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## The New Australian Curriculum, Teachers and Change Fatigue

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*Abstract: A new national curriculum has recently been implemented across Australia. This paper reports on a case study of a regional Western Australia government school as they re-wrote and taught the phase one learning areas: maths, English, science and HASS. Results showed what it is like to work in an environment where continual change is not only expected, but also seen as best practice. Cynical, realistic and even enthusiastic teachers suffer change fatigue after years of rapid and continual curriculum change.*

*The research traces back the reasons why teacher change fatigue might occur using Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson & Braud, 2011) as a hermeneutical process. It captures the reactions of teachers as they struggle to adapt to another top-down curriculum framework, badged as 'continual school improvement.' It documents that change fatigue negatively impacts on what is now known as the Western Australian Curriculum and Assessment Outline.*

### Introduction

This paper examines the experience of change fatigue through teachers' experience of introducing the Australian Curriculum in a Western Australian (WA) government school. Change fatigue can be defined by its synonyms: being tired of change, adaptive failure, future shock and innovation fatigue. Whatever the terms used, it describes the same process. In the face of frequent change, workers become less able or enthusiastic (Bernerth, Walker, & Harris, 2011; Graham, 1997) to implement successive reforms as the continual effort to do so depletes their personal resources (Bernerth, et al., 2011).

In the case of WA teacher rhetoric, change fatigue (see Andrich, 2009; Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Education Workforce Initiatives Taskforce, 2007b), describes a tiredness and lack of enthusiasm for change as a result of negative lived work experiences of an overwhelming number of curriculum reforms already mandated and implemented in the last 20 years.

The link between change fatigue and disposition towards new reforms had already been established by American researchers Cohen and Ball as far back as 1990 when they saw US education policies filtered by teachers' values, knowledge and experiences. In Wales, a very recent and damning OECD report linked "reform fatigue" to overwhelming and continual changes in education policy in very short implementation periods (Evans, 2014, p. 1). In Australia, issues relating to curriculum are commonly underpinned by global trends, and so we were curious to see if disposition towards the Australian Curriculum reform would uncover similar linkages to change fatigue.

The first section of this paper describes the historical context of a culture of continual curriculum change. Then the focus becomes the research that underpins this paper, which traces back the reasons why teacher change fatigue might have occurred using Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson & Braud, 2011) as a hermeneutical process. The data are presented as four composite narratives from interviews of 23 teacher-participants who were sourced from a regional high school. They were questioned about their lived experience and perceptions of mandated curriculum reform, with particular reference to the Australian Curriculum. The paper concludes with key findings and their relevance for curriculum implementation processes in the future which may not exacerbate change fatigue in the teaching profession.

### Continual Curriculum Change Culture

For decades, educational reform in Australia has been a quagmire of political and educational agendas, with a myriad of known factors (of which change fatigue is a part) that have enhanced or hindered implementation. Arguably, curriculum implementation has been hindered by the New Public Management (NPM) ideology which has been influential in government education policy formulation from as early as the 1980s through the Beazley inquiry and McGaw report (Tully, 2002). Change is at the centre of NPM reform, as is the globalisation of society and the need to cater for individual students in a free market public sector (Goldspink, 2007). NPM has and continues to influence Education Department of Western Australia (EDWA)’s secondary education policies which are “...designed to meet ‘the changing needs and expectations of individuals and the community to the end of this century and probably beyond’” (Tully, 2002, p. 119). To understand the strength of this influence and its effect on WA teachers’ reform experiences, it is necessary to summarise WA’s recent past curriculum reform.

WA has had a turbulent three decades of mandated curriculum reform. Table 1 summarises curriculum reform in WA from the 1980s to 2013, including policies that guided state curriculum decisions.

Curriculum Reform or Policy	Purpose	Outcome
<b>1980 Course Coordinating Committee established</b>	To inquire into non-academic students staying on in senior secondary school due to lack of employment opportunities. (Tully, 2002)	Recommended creating a unit to work with schools (late 1980-1983) to develop appropriate curricula and liaison programs within communities to better enable these students to find employment.
<b>The Beazley Inquiry 1983</b>	Government wanted to test the adequacy of most aspects of WA’s education system in 12 months	Recommended that advanced, intermediate and basic levels in the Achievement Certificate subjects be dismantled and that the emphasis on ‘core’ subjects eased as this reflected poorly on basic level students who completed ‘optional’ subjects.
<b>McGaw Report</b>	A subcommittee of the Beazley Inquiry.	Emphasis of secondary education was “...no longer to prepare students for matriculation but to cater for the majority average student” (Tully, 2002, p. 119).
<b>Unit Curriculum 1980-1998</b>	Unit Curriculum was developed to meet the changing needs of senior secondary students.	A shift from putting the acquisition of academic knowledge first, to equally valuing the acquisition of skills (Tully, 2002).
<b>Outcomes Based Education (OBE)</b>	OBE was designed in line with NPM theories to allow students freedom to be taught and assessed in line with	WA curriculum and assessment models influenced by this ideology –included the years K-10 CF and its assessment guide (the Student Outcome Statements (SOS)), along with the years 11-12 CoS,

