# An investigation of Early Childhood Staff and Their Transition to the New Western Australian Humanities and Social Sciences Curriculum

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*Abstract: In 2017, a new Humanities and Social Sciences (HASS) curriculum was introduced into all of Western Australia's classrooms. The aim of this study was to investigate how teachers transitioned to that new HASS curriculum. Using case study methodology, the experiences, opportunities and challenges faced by the early childhood (EC) staff in two Perth schools were investigated as they prepared for and implemented a new HASS Curriculum. The results suggested the need for strong leadership in times of change. The results also indicated that these small, independent schools needed good resources and professional development to help understand the changes. The research is significant because it starts a much-needed conversation about prioritising HASS in the early years of schooling as well as addressing the challenges faced by early childhood teachers as they transition to teaching new curriculum in a core learning area.*

**Keywords**: HASS; Early Childhood Education; staff, curriculum, inquiry-based teaching, play-based teaching, integration, leadership

## Introduction

The research that underpins this paper, took place during a period of time when all Pre-primary to Year 6 teachers in Western Australia (WA) had to transition to a new 'Humanities and Social Sciences' or HASS curriculum. In the Early Childhood (EC) context, teachers were introduced to a new HASS Curriculum in 2016 and then were required to implement it in 2017 (School Curriculum and Standards Authority [SCSA], 2015c). This paper refers to a case study to document the curriculum transition from 2016-2017 and offers preliminary lessons from the experiences and perspectives of EC staff in two independent schools in the Perth metropolitan area teaching in either Pre-primary, Year One or Year Two. In Western Australia, Pre-primary is the first compulsory year of schooling. Every child turning five years old by June 30 of that year must be enrolled in Pre-primary in a recognised school program. HASS is the term used to describe the study of a multiplicity of humanity subjects including Geography, History, Civics and Citizenship, Economics and Business. However, the new WA HASS curriculum from PP to Y2 comprises of only two of these subjects, History and Geography. Each subject contains two interrelated strands: Knowledge and Understanding, which includes the key concepts and content to be taught for each subject

and HASS Inquiry Skills that are common to both subjects and may taught discretely or as part of an inquiry approach (SCSA, 2014c). The state government's curriculum authority stresses the importance of HASS in its curriculum rationale:

By studying Humanities and Social Sciences, students will develop the ability to question; think critically; make decisions based on evidence; devise proposals for actions; and communicate effectively. The Humanities and Social Sciences subjects provide students with the knowledge and skills they need to develop a broad understanding of the world in which we live and how people can participate as active and informed citizens in the 21st century. (SCASA, 2014, x)

The 2017 HASS curriculum implementation was part of the slow rollout of an entire Australian Curriculum (AC). The AC was initiated in 2008 when the the federation of Australian education ministers signed off on a new vision for a new curriculum for all education jurisdictions in the country. The Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians flagged "the central role of education in building a democratic, equitable and just society - a society that is prosperous, cohesive and culturally diverse, and that values Australia's Indigenous cultures as a key part of the nation's history, present and future" (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2008, p. 4). This vision of Australian education required the inclusion of a humanities education; one that "support students to relate well to others and foster an understanding of Australian society, citizenship and national values, including through the study of civics and citizenship (MCEETYA, 2008, p. 13). Thus, the humanities, now HASS, was re-valued as an integral aspect of Australia's new curriculum.

The authors of this paper started from the assumption that it is important to teach HASS and to begin teaching it to all Australian children as early as possible in their formal schooling journey (Aldama, 2008; Graffeo & McCabe, 2009; Smith, 2014). The aims of the study were to:

- Investigate the transition to the new WA HASS Curriculum from PP to Y2 in two Perth metropolitan independent schools in 2017;
- Investigate the preparation that was undertaken for the transition to the new WA HASS Curriculum by EC staff; and
- To explore the opportunities and/or challenges that facilitated or inhibited the implementation of the new WA HASS Curriculum.

The results of this study begin to address the paucity of research on HASS in an EC context. It offers observations about what was successful and how the transition proved challenging as two schools adopted their new HASS curriculum in years PP-Y2. This research also contributes to the broader study of curriculum change and offers some suggestions on how leaders may prevent staff from burning out (Dilkes, Cunningham & Gray, 2014) while preparing to effectively implement new curricula. It is hoped these preliminary findings and discussions inspire and enable further research on the topic in a larger, longer-term study on effective teaching of HASS in Australian EC classrooms.

