schools had to create their own.*

*Furthermore, whilst the Federal Government was careful to include technologies [sic] as a learning area and ICT [Information and Communications Technology] as a capability, they simultaneously pulled the funding for the DER [Digital Education Revolution] program and ICT support in schools, which has left schools at a considerable loss.*

These comments reveal the differences in implementation evident between Australian states and territories. However, there also appears to be differentiation within the states themselves. The responses from participants in this study show this to be the case in SA, as illustrated above, and in NSW.

In regard to support in NSW, P3 noted that *[a]ctually in NSW this has been quite good*. P2 from the same school responded similarly, acknowledging in particular the support gained from the *HTANSW* and the *Sydney Region History Teachers Network*. However, P7 stated:

*I personally have not had a huge amount of support but I believe this is largely due to my temporary positions in the part [sic]. My current position which is more stable has allowed for a lot more talk on planning and development.*

A number of responses from Australian participants pointed to the greater level of support provided by schools, education jurisdictions, and professional associations than by the government. P4 noted, for example, *[w]e have had excellent guidance from within our school. I would love more free government supported seminars as these are sometimes more possible to attend than a conference*. P4 also considered that:

*Conferences have been especially helpful for the sharing of knowledge and ensuring we are all providing educational experiences and techniques that are world's best practice, as well as networking. However, these are usually organised by professional organisations, not the government.*

P8 explained how teachers themselves took the initiative. *Workshops, initiated by teachers across numerous schools, have been useful. Groups on social media are increasing, however, these are 'hit and miss' regarding usefulness*. These last comments draw attention to another commonality expressed by Australian participants, that of the emphasis placed on the resources teachers and schools acquired for themselves and often shared with one another. This sort of self-reliant approach was captured in participant responses from all three Australian states. The use of the internet seemed to play an important role in independent research. For instance, within her response, P7 stated that *I have found ... that*



*there are a huge range of resources available on the internet, sites such as TES, which are great for developing new strategies.*

The comments of the Australian teacher participants provide evidence of a high level of differentiation in relation to history teaching among Australian schools and jurisdictions. This reality was also recognised by Taylor in his personal statement.

*One big issue is that the larger private schools tend to be gung ho on history and have well-developed courses, good in-school PD [Professional Development] and discrete Heads of Departments (as opposed to multi-subject faculties) which means we have two nations when it comes to learning about history.*

The emphasis on particular schools and teachers themselves could be seen as a result of organisational structure. As Macintyre highlighted, in his personal comments:

*Most of them [i.e. Australian states and territories] devolved decisions about staffing and the school timetable to their schools, with the result that history was often poorly served ... There was an associated failure to determine how teacher would be assisted to teach the curriculum, and a ... lack of provision for professional development.*

Whilst Paul Foley, acknowledged that the role of HTAA *is to support teachers in the delivery* of the ACH, professional development was his *greatest issue*. He expressed:

*What you don't [sic] want are teachers working in isolation, not working in isolation, not networking, you want teachers who are part of networks, who are part of collaborative groups of individuals, who want to share and bounce ideas of each other, and create what is best practice. ... [W]hether it be your early career teacher, or the teacher who has History with Year 8 on a Friday afternoon and the rest of the*

*time they are [a] Science, [and] Maths teacher. It doesn't [sic] matter how do we support those teachers? That is our ... aim, it is what the HTAA is all about.*

In comparison, the level of support and assistance available to Singapore teacher participants was much greater and more efficiently organised. Three Singapore participants commented positively on the support provided by MOE. Two, who were History seniors, commented of their own accord on the support and resources provided to teachers during the implementation of the 2014 syllabus document. P14 considered that because the 2014 syllabus that *[m]any resources were prepared by the History unit in MOE to enable the teacher to teach the subject with ease*. P6 also commented on *[t]he tremendous support provided by the ministry in providing us with resources to conduct the inquiry has helped us a lot in our planning and execution of our lessons*. P11 responded directly to a guideline question, in stating,

*The curriculum planners from the Ministry organized [sic] several workshops where they demonstrated for teachers how to make use of the available toolkits and online platforms created by them. They were also open to receiving feedback from the ground on the challenges encountered, and followed up with useful proposals.*

Another participant (P9) from Singapore conceptualised the syllabus document as a resource, stating *I've [sic] been given the 2014 History syllabus of which I've used it to plan the objectives I want to achieve for every lesson*. The background details for this participant show that she studied Mathematics as a major subject in her Bachelor degree. She also explained, *I've attended courses related to the teaching of the new history syllabus, and adopted some of the pedagogical approaches introduced in my class*. This comment is of interest for two reasons. First, that a Mathematics graduate was actually teaching Lower Secondary History in Singapore, and secondly, that there were professional development courses in history teaching that she could attend. Comments from the staff member at NIE

in the last section of Chapter Six outlined MOE's automatic provision for the new syllabus to be taught to students in critical teacher training programs, as well as in-service professional development courses.

Given the centralised nature of Singapore's MOE and the existence of one tertiary institution to provide professional development and resources, the extent of government-based support is not unexpected. Moreover, they were designed explicitly to assist with the implementation of historical skills and inquiry processes, which were the newly introduced features of the syllabus. The level of support and resources taken for granted in Singapore stands in contrast to the Australian teacher participants' description of their experiences of receiving only minimal support from the federal and some state governments. As mentioned in Chapter Four and Five, there appears to be little specific discussion on the development of historical skills in the ACH. Instead, Australian teachers relied on support from within their school or from professional history teacher associations. In addition, they depended on their own individual research, and collaboration and exchange with one another.

## **2. Concern over Too Much to Teach in Too Little Time**

Two of the Australian experts who wrote personal comments for this study mentioned two key areas of concern in the current formulation of the ACH. Macintyre considered that the *principal issues* [regarding the teaching of history] *are space within the school timetable and the employment of teachers trained in history*. Taylor argued that what he called *specialist teaching* i.e. by history specialists, was the main issue in the teaching of history for students in Years 6 to 9. Discussion in the last section of Chapter Six has already indicated that the reduction in the hours allocated to the teaching of history for the Australian Curriculum overall was, in Taylor's judgement, *ACARA's biggest failing as far as the history curriculum is concerned*. The present section deals with the problems of time in relation to the history curriculum; the next considers the issue of teachers needing qualifications in

history to effectively teach the historical inquiry approach in the new curriculum/syllabus documents.