	their talents and abilities.	delivered in several phases (Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Education and Health Standing Committee, 2006).
<b>Curriculum Framework (CF) 1999-2014</b>	The CF outlined broad concepts to be covered from K-10. It was underpinned by core values and mapped progression of key skills and understandings.	The CF and its accompanying SOS were criticised as being too nebulous making it hard to follow, allowing for huge variations in implementation and increasing teacher workload (Andrich, 2009).
<b>Courses of Study (CoS) 2005-</b>	The Western Australian Certificate of Education CoS were designed to allow traditionally non-university pathway subjects to contribute to a tertiary entrance score (TES).	Implementation was undermined by poor management including not giving teachers enough time to prepare, providing a detailed syllabus, realising the practicalities of giving a TES based on school work, providing adequate support whilst changing content (Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Constable, Hames, & Waldron, 2005; Education and Health Standing Committee, 2006; Kessell; Tognolini, 2006).
<b>Australian Curriculum (AC) 2013-</b>	Developed to meet Melbourne Declaration's common goals for education (ACARA, 2010).	This curriculum reform is presently in its initial implementation stage.

**Table 1: Curriculum Reform Policy and Packages in Western Australia 1970-2013**

The development of outcomes based education (OBE) seen in Table 1 was not novel to WA (Kessell, 2006), or even Australia, and was the format of choice for curriculum provision amongst NPM influenced education systems in the OECD and beyond (Berlach & McNaught, 2007). OBE based reforms in other Australian states experienced more success than those in WA (Kessell, 2006) due to the implementation process of both the CF and CoS in WA (Andrich, 2009; Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Constable, et al., 2005; Education and Health Standing Committee, 2006).

Issues with OBE in WA included change fatigue, dissatisfaction and exhaustion for some teachers, created by continuous curriculum change and increased workload over the course of a decade (Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Education and Health Standing Committee, 2006; Education Workforce Initiatives Taskforce, 2007b). Unfortunately, these negative changes occurred at a time when performative accountability measures popular in NPM were already increasing teachers' workloads (Education Workforce Initiatives Taskforce, 2007b). Concurrently, there was a recognised lack of appropriate support, training and resources available (Education and Health Standing Committee, 2006; O'Neill, 2007), and time lines for implementation were often unrealistic (Constable, et al., 2005; Education Workforce Initiatives Taskforce, 2007b).

It is little wonder that evaluation of both the Curriculum Framework and the Curriculum Improvement Program (CIP) (which was to rectify issues with Courses of Study) indicated that teachers were in general negative about the implementation processes of these reforms in WA (Andrich, 2009; Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Education Workforce Initiatives Taskforce, 2007b).

Thus, recent history in WA state education policy tells of negative experiences by teachers to multiple curriculum reforms over multiple decades. This perhaps set the scene for a unwelcome attitudes by teachers towards more change – including a nationally controlled initiative known as the Australian Curriculum.

### Australian Curriculum Creation

At the federal level in Australia, the State, Territory and Federal Ministers of Education a change agenda has been prioritised at each meeting of the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs or MCEETYA. Since 1989, MCEETYA has released The Hobart (1989), Adelaide (1999) and Melbourne (2008) Declarations, outlining common education goals for all Australian schools. These declarations were seen as the first steps towards a national curriculum (McGaw, 2010) as the momentum in Australian education significantly changed from state controlled provision to unprecedented uniformity through the introduction of the Australian Curriculum (AC).

In 2008, a federal Labor government was elected with significant support from voters and from state governments because of an election promise to introduce a national curriculum (Rudd & Smith, 2007). This allowed Labor to reach agreements regarding the creation of national education policy, which were not possible under previous governments with less comprehensive support from the states and territories (Seddon, 2001; National Curriculum Board, 2008). The Labor government created the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Agency (ACARA). ACARA began work on the national curriculum whilst creating the *MySchool* website and the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN). These changes together helped to reinforce uniformity and accountability of schools (ACARA, 2011) and are just part of the culminative changes WA teachers face whilst implementing the AC.

By 2010, new curricula for English, maths, science and history had been drafted for K-10 and ACARA assured schools that they would be available for national implementation (McGaw, 2010) from 2011, but they were not formally approved by the states until October 2011. This inconsistency between messaging and reality was not new as mandated curriculum reform in WA has been poorly implemented for decades (Andrich, 2009; Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Constable, et al., 2005; Watt et. al., 2008).

The LA which was previously called Society and Environment (S&E) in WA and which will now be termed Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) has also undergone significant internal changes. Previously this LA was taught in a combined cross-curricula method, however, the AC sees it dissected into History, Geography, and Civics and Citizenship. The reshuffling of S&E includes a significant alteration of the content delivered by S&E staff. The new science curriculum will also require teachers to undergo significant professional learning (Aubbusson, 2011). An increased workload may be a factor that clouds the participants' view of the AC.

The AC involved a number of changes for WA teachers aside from the new curricula for each Learning Area (LA). The AC incorporates new subject matter, Cross Curriculum Priorities (CCPs), and new skill measurements, General Capabilities (GCs), across all LAs. Australia's Aboriginal history, relations with Asia and education for sustainability are now stated as necessary knowledge sets for Australia's development (ACARA, 2010). Whilst some teachers in WA previously taught parts of the above, all teachers will now be expected to incorporate all of the CCPs and GCs into their day to day teaching. The justification of inclusion of these aspects in curriculum, and stakeholders' combined reactions to these reasons (see Bachelard & Stark, 2010 for an indication of early public opinion), could influence the WA teacher perceptions of the AC. Whether appropriate resources and support are available for this new subject matter could also influence teacher experiences with the AC.