**Literature Review**

During the Australian wide planning and writing stages of the 2017 HASS curriculum, its development did not run smoothly. First, each HASS subject area was originally designed as separate curricula; history; geography; civics and citizenship; economics and business. However, after a 2015 study conducted by The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA), it was decided these subjects

would be combined to form just one new subject, HASS, due to the feedback received from participants regarding concerns of an overcrowded curriculum (ACARA, 2015). Most respondents to the ACARA study were generally accepting of the HASS curriculum redesign, however, requests were made by many respondents for increased clarity on what would and would not be taught and for more overall guidance as they transitioned to the new curriculum.

In the following literature review, three topics are presented that investigate previous research offering suggestions on how to achieve success in curriculum redesigns in an early childhood context. These can be summarised as: how to teach the new curriculum; the benefits of professional learning for curriculum change; and effective school leadership during a time of curriculum reform. As will be shown later, the results of this study suggest that if these three topics were effectively utilised in the case study schools then this advantaged their transition to the 2017 HASS curriculum.

**Teaching the 2017 HASS Curriculum in an Early Childhood Context**

Just before the research underpinning this paper commenced, a study in the EC sector revealed a crowded curriculum with an increase of formal teaching in literacy and numeracy thus leaving minimal room for other learning areas (Barblett, Knaus & Barratt-Pugh, 2016). The new, 2017 HASS curriculum was competing in this space and there have been many advocates in the sector arguing for various solutions for how best to teach HASS curriculum in an early childhood context.

*Inquiry-Based Teaching*

Some education advocates who see themselves as humanities and social science specialists are most likely to support the Inquiry-based teaching (IBT) pedagogy for teaching HASS in an EC classroom (Reynolds, 2014; Gilbert and Hoepper, 2016). The HASS skills including questioning and research; analysing; evaluating; and communicating and reflecting can either be taught discreetly, or as part of an IBT approach. Preston, et al. (2015) conducted research that focused on pre-service teachers' knowledge and confidence in using IBT in HASS lessons. Participants' written responses showed a five-week simulation helped them understand inquiry pedagogy and gain confidence using this approach. In a longitudinal, iterative research project by Edelson, et al.; (2011), the researchers reported that inquiry pedagogy can provide a valuable context for students to develop skills, such as questioning, research and application for understanding science concepts. IBT also provides opportunities for active, rather than passive learning.

*Integrated Teaching*

As the 2017 HASS Curriculum comprises of multiple subject areas, reviewers of the AC reported the lack of integration of subjects, the issue of overcrowding and possible increase in the workload for teachers (Australian Government Department of Education, 2011). Integrated teaching is referred to by several terms, such as cross-curriculum, interdisciplinary, blended learning and multi-disciplinary integration. Despite the different terminology, this approach to teaching HASS in the early years is evident in the WA curriculum (SCSA, 2017). Official documentation makes the case that, in the early years,

children's learning is integrated and experiential by nature. It also argues  this should be continued when they reach compulsory schooling - even when the curriculum is organised into learning areas (Department of Education and Training, Western Australia, 2011).

EC educators, who are concerned about an overcrowded curriculum, may support an integrated teaching approach (Boyle & Bragg, 2008) for covering a significant number of HASS outcomes and skills in an EC classroom. However, according to a study by Hinde (2005), even with an integrated approach, there was simply not enough time to teach the humanities and social sciences in an overcrowded curriculum.  Despite these findings, Hinde recommended integration as a solution, as it is a curriculum approach that purposefully draws together knowledge, perspectives and methods of inquiry from more than one discipline (Parker, 2005, as cited in Hinde, 2005, p. 106).

*Play-Based Teaching*

Across the EC axiological spectrums, many are also enthusiastic about using a play-based type of pedagogy for teaching HASS in an EC classroom (Moyles, 2001).  HASS content and skills fit well with play-based teaching. This is because the foundations of critical thinking and metacognition are developed through play, dialogue, participation and investigation, which may guide children towards deeper understanding and fostering their disposition for learning (Hedges & Cullen, 2012). Since the content of the HASS Curriculum from PP to Y2 relates to the child, their relationships and their world, play-based learning provides another medium for deeper learning and understanding through opportunities to engage with people, the environment and artefacts (SCSA, 2014b).