History teachers are frequently heard to complain that they never have enough time to cover all the material set down in the time available. There are thus two factors that need to be considered and kept in balance, if the curriculum/syllabus is to be effective in the school context, so that teachers and students do not feel over stretched by the amount of work to be covered and deadlines to be met. Both Singapore and Australian teachers expressed their feelings about the time constraints they experienced in teaching their lower secondary history classes.

Even though the guideline questions made no particular mention of time issues, all Australian participants made comments regarding time, predominantly centred on issues of content and school timetable. One teacher explained the sorts of school pressures that were reducing the amount of time allocated to the teaching of history. P13 explained that the currently allocated time for history in Years 6 to 9, in his particular school context, *has been threatened in recent years due to extended curriculum demands such as Gender education, expanded Maths and Science courses and Pastoral Care programs*. Similarly, P8 explained how the introduction of these subjects had impinged upon the study of history.

*[T]ime allocated [is] insufficient for teaching ALL [sic] curriculum and skills involved in History. The implementation of Civics and Citizenship and Economics and Business as part of the Year 8 HASS curriculum has furthered this difficulty. As a result we have to focus on the skills, rather than the content, due to the poor time allocation [which] averages out to be 5 weeks per topic.*

P1 encapsulated the predicament by identifying *[t]ime to ensure all aspects of curriculum are met in the time we have with students* as an issue. However, she also noted that: *At our school students are required to study this subject but I feel that it depends on the teachers*

*engagement with the topic as to how the students learn. P4 stated [t]ime is the biggest issue! The curriculum feels overcrowded and we have to split our allocated lessons for the year between history and geography (4x50 minute lessons a week). P2 claimed it was necessary to 'gloss over' some areas; the Year 9 example she gave was the inter war period. P10 stated:*

*Teachers struggle to look at the required content with their class and develop all the required skills in the timeframe given. Many get 'bogged' down with trying to squeeze in all the content and this is usually at the expense of skill development.*

P12, for example, considered that *the content is huge. It is impossible to cover every area in any sort of depth. Rather, it is important to combine some of the concepts and ideas of each (e.g. [Year 10] Holocaust – WW2 and human rights – apartheid).* She added that *[t]here needs to be several modifications to the depth studies by teachers to ensure that there is both enough time and sufficient connections to make the learning meaningful.*

P3 expressed her concern *at the level of depth we go to, it is quite shallow in parts and that is frustrating for my student-audience.* She also raised that the problem that *the time requirements don't [sic] allow for sufficient depth of learning, a frustration for many high-achieving students.* Her overall view of the national curriculum is that *it offers interesting choices that can only be done at a shallow depth in the times that schools have allocated.* As P2 noted, *we would always like more teaching time.*

One of the new features of the ACH which has proved time consuming for many teachers has been the depth studies. For instance, Paul Foley, in his interview, noted time as the main difficulty experienced by teachers when implementing depth studies. Although their value in learning historical inquiry methods and concepts is appreciated, the prescribed number of three for each year level has presented timing difficulties in many history classrooms. As a result, many teachers have come to genuinely feel the new history curriculum is overcrowded. P1 highlighted that *we split our allocated lessons for the year*

*between history and geography.* P12 also expressed that there are *continued concerns that the curriculum is 'overcrowded' in terms of content*, however she also believed that *there is still sufficient scope for teacher choice and judgement based on student need.* These responses are confirmed through a report from ACARA (2015a), possessing data collected from 2014 to 2015, which noted for 7-10 History teachers were concerned with “overcrowding due to the construct of 3 depth studies” (p. 33). This was reflected by Macintyre who highlighted that *there were concerns about excessive content.*

The commentary in Australian peer reviewed academic articles over this period confirmed the time constraints experienced by history teachers (Hart, 2015), as well as elaborating on the educationally undesirable consequences of teachers being pressured for time. Many of the same views were expressed by others who were responding to the *Review* (Ferrari, 2014; Hurst, 2014c; Hurst & Murphey, 2014). Taylor, in his personal response highlighted that in one case, History in Year 7 and 8 had been *allocated 11 hours pa.* Hart (2015), an academic history education researcher, made the following assertion in her article in a special edition of *Curriculum Perspectives*: “ACARA’s suggested 50 hours per year across Years 7 to 10 is inadequate in terms of allowing teachers to meet the content and skills demands of the AC History at these year levels” (p. 59). She went on to note from her own observation that the “sheer breadth” of the curriculum had promoted “pedagogies of speed” to ensure that all required elements of the curriculum were met, inadvertently promoting what has been termed a “drive-by” approach to history that does not encourage any deep understanding of the subject (Hart, 2015, p. 59). In addition, Hart (2015) suggested “that the ready availability of commercial textbooks which explicitly address prescribed content, subverts effective curriculum planning, and that this, in combination with the layered content of AC History acts to promote a technicist implementation” (p. 59). This negative effect was most noticeable, she considered with “non-specialist or less experienced teachers ... [and can result in an] approach focused on the transmission of content albeit slung over the

occasional inquiry question” (Hart, 2015, p. 59). Such teaching could provide the impression of historical inquiry without truly being a disciplinary approach.

Other Australian academic experts have been critical of this dilution of the original concept of history as an R – 10 subject in the Australian Curriculum. For instance, Taylor believed that there were *SOSE-lamenting officials and teachers as well as timetablers who want to keep the disciplinary side of history and geography lumped together in a small dark corner of the curriculum*. In his opinion, the HASS label, was an *invitation to SOSEise [sic] the subject in schools that want to use the new label as an excuse to implement old ideas*. For Macintyre, in his personal comments, the decision to allow HASS was a development that he regretted since it meant that many students were deprived of an early exposure at primary school level to learning in the discipline of history. In drawing attention to the differentiation present among Australian states and territories, as well as schools, Foley did acknowledge that there are *schools in Victoria where it is SOSE to Year 10*.

In Singapore, the introduction of the Lower Secondary History syllabus led to similar problems with time. All the Singapore teacher participants involved in this study, except one noted, in varying degrees, time constraints in implementing the 2014 history syllabus. The one participant, P5, who did not refer to time constraints was responding to the set of guideline questions originally devised for principals and deputies of secondary schools. Two others in similar positions did discuss the issue of time constraints on their own initiative. For instance, P6 explained that:

*Time is the main problem as the inquiry requires a lot of time to execute but given our current allocation of period, we usually find ourselves rushed for time to guide the students and complete the inquiry within the stipulated time. How we overcome it is ... we narrow down our focus to certain aspects of the syllabus.*

Similarly, P14, a History senior, explained that the 2014 history syllabus required *time to teach Source-based skills, structured-essay questions and even historical investigation skills*. P14 also referred to time constraints, in that there was *not enough time to cover skills, content and Historical Investigation projects*. *For historical investigation projects the students especially the ... [Secondary] I needs a lot of guidance to complete the project*. P9, a teacher, described what it meant to her; simply she was *constantly trying to finish the syllabus on time*. Another teacher, P11 discussed the limitations with time in regards to the development of historical concepts. He stated *a balance between covering content knowledge and conceptual knowledge has to be struck, particularly with the constraint of time*. The responses of both Singapore's History seniors and teachers showed agreement on the fact that the time needed to implement processes related to historical inquiry was the source of the time constraints experienced with the 2014 Lower Secondary History syllabus.

