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**Arts Curriculum Implementation.  
"Adopt and Adapt" as Policy Translation.**

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## **Arts Curriculum Implementation. "Adopt and Adapt" as Policy Translation.**

This paper examines macro, meso and micro understandings of policy enactment within Western Australian primary school arts education where a new national arts curriculum is being revised and implemented through a process colloquially known as 'adopt and adapt'. This paper focuses on how a government led implementation policy has influenced arts teaching and learning in unintended ways. It includes a theoretical reflection and a consideration of the effects of such policies. Using policy enactment theory as the enquiry lens, four contextual variables are highlighted for their impact on teachers and schools. The variables include situated contexts, material contexts, professional cultures and external factors. Effects are discussed through the perspectives of eleven arts curriculum leaders drawn from in-depth semi-structured interviews. Marginalisation of the arts, the disconnection of schools and teachers to the arts and professional learning impacts are discussed as results of this policy translation.

Keywords: arts education, policy enactment theory, curriculum implementation, translation, adaptation

*"The Arts have the capacity to engage, inspire and enrich all students, exciting the imagination and encouraging them to reach their creative and expressive potential." (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2014)*

This statement from the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), the body responsible for the development of the national curriculum in Australia, serves as an aspiration designed to inspire teachers to engage all students with the Arts. The Western Australian Curriculum: The Arts (School Curriculum and Standards Authority 2015), to be fully implemented in Western Australia by 2018 (Collier 2015), is a process of translation of the national curriculum for the Western Australian context. This Pre-primary to Year 10 syllabus promises an arts education in dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts that encourages students to "explore and experiment" as they are involved in arts making and responding activities (School Curriculum and Standards Authority 2015). Teachers are encouraged to provide a creative learning environment in which imagination and curiosity thrive. While this is an admirable goal for a new curriculum, as is often the case in curriculum matters, the rhetoric of the curriculum documents does not always match the reality of the school environment. In the primary setting (children aged from 5 to 12 years of age), where teachers are responsible for up to seven learning areas, literacy and numeracy are the priority and arts learning has a lower status. This lower status is in contrast to Australian and international research that points to how the Arts are recognised and valued by teachers, parents

and the wider community as having positive influences and learning outcomes for students (Bamford 2009, Costantoura 2000). Understanding this mismatch is a key theme for this paper if there is to be a better use of resources currently allocated to curriculum development, and improved student engagement and learning outcomes for students in the Arts.

Examination of the mismatch is undertaken on three levels. First, the macro level, identifying the political – economic climate that pervades education in Australia and other similar western countries. Second, the meso level, identifying the policy at the centre of this paper and the contextual dimensions that impact on arts learning opportunities. Recognising their contribution to the ecology of primary schools will highlight the focus of arts curriculum implementation (Ludwig, Marklin, and Song 2016). Finally, the micro level, the intended and unintended results of implementation policy and what this has meant for arts education in this scenario. It is to this first broadest context that we now turn.

### **Macro forces: Neoliberal Movement**

As a macro force impacting on education across the globe, the neoliberal movement is considerable. The current neoliberal approach to education has resulted in what Lingard, Martino, and Rezai-Rashti (2013) suggest is a rescaling of educational accountability. This rescaling shifts the focus of performance from the child to the school, education system and governments, and is being experienced most in western post-industrialised countries such as the United Kingdom, United States, Canada and Australia (Lingard, Martino, and Rezai-Rashti 2013). Argued as an inevitable process of living in the global village (Rizvi and Lingard 2010, Sabol 2013, Ditchburn 2012), this competitive focus has driven the educational agenda and ties it to economic policies meaning that the mathematical world of economics becomes the sole determinant of ‘value’ and so the ‘currency’ of what counts in education is linked to market forces. This matters because these neoliberal principles inform policy and its enactment (Martino and Rezai-Rashti 2013). Yet a disconnection exists between many teachers’ desire to do ‘the right thing’, make a difference in their students’ lives, and be informed by policy that reflects conflicting educational imperatives.

Across Australia, the development and implementation of a national curriculum, the Australian Curriculum (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2014), heralds the latest change in our education landscape. This process of curriculum development and implementation has not been without its challenges as Australian States and Territories try to reconcile the new curriculum guidelines with the current curriculum practices. In order to better understand the

current situation and perceived mismatch of curriculum and practice, we briefly consider the history of the national curriculum.

### National Curriculum

The notion of an Australian curriculum was initiated in the early 1980's with the possibility of a systematic and systemic approach to curriculum discussed by scholars and politicians of the day (Brennan 2011, Drummond 2012, Gerrard et al. 2013). Iterations of Australian State, Territory and Federal governments led attempts to develop and implement a national curriculum but the complex Federal versus State and Territories struggle for education control meant that most efforts floundered (Brennan 2011). In 2003, State and Territory education ministers through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) released a joint document that coalesced into the idea of a national curriculum. In 2008, the then Federal Rudd government announced the development of a national curriculum as part of its 'education revolution' (Brennan 2011, Gerrard et al. 2013). This 'revolution' can be interpreted as one of several initiatives aimed at increasing the Federal government's control over education policy and practice (Rizvi and Lingard 2010).