## **Known Factors Influencing Reform Implementation**

Teacher disposition towards reform involves both their desire to enact a change and their ability to do so (Dottin, 2009). Education reform is an intensively studied area and most factors that shape teacher reactions to mandated curriculum reforms are well documented. The interconnectedness of these factors with curriculum reform management and implementation in Australia is not always clear. Classroom teachers are the medium through which the AC will be passed on to students (Smith & Lovat, 2003) and the likelihood of increasing workload described in the above section is not the only known factor to influence teacher reactions to mandated reform. There are many other well documented factors, including systemic issues (Hoyle & Wallace, 2007; Seddon, 2001), lack of support during implementation (Drummond, 2012), burnout (Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Salmela-Aro, 2011) or how ideologically aligned the rationale of the reform is with a teacher's values and practices (Bee Bee, 2008; Chan, 2010; Turley, 2005). Commitment, motivation and goodwill are aspects of a teachers' disposition that whilst being internal can be affected by experiences (Goldspink, 2007; Thornton, 2006). Currently trends show these attributes in teachers deteriorating over time for a variety of reasons.

WA teachers have experienced mandated curriculum reforms that have lacked a detailed rationale, lacked appropriate resources and support, were potentially deprofessionalising due to their nature, were acknowledged to potentially create mistrust of their employers and increased their accountability and workload (Andrich, 2009; Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Constable, et al., 2005; Education and Health Standing Committee, 2006; Education Workforce Initiatives Taskforce, 2007; Kessell, 2006; O'Neill, 2007; Tognolini, 2006). Taken together, these myriad of factors have had a negative impact on past mandated curriculum reforms and it is likely that they have also influenced the disposition of WA teachers towards reform.

The question remains, how badly has this past affected the dispositions of practising teachers, and is it influencing their reactions to the AC?

## **The Research**

This study was informed by the five cycles of Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson & Braud, 2011) to gain an insights into how Cohen and Ball's (1990) filters (values and experiences, and to a lesser extent, knowledge) will affect the implementation of the Australian Curriculum.

### **Intentions and Questions**

The first cycle of Intuitive Inquiry involves the engagement with a specific text in conjunction with the researcher's past experiences to form the research aims and question (Anderson & Braud, 2011). This process began naively before deciding on an appropriate method and as such had two focus texts; *Curriculum History* (Hamilton, 1990) and Andrich's (2009) review of the Curriculum Framework for the Western Australian Education Minister.

In brief, it was discovered from *Curriculum History* that curriculum reform has been an ongoing process from the time the term 'curriculum' was first conceptualised and usually there was an underlying political, social or religious agenda; not simply how to educate students in the best way possible (Hamilton, 1990). From Andrich (Andrich, 2009), it was clear that past curriculum reform implementation in Western Australia had been mismanaged and teachers were in need of clearer direction, rationales and resources to engage with the Australian Curriculum favourably.

Therefore, taking into account the initial problem of exploring teachers' perceptions and experiences with curriculum reform and how they might influence the implementation of the AC, the aims of this study were based around assisting ourselves, colleagues, policymakers and other stakeholders to develop understandings of this phenomenon. Specifically, our intentions were to:

- a. Enrich personal understandings of teachers' lived experiences of non-voluntary curriculum reform in general, and the current reform – the Australian Curriculum, in particular,
- b. Help the participants reach new understandings and perspectives of the above phenomenon, and
- c. Illuminate for other education stakeholders the areas of interest for practitioners as they are preparing to implement mandatory curriculum reform.

The above aims led to the following research question: What are teachers' perceptions and experiences of mandated curriculum reform, with particular reference to the Australian Curriculum? Three specific subsidiary questions guided data collection:

1. What are the lived experiences of the participants with regards to mandatory curriculum change?
2. What are the experiences and perceptions of the participants regarding the Australian Curriculum?
3. What factors do the participants consider would help or hinder them to implement the Australian Curriculum?

In a following section we presents data pertinent to the first two research questions. Both how past experiences have influenced the participants and what ramifications this has for their perceptions of the AC.

## Method

Gathering and analysing an in depth account of varied personal perceptions and experiences of curriculum reform using Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson & Braud, 2011) was performed as this allowed for vivid, lived experiences of the participants to come to life and be presented for others. Intuitive Inquiry is rooted in hermeneutical processes as can be seen in its five iterative cycles. These cycles encourage the use of intuition along with reflection and dialogue over time to draw conclusions or build theory. In brief the cycles are:

1. choosing a topic,
2. preparing a list of preliminary interpretative lenses through reflection and reading,
3. gathering data via teacher-participant interviews and presenting them in a form that presents the 'voices' in the texts,
4. presenting a set of interpretative lenses that have changed through engagement with the data,
5. integrating the cycle four lenses with relevant literature and discussing the implications (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

This approach provides clarity in showing delineation between initial understandings of the topic and how these have changed after undertaking data analysis. It also allows for the descriptive presentation of data with the potential to generate theory "based on the development of understanding of the topic in the five cycles" (Anderson & Braud, 2011, p. 256).

