

Submission to the National Curriculum Board in Australia

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Australia

In December 2008, our parliament, in Australia passed the Schools Assistance Act 2008, No. 153, 2008 - An Act to grant financial assistance for non-government primary and secondary education for 2009 to 2012, and for related purposes. (downloadable from the internet: http://www.austlii.edu.au/au/legis/cth/num_act/saa2008205/)

Amongst other things the Act states in PART 3--AUTHORISATION OF FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE, Division 3, Point 22:

Funding agreements—national curriculum

(1) *A funding agreement for a non-systemic school, or an approved school system, must require the relevant authority for the school or system to ensure that the school,*

or each school in the system, implements the national curriculum prescribed by the regulations for primary education or secondary education (or both, as applicable).
(2) *The requirement mentioned in subsection (1) must be satisfied on or before 31 January 2012.*

It was a milestone in the education history of the country – not one to sleep through. Parliament had passed an act making all schools wishing funding to be compliant to a National Curriculum – which had not been written yet.

Through the work of the Executive of the Rudolf Steiner Schools of Australia Association (RSSA) and the Australian Independent Schools (AIS), the National Curriculum Board and the Deputy Prime

Minister, Julia Gillard, were aware of the need to consider the impact of the act on the independent schools such as the Steiner, Montessori schools. On 2 December, 2008, Julia Gillard said on an ABC Radio National Interview: *“Our National Curriculum Board will work with those schools, Montessori schools and Steiner schools, so that the national curriculum works with their special teaching styles and special views about learning.”*

In November 2008, the National Curriculum Board, appointed by the government in April 2008, presented four framing papers for the National curriculum. The papers were for the subjects, English, History, Maths and Science. Public response was invited by 28th February, 2009. The timing of the presentation of the papers made it difficult for schools and teachers to respond. November is

nearing the end of the school year and then come the holidays when most people are preoccupied, followed by the bustle of the start of a new school year.

Mainly as a consequence of Peter Glasby's concern over the direction of the 'framing paper' for science for the new national curriculum in Australia, a number of us (Ann Jacobson, John Blackwood, David Bowden, Noela Maletz, Robyn Maletz, David Skewes, Michael Nekvopil, Jeremy Board, Lynette Doyle, Dennis Millar) got together in Adelaide at Mount Barker School in February 2008. Teachers came from Adelaide, Sydney and Canberra as the matter was considered of some importance. It was felt that a strong response was needed from the Waldorf/Steiner movement. There was a deadline for submissions on these framing papers of 28th February 2008.

After coming together on the Friday night more generally we planned the weekend to work in specific groups as per expertise. A group worked on the English paper all weekend and some work was done towards history. Peter's work on the science framing paper was elaborated in another group. After some preliminary work on the maths, a group

met on Saturday afternoon and Sunday morning to further elaborate a response to this paper.

It became clear that the proposed stages of education practice and content outlined in these framing papers was of considerable concern. These stages did not appear to allow for the stages of soul development that are core considerations in the Waldorf Curriculum. This was commented upon, in some detail, in our responses. Little content as such had been put forward in these papers so there was not much to offer here except that too much too early was an apparent danger, along with a presumptive role for the technological and too early insistence on the abstract rather than the imaginative.

This disjunct between the Waldorf picture of the human being, in particular the child and that which seemed to pervade these papers was more than apparent. The human as merely an economic unit cropped up all too often! Waldorf work throughout Australia would be severely compromised if there is little or no room for the freedom of choice supposedly existing in this country.

What also became clear was the remarkable unanimity (mostly!) of pictures living in the teachers present. As practic-

ing professionals the experience of all, as well as the insights gleaned from the Spiritual Scientific direction, contributed to a consistent expression of views enabling worthwhile work on these papers. It is also became clear how important working with Anthroposophia was, if our work was to maintain any integrity and truth.

The weekend's work from Mt Barker was then sent to Rosemary Gentle, Executive Officer of the RSSA, who offered helpful advice on the work done. She also contributed out of her own experience to the submission on history. Other work on the English paper done by a group in Coffs Harbour was also woven into the Mt Barker work. After a collaborative editing process with the RSSA executive, the four framing paper submissions and an overarching paper (70-80 pages in all), were sent to the National Curriculum Board, on behalf of the RSSA, before the February 28th deadline.

We await with interest the response.

John Blackwood:
has worked in mechanical and design engineering for nearly 30 years and subsequently in high school maths, physics and philosophy teaching for over twenty two years at Glenside Rudolf Steiner School. He is currently writing up his work on formative and architectural elements as they appear in organic nature. He has worked with Parsifal College since its early inception on such themes as graphic projective geometry.