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## Human Rights and History Education: An Australian Study

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*Abstract: The place of education for and about human rights within the school curriculum remains contested and this paper reports on the first national cross-sectoral investigation of its place in Australian curricula and more specifically in national and state History curriculum documents. Opportunities for the inclusion of human rights based studies were examined across school learning stages, taking into account explicit and implicit, compulsory or elective, as well as curricular and extra-curricular dimensions. Given the continued importance of History as a learning area, there is a need to strengthen the available explicit and mandatory opportunities for students to learn about human rights issues, working closely with key teacher associations, non-government agencies and supportive networks, drawing on available educational technologies.*

### Introduction

Australian education systems, at state and federal levels, have been undergoing major reforms to their governance structures and to the nature of their curriculum. At the same time over the last decade there has been a national conversation about the community's knowledge and understanding of human rights (National Human Rights Consultation Committee, 2009). In this context, it is an opportune time to review the place of education for and about human rights within the school curriculum, with specific emphasis in this paper on one subject area, History, and how it addresses human rights issues. The study reported on in this paper (Burridge et al., 2013) outlines and examines the findings of a nationwide investigation into the capacity of each state and territory school education system and their individual curricula to provide opportunities to educate and motivate school students about human rights. It also engages in a discussion of the curriculum reforms being introduced as a result of the national Australian curriculum framework that is being led by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the extent to which it caters for human rights perspectives. The study was the first national cross-sectoral investigation of the place of human rights in Australian school curricula.

This paper confines itself to reporting on the curriculum opportunities found in the existing History syllabus in the various state and territory based curricula at the time of the investigation in 2012. Our data derive from four main sources: a review of the literature; input from roundtable discussions with participants with an interest in the advocacy for and the delivery of, human rights education in schools; analysis of curriculum and policy documents at the state, territory and national levels; and data on the resources and technologies being used in the teaching of human rights in schools.

In general terms, it appears that the opportunities for delivery of effective human rights education, including History, are fragmentary and the efforts being made to engage in discussions about our rights, particularly in schools, are limited and sporadic, across all Australian states and territories, school sectors and in each of the key school stages from the

Foundation years to Year 12. Learning about human rights issues often depends on the interests and commitment of individual teachers, and is being relegated to classes in the senior, non-compulsory years of secondary school, or to optional elective subjects.

Overall only a small proportion of school students are able to take up the chances available in the curricula to learn about human rights. Therefore, in the context of the new national curriculum now available in schools, there is a need to refocus efforts to ensure that Australian school students are given the opportunity to learn and engage in discussions about a range of human rights issues as part of their school experiences, across their school years.

### **Importance of Learning About History**

There are a myriad of arguments about the importance of historical knowledge in the development of a critical mind and for developing an understanding of the forces which have shaped the 21<sup>st</sup> Century world. History is nothing if not *contested* and the development of school curricula involves a process where choices are made about what histories, topics and issues are to be taught and which resources are recommended for study. Also important to consider are which perspectives and whose histories are being studied and whose are being ignored or marginalised. While history education is, as Reynolds (2012, p. 152) points out, “the study of events of the past through the development of specific historical concepts and skills”, Marsh and Hart (2011, p. 221) add a caveat that, “through a process of historical memory and historical amnesia, a particular version of the past, one that is posited as the ‘truth’, is transmitted to members of the public”. As can be seen from Marsh and Hart’s observations, much historical analysis is necessarily inferential in nature, and it is selective, privileging some histories over others. Collingwood (1946, cited in Pickford, Garner & Jackson, 2013, p. 24) described historical enquiry as a, “web of imaginative construction stretched between certain fixed points”. We would argue that even these fixed points and their status are, in the main, *contestable*. Barton and Levstik (2004, p. 181) expose the seduction of “unreflective cheerleading” for our own time and they warn against ascribing superiority to the present day, and judging previous ages and peoples accordingly.

History’s capacity for developing learners’ skills also affords it an important place in the curriculum. Drawing on earlier work, Pickford et al. (2013, p.31) include among the skills and experiences from studying history “making probabilistic inferences, supporting opinions with arguments and accepting that differing interpretations may be valid”. Tudball (2013) refers to the capacity for history study to develop students’ empathy and their capacity to assume multiple perspectives. Hoeppe (2011, p.24 emphasis added) contends that history can be used as a means to help learners “understand the origins and development of their own nation, to place that development in the context of the wider world, and to develop insights that will help them become critically aware and active citizens of the emerging world”. While Taylor (2012, p.47) argues that history “develops logic, the capacity for argument and sense of critical analysis”.

## History as a Vehicle for Human Rights Understanding and Action

The importance of the study of history is that it seeks to place historical evidence, rather than just ideology, at the centre of debates about place, time and events. Historical evidence only serves to emphasise the importance of historical debate that brings out the facts and the different perspectives of history. These differing perspectives are easily identified in Australia's history from colonial times since 1788. For example fear of the 'other' has framed our social and political history since that time. Yet, the Australian nation has emerged from the depths of the White Australia policy (passed into law in 1901 as one of the first acts of the new Federation), to become one of the most ethnically and linguistically diverse nations in the world.