Presented in this paper are elements of cycles two (parts of the literature review created to inform the initial lenses make up the introduction), three (the following explanation of data analysis and the composite data presentation in the findings section) and five (a discussion of my reflections on the data presented and implications for the future, linked with relevant

literature) that pertain to WA teachers and change fatigue. For the full account of all five cycles please see Lyle (2013).

### Participants and Data Collection

Participants were sourced from a regional high school in WA. Initially English and maths teachers, then HASS and science teachers were recruited for the first round of data collection. After collating the first round of data it became apparent that school leader insight was required to give a full account of the examined experience. The four respective Head of Learning Areas (HOLAs) and the Principal were then recruited to participate bringing the total number of participants to 23. Table 2 is a breakdown of participants by LA and participation in data collection.

Subject	Curriculum Change History 2011	Interview Mid 2011	End of Year 2011	Comment on Findings 2012
English	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
English	Yes	Yes	No	No
Maths	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
English	Yes	Yes	No	No
Maths	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A left
English	Yes	Yes	No	No
HASS	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Science	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
HASS	Yes	Yes	No	No
English	Yes	Yes	No	No
Science	Yes	Yes	Yes	N/A Left
English	No	Yes	No	N/A Deceased
Science	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Science	Yes	Yes	No	No
Science	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
HASS	Yes	Yes	No	No
Science	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
English	Yes	Yes	No	N/A Left
English HOLA	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Maths HOLA	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
HASS HOLA	N/A	Yes	Yes	Yes
Science HOLA	N/A	Yes	Yes	No
Principal	N/A	Yes	No	No
23/23	18/18	23/23	11/23	7/23

**Table 2: Participation in Data Collection Rounds**

As can be seen in Table 2, there were three data collection rounds and one resonance round. The first round involved the teacher participants responding to an email with demographic and basic mandated curriculum reform experience questions. The second round involved a semi-structured interview where all participants were asked about their experiences with mandated curriculum reform, their perceptions of and interactions with the AC and factors they believed could help or hinder the AC implementation process. The third round was a follow up email where participants were



asked to comment on any new insights into the AC as they approached what was meant to be the start of the AC implementation in WA.

The resonance round was part of Moustakas' (1994) modified van Kaam data analysis process, where participants are asked to give feedback on the composite data from the study before it is presented as findings. Resonance and data analysis is explained in more detail in the next section.

Table 3 collates the data from the initial participants' curriculum change biographies. At the conclusion of this round it was apparent that the participant sample had a wealth of experience implementing curriculum reform. It was also apparent that many participants had experience teaching within other education systems. This meant that many participants were able to compare WA processes with those in other countries and states.

Age Range	Teaching Years	Teaching Qualification	Currently Studying?	Other states, countries, settings?	Curricula Taught
40-49	10	Dip. Ed.	Yes	No	Outcomes Based Education (OBE), Courses of Study (CoS)
30-39	5.5	Dip. Ed.		UK	Curriculum Framework (CF), OBE, CoS
50-59	25	B.Ed.		No	Unit Curriculum, CF, OBE, CoS
50-59	22	Dip. Ed.	Yes	Prison	Unit Curriculum, CF OBE, CoS
50-59	17	Dip. Ed.		No	Unit Curriculum, CF, OBE, CoS
NR	30	Dip. Ed		Canada, S&E	No Response (NR)
50-59	35	Dip. Ed.		NZ, QLD, Primary	NR
30-39	10	Dip. Ed.		No	OBE, CoS
20-29	6	B.A. (Ed)		No	Upper school –CoS
40-49	20	Grad. Dip.		Canada, Youth Officer, Deputy	CF and OBE
40-49	24	Grad. Dip		No	Unit Curriculum, OBE
NR	1	NR		NR	(New graduate)
40-49	14	B.Ed.		India, Dubai	NR
30-39	10	Grad. Dip.		TDC Co-ordinator, SA, QLD	NR
40-49	5.5	Grad. Dip		No	OBE and TEE courses
NR	NR	NR		NR	NR
40-49	21	Dip. Ed.		No	Unit Curriculum, CF, OBE
40-49	20	B. Ed (Hons)	Yes	Canada	Unit Curriculum, CF, OBE,
40-49	16	B.A. Ed (Primary)		Primary, Deputy, Professional Learning Centre	CF, OBE, CoS

Table 3: Curriculum Change History

## **Data Analysis**

An extensive methodological process resulted in data being reduced to four particular dispositions towards curriculum reform. In their guide to Intuitive Inquiry Anderson and Braud (2011) support the use of Moustakas' (1994) analysis methods as they are epistemologically matched. Problems arose both preserving the participant anonymity and presenting the data in a way that characterised the experiences of all the participants whilst allowing the reader to come to their own conclusions, a necessary part of Intuitive Inquiry (Anderson & Braud, 2011). The data analysis method described as follows is by necessity then, an adaption of Moustakas' (1994) already modified van Kaam method.