As a result, the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) was formed in May 2009. This body now carries the responsibility for developing curriculum, assessment and reporting documents for all Australian States and Territories and takes its direction from Federal and State/Territory Education Ministers. A decision was made by ACARA to phase in different learning areas of the curriculum over several years to allow teachers and schools more time to come to terms with the changes; currently there are three phases of curriculum implementation planned (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2013b).

In 2011, teachers and schools across Australia began the familiarisation of Phase One learning areas of the Australian Curriculum: English, Maths, Science and History. This required unpacking the national curriculum, changing current programs, and consideration of assessment and reporting mechanisms before full implementation of this first phase by the end of 2014. The Arts, as a learning area, fell within the Phase 2 group of subjects and was made available nationally for implementation in February 2014 by ACARA. The initial timeline for full arts implementation across the nation was 2016. Western Australia, through the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (SCSA), the regulatory body for education in Western Australia, chose a different path. This path or adaption included a revision of the Australian Curriculum: The Arts, a rewriting of the syllabus materials, and a revised timeline for implementation.

## **Meso forces: 'Adopt and Adapt' as Policy**

At a meso level, the policy central to this paper is colloquially known as 'adopt and adapt'. In this context, 'adopt' recognises policy components to be implemented as published by the Australian Curriculum, whereas 'adapt' indicates components to be altered for use in Western Australian schools. This policy phrase was introduced by SCSA and endorsed by the Western Australian government for this process of translation from Federal to State responsibility. In this parlance, translation implies taking policy from its written to enacted context. Policy, however, is described as more than just text, or a set of directions or prescriptions to be followed. Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) and Rizvi and Lingard (2010), for example, consider policy to be a process where a directive is understood and translated into action in different ways for different contexts. In considering policy as both text and enactment we can better understand the notion of 'adopt and adapt' as a tool to manage the introduction of a curriculum, and discuss why this may or may not produce the intended outcomes of teacher and student engagement with the arts in and through the new curriculum.

As a phrase of translation, adopt and adapt, is used across many disciplines. Examples from medicine (Bhoo-Pathy et al. 2013), management (Frigo and Anderson 2014), and cultural studies (Grodach 2013) use this terminology to identify the translation of one idea into action. It is used across education generally (Adams et al. 2006, Thomson and Sanders 2010), and also in other Australian education settings as a translation of policy from its written to enacted context. This approach of 'adopting and adapting' appears in the Queensland government's *Curriculum into the Classroom 2013* (Queensland Government 2013), and the terminology features heavily in the Western Australian rhetoric for the implementation of the Australian Curriculum. This process of 'translation' shapes and often changes the intention of the curriculum. What this process highlights is that any policy is only 'seen' by the way it is enacted or legitimized by policy actors (Wallner 2008) and the human interface between policy and its intended beneficiaries is key.

As a descriptor, 'adopt and adapt', first appears in the context of the national curriculum in the *Western Australian Jurisdictional Response to the Australian Government of the Australian Curriculum* (Government of Western Australia 2014). Highlighted in this document was the agreement by Western Australia to *adopt* the Australian Curriculum versions of the English, Mathematics, Science and History learning areas (phase one) but *adapt* all phase two and three learning areas for the Western Australian context. The size, complexity and the vastly different contexts of the Western Australian education system are used as a rationale for this position, as well as perceptions about the enormity of the curriculum, necessary changes to the assessment

structure, indicated standards, and the timeline for implementation (Government of Western Australia 2014).

Western Australia has always been in a unique position in Australia when it comes to the variety of educational contexts it must service. Primary schools in Western Australia range from large metropolitan sites with over 1000 students, to small remote schools with only 25 students. The remote schools can be hundreds of kilometres from regional centres and several thousand kilometres from the capital city Perth, so the concern of making the curriculum relevant to a variety of educational contexts is real. SCSA, as the body with responsibility for the development of curriculum and assessment for students in Kindergarten through to Year 12 as well as the responsibility for setting standards for student achievement is carrying out the 'adaptation' work. The Western Australian jurisdictional response document indicated that SCSA would work to reduce the amount of content (now to be identified as core and additional), and arrange content as a year by year syllabus rather than in the two school year bands of the national document (Government of Western Australia 2014). This is an important change that highlights the government's concern with how teachers currently engage with the curriculum and perhaps identifies the way to increase engagement through easy to implement documentation.

However, it is not just the syllabus content that has had an impact on arts curriculum practices in Western Australia. Recent comprehensive national reviews of music (Pascoe et al. 2005) and visual arts (Davis 2008) highlighted the wide variety of practices that are currently present in Australian primary schools concerning arts education. In addition, there are three key characteristics that function to add layers of complexity to perceptions and issues for implementation of the arts curriculum in Western Australian schools. (1) There are five arts subjects to cover (dance, drama, media arts, music and visual art), (2) Each art form has its own distinct language and expression, and (3) Teacher's own experiences of the arts and teaching the arts in primary schools is limited and usually constrained to one, or possibly two, art forms (Gibson and Anderson 2008, Wright and Pascoe 2004). Each of these characteristics alone creates a challenge for a generalist primary teacher but when considered together the impact is even more significant.