Whilst EC teachers internationally recognise the importance of play-based learning in the early years, the Barblett, Knaus and Barratt-Pugh's (2016) research identified that EC educators in WA were concerned with the "the erosion of play-based learning…[due to]…the introduction of a pushdown curriculum" (p. 38), with a focus on content knowledge and skills. Jay and Knaus (2018) identified supports and challenges for implementing a play-based approach in the early years. Supportive measures, such as "teacher mentorship; the formation of collaborative year level teams… [and] weekly collaborative team meetings" (p. 123) were strong features of the school culture. Several challenges were also identified. The first related to the availability and use of resources in a play-based approach. The second challenge identified the time required to implement a play-based approach. The third challenge included factors such as environment, the curriculum and reporting requirements.

**Professional Learning for Curriculum Change**

School leaders and teachers are responsible for interpreting and implementing mandated requirements (ACARA, 2015) such as the 2017 HASS curriculum. In order to effect successful curriculum change, EC teachers need access to professional learning opportunities to become familiar with the new curriculum and upskill their capabilities to teach HASS to young children. The Australian Institute for Teaching and School Leadership [AITSL] (2017), states professional learning is an essential component for teachers' understanding of curriculum reform. Professional learning also supports teachers in adopting effective teaching strategies for successful curriculum implementation.

A study by Henderson (2012) was undertaken with secondary humanities and social science pre-service teachers at Queensland University of Technology. They investigated the preparation of pre-service teachers for curriculum change. The study found access to quality

professional learning crucial to navigate continual curriculum changes, especially for novice teachers. It is worth noting that secondary teachers are specialists and experts in their subject area, while early childhood teachers are generalists. Familiarisation with curriculum is a start, but mastery of content knowledge is also important as HASS includes multiple areas of content; even if in the EC years teachers need to only implement history and geography content. In 2015, Harte and Reitano (2015) conducted research that investigated the confidence of pre-service teachers in another Queensland university to teach secondary geographical content knowledge, and their ability to teach the proposed geographical skills in the HASS Curriculum. The researchers found confidence was quite low, but after intense engagement in professional learning and microteaching pre-service teachers' confidence to teach the subject increased. If the studies of Henderson (2012) and Harte and Retiano (2015) suggest specialist HASS teachers needed a lot of professional development to understand the 2017 HASS curriculum, then it may be even more important that EC teachers are provided professional development support with what may be unfamiliar curriculum content in HASS. Unfortunately, no studies could be found while conducting this review that showed any previous research has taken place in any Australian jurisdiction about HASS professional learning for primary or EC teachers.

In WA, constant changes to the curriculum have been be challenging for teachers and school leaders. Dilkes, Cunningham and Gray's (2014) intuitive inquiry investigated the notion of 'curriculum fatigue' experienced by WA teachers in recent years due to the number and continuous nature of education reforms and curriculum changes. The study found there was a need for increased support, resourcing and better management of curriculum change to avoid eroding teachers' self-efficacy and job satisfaction. They recommended support, including professional learning, to provide teachers with the knowledge they needed for successful implementation of new curricula.

**Effective School Leadership in the Early Years**

Effective school leadership is an identified key factor in previous research about successful curriculum reform (e.g. Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007; Robinson, Hohepa & Lloyd, 2009), but Campbell-Evans et al. (2014) revealed there are too few leaders in the Australian early years sectors. They argue that building leadership capacity has become a fundamental concern within the EC sector. If there are not even enough leaders to go around, the issue of leaders' effectiveness may necessarily become a secondary concern and then that may lead to successful curriculum reform being only able to be a third tier goal.

Furthermore, in WA it is usual that primary school trained primary principals line manage and lead the EC staff. The question then arises, can non EC specialist leaders be effective in overseeing EC curriculum reform? O'Neill (2011) argues the affirmative as EC teachers have expertise and knowledge of child development and appropriate EC pedagogy, so the school principal can rely on their expertise and just be responsible for ensuring continuity and cohesiveness in the educational programs across these years and within their whole-school plans.