### **Step 1 Listing and Preliminary Grouping**

Once all the data from the first three rounds were collected and transcribed, all data from a particular participant were placed into one document. Each expression relevant to the individual's experience (horizons) was listed and grouped, then checked carefully for accuracy and the influence of researcher bias. All comments not relating to the research questions were eliminated at this stage.

### **Step 2 Reduction and Elimination**

The purpose of this step is to reduce the data so it is concise whilst still covering all aspects of the phenomenon expressed by the participant (Moustakas, 1994). To do this each horizon needs to be checked to see if it contains a "moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it" and if it is "possible to abstract and label it" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). Next, "overlapping, repetitive and vague expressions are also eliminated or presented in more exact descriptive terms. The horizons that remain are the invariant constituents of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

This analysis was carried out at the individual participant level. The horizons were grouped by research question at this point while the data was firmly grounded in the participants' own phrases to ensure future abstraction did not lose the meanings of the participants' experiences and perceptions.

### **Step 3 Clustering and Thematising the Invariant Constituents**

The invariant constituents were then clustered and assigned thematic labels (like 'networking works' or 'tired of change').

### **Step 4 Final Identification of the Invariant Constituents and Themes**

These invariant constituents and themes were then checked against the original data to ensure they were either expressed explicitly or are compatible with the complete transcript. Invariant constituents not meeting these criteria were deleted. At the end of these four steps, the remaining data was grouped by theme for each participant for each research question in a condensed form, missing repetition and vague description.

### Steps 5 and 6

It is customary in steps 5 and 6 to develop both an Individual Textural Description and an Individual Textural-Structural Description of the experience for every participant from their invariant constituents, themes and imaginative variation (Moustakas, 1994). Although these were engaging, they made the participants highly identifiable to the other participants and they were lengthy, giving an overabundance of data. It was decided to focus on Step 7, creating a composite description of the experience, to avoid both issues whilst retaining the nuances of the data.

### Step 7 Develop a Composite Description of the Experience

According to Wertz, Nosek, McNiesh and Marlow (2011) the use of the composite narrative allows for a successful blending of the textural (felt sense of) and structural (themes and boundaries) aspects of a phenomenon, in a form that the reader can access easily. The range of feelings expressed by the participants towards mandated curriculum reform indicated that a whole group textural-structural composite exemplifying the essence of the phenomenon for all participants was not possible. The divided nature of the participant's responses were strongly conveyed and needed to be honoured without dilution to find a middle ground experience description.

Instead, the themed and labelled invariant constituents from the teacher-participants were sorted by underpinning emotion, starting with the basics negative, positive and neutral. These basic categories evolved into apathy, cynicism, realist and positive (from the teacher data) and then a leadership category using the leadership data from teachers, the HOLAs and principal. The fine line between apathy and cynicism proved problematic and as such these two categories were merged. The final categories became The Cynic, The Realist, The Enthusiast and The Leader.

Once sorted and reduced in this way, there was a noticeable disparity in data. The Cynical category had 9371 words, The Realist 5645, The Enthusiast 3677 and the Leader 6771.

The reduction and elimination step was carried out again as there were many overlaps in the data once combined. While roughly already in theme clusters, these were then further refined leaving four separate documents containing the full range of perceptions and experiences for each of the four 'categories' of response type, that had been reduced, refined and thematised.

The data for each group was used to develop four composite descriptions of the experiences which together encompass the lived experience of the target phenomenon for all participants. The four dispositions evident in the data thus became the four composites that embody the reduced relevant data. The composites are as follows;

- **The Cynic**, contains the overtly critical or apathetic invariant constituents from the teacher-participant interviews.
- **The Realist**, contains the pragmatic or realistic invariant constituents from the teacher participant interviews.
- **The Enthusiast**, contains the positive and enthusiastic invariant constituents from the teacher-participant interviews.
- **The Leader**, combines the invariant constituents from the teacher-leader participants.

The Leader category gives an insight into the systemic realities of mandated curriculum reform, whereas the three teacher-participant categories convey the emotions and perceptions of the participants as they reflect on their reform experiences.

## Resonance

To ensure that the participants' views had been represented, the four composites were then sent to the participants for comment in the resonance round. Apart from the formal feedback received (see Table 3 for numbers), a number of the participants commented in passing during discussions at school declaring that they knew who a particular composite was, thinking that they were actual people, not created by drawing on many people's experiences. The way these composites reflected real people validates the use of the data in this way (Anderson & Braud, 2011). Only minor revisions needed to be made to the composites based on participant suggestion.

## Findings

In an article of this length it is not possible to convey all the data gathered, so instead we will summarise key findings pertinent to curriculum reform and change fatigue. To this end, relevant excerpts from the four composites described above are presented in this section, followed by reflections on how they communicate change fatigue in WA teachers and a diagram encompassing the many responses presented in the whole data set. Change fatigue is then examined in light of relevant literature along with the participants' lived experiences in the Discussion section. This is in keeping with Cycle Five of Intuitive Inquiry where data and reflections are tied with literature to create theory (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

### The Cynic

The first excerpt is taken from The Cynic composite, created from the negative and apathetic teacher-participant data. When interviewed the extreme Cynics (those whose data only informed The Cynic composite) were nervous of being overheard, in some cases even of being seen with us at other times, fearful that their attitude might be discovered. After reading the composites during resonance, many participants found us in quiet corners of the playground to mention how surprised they were at all the negativity surrounding these reforms and that they did not realise so many people felt that (same) way. Their relief was evident in these remarks.