If the curriculum is perceived to be elitist or not accessible for a generalist teacher or there is a lack of teacher confidence, then it is understandable that teachers take the path of least resistance and engage with the arts in a less focused and structured way. It could, therefore, be argued that the purpose of the 'adopt and adapt' policy is to implement the curriculum in such a way as to actually reach students in schools and increase their engagement with the arts. However, there have been issues and ramifications not fully understood in the implementation of this policy in schools. Policy



enactment theory provides one focusing lens that enables us to better understand the intended and unintended results of 'adopt and adapt'.

### **Policy Enactment Theory**

Policy enactment theory is one way to understand policy and the impact that it has on systems and schools. Arts curriculum implementation practices in Western Australia are contextualised by both 'big picture' policy contexts, and 'smaller picture' policy practices in policy discussions (Vidovich 2007). Analysing the links between the two, policy enactment theory provides a helpful framing device as it incorporates an understanding of the variety of individual settings and teachers in those settings. How a policy such as 'adopt and adapt' impacts on curriculum implementation is especially important in terms of the complexity previously highlighted.

Seminal in the field of policy enactment theory is the work of Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012), who argue that policy enactment theory involves *interpreting, translating and reconstructing* policy. What this approach does, for example, is highlight the way that policy and the ways it is enacted is always mediated and in a state of flux. More specifically, Ball, Maguire, and Braun (2012) research, conducted in secondary schools in the United Kingdom, argues that policy is not enacted in a vacuum and there are "four contextual dimensions that need to be considered: situated contexts, professional cultures, material contexts, and external contexts" (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012, 21). How these components are coded and decoded by individual schools and teachers comprises the messy, creative and negotiated process of enactment (Ball, Maguire, and Braun 2012).

#### Figure 1. Contextual Dimensions

As a heuristic device these four contexts provide a framework for understanding a number of the significant contexts that impact on teachers' work outside of the immediate classroom environment.

Looking at 'adopt and adapt' focusses our attention on the:

- Situated contexts (e.g. location, population, socio-economic factors)
- Professional cultures (e.g. administration, priorities, relationships, marketing, values, and teacher commitment)
- Material contexts (e.g. infrastructure, provision, staffing, technology and time)
- External contexts (e.g. pressures and expectations from broader policy contexts). See Figure 1.

In order to understand the complexities of policy enactment at both the meso and micro level we focus on the actors and agencies involved. Arts curriculum leaders, are key actors who have a

responsibility to lead and support change, provide one important insight into this contested world and the 'adopt and adapt' ideology more broadly. It is to these curriculum leaders we now turn.

### **Arts Curriculum Leaders**

As significant actors within arts curriculum implementation, Arts curriculum leaders have a critical perspective to add to the conversation about curriculum change and its effects. For example, as leaders they are not policy makers but charged with supporting teachers to understand and implement arts curriculum. Using a stakeholder sampling method (Palys 2008), twelve key representatives were directly approached to participate. All but one agreed. The eleven curriculum leaders interviewed in this research come from a range of educational contexts. Initially, from education jurisdiction offices; Government (2), Independent (1) and Catholic Education (1), as well as the state's regulatory body, the School Curriculum and Standards Authority (2). Participants (2) were then recruited from Teacher Development Schools (TDS). TDS's are an initiative of the Western Australian Department of Education where schools apply for the role and selected staff in those schools become the point of contact for other government schools and teachers for curriculum related support and professional learning. Finally, Education officers (3) from the major performing arts companies in Western Australia were also included. It is interesting to note that there were only eleven identified primary arts curriculum leaders available to interview. In a state with over 500,000 school-aged children with 10% of the nation's young population, that there are so few direct and indirect curriculum support positions relating to primary arts reflects the low value of the arts in this education system.

All participants have an interest in, and understanding of arts practice, and each has a personal focus in at least one of the five art subjects (dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts) offered in Western Australian schools. These curriculum leaders have a similar affection towards the Arts and all talked about the importance of the Arts in the lives of Western Australian children. Each of the curriculum leaders interviewed as part of this paper identified the 'adopt and adapt' mantra and the impact they perceived this was having on schools. Participants were interviewed using a series of open-ended questions with a focus on curriculum enactment<sup>1</sup>. The questions being asked of the participants were designed to give greater clarity to the following question:

How and in what ways are the Arts understood, interpreted and enacted by classroom primary teachers in Western Australian schools?

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<sup>1</sup> This research was approved by the affiliated university and the anonymity of the participants protected by the use of pseudonyms.

The Arts curriculum leaders' responses focused on their understanding of what impacts on classroom primary teachers when implementing the Arts, and the contributing factors that enable or inhibit arts learning in schools. These contributing factors were aligned to the contextual dimensions identified earlier. The responses to each contextual dimension were examined separately to develop a deeper understanding of the complexity at play. This complexity was then considered holistically to further unpack the intended and unintended outcomes of the 'adopt and adapt' message. A discussion of each context now follows.

### **Situated Contexts**

The situated contexts reveal an understanding of the impact of *place* on curriculum implementation practices. Three key factors were identified as important in understanding *place* in this way. First, the school community itself and the values it reflects, second, the resources within the school and third, the geographical location was identified. Each of these are now described in turn.