Interestingly, the personal comments of the staff member at NIE pointed out that there were *some teachers who felt that there should be more content*. They also highlight that since the 2014 syllabus covers Singapore's history across a two year period instead of one, it means that *[t]here is now time for teachers to carry out ... activities [related to the historical investigation and historical inquiry] in class*, which enables them to *pay more attention in teaching historical skills and concepts*. Despite this, *time* was again acknowledged as the main *constraint* teachers experienced when implementing the historical investigation, *even though there are 12 to 14 periods set aside for HI*. As mentioned previously, the syllabus document states that each period lasts approximately 35 to 40 minutes, although concrete data from school participants shows variations in what schools constitute the length of a period.

### **3. The Need for Teachers to Have History Qualifications**



A number of the academic experts expressed strong views on the question of teacher qualifications. Both Macintyre and Taylor in their 2016 personal assessment of the ACH explained their concern over the number of teachers who in practice would be expected to teach the ACH in classes around Australia, despite the fact that they did not have any formal qualifications in history education. Both considered that it would be difficult for such teachers to provide students with a good understanding of the concepts and skills required for the process of historical inquiry, which was central to the ACH. In Macintyre's view, these problems could be explained, at the most fundamental level, by the fact that the implementation of the ACH was a matter for the states and territories, and not the Commonwealth government. In addition, the decentralisation policies of state and territory departments of education over the last decades had meant devolving the decisions about staffing and teaching to the local school level.

In his personal comments, written for this study, Macintyre stated categorically that *appropriate history qualifications are essential*. Melleuish also claimed that *qualified teachers are essential*. He added that teachers *should also be enthusiastic and inspire students*, while questioning whether the new curriculum actually did *inspire* teachers. Similarly, Taylor noted the importance of appropriate history qualifications *very highly* but acknowledged that he was aware of *excellent primary teachers who had little or no history or history education background who have become successful teachers of history because of enthusiasm and professional engagement*. At the same time, he admitted that such teachers were *not common*.

The concern about history qualifications for all those teaching history was particularly relevant in the middle school years in Australia. Because of differences in school structures and organisations across the states, teachers who were trained and had taught in primary schools were often found working alongside those with training and experience in

teaching at secondary level. These were considerable differences in their teaching expertise and levels of knowledge in the discipline of history. The most disturbing thing for Taylor was the fact that at secondary level, *we are still stuck with the depressing ‘anybody can teach humanities’ approach*. He was prepared to recognise however that where it was possible to provide necessary professional development and support for such teachers, the problems of lack of history qualifications could be overcome.

*As long as the teachers are fully au fait with the disciplinary aspects of history including Understandings, Skills and Content and the school provides adequate time and staffing I don’t have a problem with integration but in primary schools most teachers have had very little university background in these areas.*

Concern over the number of staff teaching history when they lacked history qualifications was also evident in the comments of some teachers. P13 indicated that *[u]nfortunately not all teaching staff have recognised History backgrounds. This is especially true for Middle Years. Often we receive teachers from a variety of backgrounds because the perception amongst Admin. is that “anybody can teach History”*. Similarly, P10 explained that at her school, *[a]s at many schools, unfortunately HASS is often seen as a subject that anyone can teach and It [sic] is occasionally used as a timetable ‘filler’ for staff who do not have HASS qualifications.*

Appropriate qualifications in history was not an issue for staff teaching history in Singapore, with the staff member at NIE stating that *history qualifications are important – I would say 8 out 10*. His comments discussed at the end of Chapter Six explained how Singapore managed to ensure that those teaching history had appropriate qualifications. Almost all Lower Secondary History teachers in Singapore schools had their initial teacher training in one university, Nanyang Technological University’s NIE. In the year or so before the release of the 2014 syllabus, staff members like the academic expert mentioned above

had introduced students to the rationale and the new approach to historical inquiry, so that they were well prepared for teaching it in the classroom. Those already teaching were given professional development to introduce them to the new features of the syllabus and introduce them to the new features of the syllabus and ways of teaching it to their students. Moreover, one of the teacher participants (P9) explained how she as a teacher with qualifications in Mathematics had been given the opportunity for professional development in history education.

By contrast, in Australia state and territory departments of education, education jurisdictions, and other associations, such as HTAA, were responsible for providing professional development for history teachers in relation to the ACH. It is also up to the individual teacher to source professional development opportunities which connects to their AITSL accreditation. As the participants comments, discussed earlier in this chapter, make it clear it was sometimes a matter for individual schools, particularly in rural and regional areas, where the Senior teacher in history was the one who took the initiative in preparing fellow teachers for the changes in content and teaching approaches. Moreover, the process of preparing teaching for the new curriculum was complicated by the fact that the ACH was introduced over an extended period of time of three to four years, 2011 to 2015 (Appendix 1.4), during which it was subject to a number of changes.

In the case of initial teacher training for students about to become history teachers in Australian schools, the programs were scattered across a number of universities and higher education institutions, each of which had its own approach to the preparation of teachers, generally and for students wishing to become history teachers as well. AITSL (n.d.) has identified that there are currently 16 institutions in NSW offering accredited undergraduate and graduate qualifications needed for teaching; in SA there were 4, but there was only 1 in TAS. This list includes universities such as the University of Adelaide (SA), Macquarie

University (NSW) and the University of Tasmania, as well as higher education institutions, such as Tabor College (SA) and Alphacrucis College (NSW) (AITSL, n.d.).

## **VII. Conclusion**

A number of the differences and concerns raised by teachers in their comments on implementing the new curriculum/syllabus in the classroom related to the variations in country contexts and school situations. Examples are the Singapore teachers concerns with the limited scope of the Lower Secondary History syllabus and the Australian teachers' frustration at the lack of adequate resources and support. As regards the features of the curriculum/syllabus documents that teachers liked, there was a somewhat surprising similarity of response, revealing common underlying assumptions about the importance of history education and their common concern to find more effective ways of teaching it. They were concerned to achieve the aims set out in the respective documents. At the same time their comments highlighted their desire to make the learning of history as a meaningful and enjoyable experience for the students.