More paradoxes are found within its post-colonial history in relation to the legendary Australian egalitarian spirit and its record on human rights. Australia was one of the first nations in the world (together with New Zealand) to give women the vote (Australian Electoral Commission, 2013). In 1908 Justice Higgins, a judge in the Conciliation and Arbitration Court, in a milestone of labour reform known as the Harvester judgement, initiated the concept of a 'basic wage' as a fair and reasonable wage on which a family (husband and wife and three children) could live (Rickard, 1983). Despite some misgivings with such a concept and the premises on which it was based, the basic wage formed the basis of wage regulation for decades.

In contrast to such progressive attitudes were first the colonial and then the Australian attitudes to Aboriginal Australians who were deemed to be second class citizens, unrecognised in our constitution, subjected to discriminatory laws and suffering from a history of omission and neglect which did not provide them with any sense of equality or equity well past the 1967 national referendum (Williams, 2007). The 1967 referendum saw them recognised in sections of the constitution and made it possible for them to be counted as peoples in national census statistics. Another 25 years would pass before the High Court's 1992 *Mabo vs Queensland (no 2)* ruling that Aboriginal people held native title rights on un-alienated land in Australia and that the concept of Terra Nullius was invalid (Williams, 2007).

Consequently, as this example clearly illustrates, the views about the colonisation (or invasion) of the Australian continent differ considerably. The view from the 'shore' looking out to sea, was vastly different from the view from the 'ship' looking towards the vast lands of 'terra australis'. Students of history need to see these differing perspectives and understand the motives, actions and rights (assumed and denied) that propelled each of these very different peoples to engage in a long struggle for sovereignty of territory.

The study of history is essentially and fundamentally a moral and ethical exercise (Buchanan, 2013), dealing as it does, with people's treatment of, and attitudes towards, other people(s). Therefore, it is important that the study of history *does* set out to examine the hearts, minds and actions of those who opposed a denial of human rights. This is exemplified in the abolition of slavery, the suffragettes and the struggle for the right of women to vote, Aboriginal land rights and the end of apartheid in South Africa. Presumably, future students of history will also investigate the motives of both those who currently propose and oppose same-sex marriage or the treatment of asylum seekers and 'boat people'. Rights, therefore, have been the motivating force in the seminal historical events of the modern age, from the French revolution to the current struggles for the rights of the most marginalized in societies across the world.

## Concepts, Contestability and the New Australian History Curriculum

Students learning skills and historical concepts and developing an understanding of contestability are important features of the new Australian History curriculum developed by ACARA. Together they can help reinforce History's capacity for generating a rights and social justice related discourse (see Day, 2001, for example). From Foundation level, students of History are developing a number of history-related skills, and understanding of concepts. Among the topic areas for F-6 Australian History, Tudball (2013, p. 155) enumerates the study of "pre- and post-European contact ... colonisation, federation and the world wars". These and other historical events, such as the Gold Rush, provide excellent opportunities for, and indeed demand inclusion of, a human rights perspective. While some of these (chronology, terms and concepts) might not have direct human rights implications, others have more explicit links, such as: historical questions and research, analysis and use of sources, perspectives and interpretations, and explanation and communication. A number of other historical curricular concepts arguably also have strong links to a better understanding of human rights, and include: cause and effect, perspectives, empathy and significance.

From Year 3, students begin to explicitly examine sources of historical information. In the early years, as students examine their families' and communities' histories, issues of human rights, powerful stories of flight from persecution, oppression, threat or violence, disease, famine, natural or industrial disaster, cannot but emerge. As Buchanan (2013) points out, the youngest of school children have well developed albeit perhaps self-centred, concepts of fairness.

As a concept, contestability, is formally encountered in the History curriculum in Year 7 and it is in the Senior years in particular, that the new national Australian History curriculum (ACARA, 2013a) embraces contestability. There it refers to "the actions of individuals and groups, and beliefs and values to explain patterns of change and continuity ... causes and effects ... context for people's actions ... from a range of perspectives ... different interpretations" (p. 24). One of the Year 10 depth studies specifically addresses rights and freedoms, including how they have been "ignored, demanded or achieved in Australia" (ACARA, 2013a, p. 22). In Year 9, students consider the question, "making a better world?" (p. 18). Many of the skills and concepts, such as significance, empathy and perspectives, are treated *implicitly*. In our study, the distinction between *implicit* and *explicit* inclusion of a human rights dimension in curriculum documentation became a useful part of our analytical framework.

### Australian Context

The study of human rights and interest in human rights education in Australia is located within a national and international public human rights discourse driven by key legislative steps that have taken place since the establishment of the United Nations (UN) in 1946. Internationally, the adoption of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* in 1948 and a set of subsequent UN human rights treaties, charters and conventions have led the debate. It is probably not well known that Australia was a leading protagonist in designing that declaration, which was steered through the UN General Assembly by Dr H. V. Evatt eminent lawyer and Labor leader, acting as the president of the Assembly at that time (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2013).