The school community was found to be vitally important in delivering a strong arts curriculum for primary schools in Western Australia. In this context a school community consists of the teachers, parents and wider community members working to benefit the learning outcomes of students. For example, programs that involve the strengths of the school community are an obvious way explicit learning can be enhanced benefiting not only the children but also providing a mechanism for staff professional learning as well. Imogen, a curriculum leader from the government jurisdiction, offered an example of when a strong school community works well for the Arts.

We certainly find that our schools in [a particular region] ...have a very strong focus on the Arts and they have a lot of family, of community members who are practicing artists in their own right, who actually come in and support the school in the delivery of the Arts there. In many of our remote schools the Arts are high on the agenda because the Arts are very important to that community too.

(Imogen, curriculum leader, Government)

Tapping into the interests and skills of the school community is a logical way to add to staff knowledge and understandings. This view is also consistent with the literature that suggests that children generally engage in learning better when they have access to the arts that are relevant to their context (Ewing 2012, Blakeslee 2004).

Location and socio-economic influences are also factors that influence understanding of place. For example, the socio-economic bearing of a school has a considerable effect on a child's academic performance (Perry and McConney 2010). This impacts on arts offerings as the focus on the improvement of academic performance has direct links with how much time and attention is given

to other learning areas (Thompson and Harbaugh 2013). School based opportunities form one component of an arts program but schools being able to offer and integrate additional arts learning opportunities into their programs depends on geographical and financial resources to do so. A schools physical location and ability of the students to pay for items like transport and tickets was also raised by one Education Officer as a concern to offering well rounded arts programs. Clara, for example, highlighted the difficulty faced trying to attract teachers and schools to centralised performances.

...for teachers to actually come out of schools is really, really difficult cause of the amount of risk and safety management for the students is really huge and that has had a great impact. I also know, I've had some teachers that we have had some great support from say "look my budget has literally been slashed this year" so I got that at the end of last year saying "I have to be really careful about where we spend the money and have to relate it directly back to curriculum and what are the outcomes going to be for the students".  
(Clara, Education Officer, performing arts)

The travel, risk management procedures and paperwork associated with taking students out of school has increased teacher workload in recent years. Education officers also highlighted that the associated administrative burden has a greater impact on schools further away from the city. The situated contexts give an impression of how location creates both opportunity and restriction in education. How schools and teachers respond to these impacts delineates what is possible to offer students. For example, if excursions are not possible due to funding and travel constraints, how can local artists and opportunities be used instead? Influencing how these opportunities and restrictions are handled characterises the professional cultures of the school.

### **Professional Cultures**

Professional cultures identify the processes within a school that impact on arts curriculum implementation and delivery. Three key impacts relating to school processes were identified. First, support for the arts (by the school administration and the school community), second, school administration decision-making processes, and three, teacher values and commitment were concepts identified by participants as being significant.

Support for the arts is a concept that has a global audience. In the US, McKean (2001) identified district administration support as an issue for teachers working in partnership with teaching artists to improve curriculum delivery. In Western Australia, the curriculum leaders identified support through explicitly valued and supported arts programs in schools. Louise, a curriculum leader in the independent school jurisdiction, saw a strong connection between a school administrator's position on the Arts and how that translates to and through the rest of the school.

...then there is the attitude towards the Arts from the executive, from the principal, the assistant principal and so on. [At North PS], their principal actually has an arts background so she thinks that the Arts should permeate every part of the school curriculum, so she is going to employ a music teacher and a visual arts teacher and she would welcome me to the school to talk to people and so on. (Louise, curriculum leader, Independent)

Where there is explicit support and value from a school executive, there is openness and sharing between the administration team and teachers and between teachers themselves. This value is reflected in the way the school operates.

School operation is very closely tied to administration decision making; the second key impact to be discussed. One way that administration teams influence school operation is through the school timetable. The timetable provides structure to the school. Teachers know when their class is working with another teacher for a particular subject, and for how long, because it is timetabled. This allows classroom teachers to focus on other aspects of the curriculum. However, allocation of time, space and resources to a learning area provides an indication of value; greater resources, greater value. Imogen, a curriculum leader from the government jurisdiction, saw the school administration team as having an influence over the school timetable but also recognised the juggling of many competing priorities.

I think again the administration team is important in terms of what they will timetable, how they will timetable it and the space they will allocate to it. And of course our administration teams have got so many competing agendas, so many competing priorities they have to accommodate .... (Imogen, curriculum leader, Government)

When support is explicit, through timetabling and resourcing, new ideas are encouraged, lessons and programs are trialled and reflected upon. It is in this way curriculum development and change becomes part of the ethos of the school. Helene, an arts teacher in a Teacher Development School (TDS) shared an example of teachers in her school sharing pedagogy and valuing arts learning to help students retain information.