Curriculum reform is mandated, so it happens regardless of how I feel. I do realise that reform is inevitable, but I am suspicious of the underlying agenda to new reforms. The sad truth is that after a few years in the system, I recognised that curriculum reform is *political*. It is driven by people who build their careers from it. When a new 'flavour of the day' is promoted, it is just a political stunt; governments have to look like they are doing something to aid education.

The changes are so frequent now that it is *frustrating*; the waste, the money, the stress is all for nothing as in a few years it will be thrown out and I will have to start all over again. On top of this, the effect of curriculum reform on outcomes for my students is negligible. So, it feels like I am in a constant state of flux with no real results.

A lot of time and money has gone in to developing this new curriculum. It had the potential to be inspiring, but it is mediocre. It is just like the *disappointment* Courses of Study turned out to be. I was hopeful that CoS might change things. They had this great opportunity to improve the status quo, and initially they did come up with these radical changes I was hoping for. But then all of the old boys went 'oh my god we can't possibly do that' and we have ended up with a syllabus not that much different from what we started with.

The Cynics have a negative world view and describe mandated curriculum reform with words like; frustrating, sad, waste, mediocre, conservative and disappointing. They are cynical, suspicious of motive and aware of many possible limitations to reform. Current negative

experiences are immediately related to previous trials (It is just like the disappointment CoS turned out to be). Although the Cynics are still hopeful, with each new reform there is a sense of futility and powerlessness to bring about successful change (it happens regardless of how I feel).

### **The Realist**

The following excerpt is taken from The Realist composite. This composite was formed using the pragmatic or realistic data from teacher-participants.

People seek a Holy Grail in curriculum reform and it just doesn't exist. They are looking for the perfect curriculum that will solve everyone's problems. Even if such a curriculum were possible, it would take several years of research and planning for a successful implementation and by then, it would be time to change again as society would have moved on.

I think that the most recent reforms have been all about making education work for everyone. Teachers are being asked to take into account every child's needs and are being given the flexibility to allow students to achieve in non-traditional ways. Which is great in theory but incredibly *time consuming* in practice. As an organised person I find these types of *oversights* by our leadership really frustrating. This open-ended nature is what has kept me on the back foot since I came back to teaching in WA. I guess I am looking forward to the national curriculum, maybe I will be able to catch up on things.

There are some aspects of this new reform that I *appreciate*. The increased consistency of content and standards between states is one. I also like the focus on History in the Society and Environment Learning Area (now HASS), I think that it has been rather neglected in past reforms. And lastly, the national curriculum is becoming an impetus to use electronic resources like eBooks and interactive whiteboards in classrooms, is bringing Australian teaching into the 21st century.

The pragmatic Realists temper disappointments with successes. They register the highs and lows whilst at the same time realising perfection is not possible (people seek a Holy Grail in curriculum reform and it just doesn't exist). To the Realists, change is necessary but it is still frustrating and time consuming, with very few overt benefits. Whilst being interviewed those who contributed primarily to The Realist composite were happy to explain their ideals for mandated reform, what could and should be achieved, but they always linked these ideals back to the realities of the systemic constraints they work within.

### **The Enthusiast**

The following excerpt is taken from The Enthusiast composite. This composite was created using the positive data from the teacher-participants. As outlined in Step 7, there was significantly less data available to create this composite than the other three. This may be a quirk of the particular sample, or indicative of broader issues, further research in this area is necessary.

Curriculum reform is *essential*. It allows us to keep up with changes as society evolves. It shouldn't be about our personal likes and freedom as teachers, but what is best for the kids. Those who aren't happy about where this change is leading us need to take some time to get their heads around it and embrace it, for their kids' sake.

I also feel that with recent changes here in WA there is a strong movement towards consistency and accountability. This is important as I have known peers who twisted the vague guidelines of past reforms to teach whatever they liked! I am also aware of colleagues who have been getting away with substandard teaching for a while now. Frankly, I am sick of being the one who has to fix up their students when they come to me the following year. I hope that accountability continues to be a focus area in the future. I know a

lot of people baulk at the idea of common teaching tasks and assessments, but at some stage we are going to need to all get on the same page.

It feels like we have been through a lot of curriculum change, perhaps too much change in the last 20 years, but I really do think that the overall benefits have outweighed the teacher frustration and stress involved. I know that I am a *better* teacher today because of it.

The Enthusiasts use terms like essential, importance, new, great and better to describe their feelings about curriculum reform. They acknowledge that the change is frustrating but believe that the benefits outweigh their personal discomforts. There is an underlying belief about the need for collegiality and professionalism expressed here; i.e., we all need to be on the same page/ yes it may be hard but we have to do it for our students. The Enthusiast believes change is necessary and they are personally (change is the spice of life) and professionally (I know that I am a better teacher today because of it) motivated to implement mandated curriculum reform.

