

**Specialist Teachers and Curriculum Reform in a
Western Australian Primary School in 2002**

**A Comparative Study of Specialist Music,
Health and Physical Education, and
Languages-Other-Than-English
Teaching Professionals**

Helen Stone

**A report of an investigation submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Education (Research)
at Murdoch University**

June 2006

Abstract

This thesis details research on the first phase of curriculum reform (1999–2004) in a government primary school in Western Australia. The purpose of the study was to examine what progress had been made with the implementation of the *Curriculum Framework* (1998). The research focussed on Music, Health and Physical Education, and Languages Other than English as specialist teachers working with the *Curriculum Framework* (1998). Teachers and school administrators, as frontline practitioners, considered their experiences and perceptions of daily practice and provided their perspectives on curriculum reform.

The hypothesis formulated for the study was that with the introduction of the *Curriculum Framework* (1998) the delivery of these three subjects could be further improved. This study argues that successful curriculum performance of these three subjects traditionally considered “specialist programs” may be more fully supported by becoming aware of the forces influencing Australian curriculum discourse and delivery. Subject knowledge endorsement in this study refers to the transfer of valued knowledge in Western Australian educational systems. It is proposed that if teaching professionals articulated the substance of their educational beliefs and experiences with regard to subject knowledge meaning, place and value, curriculum delivery in primary schools may progress more effectively. Positive learning experiences for all students can be provided through the encouragement of communication and collegiality together with relevant and accessible professional development. These measures can also be supported by mounting whole-school primary programs that engage with beliefs about Music, Health and Physical Education, and Languages Other Than English through collaborative networks and learning communities. Accordingly, curriculum delivery can come within reach of the seamless curriculum anticipated by reform (*Curriculum Framework*, 1998:6–7).

In this qualitative interview study, the frontline participants included generalist teachers, specialist teachers and school administrators. These educational practitioners were asked to participate in an in-depth, semi-structured discussion that explored their perceptions of specialist teaching and knowledge while employed at Deep Sea Primary School in 2002.

They teachers also commented on how these perceptions may be linked to their experiences of socially constructed and established notions of valued knowledge.

The findings of this study indicated that the progressive implementation of these three subjects or specialist's areas were characterised by subtle historical, economic, political and social forces. This thesis suggests that, these largely obscured external forces together with individual yet, taken for granted perceptions of what is perceived as valuable knowledge work together to position curriculum rhetoric and curriculum enactment that reflect established perceptions of the knowledge hierarchy. Teachers and administrators at the school often operated within the structures and meanings of conventional teaching practice of subject knowledge as determined by dominant culture in Australia. The findings indicated that school culture in a time of reform re-traditionalised hierarchical patterns of subject knowledge organisation and evaluation. Accordingly, current subject knowledge endorsement in terms of specialist teaching often worked to the benefit of established power relationships typical of post-industrial market economy in Australia.

The findings also indicated that issues pertaining to curriculum prioritisation were influenced by institutional, group and individual experiences of subject specialist knowledge. Poor perceptions of these three subjects could also be generated by experiencing inflexible and inadequate yet established funding and resource patterns in educational systems. Frontline teachers, their school-based roles and responsibilities attached to the teaching and learning of the three specialist areas were typified by rigid school organisation and job structures together with condensed teaching time and community backing.

This thesis argues that progressive, outcomes education requires an articulate and supportive school culture, more funding and the genuine maintenance of quality Music, Health and Physical Education and Language Other Than English teachers. In addition, curriculum implementation would benefit from the promotion of constructivist-orientated student activities within specialist programs.

Declaration

I declare that this thesis is the result of independent research, and that all authorities and sources that have been consulted are duly acknowledged. The content of this thesis has not been submitted for a degree at any other tertiary institution.

(Helen Stone)

Acknowledgements

Acknowledgments go first to the staff members of Deep Sea Primary school, who stirred my interest in the topic of change and opportunity. I would like to thank Murdoch for the time it gave me to grow and learn and for providing employment. Robin and Cal are much appreciated for their efforts. And to my family for warmth and patience.....