In the classrooms we have a movement about explicit teaching, which is about every day, like repetition, body language, sound repetition, repetition to push it from the short term into the long term [memory]. If you are a specialist like me, you don't have the opportunity to see the kids every day. So the retention of knowledge from one week to the other, that continuity of the creative process is staggered all the time. So you need to have things, other strategies to help students retain that. (Helene, arts teacher, TDS)

However, when programs have less support or no specific time allocated through the timetable, curriculum leaders saw teachers who may have an interest in self-improvement or in collegially

sharing ideas being left to attempt new ideas alone; a consequence being them reverting to what they already know. This notion of value was evidenced by Hannah in her work in an Arts TDS, working with teachers in surrounding schools.

... so for teachers who want to try and explore a new avenue or explore the Arts that takes more time outside of their given time that they have in schools so ...unless you've got a teacher that really wants to run with it, that time poor teacher is not going to have the time to really go and explore a different avenue or a different approach or using the Arts or trying to make the arts fruitful in their school because they are already time poor with all the other things that already occur with teaching.

(Hannah, arts teacher, TDS)

The professional cultures identify the processes and structures that exist within the school. They are the interior, less tangible elements of a school community that create tension in either positive or negative ways. The culture of a school can also be influenced by what the school has; the material resources available.

### **Material Contexts**

The material contexts are identified as the human and physical resources available to schools. Three key notions were identified as having an impact. They were staffing, infrastructure, and provision.

The teaching of the Arts in primary schools is undertaken by the classroom teacher or a specialist arts teacher, using the most knowledgeable or willing person available. The curriculum leaders identified these staffing policies as having an impact on arts teaching in primary schools and saw staffing as a challenge for the administration of the school. Richard, in his role at SCSA, was in a unique position to comment on the concerns of principals, having spoken to all of them in a series of meetings held across the state in the lead up to the introduction of the Western Australian curriculum.

The challenge now for principals is making decisions now about who and what am I employing in this school and how will I cover this? Which one of these areas do I think would best support the remaining teachers...so I can get the specialist; think physical education specialist, think arts specialist - visual arts, drama or dance. (Richard, curriculum leader, SCSA)

However, staffing is only part of the equation. The new curriculum calls for study of both visual and performing arts during the primary school years (School Curriculum and Standards Authority 2015), so for schools to manage this requirement, issues beyond staffing must also be considered.

A school's infrastructure will, in many ways, determine what a school may offer in the Arts. Providing quality arts learning requires space, across both physical and time dimensions, but the reality of

dwindling school resources is a concern, as highlighted by Imogen, a curriculum leader working in the government sector.

I think what impacts on a curriculum delivery for a teacher is if they are not given a regular space. So if one week you are in the art room but next week you are in the Year 4 room and then next week you are in the undercover area, I think that has the greatest impact, more so than having a dedicated drama space or a dedicated music space. I think for people who don't necessarily have as much experience, not having a dedicated space will certainly have a negative impact. I believe it can be taught (Arts we are talking) can be taught in any space, as long as that is the regular space.

(Imogen, curriculum leader, Government)

Somewhere to go to teach the Arts, where the materials were stored and easily accessed and where it was appropriate for the children to either make a mess or make noise was considered important in the effective delivery of the Arts. In addition to the infrastructure of a school and the space allocated to the teaching of the Arts, provision for the necessary supplies was raised.

Provision for the Arts in schools was characterised primarily as conversations around money. Money for supplies, for instruments, for excursions, for incursions, and even for extra staff. Marie, a curriculum leader for the Catholic sector, identified a range of concerns that face schools when considering the issue of provision.

Resources are going to be a big thing for media, some schools with music, it is going to be quite a big issue...finances of course. Just trying to set all that up. Specific rooms are sometimes another issue. If you have got music happening and to meet the curriculum you probably need a lot of instruments and where are you going to keep them? Locked up where...also singing music - copyright issues. Media arts - camera's and computers and all sorts.

(Marie, curriculum leader, Catholic)

The material contexts identify the tangible components of providing for a learning area. Where and how the Arts are positioned in the school (infrastructure and resources) become an obvious way to discuss whether a school community values a curriculum. However, sometimes factors outside of the control of a school community impact on curriculum and it is to these external contexts that we now turn.

### **External Factors**

The external contexts identify the wider issues that impact on schools and are characterised as external pressures or expectations. These issues are often outside of the control of the teachers and even individual schools. As system initiatives and requirements, these policies are implemented by

schools to meet the needs of their student cohort, school community and education sectors. One impact of policy and curriculum pressure is the resultant notion of a crowded curriculum.

### Curriculum Pressures

A crowded curriculum has been blamed for many pressures currently encountered by teachers as a result of competing priorities in schools (Crump 2005). These competing priorities can be both school initiated and teacher initiated. Aoki (2009), identified that the school day is filled with both planned and lived experiences. The current lived experience of teachers in schools requires significant time spent in mathematics, literacy, and increasingly science. Mandated time has also been allocated by the government for physical education. Once these requirements are considered there is not much time left in the school day for everything else. At the moment the Arts falls under the banner of 'everything else'. The curriculum leaders recognise this as a potential hurdle for the Arts as indicated by this statement from Richard, curriculum leader at SCSA.

...there is much complaint that we are dealing with an overcrowded curriculum. I think the curriculum has always been crowded because we teach many other things that aren't described anywhere, which are the things that may not be happening in some homes, the things that are no longer happening in society that the village used to teach, all being put on shoulders of the primary school...