The points of greatest difference between the teachers related to teaching history to develop a collective consciousness towards national unity and loyalty to the nation. Singapore teachers took this for granted as the primary aim of the Lower Secondary History syllabus. Their comments revealed their own personal acceptance of their involvement in this learning process. The Australian teacher participants, on the other hand, were strongly opposed to using the teaching of history, particularly at the lower secondary level, for political or national purposes.

Perhaps the view of the Australian teachers were influenced by knowing that in Year 9 and especially 10, when the curriculum dealt with the historical realities of two world wars,

the issues of national loyalty would inevitably arise, but at a time when students were two years older. This possibility does not exist in the overall pattern of secondary education in Singapore. Whilst, aspects of Singapore's history are evident in the syllabus documents for Upper Secondary History, Social Studies and at the Pre-University level, the one year of history (normally undertaken over two years) is the only place in the whole of their secondary education when the study of history is compulsory. This difference in attitudes between the Australian and the Singapore teacher participants in this study, can thus be explained not only by the way different geographical and historical factors that have influenced the development of the two nations, but also by differences in the present educational landscapes of the two countries.

## **Chapter Eight: Using Historical Inquiry for Diverging Educational Purposes**

### **I. Introduction**

This PhD research was designed as a comparative education study of the experiences of Singapore history teachers implementing the new 2014 version of the Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses compared with those of Australian teachers in 2015 and 2016 introducing the new national history curriculum to comparable year levels. Given the public debate and controversy surrounding the new curriculum in Australia, it was important to investigate how teachers were implementing it, particularly the new emphasis on concepts and skills related to the discipline of history. Comparisons with Singapore experiences of teaching the basics of historical literacy have proved particularly useful. Analysis of school-based data from both countries, as well as public commentary, have contributed to understanding the strengths and limitations of each country's document and suggesting other approaches and possibilities.

This study investigated the nature of the history curriculum/syllabuses in Australia and Singapore with an emphasis on the content and the historical skills developed and the extent to which the history curriculum fostered higher levels of historical understanding. In some cases, this has produced unexpected insights from the deepened understanding of the similarities and differences in the approaches to history education in Singapore and Australia at the lower secondary level.

## II. Method

Since the inclusion of history as a compulsory subject in the first national curriculum (F-10), Australia has entered a new phase of history education, in relation to curriculum development and implementation. In 2014, Singapore started to implement its revised Lower Secondary History syllabus in Secondary 1. The curriculum rationale in both countries claimed that studying history promoted student awareness of important issues and historical events, whilst instilling a greater understanding, empathy and an appreciation of different groups, cultures, and societies (MOE, 2013; ACARA, 2015e). As MOE (2013) stated, it “allows students to draw connections between the past and the present by understanding how the nature and impact of past development explain today’s world” (MOE, 2013, p.1). In order to promote these possibilities, higher levels of historical understanding, inquiry skills and higher-order thinking needed to be developed in students. Hence it was important to investigate teaching approaches and classroom practice in implementing curriculum, as well as pay attention to the public commentary on history teaching in both countries.

Although studies of these issues relating to each country existed, this comparative study, including academic and teacher views, as well as curriculum analysis, has pointed to new approaches and possibilities, for both countries. Using a comparative education approach has allowed the research to highlight the Australian situation, discuss successes and problems of implementation, and provide an understanding of what Australia can learn from Singapore in relation to teaching history in Years 7 and 8, and vice versa. The comparison of the sets of curriculum documents concentrated on statements of purpose, content, and pedagogy, as they related to fostering historical consciousness and empathy. The documents were introduced at similar times in response to the same international influences in reconfiguring history education as a way of engaging students’ interest and developing historical consciousness.

The comparative analysis of the two curricula was triangulated in relation to both space and method triangulation (Cohen et al., 2007), with related public commentary found in newspapers, journal articles and in the case of Singapore, parliamentary responses and forum letter replies. The data that made up the third point of triangulation were specifically gathered by the researcher for the purposes of this study. They consisted of a small collection of personal responses from history academics, curriculum experts, classroom teachers and those in charge of history in the lower secondary levels. Evidence from the second and third sources, the public commentary and the academic and teachers' responses, have been incorporated into the analysis and discussion to support, explain and critique the curriculum documents, especially in relation to the viability of their implementation. Thematic analysis, of the three sources, was based on the purposes of history education, the structure of each curriculum document and historical inquiry methods. The use of triangulation broadened and deepened the study in terms of the scope of the responses.

The application of space and method triangulation, successfully provided, in the words of Patton (2002) "a behind-the-scenes look" at the development and implementation of history curriculum, which was not "directly observable" through document analysis alone (p. 307). In the case of Singapore, whilst public debate is limited, the inclusion of academic and media commentary drew attention to society's wider interest in the way the nation's history is taught. It also highlighted a centralised and collective endorsement of history education, as well as an attempt to notify and update the general public of developments in education. An example of this, was the continual reference made to Singapore's new inquiry-based approach to learning which was reiterated by various people in different mediums using similar expressions. The public commentary, in Australia, on the other hand, highlighted the reporting of key developments in history education, which often drew attention to competing ideological assumptions.



The third source of data in the form of personal responses provided insight into teachers' interpretation of the respective documents, and engagement with its content. Most importantly, it highlighted some of the realities of implementing curricula in the two different national contexts, each with its own social, cultural and political influences. For instance responses from History seniors in Australia pointed to concerns regarding teacher capacity, including *the skills of teachers themselves* (P13), as well as the way history has been scheduled into school timetables, *as a timetable 'filler' for staff who do not have HASS qualifications* (P10). This contextualised the situation and exemplified the perception often associated with history as a subject in Australia. This assumption appears not to have changed with the introduction of a national curriculum.

These participants provided illustrative examples of curriculum implementation from various classrooms. Their opinions gave insights into what is currently occurring in schools in the two countries and in different states. Teachers' opinions on the curricula, thus formed a bridge between the social context or classroom reality and the curriculum text, of the official documents. It also highlighted differences in approach and implementation between jurisdictions in Australia, especially in regard to the presence of Year 7 in secondary schooling and disciplinary approaches to history education.

These insights assisted in producing an understanding of whether views and issues established in public commentary mirrored those of teachers involved in implementing history education. The results of the comparative and thematic analyses indicate that where the curriculum/syllabus statements encouraged historical literacy as the foundation of historical consciousness, lower secondary school students can demonstrate feelings of empathy in classrooms, where teachers understand these concepts and support them in classroom activities.