Table of Contents

Abstract	ii
Acknowledgements	iv
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 The Nature of the Study	1
1.2 Aspects of the Literature Review	2
1.3 Culture, Curriculum and Classroom	6
1.4 Aspects of the Methodology	8
1.5 Locating Deep Sea Primary School.....	9
1.6 The Structure of the Thesis.....	9
1.6.1 Chapter Two: Literature Review	9
1.6.2 Chapter Three: Methodology	9
1.6.3 Chapter Four: Results	10
1.6.4 Chapter Five: Discussion.....	10
1.6.5 Chapter Six: Conclusion.....	10
Chapter 2: Literature Review	11
2.1 Introduction	11
2.2 Curriculum Construction in Australia	11
2.3 Curriculum Reform in Australia	13
2.3.1 Influences in Australian Curriculum	14
2.4 Learning Theories and the Curriculum Framework	17
2.5 Constructivist Theories of Teaching, Pedagogy and Learning.....	19
2.5.1 Outcomes- Based Education.....	20
2.5.2 Curriculum Reform in Western Australia	21
2.5.3 Curriculum Diversification.....	23
2.5.4 The Economic Drive and Curriculum Priority	25
2.5.5 The Division of Knowledge	27
2.5.6 Towards 2000, Formalising Ideals	28
2.5.7 Who will teach the students what.....	31
2.5.8 Definitions of Specialist teachers and Generalist teachers	31
2.5.9 Operating a Primary School with Specialist Teachers	32
2.6 Curriculum, Knowledge and Social Reproduction.....	37
2.7 Social Constructionism.....	38
2.8 Discourse Analysis as a Window into Power Relations.....	41
2.9 Pathways to Conceptualising Curriculum.....	41
2.10 School Culture Organisation and Group Processes	44
2.11 The Organisation, Teaching and Learning of Music, Health and Physical Education and Languages Other Than English Curriculum	47
2.11.1 Dynamic Schools.....	47
Occupational Perspectives:	48
2.12 Specialist Teachers	48
2.12.1 Academic Value and Curriculum Prioritisation	49
2.12.2 Provision of Resources for Specialist Teachers	50
2.12.3 Allocated Time	50
2.12.4 Providers of DOTT in the Timetable.....	51
2.12.5 Itinerancy and Fractional Positions	52
2.12.6 Working with Timetables	53
2.12.7 Occupational Isolation.....	54
2.12.8 Professional Development Opportunities	55
2.12.9 Programme Integration	56

2.12.10 Opportunities for Collaboration and Networking.....	57
2.13 Occupational Perspectives: The Generalist Teacher.....	57
2.13.1 Poor Learning Experiences.....	58
2.13.2 Subject Matter Proficiency.....	58
2.13.3 Conceptual Difficulty.....	59
2.13.4 Academic Value and Status.....	60
2.13.5 Valued knowledge.....	60
2.13.6 Avoidance Behaviour.....	61
2.13.7 Roles and Responsibilities.....	62
2.13.8 Administrators and Specialist Curriculum Evaluation.....	62
2.14 Learning Opportunities for Students.....	63
2.15 Summary.....	67
 Chapter 3: Methodology.....	 69
3.1 Introduction.....	69
3.2 The Case Study.....	70
3.3 The Rationale of a Qualitative Case Study Methodology.....	71
3.4 Data Collection.....	71
3.4.1 Deep Sea Primary School.....	71
3.4.2 The Participants.....	72
3.4.3 The Interview Procedures.....	73
3.4.4 The Naturalistic Process.....	73
3.5 Ethical considerations and Methodological Limitations.....	74
3.5.1 Credibility.....	75
3.5.2 Transferability.....	75
3.5.3 Dependability.....	76
3.5.4 Confirmability.....	76
3.6 Data Analysis: The Narrative Style of Presentation.....	77
3.7 Reconstructing the Interviews.....	79
 Chapter 4: Narratives.....	 81
4.1 The Principal: George.....	81
4.2 The Deputy Principal: Samantha.....	85
4.3 The Foundation Staff Member: Jerry.....	92
4.4 Junior Primary Narrative: Elaine.....	98
4.5 Music Narrative: Charlotte.....	102
4.6 Health and Physical Education Narrative: Karri.....	109
4.7 Languages Other than English Narrative: Miranda.....	113
 Chapter 5: Discussion.....	 121
5.1 Curriculum in Australia: Contextualising the Research.....	123
5.1.1 Dominant Discourse.....	124
5.2 History, Tradition and Curriculum, in Western Australia.....	126
5.2.1 Teachers Roles and Responsibilities.....	128
5.2.2 Experience and Valued knowledge.....	128
5.3 Curriculum Contestation and Social Reproduction.....	130
5.4 Deep Sea Primary School.....	131
5.4.1 Leadership.....	132
5.5 Program Organisation.....	133
5.5.1 Opportunities to Teach and Learn.....	134
5.5.2 Curriculum Prioritisation.....	134
5.5.3 Resources.....	135
5.6 Time Allocation.....	138
5.6.1 Time.....	138
5.6.2 Duties Other Than Teaching (DOTT): The Specialist.....	138

5.6.3 Isolation	141
5.6.4 Incorporating Specialists	141
5.6.5 Duties Other Than Teaching (DOTT): The Generalist	143
5.7 Occupational Perspectives: The Specialist Teacher	144
5.8 Occupational Perspectives: The Generalist.....	146
5.9 Professional Development Opportunities	147
5.10 Learning Opportunities for Students.....	148
5.11 Summary	150
Chapter 6: Conclusions	152
6.1 Introduction.....	152
6.2 Curriculum Reform	153
6.3 Future Directions	155
6.4 The Whole is More Than the Sum of its Parts	156
List of Abbreviations	159
Appendices.....	160
Bibliography.....	168