(Richard, curriculum leader, SCSA)

The pressure to adequately cover all components of the current curriculum was a common theme discussed by curriculum leaders and in their opinion seemed to be used as a reason for some schools to not offer or to limit offerings in the Arts. This view is strengthened by curriculum design documents released by ACARA. In *Curriculum Design v3.1*, a document highlighting the process used by the writers of the Australian Curriculum, the Arts were allocated between 4 and 5% of the total curriculum time in the primary years. In comparison, English was allocated between 20 – 27% and Mathematics 16 – 18% (Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority 2013a, 9). Placing a greater emphasis on the Arts is difficult under such powerful framing. Complicating the place of the Arts further are the expectations placed on the Arts and arts teachers to showcase students and schools through the Arts to parents and the wider community. These expectations are now considered.

### Expectations

Expectations around the Arts are tied to school business plans and school marketing strategies. A great source of leverage for school self-promotion, the Arts were observed by the jurisdiction based curriculum leaders as a way for schools to market themselves in tight school markets. This was especially noted where several similar schools in close proximity were competing for student



enrolments. However, there was also the perception that the pressure of using the Arts as a vehicle to showcase the school sometimes outweighed the teaching learning process. Louise, the curriculum leader for the independent sector saw this in her work with schools and teachers.

A lot of their time [the teachers] would be spent, rather than delivering an authentic arts education, what they were being forced to do was produce an exhibition or make a performance...

(Louise, curriculum leader, Independent)

This expectation for the Arts to provide the vehicle for school and community engagement was seen as detrimental to the teaching of the arts when it became the sole focus of the Arts program. The curriculum leaders saw the Arts teacher as instrumental in advocating for a comprehensive arts program in these instances.

The provision of a strong teaching and learning program in the Arts, is contextualised by an understanding of the impact of the four variables described. The contextual dimensions were considered individually to appreciate the environment in which arts implementation is either enabled or constrained. Understanding the intended and unintended outcomes of the 'adopt and adapt' message is strengthened by an awareness of the complexity context creates for schools. With this awareness in mind, the micro forces of the intended and unintended outcomes of 'adopt and adapt', can now be considered.

### **Micro forces: Understanding of the 'adopt and adapt' message (mantra)**

The 'adopt and adapt' message has been a powerful tool for SCSA in outlining their plan for curriculum change in Western Australian schools. Each of the Arts curriculum leaders interviewed understood the purpose of the 'adopt and adapt' policy and how this related to the perceived best interests of arts education in Western Australia. For these respondents, it was hoped that the delay and revised outline would provide a more comprehensive, easy to use document for schools. In discussing how the 'adopt and adapt' decision was theorised from the original ACARA documents, Richard, a leader at SCSA explained:

We 'adopt' that you [ACARA] have defined drama and dance and media, music and visual arts. But we [Western Australia] are going to 'adapt' it because we are going to split it into years, and we are going to sort the achievement standard out because it doesn't work for us.

(Richard, curriculum leader, SCSA)

That the national ACARA syllabus 'doesn't work' for Western Australia can be seen as a reflection of the unwieldiness of the Curriculum Framework<sup>2</sup>; the most recent syllabus materials used in Western

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<sup>2</sup> The Curriculum Framework was introduced in Western Australia in 1998 with eight learning areas: English, Maths, Science, Society and Environment, The Arts, Health and Physical Education, Technology and Enterprise and Languages other than English. Debate between teachers about the balance between content and

Australia (Curriculum Council of Western Australia 1998). It is the case, for example, that conflicting perspectives and conceptions about the nature of the Curriculum Framework have permeated discussions amongst arts teachers since the framework's conception, particularly with relation to uncertainty between the need for content and the need for pedagogy. Richard, a leader at SCSA described his understanding of the previous Curriculum Framework implementation:

We ran the notion of eight learning areas all equal in the sun...the entitlement model that came with the Curriculum Framework... if we had syllabuses...mandated syllabuses (which are the *what*)<sup>3</sup> ...and then gone to the how...  
(Richard, curriculum leader, SCSA)

One of the criticisms of the Curriculum Framework was that the focus was on pedagogy, leaving teachers to work out what to teach, when what was needed by teachers was a syllabus (the *what*) and the related pedagogy (the *how*). What this comment leads to is the intent and purpose behind the new 'adaption' work promoted through the policy, growing out of unsuccessful regimes of curriculum implementation.

What this has meant, for example, is that creating achievement standards for each school year Pre-primary to Year 10, instead of 2 year bands that work across year levels, has been one major focus of the alterations undertaken for Western Australian schools. More specifically, identifying specific content to be achieved at each year level (creating *what* to be taught) with less emphasis on the pedagogy (*how*) has been the overall aim of SCSA in order to reenergise the Arts in the Western Australian school system. However, this has created a paradox between, on the one hand, the current neoliberal push for educational reform and accountability, and classroom teachers' current needs and understandings on the other. This mismatch leads to confusion adding to the discontent felt in schools, and consequently makes policy revitalisation more difficult.