Research also revealed a need for changes in tertiary training to build EC leadership capacity in school settings (Campbell-Evans, Stamopolous and Maloney's, 2014). They identified three qualities that effective leaders need to possess: trustworthiness, approachability and empathy. These characteristics are commonly ascribed to leaders whom align with the traits expressed in transformational leadership theory (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2007; Engels, et al., 2008). In contrast, leaders who align with transactional leadership theory

value compliance, use reward and punishment behaviours (Leithwood, 2001) and are not commonly seen to display trustworthiness, approachability and empathy.

Avci's (2015) researchers concluded that the personal characteristics of transformational leaders can positively instigate change, enhance teachers' self-efficacy, and ultimately improve educational outcomes for students. Research since this study was completed, also found that transformational leadership is superior to transactional leadership when seeking change in a school (MacNeill, et al., 2018). Approachability in a leader means to be present and available. Skogstad, et al. (2007) describe another type of leader who is unapproachable as a laissez-faire leadership style. According to these researchers, laissez-faire leaders tend to be less involved with teacher decisions and make little or no attempt to motivate their staff. Skogstad et al. (2007) conducted a large-scale survey in Norway where their results supported the assumption that a laissez-faire leadership approach can be destructive in schools and lead to workplace stressors such as bullying and psychological stress.

Barnett, et al (2005) also conducted research to test whether a laissez-faire leadership style is effective in an Australian setting. A total of 458 participants from 52 schools in New South Wales, Australia, were involved in the research. Data were collected via a survey aimed at uncovering the leadership styles of school principals and revealed that a laissez-faire approach is not always harmful. Barnett et al. (2005) concluded that although an absent or laissez-faire principal who delays decision-making may prove frustrating for teachers, it is a fallacy that all aspects of the school learning environment are negatively impacted by this leadership style.

Other important research about effective leadership in early childhood settings focus not on personality traits but pedagogic capacity. To successfully implement curriculum reform, it is arguable that school leaders should be pedagogic champions and experts. Pedagogic Leadership (Robinson, et al., 2009) is a theory to explain when leaders motivate staff and lead teachers in seeing themselves as a community of professional learners. Pedagogical leaders can assist "staff with professional learning, setting goals, collecting evidence and reflection on the effects of the implementation" of new education strategies (Barblett & Kirk, 2018, p. 49).

Leadership decision making is another area that has been researched and been shown to be pivotal in an effective school (Cunningham, 2014). One area of decision making that can have a big effect on curriculum reform in a school is how subjects are timetabled. The HASS learning area in PP to Y2 recommends a time allocation of two hours per week. Ditchburn (2015) argued the lack of time allocated to the HASS learning area made thorough investigation of all the content very challenging. Furthermore, teachers may resort to pedagogical practices that facilitate speed rather than promoting creativity, investigation and genuine student participation (Ditchburn, 2015).

**Research Design**

The theoretical frame for this research project is based on a constructivist approach. This framework allowed the researchers to look at the nature of social reality and learn from an individual's perspective. In this framework, meaning-making activity is explained in terms of individual agency and the unique experience of each of us (Burr, 2003; Crotty, 1998). Constructivists view teachers and principals 'as constructive agents and view the phenomenon of interest (meaning or knowledge) as built instead of passively received by

people whose ways of knowing, seeing understanding, and valuing influence what is known seen, understood and valued' (Spivey, 1997, p. 3).

A qualitative, comparative case-study approach guided the design of the research methods. A two-school case study was selected as an appropriate research design for a this study because it suited a context-related inquiry (Yin, 2009), enabled comparisons and allowed the researcher to explore the practices, perspectives and experiences of the EC staff. Ethics approval was sought and gained through regular university protocols to approach two schools to seek out their participation in the study. When two schools were found, as both schools were WA independent primary schools, ethics permission was directly sought and gained from each school governing board as well. Then, interview questions were developed from the research questions and improved via research team discussions. The methods of data collection were group and individual interviews and policy/curriculum document analysis.

The participant schools, which are identified here as School A and B, are located in the Perth metropolitan area. Both schools are members of the Association of Independent Schools Western Australia (AISWA), are co-educational and affiliated with different Christian denominations. The staff who agreed to be participants in the research included the EC teachers in PP to Y2 and the school principals at both schools.