The UN has played a vital role in focusing attention on the importance of human rights education with two initiatives - the UN *Decade for Human Rights Education* (1995-2004) and the *World Programme for Human Rights Education* (2005-2014). In 2011 the UN *Declaration*

*for Human Rights Education* highlighted three key dimensions of human rights education: Education *about* human rights, which entails student learning about their individual rights as well as collective rights; Education *through* human rights, which includes learning and teaching in a way that respects the rights of both educators and learners; and Education *for* human rights, which includes empowering persons to enjoy and exercise their rights and to respect the rights of others (Office of High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2011). Importantly Australia is a signatory to all but two of the ten core UN human rights treaties and the Australian Human Rights Commission, established in 1986 is the main Australian government agency with the national responsibility for ensuring human rights are understood, protected and promoted.

Alongside the moves to put in place a national Australian Curriculum significant efforts were made nationally by the Labor government to further a human rights agenda. Between 2009 and 2013 the first *National Human Rights Consultation* in 2009 (NHRCC 2009) was carried out, the Australia's *Human Rights Framework* implemented in 2010 and a *Human Rights Action Plan* developed in 2012 (Attorney General's Department, 2013). The role of education, including school education, in each of these steps was recognized as a central feature of these initiatives.

The Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC) has also contributed through its valuable position paper on the important role of human rights education in the national school curriculum (AHRC, 2011). However a change of government at the Federal level in 2013 may mean a further shift in focus on a Charter of Rights at a national level. The incoming Coalition government's Attorney General stated that there was a need to reshape the debate about human rights and move away from the rights championed under Labor to a set of traditional individual common law rights and freedoms, in particular the freedoms of religion, expression and the press (Merritt, 2013). It remains to be seen how this impacts on efforts to improve the curriculum opportunities for students to learn about human rights issues and whether teaching about particular rights will be privileged over others.

## **Data collection**

### **Data**

Data for this project were derived from a literature review, document analysis (syllabus and curriculum documents and policy documents), and a series of cross-sectoral roundtable discussions held in each Australian state and territory capital. These were supplemented with an analysis of related technologies and resources. The roundtable discussions were a key aspect of the research design for this project as they brought together for the first time key educators, policy makers, community based educators and stakeholders concerned with human rights education in Australian schools across each state and territory. Importantly they included representatives from curriculum authorities, state government departments of school education, Catholic and Independent school authorities, key teacher associations and non-government organisations or agencies working with schools on human rights issues. The roundtable discussions took place between June and November 2012, with eight roundtable forums conducted, one in each capital city.

A background paper identifying a set of key issues, related to teaching about human rights, was sent to participants before the roundtable. This allowed participants time to reflect on the issues in advance and facilitated focussed discussions during each of the roundtables. In each state and territory the paper and the roundtable discussions addressed the following issues including: what participants saw as the main curriculum opportunities (explicit/implicit; compulsory/optional; broad based/specific; subject specific /extra-curricular); approaches

(pedagogical, whole school, individual); school based projects or programs (curricular and/or extra-curricular); community-led initiatives; relevant teaching resources and technologies; perceived gaps, impediments and barriers; and any other issues participants thought were relevant. Discussions were recorded and transcripts used to construct a themed content analysis in the compilation of a report on the findings.

### **Participants**

The roundtable discussions were generally well attended with more than 70 participants representing 43 different types of organisations or agencies across the eight capital cities. Representation among key stakeholder groups did vary from state to state as minor difficulties were experienced in engaging state education department representatives in some states and territories to attend. However, this issue was addressed in a number of states and territories by follow-up meetings or teleconference discussions with state and territory educational department representatives, teacher associations and non-government organisations to ensure their perspectives were included in the data collection.

### **Analytical Framework**

The participant discussions and curriculum documents examined in this study were considered and analysed so that the curriculum opportunities available to students to learn about human rights issues across their school years could be identified and reported on. The starting point for the analysis involved an examination of subjects and topics within subjects, by each key school learning stage from Foundation to Year 12. In addition a number of key curriculum dimensions were considered important in helping to further clarify the nature of the opportunities available to students. These included whether the curriculum content was: Explicit or Implicit; Compulsory or Optional; Curricular or Extra-curricular.

*Explicit content* refers to specific inclusion of human rights conventions, definitions, issues, or topics and their application in historical or current contexts. *Implicit content* is much more diffuse and non-specific and refers to content which could be interpreted by teachers to relate to the teaching of specific human rights issues, but which is not specifically defined as such. It was also important to note if a topic or issue was *compulsory* and required for study by all students or was optional or part of an elective. Also, considering the *Extra-curricular* opportunities where students could learn about human rights issues was necessary as they provided other valuable ways of learning that were outside the formal curriculum.

Among the limiting factors in the study arose from the focus on finding out about what opportunities were available in the curriculum, rather than exploring in detail how teachers conceived human rights and their understandings of human rights issues. Also this study did not have the resources or time to visit schools to see first hand good practice in action in the teaching of human rights. The documentation of teacher views and case studies of good practice remain important aspects to be addressed in any further study to be conducted in the future.