### **III. Answering the Research Questions**

Chapter One outlined three research questions, which now need to be answered in the light of the analysis of the data gathered.

#### **1. What influences shaped the 2015 version 8.1 of the Australia Curriculum: History for Years 7 and 8, as compared with the Singapore 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses?**

The analysis of the three sets of data, the two curriculum/syllabus documents, and, from both countries, the written responses to guideline questions from history education experts and lower secondary history teachers, as well as public commentary in media and academic journals pointed to three important influences shaping the curriculum documents studied in this research. All were in the form of ideas that were espoused by various groups. For Singapore, the fundamental idea was the building up of the nation. In the case of Australia, the ideas that gained most attention were ideological and political. The one influence which was evident in both sets of documents related to the educational ideas associated with historical inquiry and its importance for history learning in the contemporary world.

The inclusion of historical inquiry as a fundamental component in both documents is proof of this influence. This shared emphasis can be traced to a common source — a group of history education specialists from USA, Canada, the UK, Australia and including Singapore. Through conferences, journals and PhD Supervisions these ideas have spread through the English-speaking world to change the basis of teaching history in middle and secondary schools in order to make history learning more relevant and exciting to study.

Both the Australian and Singapore documents can be seen to demonstrate this notable change in the country's approach to history education, particularly in regards to the new emphasis on the importance of historical inquiry and critical thinking, designed to assist in the development of active and global citizens. When taught using inquiry methods to achieve historical literacy, the subject can also promote historical consciousness and the attainment of higher order thinking skills that can be transformative to students' learning.

For the Singapore Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses, historical inquiry is directly referred to as the recommended pedagogy. This section includes the Cycle of Historical Inquiry derived from the work of Peter Doolittle, David Hicks and Tom Ewing, *The Historical Inquiry Project, 2004-2005* from Virginia Technical University. It was also supported not only with a newly devised statement on the Philosophy of History Education, but also by a reference list including works by leading scholars, including Lee and Ashby. The inclusion of the Qualities of a History Learner diagram reinforced this approach through summarising the qualities that emerge from undertaking historical inquiry. This diagram was drawn upon in several key sections of the document, including the learning outcomes and aims, which promotes the continual relevance of these concepts. These outcomes were also stipulated more explicitly than in the ACH counterpart.

Singapore's Lower Secondary History syllabus document has been largely influenced by social, cultural, historical, political, and economic factors. The interplay between these, reflects the uniqueness of the city-state and their approach to the teaching of history in this particular context. The approach taken toward historical content in these years was shaped by the emphasis the PAP and MOE places on its national history. It is the only compulsory history education students undertake and its focus is strongly national. Although previous syllabuses have encouraged the 'Singapore Story', the 2014 syllabus document can be seen as an attempt to make improvements/progress in providing the provision for teachers

to include alternate perspectives, which is strengthened through revised coursebooks. This does place emphasis, not unlike Australia, on teacher knowledge and classroom practice. Overall, the syllabus document highlights a tendency to place emphasis, for the reasons above, on shared memory and the collective experiences of the different groups in Singapore society.

In its past, Singapore experienced racial tensions and disharmony, history education has been a way to construct and reinforce racial harmony and social cohesion. It is also a country that gained independence more than fifty years ago and has surpassed external expectations, in part through adapting education initiatives to suit the climate of the time. The 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses reflected the need to remind students of these developments, to be grateful to the founding forefathers, and to encourage a sense of belonging in an ever changing technology driven world, where youth were constantly influenced by mass media and what was taking place in western society. As a result, external forces and Singapore's geographical vulnerabilities are clearly reflected in the document. The social unrest in many neighbouring regions, strengthened the necessity, from the perspective of PAP, to instil in students a sense of belonging and patriotism, despite cultural differences among its citizens.

Coinciding with this, the syllabus reflected a new 'phase' in Singapore's education system whereby critical thinking skills were encouraged in classrooms to develop students for a twenty-first century workplace. The 2014 history syllabus, as a result, can be seen to be largely influenced by preceding education initiatives, such as 21CC and economic imperatives envisioned by the PAP. The 21CC are not only crucial to developing active and global citizens, but also in preparing students to make a positive contribution to the workplace environment. In turn the Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses can be seen to fit into this wider education landscape by providing transferable skills that create well rounded, confident learners. These ideas reflected consideration by MOE and

academics that, in regards to history education, modifications and developments needed to be made in order to focus upon a student centred approach to learning, which encourages a deeper understanding of the nation's history, not simply knowledge in order to perform well with assessments. These attributes were reflected in the official statement, particularly the Qualities of a History Learner, which encouraged students to become empathetic, knowledgeable, methodical, reasoned and balanced in their judgements. As such these characteristics were seen to foster productive, contributing, and active members of society.

In comparison, the ACH includes historical inquiry infused into both strands of the document. Whilst it links to the document's second strand, historical skills, and the phases in the process of historical inquiry are included in the document, the terminology can be considered as an elective. The new depth studies provide a means for introducing the basic concepts and inquiry skills central to History. However, it is largely left up to the individual teacher's interpretation, understanding and prior understanding of the document. It is for this reason that the accessibility and completion of professional development is important. Although, processes and concepts linked to historical inquiry are discussed in the ACH, there is no explicit mention of historical inquiry as a teaching methodology. More emphasis is placed on the skills used in the process of historical inquiry. The limitation with this predicament, is to what extent this limits a newly appointed history teachers' understanding of the discipline, when they only have access to the most recent version of the ACH available online.

Whilst the overall impact of the 2014 *Review*, did not have the dominant influence on Australia's education system as was originally publicised in the media, it did have an impact on the way in which history could be structured in Australian schools, particularly in the primary and lower secondary years. The ACH in its Rationale asserts that history "is a disciplined process of inquiry into the past that develops students' curiosity and imagination"

(ACARA, 2015, p. 10), however if merged into a multidisciplinary approach with subjects such as Geography or Civics and Citizenship, to what extent is this possible. Most importantly this development, in retrospect, highlights the political influence that is possible within Australia's education system. The renewed interest in the ACH leading up to the 2013 Australian federal election was influenced considerably by political motives and has been from the onset — contested. Politicians valued the history curriculum as it provided a means to promote ideological differences. This subsequently permitted political climate to dictate curriculum alterations and developments to occur following volatile federal elections, allowing for instability to ensue.