Data collection took place at the participating schools in August and September of 2017. Both schools allowed the researchers to conduct semi-structured focus group interviews, one-on-one interviews and collect artefacts related to the HASS Curriculum, such as planning and assessment documents and photographs of the resources used to teach HASS in PP to Y2. The following table summarises the data collection process:

| Methods | Data Collected |
| --- | --- |
| Semi-structured focus group interviews | - Focus group interviews with the Pre-Primary, Year One and Year Two teachers at Schools A and B.<br>- All interviews audio recorded and transcribed. |
| One-on-one interviews | - One school leader from each case study school.<br>- Pre-primary, Years One and Two teachers at School A and B.<br>- All interviews audio recorded and transcribed. |
| Document Analysis | - HASS Curriculum whole-school planning documents.<br>- Pre-primary to Year Two HASS Curriculum planning and assessment documents.<br>- Photographs of HASS resources. |

**Table One: Data collection methods**

During the data analysis stage, each school was considered a separate case study and so both school's data were first analysed independently. The data was read multiple times, then the data from interviews, artefacts, and documents were organised and re-organised until themes began to emerge. After that, the two schools were compared using a cross-case analysis and generalisations were made from common themes across sites. Eventually the analysis allowed for 'thick descriptions' or detailed accounts that enable an appreciation for the nature and context of the specific case (Pope & Denicolo, 1986).


## Results and Discussion

The results from the two case-study schools, revealed information about the experiences of EC staff as they transitioned to the 2017 HASS Curriculum. From these

results it was evident that very different approaches had been used by the two schools. This led to varying degrees of competency and confidence in their transition to a new HASS Curriculum. Three key factors emerged from the data about the challenges and successes in both schools as they transitioned to the 2017 HASS curriculum:

1.  Using effective HASS pedagogy in early childhood classrooms
2.  Undertaking Professional Learning in the preparation of early childhood school staff as they transition to the new WA HASS Curriculum; and
3.  Having school leaders championing and prioritising HASS.

### Effective HASS Pedagogy in EC Classrooms

In the individual interview sessions and focus group sessions, 90% in both schools' participant groups argued a very similar position to Boyle and Bragg (2009) that an integrated teaching approach was the "only" way to introduce the 2017 HASS curriculum into their EC classrooms due to an overcrowded curriculum and so little time:

> *Mine's all integrated, otherwise I just won't get to everything. So um this term we're doing time in maths and we're doing…what's the one? Earth sciences in science so a lot of it happens in maths and science, so that's all integrated. And a couple of project based on that links to other concepts in English and HASS and that…*
>
> *What I'm teaching (in maths) with measuring, giving directions and telling time, links with what I'm teaching them in geography.*

Of course, not all participants were unanimous in their views. One participant suggested their predilection for the inquiry-based approach yet was a little vague on how it looks in her classroom: "Yes we do it in different ways I suppose. Like we introduce it with an inquiry and then you sort of continue on and then you'll do another topic with a bit more inquiry". However, one participant did not like integrating curricula and explained,

> *I keep it separate. Sometimes it links in with what I'm doing, but mainly I keep it separate and have geography at my set time and we have that focus. I find it easier with assessment that way cause then I can actually teach, then assess...*

To teach HASS well in an EC classroom, many teacher participants said play-based learning would suit perfectly, but to facilitate such learning they need maps, historical costumes, picture books, child size tents, masks and many other resources and artefacts. However, participant groups in both schools identified a lack of resources available during the HASS transition period. In particular, EC teachers from School A found the lack of suitable resources a significant challenge. While the Principal at School A believed teachers were given a generous yearly budget of $2000, the teachers disagreed, "Really it's whatever we can scrounge or borrow from people." Other participants said:

> *I'd like more resources and PDs on it. Like that resource (History in the Making), you know, half an hour with it and we've got something new, so I'd like to have more PDs and incursions for HASS.*
>
> *I feel like if I don't have something and it's hard to come by, I know you can get it on the computer screen, but I don't think that's enough, I want something else.*

During the focus group interview at School A, participants reported the money was mainly spent on resources for teaching other learning areas.