### **Analysis of Curriculum Documents**

This study was undertaken in the context of the staged introduction of the nationwide Australian School Curriculum across a number of learning and subject areas. Led by the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), in consultation with each state and territory education authority, subjects have been in development over three stages since 2008. History was included as one of the first four subjects in the Stage 1, developed between 2008 and 2010, with implementation planned to start at a state level from 2012. The subjects being developed include in Stage 1 – *English, History, Maths, Science* (2008-2010); Stage 2 – *Geography, the Arts, Languages* (2010-2013) and Stage 3 – *Civics and Citizenship, Economics, Business, Health & Physical Education, Design & Technologies* (2011-2013) (Perkins & McAskill, 2012).

A feature of each of the Australian Curriculum subjects, including History, was a requirement for the curriculum for each subject to include consideration of a broader set of Cross-curriculum priorities and General Capabilities statements. One of the Australian Curriculum's cross-curricular priorities that explicitly related to History was the study of *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island histories and cultures* (ACARA, 2013b). There were two other priorities, *Asia and Australia's engagement with Asia*, and *Sustainability*, that also related a study of History. Among the Australian Curriculum's General Capabilities statements (ACARA, 2013c) a number did embody human rights implications that related to a study of History. They included: critical and creative thinking, personal and social capability, ethical understanding, and intercultural understanding. As Tuddball (2013) and Hoeppe (2011) suggest the study of history involves critical and creative thinking, develops personal and social capabilities, and as Buchanan (2013) emphasised has a role as a moral and ethical exercise. Taylor and Young (2003) clearly establish that the historical narrative is subject to contestation and has multiple perspectives.

### **Learning Stages**

It is important to note here that the study was undertaken at a time of transition. While the Australian History Curriculum had been developed and agreed upon, it had yet to be fully implemented. This meant that state and territory subjects, including History, remained in place alongside the newly developed Australian Curriculum subjects. So the research team carried out an initial document search to inform the roundtable discussions with key stakeholders from each state and territory. Then a further key word content analysis of selected available History curriculum documents was carried out to identify the opportunities for teaching about human rights. While states and territories still used different terms to name their learning stages, the study reported findings for the following three learning stages Senior Secondary (Years 11-12); Junior Secondary (Years 7-10) and Primary (Foundation/Kindergarten-6).



### Extra-curricular, Technologies and Resources

An important feature of the study was a focus on the extra-curricular learning opportunities that arose from the involvement of a number of key non-government community based organisations (NGOs) with schools, as well as excursions, events and celebrations. It is these NGOs that are providing valuable current examples of struggles involving a range of human rights issues in various human rights contexts in countries across the world. They are also developing resources, utilising the most up-to-date technologies, and many can be used to support teaching about human rights issues in schools. A range of communication technologies were identified, as well as a number of recently developed educational resources available from bodies such as the Australian Human Rights Commission and key NGOs that organise human rights programs in schools. In some cases, particular resources have been linked to specific curriculum topics, to assist teachers to apply more effectively the resources in their teaching.

### Findings

As teachers in classrooms play a central role in the implementation of the curriculum opportunities for students to learn about human rights issues, a strong focus in the organisation of the roundtable discussions in this study was on engaging with representatives from key teacher associations. This ensured that the project contained perspectives on the practical challenges of incorporating human rights content within the current school curriculum, possible pedagogical approaches, and ways of providing school children with the opportunities to acquire human rights-related experiences and skills. The feedback obtained through the roundtables was highly informative, with many human rights initiatives and activities identified and a wide range of issues and challenges canvassed.

Consideration of both the *explicit* and *implicit* inclusion of human rights-related topics and materials in subject curricula was important for teachers because *explicit* content provided a valuable starting point for learning about rights. However, with regard to *implicit* inclusion, while useful to some degree, there less clarity of pedagogical approach and intent in subject content. When human rights are implicit in topics or issues both teachers and students may or may not be aware of the implied link and therefore units of work and lessons may be devoid of important human rights perspectives. Also importantly for teachers, when included implicitly there were often no clearly identified support materials related to these rights that were available for teachers to use in their teaching. This necessarily created obstacles and challenges for teachers in their attempts to address human rights issues.

### Senior Years

A major finding of the study was the lack of coherence and fragmented nature of the curriculum opportunities for students to learn about human rights across their school years and among states and territories. This applies to the curricula for the History subjects examined in this study, across each state and territory. The analysis showed that the majority of opportunities for the *explicit* study of human rights topics or issues in *History* were available in the Senior years 11 and 12 and to a lesser extent in Years 10 and 9. Often the references to human rights were embedded within larger historical themes, for example, the experiences of Indigenous peoples. However, there were explicit references to human rights in time and place contexts

when the modern world has had to face great crises –such as World War II and the creation of the United Nations.