To revitalise the Arts, the curriculum needs to be achievable. One of the participants Gwen, in her role at SCSA, suggests that classroom teachers need concrete syllabus content mainly due to a lack of confidence in their ability to teach the Arts. This lack of experience with the Arts leads to a lack of understanding and engagement:

So I think that it is a lack of expertise and confidence of "well what do I actually have to do?" So our work here is not just to produce a syllabus that a generalist can pick up and run with. It's developing those teacher support materials with an assessment and everything so a generalist will think "I can do that, I can pick that up, I can do that". I think that has been missing in our curriculum up to now.  
(Gwen, curriculum leader, SCSA)

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pedagogy, especially in the Arts, was common for much of the time that the Curriculum Framework was in use and now the same arguments could be used with the national curriculum.

<sup>3</sup> Author emphasis (Curriculum Council of Western Australia 1998)

This group of curriculum leaders recognised that the work commenced by ACARA and continued by SCSA needs to be attainable if arts in WA schools are in fact to be re-energised. For example, if a classroom teacher does not feel comfortable with the language and the presentation of the material then these curriculum leaders understood that teachers themselves would fail to engage with and therefore implement the curriculum.

We have got to be careful that we don't put ourselves so high up on a pedestal that nobody...that a generalist goes "I can't go near that...that is too scary". It is just not that scary... (Richard, curriculum leader, SCSA)

Understanding how teachers currently feel about teaching the Arts is partly the work of the Arts curriculum leaders.

How the 'adopt and adapt' policy relates to the ongoing work implementing the curriculum is a critical component in comprehending its impact. Understanding its purpose; to make curriculum more accessible to students is one component of this paper, and highlights the intended outcomes of the 'adopt and adapt' message. The second purpose of this paper is to examine the unintended outcomes of the 'adopt and adapt' message. This knowledge pinpoints some of the reasons that the 'adopt and adapt' policy falls short in achieving its aims. The unintended outcomes will be explored now.

### **Implications: marginalisation, disconnection, professional learning**

'Adopt and adapt' as a policy initiative has an intended purpose. We suggest that this purpose involves a streamlined, simplified curriculum intended to offer clear access to arts content for the generalist classroom teacher. However, in the rhetoric of implementation there have been several unintended outcomes and the implications of these changes has resulted in teachers and schools marginalising the Arts further and disconnecting from the curriculum. To us, these actions appear as a direct result of continued ongoing change and shifts in policy and curriculum across the system.

We argue that 'adopt and adapt' although instigated in a display of understanding and consultation has in fact exacerbated the side-lining of the Arts and struggles to make, encourage or coerce teachers to place greater emphasis on the Arts in their classrooms.

### **Marginalisation**

Marginalisation is a process of isolation and separation. The Arts have been isolated by the increased status of literacy and numeracy and resultant focus on these areas in standardised testing regimes. This isolation is exacerbated by the way that the Arts themselves have been separated into discrete forms – dance, drama, media arts, music and visual arts, requiring schools to choose between them. A requirement by the Western Australian curriculum for schools to select one performing art

and one visual art as a focus for Arts learning (School Curriculum and Standards Authority 2015) further separates and marginalises the learning area. How schools organise for this requirement is yet to be seen.

Marginalisation is also occurring in the Western Australian education system due to the plethora of policies that schools and teachers are required to oversee and enact in any given school year. Schools are now seen as the glue keeping the social fabric of our society together, responsible not only for traditional curriculum subjects such as English, Math, Science and the Arts but also drug education, sustainability awareness, road safety and decreasing obesity levels in children (Goldman 2010, Harris 2000, Walton et al. 2010). Given this context, it is not surprising that schools and teachers struggle to keep pace. While Australian schools have greater autonomy in how they run on a day to day basis as a result of decentralisation and one line budgets, they have less and less autonomy in what is considered important and essential learning idealised through the development of a national curriculum. This has led to further marginalisation. This issue is a global concern with the standardisation movement spreading throughout western industrialised countries. Issues for arts practice as a result of national policy decisions involving standardisation of practice have been well covered by this journal (Blakeslee 2004, Conway et al. 2005, Sabol 2013, Allison 2013).

#### Disconnection

The second implication faced by this policy is disconnection. Disconnection can lead to apathy and a lack of enthusiasm. In the Arts this lack of enthusiasm translates to a lack of advocacy. It is difficult to advocate for the Arts in the primary school when there is little appetite from teachers for doing more. The hidden rhetoric of the 'adopt and adapt' policy is that Western Australian teachers are in some way deficit in their arts knowledge, requiring the regulatory body to make the curriculum easier to use. The return message, via the arts curriculum leaders, is that with other curriculum priority areas to consider, and only so many hours to achieve required measures, teachers will attend to what they will be held accountable for first.

At this stage there are few accountability measures in place for quality arts learning in Western Australian primary schools, and the processes of 'adopt and adapt' have not made it easy for teachers to be concerned about the Arts in schools. This lack of concern and lack of attention is in direct contrast to the 2014 *Arts in Daily Life: Australian Participation in the Arts* report released by the Australia Council for the Arts which notes that in 2013 "85% of Australians agree that the Arts make for a richer and more meaningful life". The report goes on to highlight that "66% of Australian's believe that the Arts have a big impact on the development of children" (Instinct and Reason 2014).