One consistency seen from conception of the *National Curriculum Framing Paper* (NCB, 2008), to v.8.1<sup>31</sup> is the implementation of world history approach to learning, which has been well-received by academics, teaching associations and teachers. This highlights that academics who assisted in the development of their nation's curriculum document have influenced the content and approach undertaken. This does not necessarily link to issues such as political affiliation or the history wars. An example of this can be seen in the curriculum documents of both countries. Firstly, Stuart Macintyre had previously published work on the field of world history and was crucial in preparing a draft version of the *Framing Paper*.

There appears to be two competing forces at play in Singapore's syllabus document. Whilst the contextual statements draw attention to global realities and a regional consciousness with the historical knowledge component of the document, there remains an undeniable interest in outlining the nation's history, which involves a singular historical narrative. It can be said that, similarly to the ACH that an inclusion of multiple perspectives is left up to the teacher. Despite this, the fact that the Singapore also considers school syllabuses in terms of attitudes and values as important qualities that students should learn,

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<sup>31</sup> This can also be seen in the curriculum document currently implemented in 2019.

it can be said that this heightens students understanding of other cultures. The ACH does not have a comparable section, and although the inclusion of these sorts of dispositions can have negative connotations regarding the mandatory aim of producing students with certain mindsets. Instead the way in which these aims are structured and conveyed to the reader highlight the kind and types of mindsets needed in order to facilitate historical inquiry in the classroom. They are identified as inherent aspects tied to history education and provide a foundation for the historical concepts to work from.

## **2. Which of the purposes of history education are most emphasised in each of the curriculum/syllabus documents and why?**

The curriculum documents of the two countries give clear evidence of differences in purpose for the teaching of history in Years 7 and 8. This is particularly evident in content knowledge outlined, which reflects national contexts. Alongside this, both Australia and Singapore have introduced historical inquiry as the most effective pedagogy in the twenty-first century. In turn, both countries appear to model these approaches on the works of a group of international scholars, such as Peter Seixas, Sam Wineburg, Peter Lee and Tony Taylor. Therefore, the inquiry purposes of history education are reflected in both curriculum statements.

Whilst the discussion of historical inquiry can be seen through the outline of historical concepts in the Australian curriculum, this remains largely implicit. Whereas Singapore has student-oriented learning outcomes and relates historical inquiry to student benefits, the Australian Curriculum has a teacher-oriented focus and lacks a definitive communication of the benefits derived from studying history. Unlike the Singapore syllabus there is no discussion of the theoretical underpinnings of historical inquiry and its benefits for students.

The ACH explicitly encourages a disciplinary approach to teaching history, especially in Years 7-10. This approach is unquestioned, and no alternatives are presented, despite differences in the way teachers and schools are now implementing history in the middle and lower secondary years. As mentioned previously, the world history approach encouraged in the ACH highlights the work of academics, including Stuart Macintyre, involved in the developmental process of the national history curriculum. The ACH was also influenced by the *Framing and Shaping Papers* that were published prior to the release of the curriculum document. However, as a result, the introductory statements of v.8.1 of the ACH, including the documents rationale and aims, reflecting another mood from the initial excitement. Since the release of these papers, practical realities, such as the loss of mandatory hours. One result has been to disregard the overviews, which were designed to constitute 10% of the teaching.

Singapore, on the other hand, reflects national purposes of education alongside each other in the Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses. As shown earlier, participants from Singapore were more aware of collective consciousness, at both the national and ethnic group level. All three sources of data pertaining to Singapore noted the expansion of content from a syllabus which largely focused on the nation's British colonial heritage to a document which demonstrates greater consideration to archaeological evidence and maritime kingdoms from the thirteenth century. Despite this, the syllabus document does prioritise national history, for nation building purposes. In comparison, Australian Curriculum writers and planners have not stressed national purposes, considering it inappropriate, especially at the lower secondary level. This judgement was strongly reflected in the Australian teachers' comments.

Academic purposes are reflected in the encouragement of historical inquiry as the recommended pedagogy in Singapore, particularly the way in which international academic



research underpins the document's discussion and approach to their recommended pedagogy. Emphasis is placed on student learning and the benefits that can be derived from studying history. At times the language used in the syllabus document, and reflected in public commentary, appears to convince teachers that this new approach is necessary, beneficial and warranted. Perhaps one reason why similar commentary is omitted from the Australian Curriculum is that the inquiry approach was not seen as new. As a result, although the ACH focuses on the academic purposes of history, it does not provide any discussion to justify the purpose of historical inquiry.

The findings from this PhD indicate that each country's conceptualisation of history education played a role in the extent to which historical consciousness emerged in the three sources of data from the country concerned. Since historical consciousness relates not to facts or interpretation of concepts but rather to personal dispositions and attitudes, which are not always evident in school contexts, they are often overlooked in curriculum statements. However, historical consciousness, is important for developing empathy. This comparison, of the ACH and the 2014 Singapore Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses, has attempted to investigate this attitudinal dimension. In regard to the Australian context, the findings of this research points to the benefits that might follow from giving consideration to a rebalancing of historical literacy and historical consciousness, and recognising that the latter can be fostered through the former. It appears that this has been more easily achieved through the context of Singapore, which still includes within the school syllabuses an emphasis on attitudes and values as the qualities of learners. This emphasis in history curriculum can extend that sense of relationship beyond the immediate practical realities of students' lives.

**3. From the perspective of academic specialists, media public commentary and teachers, what were the main issues that emerged in the implementation of the new curriculum/syllabus in the lower secondary history classes in Australia and Singapore?**

Whilst highlighting aspects and components of the curriculum document that they have liked, participants also drew attention to issues encountered in the implementation of the curriculum/syllabus document. Some of the issues presented are common to both countries, whilst others play into their differing contexts. Time constraints were a considerable issue to teachers in both countries. Although teachers, generally, wanted more time devoted to their subject, the comments, from these sources of data point to issues in achieving this. For Singapore, more time was needed in order to devote attention to the teaching of historical skills and concepts, as well as the implementation of the HI. In Australia, issues with time constraints in fitting in both overviews and depth studies resulted in several teachers removing the overviews in their teaching of history. This enabled more time to be allocated to depth studies, but at the expense of the crucial element in the curriculum which provided an underlying structure and necessary links between the depth studies selected. Time also manifested itself as an issue in regard to allocations in the school timetable. This concern was isolated to the Australian context, where the History seniors and curriculum experts drew attention to the great difference apparent between schools, jurisdictions and Australian states and territories. Some of the allocations mentioned demonstrated significant divergences from the original expectation of 50 hours a week.