Subject	Year /Unit	HR Topic / issue	State/Territory
History	Year 12	UN Declaration of Human Rights, Apartheid, Refugees (SIVEX). Civil rights. National Studies & International Studies in Peace & Conflict topics.	Victoria, NSW
History	Year 11 Options Unit 2	Oppression and struggle for human rights, slave trade, suffragette movement, US civil rights movement, struggle for Indigenous rights/freedom, Burma, Tibet, Tianamen Square.	Tasmania,
Modern World History	Unit 1 (E) Unit 2 (E)	Experiences of Indigenous people in Australia, Ideas of race, Changes in values. Forced & free migration, Slaves & forced labour, History of women, Power & powerlessness- rights and freedom of oppressed peoples.	SA/NT ACT, WA
Modern History	Year 11/12	Civil rights; Apartheid; Suffragist struggle; 2 <sup>nd</sup> wave feminism.	Queensland

**Table 1. Senior years 11-12 History: Explicit Topics**

In the Senior years (11 & 12) it was *History*, together with *Geography*, *Legal Studies* subjects and the *Civics and Citizenship* units that provided the most significant explicit opportunities. There were a handful of other subjects, specific to a few states and territories, that also explicitly covered either UN human rights declarations, treaties or conventions or Australian human rights legislation. They were *Australian & Global Politics*, *Australian & International Politics*, and *Aboriginal Studies*. Also of note were the *implicit* opportunities found in *English*; *Science*; *Economics & Business*.

#### **Opportunities and Challenges in History in the Senior years**

A number of realities are illuminated from the above table. Firstly there is the lack of uniformity of the content to be covered in *History* subjects. There are a few common human rights issues that are addressed *explicitly*, such as women’s rights and the rights of marginalised peoples, but there is no consistency in whether they are mandatory or electives, or whether they are included in the curriculum at all. Moreover, while many more students are continuing on to complete their school studies, most Senior years subjects are not compulsory, with English often the only compulsory subject in these years. It is here in the Senior years that the national Australian curriculum could make an impact by introducing an *explicit* rights perspective into the Senior years *History* curriculum. We note, though, that NSW, for example, has yet to implement the Australian Curriculum in the Senior years, with Years 7 and 9 scheduled for 2014 and Years 8 and 10 to follow in 2015.

#### **Numbers Studying History in Year 12**

In addition to topics able to be studied it is important to consider how many students in the Senior years are able to take up the opportunities available in particular subjects. Although only partial and based on 2007 data, Table 2 shows the numbers of students studying a major History subject in Year 12. As the study of English is compulsory in all states and territories we

also include the numbers of students studying English, as an indicative comparison of History student numbers in relation to overall student numbers. The figures suggest that in the largest states NSW and Victoria only 16% and 14% of students respectively study a *History* subject (excluding Ancient History and Electives) in their final school year, with higher percentages in other smaller states.

	NSW	Victoria	Qld	WA	Tas	SA	NT	ACT
<b>English</b>	59,621	40,735	34,262	9,108	2,105	9,044	916	3,746
<b>History Subjects</b>	9,769 Modern History	4,543 History: Revolutions  1,304 Australian History	5,121 History	2,758 History	495 Modern History	1594 Modern History  205 Australian History	83 Modern History  26 Australian History	629 Histor y
<b>Total History</b>	9,769	5,847	5,121	2,758	495	1,799	109	629
<b>Studying History (%)</b>	16%	14%	15%	30%	23%	20%	12%	17%

**Table 2. Student Studying Selected Year 12 History subjects (2007)** (Source: Wilkinson & Milgate 2009)

### Secondary Years

There were significant *explicit* opportunities to study human rights topics and issues in the Secondary years (7-10) *History* subjects, with the main *explicit* opportunities available in the Year 10 and to a lesser extent in Year 9 *History*.

Subject	Year	HR Topic / Issue	State/ Territory
History- Aboriginal & Indigenous	Year 10	Struggle For Rights & Freedom – Terra nullius, Land rights, Native title, 1992 Mabo ruling.	NSW
History – Civics & Citizenship (C&C)	Year 10	Changing rights & freedom of groups, Active & informed citizens.	NSW
History-Difference & diversity	Year 10	Crime punishment, slaves, women (E).	NSW
History- Gender	Year 10	Struggle for rights & freedom of marginalised groups. Gender discrimination, Rights & freedom of women in 20 <sup>th</sup> century Australia.	
History – Civics & Citizenship (C&C)	Year 9	Cultures of people-rights & responsibilities.	NSW
History	Year 10	Rights & freedoms- UN HR declaration, & Australia’s role, civil rights. Aboriginal rights, US civil rights movement.	Victoria, SA, ACT, WA, NT
	Year 9	Movement of people: Slavery, Progressive ideas: democratic rights, UN Declaration on Rights of Indigenous People. Globalised world: Migration: refugees. Australia & Asia: Making a nation: women’s rights. Making a better world: movement of people (E).	

**Table 3. Secondary Years 9 and 10 History: Explicit Topics**

As can be seen from the table above, there are opportunities for students to learn about a range of human rights topics and issues in Year 10 *History*, in most states and territories. A number are pre-existing opportunities and others have been taken up from the new national History syllabus. For example, in NSW the study of rights and freedom are *explicit* and enable a focus on both individual and group rights, including aspects of Indigenous rights, women’s rights and citizenship rights. In other states the UN’s *Universal Declaration on Human Rights* and the *UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People* are studied as are various civil rights movements (Aboriginal, US civil rights, anti-slavery) and rights related to migration, refugees and the transnational movement of peoples. Also having the conceptual focus of the *History* curriculum is a major strength. It helps provide opportunities to discuss issues of contestability, differing perspectives, and the renewed interest in ‘empathy’, which was absent from the previous round of syllabus documents.