### **The Leader**

The following excerpt is from The Leader composite which was created using the data from the leader-participants and teacher-participants who previously held leadership roles.

I think that most teachers see the AC as a *logical* step for the nation to take. Most countries have a national curriculum don't they? So this reform makes our country seem more professional and unified. However, I don't think that they have been 'sold' on the model we have been presented with, for many all they know of the AC is what they have been able to glean from the ACARA website.

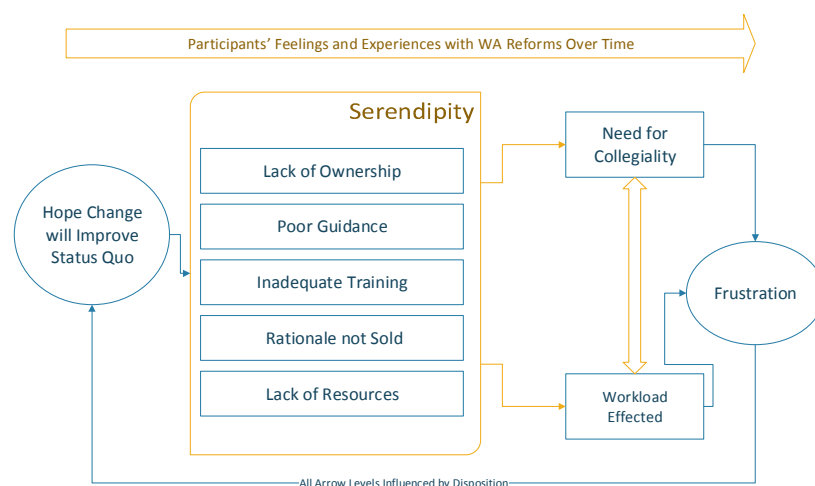
The department has provided close to nothing, and most teachers just don't have the time to go hunting for further information. If you look through NSW teacher association websites, they have actually been holding forums to discuss and give formal feedback on the AC; we haven't had anything like that here. If you look at the national proposed implementation timeline, WA is one of the few states that hasn't even got a proposed timeline. It's fairly *typical* of the [Western Australian Education] department, even when we are actively looking for support or resources to get the ball rolling, there's just nothing.

Currently they are asking a lot of people who already have *workload issues*, especially given that they do not have ownership of this new reform. Teachers who have been around a long time, of my generation, they have been through three reforms like that. You can't blame them for looking at the AC and asking 'how many changes do you need, and how different is it this one anyway?'

The Leaders believe their staff simultaneously accept and resent the national curriculum. To their staff, the AC is wonderful in theory; however, the increased workload it will insert into their lives is inescapable. For the Leaders, positive dispositions towards reform can be created or improved through a sense of ownership and delivery of a sound rationale. These convince staff of the necessity of change and allow them the influence to ensure it will be worth their effort. The Leaders' disposition mirrors the Realists'; hopeful but tempered with the systematic realities of organisational change.

### **A Continual Cycle of Change and Disappointment**

The focus of the first research question was participants' lived experiences of mandated curriculum reform and related composite data was used to create Figure 1. This is an extension of the Cycle Three low level analysis presented at the beginning of this section, moving away from faithfully describing the experiences of the participants to inductive theory building (Anderson & Braud, 2011).



**Figure 1: Participants' experiences with WA curriculum reforms over time**

Figure 1 shows the effects of serendipitous curriculum reform management (left up to the whims of fate to be properly implemented) on the participants over time. The participants' feelings of frustration and the necessity of collegiality as a way to minimise the negative impact of serendipitous curriculum reform, can clearly be seen. These are the issues the participants described the most often during data collection.

With each new reform it can be seen that there was an initial 'hope' period which then led to the realities of the situation, frustrations and then more hope at the thought of a further change. Not all dispositions were as heavily influenced by this cycle of hope and reality, but each expressed different times of hope and frustration. The continual cycle of change and disappointment in those changes, is likely to be affecting the health of the profession in WA and has ongoing repercussions for future reforms.

The second research question was devised to study this interaction between past reforms and the current one. To the Cynics, the AC is politically motivated, disappointing and misguided. The Realists, Enthusiasts and Leaders see different positives in the reform; in some way aspects that align with their values and attitudes are being promoted in this innovation. The implementation gap resulting from these dispositions needs further study, and certainly will vary between each disposition type.

Together then, the composites provide a window into the lived experiences of curriculum reform for WA teachers and indicate how these experiences are influencing their interactions with the AC. Feelings of frustration and exploitation many of the participants felt as a result of recurring, unsuccessful and uncaring change are apparent. Excitement and hope were also expressed at the thought of something new and perhaps better. For others, the experience was a necessary exercise in futility; we have to do it to keep up, but it is not going to work. These underlying currents permeate the participants' reactions to the AC.

## Discussion

This section links the findings pertinent to change fatigue and mandated curriculum reform to relevant literature and theorises repercussions for WA teachers and the success of future reforms. This is in keeping with Cycle Five of Intuitive Inquiry where the findings and subsequent researcher interpretations are integrated with relevant literature and implications are discussed (Anderson & Braud, 2011).