Within Singapore, another main issue raised was grounded in the shift from a content-driven approach to one emphasising the development of historical skills. This also correlated with a shift in emphasis away from examinations, which raised concerns among some participants regarding student's readiness to complete examinations at the upper secondary level because of the lack of preparedness in the lower secondary years. Up to this

point students had been geared toward completing examinations throughout their entire schooling, a situation which has been slowly changing.

In both Australia and Singapore, history in Years 7 and 8, or Secondary 1 and 2, have always been taught by a mixture of non-specialist and disciplinary trained teachers. This situation raises the issue of professional development. From the personal responses gathered, there appears to be more difficulties with participants accessing professional development in Australia. Where it is left largely to professional associations, schools, or individuals, to arrange. In comparison, professional development in Singapore is mainly provided by MOE and NIE to teachers at all stages.

#### **IV. Limitations**

It is important to note that there was never any intention in this study to select participants as a representative sample that could be used to generalise to the teacher population in either country. This was a small-scale qualitative study; however, it was in-depth, substantial and revealing in terms of the written responses gained from teachers and academics, who, on average provided 500 -1000 words each. In this way, the limitation of the research scope, has proved to have benefits of in-depth understanding for the aims of the study. Teachers' responses gave illustrative examples of curriculum implementation as they had seen or experienced it in their classrooms. Academic and curriculum experts, for their part, not only provided insight into the development of each curriculum/syllabus document, but also confirmed the responses gained from teachers and the data found in public commentary regarding implementation. As shown above, these highlighted the working of students, teacher capacity and the suitability of the history curriculum for lower secondary years.

School participants (such as principals, deputies, History seniors and teachers) were a vital inclusion to this study, and their thoughts and comments on the topic proved to be very important to the research findings. Emphasis was placed on these participant groups and their reactions to the documents in their early stages of implementation. Their opinions, in turn, highlighted students' feelings toward and engagement with history education. However, students were not directly included as a participant group.

## **V. Future Research Directions**

The findings highlighted above for this small-scale qualitative study, provide the foundation for future studies into history education across Australian and Singapore secondary schools. This would allow consideration to be given to the study of historical inquiry across multiple year levels, but also world and national history in both countries. However, the findings from the present study also highlight the need to further consider the extent of teacher's understanding of historical inquiry and historical consciousness and the effect of this on student's learning. The curriculum/syllabus documents in Australia and Singapore cater for mainstream education, providing minimal attention to the ways in which the content and approaches can be adapted to suit different learning environments and students with disabilities. As previously highlighted, students remain absent from the curriculum documents in the lower secondary years of the ACH, particularly when placed alongside the Singapore counterpart. This would make students an important participant group in future research endeavours. Their opinions on studying history and the ways in which their learning is affected by individual teacher's understanding of the curriculum documents are invaluable.

Australian teacher responses gained during the course of this study show that the teacher participants do use a variety of activities, student and teacher centric, that are akin to

heightening students historical understanding and critical thinking skills, such as source analysis (P1, P7), creating artefacts (P4) and using a collaborative approach to research (P3). Participants' responses from Singapore indicated similar activities, particularly in regard to source analysis (P9, P11). It needs to be recognised, however, that the teachers who chose to participate in my study, were usually well informed and confident in teaching history, whereas the Teachers in Charge of History at the schools possessed a broader understanding of teacher capacity across all history classes taught in their own and comparable schools. It is noteworthy that these particular concerns were not mentioned in the responses gained from Teachers in Charge of History or Senior/Specialist Staff in Singapore.

This study has provided the basis to explore this issue further. This includes placing emphasis on teachers' perception and understanding of historical consciousness and historical inquiry, particularly how they define these terms, with the lack of information provided in the document. Furthermore, to determine the extent to which history is still considered a *timetable 'filler'*, as well as the effect of non-specialist teachers implementing the ACH, it could be worthwhile pursuing either a quantitative methods or mixed-methods approach to collecting data. Mixed methods would help to develop a broader understanding not only of teachers' opinions on the issue and the ways in which their qualifications impact upon their classroom practice, but also of the number of schools implementing history in this way.

Where history learning promotes empathy in the form of a deeper understanding of other individuals and groups in society, it strengthens students' sense of relationality with those who are different from them. There is considerable potential for further development and future research on this topic.

## **VI. Significance**

By complementing the analysis of history curriculum and teaching documents with opinions from history teachers, heads of history and history academics/specialists, this comparative study provided a deeper understanding of the associated issues in regard to teaching approaches and content in a national history curriculum in the two countries concerned. The written responses from school stakeholders, especially teachers, evoked their school classroom experiences and their assessment of the strengths and limitations of the curriculum documents as they stood in 2015-2016, relative to a curriculum that had only been implemented for no more than 3 years. These teacher insights were not only fundamental to the research, but also most useful for refining and improving the current curriculum documents and their approaches to teaching history. In particular, it has contributed to the discourse on the nature and the importance of Australia's F-10 national history curriculum and its status as a compulsory subject.

The findings indicated the two countries' curriculum documents analysed did seek to foster historical consciousness. In addition, the comments of the teacher participants demonstrated how their understanding of the curriculum documents had led to examples of empathy and relationality in their classroom teaching. This study also provided a deeper understanding of the current state of affairs and emerging opinions on the national history curriculum/syllabuses in both countries; leading to further research on the effect that history curriculum documents has on students' learning.

## **VII. Comparative Education Insights**

Over the last three decades, research in history education has led to the development of more relevant, student-centred approaches to history curricula. Academics in the

discipline of history and history education have argued strongly for historical inquiry, historical literacy, and historical thinking as the essential elements of their discipline which lower secondary students need to learn. Some have gone further to argue that the mastery of historical literacy can foster in individual students' personal attitudes or dispositions toward history, ranging from historical understanding and awareness, to historical consciousness and empathy.

Whilst Singapore has had a history syllabus for lower secondary students since self-government in 1959, the specific teaching of Singapore's own history started only in 1984 (Chia, 2012; Lee, M.H., 2015). The 2014 Lower Secondary History Teaching Syllabuses gave increased attention to historical inquiry and related processes. The course centres on Singapore's national history, prescribing four units which commence with a focus on Singapore's maritime origins in the fourteenth century and extend to the decade following Singapore's independence from Malaysia.