In NSW, the Board of Studies has adapted the NSW History syllabus in the Secondary years to take into account the national History curriculum. Once implemented there will be an opportunity for schools to teach a school-developed option in Stage 5 History (mostly Year 10) and one of the optional topics is the Holocaust, which remains a popular choice with many teachers and students. Schools in both NSW and Victoria are also able to undertake field trips to either the Sydney Jewish Museum or the Jewish Holocaust Centre in Melbourne. We note that a number of authors have commented on the benefits and potential of field trips for historical learning, in terms of enhancing and contextualizing understanding (e.g. Buchanan, 2013; Hoeppe, 2011; Marsh & Hart, 2011; Reynolds, 2012).

We also note the potential for student-initiated and student-driven responses to specific human rights abuses as a way of students learning more about human rights issues. Teachers and curriculum advisers have highlighted the range of other possible human rights studies that could also be developed in these years. With Year 10 and to an extent with Year 9 these appear to be a particularly good years, in terms of student receptiveness, for providing a focus on human rights

issues. Engagement with specific human rights issues that relate to real world experiences may constitute a useful segue into a broader study of human rights and may also provide the added stimulus for students choosing to study History in the Senior years.

In other areas there were a number of *explicit* opportunities in *Geography*, *Aboriginal Studies* subjects and *Civics and Citizenship* units in Years 10 and 9. While the main *implicit* opportunities across Years 7 to 10 were in *English*, *Science*, and *Economics* subjects.

### **Primary Years (F-6)**

Human rights topics or issues were not often found *explicitly* mentioned across the Primary school years. Although there were a few examples in both NSW and the ACT's Year 3 to 6 *History* modules, specifically in the *Aboriginal cultures & histories* units. The new national History Syllabus offers an *explicit* human rights opportunity in Year 6 in the *Australia as a nation* unit to study the 'Experiences of Australian democracy and citizenship, including the status and rights of Aboriginal people and/or Torres Strait Islanders, migrants, women, and children'. There were also topics in NSW's Year 5 *Colonial history* unit and in Victoria's *Eureka Stockade* unit.

There were a further set of *implicit* opportunities in other parts of the *Human Society and its Environment* (HSIE or its equivalent) learning area as well as in *Geography*, *English*, *Physical Development Health & Physical Education* (PDHPE) and the *Civics and Citizenship* units.

### **Extra- Curricular Opportunities**

There are a set of extra-curricular opportunities that were identified providing students and teachers with the opportunities to address particular human rights issues and for them to be related to the study of history. These were evident through the involvement of a number of key NGOs with schools, via dedicated school programs or groups, school visits, talks, or campaigns. Among the most prominent across a set of human rights issues were NGOs working on broad based rights issues such as the UN Youth Australia; civil, political and refugee rights (Amnesty international Australia, Asylum Seeker Resource Centre); children's rights (Save the Children Australia); economic rights (Global Education Project; World Vision, Oxfam, Caritas); Humanitarian (Red Cross Australia, CARE Australia, Engineers Without Border) and Indigenous rights (Reconciliation Australia, ANTaR, Fred Hollows Foundation). A number of these NGOs, such as Amnesty International and World Vision, support active school programs that involve both students and teachers and they also have personnel available to discuss human rights issues with pre-service teachers. While these groups mostly take a contemporary focus and tend not to address the historic background to each of their campaigning issues, they do deal with change and continuity. There is considerable potential to link the contemporary with the historic, and for History teachers to develop more effective connections with these key NGOs around developing a better understanding of a range of human rights issues.

### Field Trips and Celebrations

A further dimension of the extra-curricular opportunities for students are those available through field trips where human rights issues can be addressed and related to topics studied in the History curriculum. A major national field trip for students is to the Museum of Australian Democracy in the Old Parliament House in Canberra. It supports an onsite schools program of visits by Year 5 to 7 classes and has a set of teaching resources about the development of democracy in Australia, which have links to both *History* subjects and *Civics and Citizenship* units. Among the relevant resources available are: *Hands on Democracy: my place in my community*; *Hands on Democracy: I can make a difference*; *Our voices our choices*; *Decision 3sixty*; and *1975 Prime Minister dismissed!* There are also valuable state and territory based field trips that are particularly relevant to the struggle for human rights in each state or territory's history. For example in Victoria, where the Eureka Stockade rebellion of 1854 is an important part of its colonial history and Australia's struggle for democracy, many schools in this state organise an excursion to Ballarat to visit the Eureka Centre's Museum of Australian Democracy at Eureka and learn about the struggle for rights in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

Australia Day and Anzac Day are important national days and the celebratory events surrounding those days are studied as part of various History curricula. Others important national days to consider include *National Reconciliation Week* (27 May to 3 June) and *NAIDOC Week* (7- 14 July). Both are celebrations recognising the place of Aboriginal and Torres Islander peoples within Australia and mark two important events in Australia's Indigenous history - the 1967 Referendum (NAA, 2013) on including Aboriginal people in Census figures, and the 1992 *Mabo* High Court land rights decision (ABS, 2013) overturning previous laws that had extinguished land rights for Aboriginal people. Recognition of Australia's cultural diversity and rights to maintain culture and language is celebrated in schools on Harmony Day (21<sup>st</sup> March), the same day which the UN has designated as the *International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination*. There are also other important international days or weeks devoted to acknowledging women, children, people with disabilities and refugees. The celebration of *Human Rights Day* on December 10 is a way of acknowledging the importance of the rights enshrined in the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*.