Cynicism, which can occur as a result of poor change management (Wood, 2007) is a particularly damaging emotion in regards to reform. Reichers et al (cited in Bernerth, et al.,

2011, p. 323) actually term it ‘change cynicism’ which represents feelings combining “... pessimism about the likelihood of successful change with the blame of those responsible for change as incompetent, lazy, or both”. This cynicism also grows by feeling betrayed by employers, where past programs are thrown out after teachers have committed large amounts of their time to making them work (Bailey, 2000; Cody, 2007) and then being asked to implement new programs without being given adequate resources, a rationale or demonstrated benefits for students. These underlying causes of change cynicism are at work in the participant responses, reflected in Figure 1, and are likely to account for the comparatively large amount of cynical and apathetic data that contributed to The Cynic.

As these experiences were not unique but continuous (see Table 1 and Figure 1) it is not surprising that many of the participants described the souring of their disposition towards mandated curriculum reform. This is not a unique phenomenon, Day, Elliot and Kington (2005, p. 566) observed that teachers over 45 years of age often “...find continuing commitment to classroom teaching problematic partly for reasons of time, energy and health, and because they have become emotionally exhausted or ‘disenchanted’”. This disenchantment, with its affiliates mistrust (Goldspink, 2007) change cynicism, apathy and exhaustion (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009), seems prevalent in the participant responses. Such a paradigm shift could have dire consequences for WA teachers.

#### **Repercussions of Previous WA Mandatory Curriculum Reform**

Globally, mandated education reforms are occurring markedly more rapidly (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). WA is no exception, which can be seen in the curriculum histories of the participants (see Table 2). Teachers who have been practicing over 17 years have worked with four curriculum packages; whereas a teacher who has been practicing for only 5.5 years has worked with three. This situation is problematic as change fatigue is a further known contributor to poor performance and initiative engagement, as teachers endeavour to ignore or resist changes they are not able to cope with (Wood, 2007) when their adaptive resources to deal with change bottom out through over use. Exhaustion is the end result of this process (Bernerth, et al., 2011).

Within the sample population, even though many had worked for similar lengths of time, the effects of change fatigue was varied. The extremely cynical and apathetic data formed the Cynic composite. Given the literature surrounding this topic it would be possible to assume that this apathy and cynicism is a direct result, or the only possible effect of poor mandated curriculum reform management in WA. However, the differing levels of cynicism within teachers of the same experience, that occurred within the sample leading to the necessity to divide the data into four composites suggests otherwise. It seems that disposition is both affected by and affects a person’s response to this situation.

Out of all of the factors affecting teacher perceptions and predispositions towards reforms, change fatigue continues to be the most pertinent to all Western Australian classrooms. A teacher working in Western Australia for 10 years has gone through an extraordinary amount of educational change and yet change fatigue remains under researched. It would be very difficult for any professional to work through so many changes and retain a positive disposition to future mandated reforms (Bernerth, et al., 2011; Burgess, Robertson, & Patterson, 2010; Cody, 2007; Cuban, 1990; Graham, 1997; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009). Change fatigue is currently a silent killer of mandated curriculum reform and needs to be seriously considered in any examination of teacher perceptions of, and experiences with, change management, job satisfaction and burnout.



## Conclusion

In this study, collaboration was highlighted for its contribution to the participants' coping strategies. By building on this seemingly natural resource it may be possible to help those suffering (or in danger of suffering) from burnout, change fatigue, demoralisation or other disposition problems, to become re-energised about implementing mandated curriculum reform. Prescription is another tool that could aid WA teachers struggling with the culminated effect of poorly managed changes. Although this request by the large majority of participants runs counter to current research on autonomy, job satisfaction and performance (Barrick & Mount, 1993; Chang, 2009; Day, et al., 2005; Deci & Ryan, 2008; Fernet, Guay, Senécal, & Austin, 2012; Sizer, 1997; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2009), it appears workload stress is so dire in WA after successive mismanaged reforms that this request is a necessity.

This request is also not unique, Andrich (2009) outlined the need for clearer and more detailed curriculum with suitable resources, in his report on the implementation of the last WA K-10 reform. It is apparent that many of the recommendations made by the participants are not novel, and are heavily entrenched in best practice change management literature (Bailey, 2000; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; Bee Bee, 2008; Christensen & Lægreid, 2007; Cohen & Ball, 1990; Cole, 2010; Day, et al., 2005; Fullan, 2010; Hayes, 2010; Kimber & Ehrich, 2010; King, 2001; Sizer, 1997).

Given the increasing change rate in education and teachers' past and present frustrating experiences with mandated curriculum reform in WA, policy makers need to alter their practices in regards to how such reforms are communicated and implemented if they want to increase the job satisfaction and productivity of their workforce, and in some cases simply retain their workforce. Hope for improvement was an underlying factor in each of the participant data sets. Sadly, a flawed system with known implementation issues that has already been criticised (Andrich, 2009; Assistant Director O'Neil, 2007; Berlach & McNaught, 2007; Day, et al., 2005; Education Workforce Initiatives Taskforce, 2007a) is being perpetuated regardless of such hope. Every further failure to listen to teachers and such research, brings us closer to the day when the hope experienced by the participants at the initiation of a mandated curriculum reform no longer exists.

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