

# Our own Australian Steiner National Curriculum Framework...

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In 2008, an integral part of the incoming Federal Government's *Education Revolution* policy was the commissioning of an Australian National Curriculum. The National Curriculum Board was set up in 2008 to design and oversee the process with the specific mandate of having a national curriculum (K-12) in English, Maths, Science and History published and ready for implementation in all Australian schools from 2011 onwards. This process has been a very consultative one which our movement has engaged in with energy –

writing submissions, providing feedback to framing papers and attending State and Federal forums – at all times striving to protect the right to deliver our own curriculum informed by our own educational principles.

However, another pathway also opened up, which looked much more promising.

Under the Schools Assistance Act 2008, passed at the end of 2008, compliance with the as-yet unwritten Australian National Curriculum was made mandatory for all Australian schools. Failure to comply would jeopardise federal funding – the bulk of funding for independent schools.

At the time of the passage of the Bill, the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education, Julia Gillard, in response to questioning promised that a national recognition process would be drawn up for “well-established legitimate international curricula such as Montessori, Steiner, International Baccalaureate and the Cambridge University Examinations” already operating in the Australian educational landscape. This offer was confirmed by Ms Gillard in a letter to the RSSA in February 2009.

Between February and the present moment, ongoing conversations and negotiations have taken place between representatives of the RSSA and the National Curriculum Board and subsequently the ACARA Board (Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority) about how this process might look, the criteria that might need to be met and what that might entail for us.

In mid-2009, a working party of ACARA was established to propose a draft process. Professor Barry McGaw, Chair of ACARA, wrote to the RSSA in August, informing them of this and giving some indications of the basis upon which evaluations of different curriculum frameworks might be made. A draft process was then sent to the RSSA Executive on September 3<sup>rd</sup> in preparation for a consultative meeting to be held on September 25<sup>th</sup> between ACARA and representatives of the RSSA and the Montessori Education Foundation.

It became very clear to us that, at the time we applied to ACARA for “recognition” (mid 2010) we would have to submit a National Steiner Curriculum Framework along with our application. Whilst all Steiner schools in Australia have their own curriculum documentation, up to this point there has not been a published National Steiner Curriculum in this country.

The RSSA Executive, after much consideration, took a proposal to the August delegates’ meeting at which all schools in Australia are represented. The proposal was that the membership agree to commission the design, development, writing and publication of a National Steiner Curriculum Framework.

Initially this was viewed as primarily a response to a demand from outside. However a profound change of mood occurred at the meeting. In the course of

discussion, there emerged strongly a common desire not to be reactive, but proactive – to recognise and seize this opportunity to:

- Collaborate
- Unite in purpose,
- Support and strengthen our national movement through finding the common ground
- Increase each school’s identification with the national movement
- Articulate our ideals and show how they inform our curriculum.

At the end of the day, it was envisaged that each school would have a viable national curriculum framework document which enabled each school to remain true to its mission. Oh yes... and ACARA would accept our curriculum as comparable to the Australian National Curriculum, would publish that recognition and advise all State registration and accreditation authorities of our status - giving us national credibility in a way that we have never had before.

The proposal was accepted! And now the exciting task begins!

This is probably the biggest exercise the RSSA has undertaken—and the most vital! The process will incorporate a research phase, a curriculum writing phase and an editing/publishing phase, overseen by a project manager. The documentation needs to be ready by mid 2010, when ACARA will be ready for applications. It needs to be made clear here that the “recognition” if successful will only be applied to member schools of the RSSA – a national “sign-off”.

Big exercises require considerable funding and time is of the essence! Member schools have been asked to dig deep and to find initial donations of up to \$1000 immediately. This combined with an allocation from the RSSA of \$10,000 will get the ball rolling. Schools have also been asked to budget for an extra levy for 2010 to fund the balance of this project. Of course, any and all donations from individuals or parents’ groups would be more than gratefully received!

This is our moment to gain national recognition and to ensure the steady growth of Steiner/Waldorf Education in Australia – let’s all get behind it!