### Resources and Technologies

The availability of a range of valuable educational resources was highlighted in the study and some were directly relevant to the teaching of human rights in History subjects in each state and territory, especially in the Secondary and Senior years. A major collection of accessible digital school education resources noted is the Education Services Australia (ESA) collection, although its full potential in supporting the teaching of human rights has yet to be realised. The United Nations and its agencies have an extensive body of educational resources related to the history and evolution of human rights treaties and conventions. The Australian Human Rights Commission has also taken the lead in producing a range of recent high quality educational resources related to a range of key human rights issues.

Most of the key NGOs mentioned above also have sets of available current educational materials to support study across each of the learning stages, with most focused on the Senior and Secondary years. For the Primary years a number of primary school teachers in particular referred to picture books and similar resources that dealt with human rights, such as: *Refugees* (David Miller), *Feathers and Fools* (Mem Fox), *The Silence Seeker* (Ben Morley), *My*

*Hiroshima* (Junko Morimoto) and *Sadako* (Eleanor Coerr). Among the NGOs, Save the Children had also produced a number of resources, such as Finding My Magic, to help children better understand the nature of children's rights.

The study found teachers reported the use of a range of technologies in accessing resources and working with other schools to support student learning about particular historical events or current human rights topics or issues. They included various internet communication applications (email, video and audio conferencing), including Skype, desk top conferencing and increasingly social networking via Facebook or Twitter or shared digital spaces such as wiki spaces or Dropbox. These technologies were being used to link schools locally, to make regional or remote school connections, and also to link up with schools overseas to work on joint projects. While the use of virtual resources did not feature prominently in discussions, we note here that mobile technologies now make a virtual visit possible to say the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, as easy as one to a site in the next suburb or town. With few exceptions, museums and other informal learning sites are hosting virtual learning access alongside their physical sites, and there is a growing potential to access historical materials relevant to the study of the evolution of human rights over time.

## **Discussion**

### **Curriculum Opportunities**

The fragmented and multi-layered nature of current curriculum opportunities identified in this study highlight a major deficiency in efforts to ensure school students learn about human rights across their school years. This circumstance does make the implementation of change more difficult. Keeping track of each state and territory's developments is time consuming and labour-intensive and therefore not cost effective. The study of History remains an important subject area, where the study of human rights needs to be more extensively included and better supported. Our analysis of syllabus documents and our participants' observations of current and proposed curricula suggest that *Explicit* and *Compulsory* opportunities exist in only a few subjects and the opportunities are mostly available in the Senior years 11 and 12, to a lesser extent in Secondary Years 10 and 9, with fewer opportunities across Secondary Years 7- 8.

Importantly, relatively few human rights issues are *explicitly* taught across a small range of subjects apart from *History* in the Senior and Secondary Years. These include *Geography*, *Legal Studies*, the *Civics and Citizenship* units and a set of small enrolment subjects such as *Politics, Society and Culture*, and *Aboriginal Studies, International Studies, Women's Studies, Religion* and *Society and the Environment* subjects. The topics studied in these subjects are often one-offs or single issues that are not linked back to a broader understanding of human rights. The topics within these syllabus documents were variously noted as compulsory or elective and this varied from each state and territory. However, even within core mandatory syllabus units there was no guarantee that a detailed human rights focus would be an essential theme of the unit of work covered by teachers.

It appears that while many participants perceived that rights issues and content were covered in their subject area this was not always the case - especially having rights explicitly mentioned in curriculum documents. It is to be hoped that the development and implementation of a nationwide curriculum might alleviate some of these problems. Nevertheless, adjustment to the new curriculum will take some time. Also teachers, who already have many demands on their time, are likely to be difficult to mobilise around the teaching of human rights issues.

### **Extra-Curricular Opportunities**

While most of the focus needs to be on improving the nature and extent of opportunities in the History curricula for students to learn about human rights issues, the extent of the extra-curricular opportunities identified need to be considered and the links to the study of History strengthened. These include the work of NGOs and the linking of the study of human rights issues to field trips and celebrations. There are a number of NGOs working on current human rights issues that can be linked to relevant and meaningful History topics and the historical contexts of these issues studied. This means that there is considerable potential for further improving the links between NGOs and schools on human rights issues. History teachers and students can benefit through widening and strengthening these links and connecting the extra-curricular to the History curriculum. In a similar way the field trips and celebrations highlighted also have considerable potential from being directly linked to the teaching of History, especially in the Senior and Secondary years.

### **Professional Development and Professional Associations**

A strong and clear message from the teachers involved in this study from a range of key professional associations was support for increasing the extent and quality of teacher professional support for their teaching about human rights in their respective state or territory across school sectors and stages. This includes helping teachers address what are often seen as controversial rights issues in ways that open up contested views, moral and ethical concerns. Clearly, effective teacher support and education in implementing new curricula is an indispensable component. For example, teachers said they felt quite vulnerable in the newly-mandated areas of Indigenous rights and history and there has been a reduction in the support and focus on developing better cross-cultural awareness and understanding and our multicultural histories, and the yet to be developed resources for a better knowledge and understanding of Asian history and cultures.