If this is what Australian's purport to believe, it is then perplexing that this intent is not reflected in the provision of quality arts learning opportunities in our schools.

### Professional Learning

The third issue raised by the unintended outcomes of the 'adopt and adapt' policy is the impact on professional learning. Disconnection with the curriculum impacts on the willingness and opportunity of teachers to access professional learning. At a time when teachers are under enormous pressure to maintain and increase student results through standardised testing programs like the National Assessment Program – Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN) (Thompson and Harbaugh 2013), attention to arts professional learning has decreased significantly. The Arts curriculum leaders noted this in the very small numbers of teachers that were accessing professional learning opportunities. Rowena, a curriculum leader who liaises between schools and performing arts companies indicated:

...In the meantime there is people like us trying to justify the opportunities that we have now and enticing them [teachers] to take part but [the schools] are just waiting, so we have got to keep that momentum going.  
(Rowena, curriculum leader)

This concern is replicated in other parts of the globe. In a discussion of the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) on professional development for arts teachers in the U.S., Conway et al. (2005) noted that most professional learning was steered towards traditional academic subjects and that Arts teachers professional learning needs are rarely considered. This situation is replicated in Australia. Not only is it difficult for arts specialists to access local relevant professional learning, as a generalist classroom teacher it is equally difficult. Even if a classroom teacher is interested in self-improvement in their arts teaching, there is little support at a school level for feedback on the improvement process. Helene, a teacher in a TDS, highlighted her concern in the following way.

Who do they ask and who has those skills? So they might be lucky in a school, they have administration or some classroom teachers that can help them and support them to improve but, what do they do if there is no one that can help them to improve? (Helene, curriculum leader, TDS)

Professional learning is not just about the number of opportunities on offer, although that is a concern in itself, but is also about the quality of learning and how it relates to arts pedagogy. Good professional learning in arts education is not just about *what* to teach but also about *how* to teach. It is about the provision or role of current arts specialists to guide and help classroom teachers who want to improve do so in a supportive collegial environment.

The research also reveals that at this point in time professional learning in the Arts is not a focus in Western Australian primary schools. The current arts curriculum leaders, at the jurisdiction level, are available for curriculum support but that support does not extend to assessment of teaching. This is

in contrast to the levels of support available for literacy, numeracy and increasingly science. Support exists at a systemic level, for example feedback on NAPLAN results, at a jurisdiction level, for example, district professional development opportunities, and at a school level, for example, whole school planning and collegial year group meetings. It is recognised that this support is a result of the emphasis on standardised testing and schools responding to that situation and teachers are required to participate in these focused activities.

Teachers are not required, however, to participate in arts professional learning activities. Even if they were interested in arts professional learning, a paucity of opportunities exists to support or assess teachers improve learning outcomes for Western Australian students in the Arts. Again, this reflects a mismatch of belief, practices and values.

### **The future**

The future for arts education in Western Australian schools is unclear. In recent times Russell-Bowie (2011) and Sabol (2013) have highlighted changes to arts policy needed to positively influence the teaching and learning practice across schools, systems and sectors in order for the Arts to flourish. The inclusion of twenty-first century skills, improved instruction, and increased professional development are highlighted changes (Sabol 2013). These issues raised particularly correlate to the focus of this research. 'Adopt and adapt' as a localised policy set out with the intention to make arts curriculum more accessible to a wider range of classroom teachers, in the hope that there would eventually be a greater engagement with the Arts. However, as with most policies, the Western Australian curriculum is not enacted in a vacuum and has contextual implications not anticipated at the outset by the policy makers, curriculum developers, arts researchers or teachers. The unintended outcomes of further marginalisation, policy apathy and lack of professional learning opportunities fall in line with the areas of need reflected in the literature (Sabol 2013).

Considering the 'adopt and adapt' policy from the four contextual variables highlighted, the ways in which the 'adopt and adapt' policy has been contextualised by the environment in which it operates were outlined. From the internal (school) and external (system) variables a unique way of understanding the context in which this policy is operating in, is made available. The simple introduction of a new curriculum, even one that has more detail and focus on explicit teaching, may still not be enacted in the intended way if attention isn't given to the other variables that play a part in the process.

What happens over the next two years until full implementation of the mandated curriculum in Semester 1 2018 (Collier 2015), will be telling. The Western Australian Arts curriculum has now been

released for teachers to use in their schools but with little meaningful support. Quality support to help teachers adjust may prove to be the key to a successful implementation. As Gaztambide-Fernandez and Sears in Pinar (2005) highlight, there is a perception that the right inputs into education (policies) will result in desired outcomes (better results), but the plethora of policy documents vying for attention in schools at any one time tells a different story. The policy at the centre of this paper highlights yet another policy to add to the pile.

This research has revealed some of the barriers to implementation that suggest it is not as simple as an input/output dichotomy. Local contextual variables and policy impact play their part and are yet to be revealed. This in fact, signals the next phase of this work. Discussions with teachers in schools about their local situation will add to understandings in this implementation process. Whether the intended outcomes of the 'adopt and adapt' policy prove to provide what schools need or the unintended outcomes, as revealed in this research, become the reality for teachers and schools is yet to play out.

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