In comparison, the ACH has adopted a world history approach to learning in Years 7 to 10—where world history is used as lens to examine and introduce Australian history in various ways. History in Australia, as a compulsory subject for all students from Kindergarten to Year 10 (Secondary 4), has been introduced only recently in the first ever national Australian curriculum. The early progression of the Australian colonies to self-government meant that each state had developed its own separate education system before Federation came in 1901 and under the federal constitution, education remained a state power. The move, in the early twenty-first century, to a national curriculum meant that Australia entered into a new phase of history education, which included initiatives aimed at revitalising and redesigning the subject through “a disciplined process of inquiry into the past that develops students' curiosity and imagination” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 10). Implementation of the subject began in 2012 for some jurisdictions and schools but occurred

much later in other places (see Appendix 1.4: ACARA, 2014b). Some Australian states and territories, such as NSW, have also chosen to release their own version of the national curriculum for implementation, diversifying approaches to history once more.

In relation to current comparative education research, there are very few studies concerning lower secondary history curriculum contrasting a national history syllabus with a curriculum that has a world history approach, and how this difference affects the development of historical consciousness, and feelings of empathy. Relative to this, is each country's approach to instilling the necessary skills in students that can assist them to effectively interact with the world around them; and develop the historical skills that are integral to history education. There is no denying, however, that their varying approaches not only to content and structure but also to implementation, results in differing student perceptions of the subject and where the emphasis is placed in teaching.

In Singapore's Lower Secondary History syllabus document, emphasis is placed on the educational and personal development of students. This is evident in the recognition of the students' role in their own learning and the attempt to develop their personal interest in history, which is revisited throughout the syllabus document. In their responses, Singapore participants showed the importance of developing dispositions and skills, as well as an appreciation of cultural and religious roots. In comparison, any consideration of the students and their individual development remains largely absent from the ACH. For example, whilst the Year 7 and 8 Achievement Standards detail the actions that should be achieved as a result of that year level's learning, they are not associated with educational values or the personal affects of learning history. Furthermore, no reference is made empathy. This provides the perception that the ACH is more concerned with presenting concepts, content and skills related to the discipline of history, rather than identifying and mapping out the personal educational development of the individual student (ACARA, 2015e). Although the ACH



document lacks this dimension, the written responses from history teachers, and academics/experts, as indicated earlier in this chapter, demonstrated the use of activities which heighten students' historical understanding and critical thinking skills. In some cases, teacher participants even mentioned developing *a love of history* as what they were doing in the classroom.

Fostering in students a personal connection to history is most apparent in relation to the concept of *empathy*, which is discussed in both sets of documents. A closer look at the definition of empathy in the ACH and Singapore's discussion of empathy as learning outcomes and qualities for students to possess, highlight that both countries describe empathy in terms of sympathetic understandings of other people and their historic situation.

Where the curriculum also sets out to foster a deeper understanding of other individuals and groups in society, it can strengthen students' sense of empathy with those who are different from them. For empathy to exist, there needs to be a recognition of the things groups share, as well as the things that make groups different. This duality is dependent upon a level of acceptance that groups are different — that their interaction, for instance with historical events or societal issues, do differ. However, through this interaction, the commonalities are also important and become overarching ideas that unite communities. As shown previously, Singapore has introduced an emphasis on the different experiences of groups in society in various shared events, like the Japanese Occupation.

Given the cultural diversity of Australia, this has been applied to the Australian context through the cross-curriculum priority, intercultural understanding, a concept to be encouraged through all subjects in the Australia Curriculum. Nevertheless, in comparison to Singapore, Australian states and territories each possess their own history. Therefore, whilst there have been key events in the nation's past that have affected the country, as a whole; each state and territory, as well as its people, have interacted with the respective events in

varying ways. An historical understanding and appreciation of the particular experiences of different groups needs to be balanced by the recognition of other historical experiences that all groups have shared.

Whilst an overview section in the ACH draws attention to a broad discussion on human migration theories, which can be considered a sensitive issue for some ethnic minorities, the main inclusion of Indigenous Australian culture and history is reduced to one mandatory depth study entitled *Investigating the ancient past* (ACARA, 2015e). Although this depth study is mainly designed to provide students with an understanding of the discipline of history, as well as archaeology, it also encourages students to study ancient Australian sources, including the “importance of conserving the remains of the ancient past” (ACARA, 2015e, p. 17). These are sources that belong to a shared heritage. However, in terms of developing empathy with those who are different, the ACH in Year 7 and 8 provides limited opportunities. This is apart from the Australian states and schools which have modified the national curriculum document. For instance, NSW outlines for Year 8 an elective study on colonisation in Australia in the early modern world, which is to be compared alongside another region, such as the Americas (Board of Studies NSW, 2012).

Whilst there is the assumption that everyone is independent, individuals also learn from relating to one another. Therefore in relation to the learning of history, being able to relate to one another strengthens this relationship. This can occur through consideration being given to historical backgrounds. Whilst, Singapore has embedded national history in its approach to the teaching of history for the lower secondary years, consideration is given to cultural roots. For Australia, a greater emphasis is placed on personal historical consciousness, which means that the encouragement of empathy is dependent upon classroom experiences.

What remains to be considered is whether any practical benefit flows from this piece of comparative education research. After pinpointing the differences and commonalities between the lower secondary history curriculum document in Australia and Singapore, seeking to understand the forces that have shaped the two documents and identifying the implementation issues that have emerged in schools, is there anything that one country can learn from the other?

One possibility that did emerge in the comments of Singapore participants was the benefits for Singapore students to be exposed to a broader range of history than is possible when the compulsory lower secondary course is focused solely on the history of Singapore as a nation. Australia's world history approach which provides a broader base for the understanding of Australia's own history could provide ideas for Singapore to modify and adapt to their own purposes. In making this suggestion however, it is important to recognise the different schooling contexts of the two countries. Singapore students study history as a compulsory subject across two years, Australian secondary students have four years of compulsory history study under the ACH.

Australia, for its part, could benefit from adopting some of the systematic and thorough way of presenting the curriculum requirements. This would give all teachers a clearer understanding of what is to be taught in the history curriculum and how to approach its teaching. Those who find themselves teaching the subject even though they are not history graduates, would benefit from this. Singapore's Scope and Sequence Chart, for example, its source-kits, Qualities of a History Learner diagram, and its specific examples of assessment questions and marking provide greater support for teachers to successfully implement the historical inquiry approaches into students' classroom learning,

The opportunity to learn from one another through comparative education studies offers hope that history learning in both countries will be revitalised to the point that students

find history exciting and relevant to them personally. From the perspective of the researcher, this comparative education study was rewarding and enjoyable to conduct, as well as highlighting the ways in which the teaching of history is inseparable from a country's cultural, political, and social context.