The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership (AITSL) has introduced the national professional teaching standards, in which Standards 1 and 2 relate to knowledge and understanding of Indigenous issues and history. Pre-service teachers cannot be accredited without demonstrating skills in this area, and teachers in schools need to maintain their qualifications through training and professional development. This all points to the need for a much more comprehensive and focused effort in teacher professional development across all these key learning priorities that can be linked to human rights topics and issues. Therefore we call on governments and school systems to prioritise the provision of such support in this time of curricular transition. Specifically, we recommend that of a set of teacher professional development modules relating to human rights education across each school learning stage and the main subject areas are developed in partnership with the relevant discipline-based Professional Teachers' Associations in each state and territory.

Also professional associations serve a central role in equipping teachers to implement curricular changes and innovations. It was also noted, however, that apart from some History and English professional associations, outside of Victoria and NSW, most are small in scale and supported voluntarily by dedicated but over-worked teachers. These professional associations are a vital part of any efforts to improve the range of teaching opportunities for students of History to learn more about human rights and provide a more comprehensive approach to student



learning. One of the first steps could be through ongoing networking as one of the additional and unanticipated benefits of the roundtable discussions has been the opportunity for networking about human rights issues among participants, including History teachers.

Online and hard copy resources are currently being developed commercially as accompaniments for the subjects in the Australian Curriculum, and the extent of available support for teacher professional development to implement the new curriculum remains uncertain. As Buchanan (2013) observes, the resources developed so far, at times deal with lower-order comprehension material, failing to ask more searching questions and teachers need professional development time to help with the effective implementation of the proposed curriculum changes. If the teaching of History is to continue to be an important if somewhat diminished area of study (in terms of its popularity among students), then part of its revival can be achieved through providing a focus on human rights. Also this can be supported by the development of a set of relevant History teaching materials and case studies that provide a more engaging way of students learning about a set of human rights issues across each key school learning stage. In both curriculum development and implementation History professional associations can play a valuable role at the school and classroom level.

## Conclusion

As we move through a period of major changes in Australian school curricula it is important to consider ways of better embedding teaching about human rights, both explicitly and implicitly, into subjects such as *History*. One way is through having cross-curriculum priorities and general capability statements specifically mentioning human rights issues. We call on education jurisdictions to do this, rather than leaving the responsibility solely to commercial enterprises. We see great potential for teachers to take initiatives in foregrounding human rights and social justice issues by appropriating both *explicit* and *implicit* elements of the History Curriculum, in order to inform their students, and challenge them to action.

As the study of History provides a range of opportunities for students to learn about human rights issues in the Senior and Secondary years we suggest that these learning stages need to be the main focus of further attention. There is a need to ensure that as the new Australian Curriculum *History* subjects are introduced, efforts are made to consider ways of setting out for teachers and students, a more systematic and historically grounded approach to the teaching of History topics and a broad set of human rights issues and histories. This also means taking advantage of the range of extra-curricular opportunities that can be directly linked to the study of History through strengthening links with a range of key community based NGOs and their relevant human rights programs and resources, and linking other extra-curricular opportunities, such as field trips and celebrations to the study of human rights within History topics.

Given the relative dearth of *explicit* human rights education opportunities in the Primary years it may be that teachers and curriculum writers feel that primary school aged children are incapable of understanding the issues, or might be disturbed by them. Certainly, such issues need to be approached in a considered way with younger children, but we note in passing that at about the age of 11, Malala Yousafzai, from northwest Pakistan, began campaigning for girls' education. At about age ten, Daniel Clarke, in Sydney, began his quest to save orang-utans and their habitat. At age six, Ryan Hreljak, living in Ontario, began raising funds for clean drinking water in Africa and his first sponsored well was not completed until he was seven. While these children are clearly exceptional, they demonstrate that youth is not a barrier to an understanding

of, and passion for, equality, justice and basic human rights and there is something compelling in a young child leading the way.

Also important is what happens at the school level where the support of school executives, jurisdictions and others will be vital in this pursuit. But it remains crucial for teachers to take up available opportunities and use their own initiatives in driving the curriculum in this direction.

We recognise that what we are currently analysing is a curricular patchwork and the next few years will see how each state and territory implements the agreed Australian *History* curriculum. More broadly, however, an incoming Federal Government has promised changes with regard to the Australian Curriculum, the role of AITSL and a refocusing of efforts in human rights education. It is because of, rather than despite these current and proposed changes that we chose to undertake this review at this time. We trust that key educational stakeholders and various government education authorities will hear the voices of our informants, and consider them seriously. The focus of curricular renewal can easily default to a question of content and a struggle over what is to be studied and what is excluded. While it is valid and reasonable to ask what learners will know and be able to do at the end of a course of study, a nobler question to ask is: what kind of person do we want a learner be as a result of their studies, and what are their shared experiences with us, their educators?

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