> *We have a section in the library set aside for teacher resources but sadly, there's never as much money spent on HASS as there is on like, the focus on*

> *English, the focus on reading books, the focus on Maths, and the focus on Science.*

We did a geography activity where we learned about our local park, which is the park down the road. We did not (go and visit the park) because we had already had two excursions (in other learning areas) and buses are expensive. Still, most of the children, I think about 95% had visited the park. Instead we Googled it, I took photos, we looked at its constructed and natural features, then we talked about it all. Finally, they did a mapping activity, I did it on Google Maps on the computer screen and they had to draw the actual park.

School B had an assortment of available resources, and the principal and teachers at School B liked using a variety of resources, especially hands-on resources, and many of the HASS resources were stored in the school library. There were problematic issues still:

> *I was going through planning and stuff and I was thinking, lessons on history and geography is a lot harder to find than the other subjects like English and Maths or Science lessons. Even online there isn't a lot of stuff, or you find something and think, oh that sounds alright, maybe I'll try it, but then…the problem is, that when you do HASS it's more Australia specific so you can only use Australian resources. You can't just shoehorn American resources like you can for maths.*

While the principal and teachers at School B acknowledged they had a variety of resources for teaching the HASS Curriculum, Principal B admitted:

Sadly new HASS resources tend to be neglected in favour of English and mathematics resources.

Staff also noted that it takes time and money to:

> *…build up your own resources, like the old phones and old games and that sort of thing… I got an old typewriter for $10 off Gumtree!*


### Professional Learning and curriculum reform

The responses of participants at schools A and B revealed that both schools could have benefited from more preparation for a new HASS curriculum. As Henderson (2012) and Harte and Retaino (2105) realised, transitioning to a new HASS curriculum requires sound teacher knowledge of the content and effective strategies for teaching the subject matter. This should be achieved through collaboration with all teaching staff and professional development about the content, skills and achievement standards students are expected to achieve at the end of the school year.

School A was not sufficiently prepared during the transition and no professional learning was offered to staff about the 2017 HASS curriculum, stating:

We haven't had a HASS PD in a really long time!

The HASS curriculum is so new and I'd definitely like some PD on HASS. We really just learn by doing it together and finding out ourselves.

School B was more prepared. In School B the findings showed that the most constructive professional learning for their HASS curriculum planning was provided by their principal in 2016:

> *We had that PD (on HASS) at the beginning of the year and we really realised that we need to do more in regards to that humanities and social sciences because we have been focusing a lot on those mathematical hot spots in that maths area. I mean maths and English and we have also had a huge focus on science, but when we found out that HASS is also a huge thing we need to do as well, we thought well ok.*

School B's internal professional learning process entailed collaborative scrutiny of the new WA HASS Curriculum; a review of the school's existing HASS resources and the additional resources needed; and then the development of a whole-school HASS Curriculum Plan. There was one PD session for staff on the 2017 HASS Curriculum delivered by a HASS representative from AISWA. However, this was a brief session at the beginning of the first term in 2017, and the participants could not recall much information from the session.

> *It was so long ago, we did some activities and I took some notes. I'll have to go back and look at those. I remember that the biggest point she made was that the best way to go is integration if we want to tick off all the boxes. Because subjects like science and HASS can easily be pushed aside, but if you can program it to be integrated then it's very easy to say it is in your program.*

The benefits School B staff expressed about their professional learning activities, substantiate SCSA's (2014) claim that effective schools provide assistance to teachers through discussion, collaboration and professional learning to understand the rationale, aims and outcomes of new curricula. School B's actions were also consistent with Henderson's (2012) and Author's (2014) findings regarding the need for quality professional learning when faced with curriculum change.

### School Leadership Priorities

In the case study schools, A and B, the school leadership teams did not prioritise HASS particularly highly in either school. Eighty minutes were apportioned to HASS in School A and approximately 90 minutes in School B. The SCSA notional teaching time allocation for HASS is 120 minutes based on a 25-hour week (SCSA, 2016a), so both schools fell short of the recommendation. Both principals believed, just as Hinde (2005) theorised, that HASS is afforded less attention than other learning areas due to it having a large curriculum scope and insufficient time allocation to cover it all. Certainly, the teachers reported that HASS time was often forfeited for other activities:

> *Mine's on the timetable for two periods, but obviously I've been doing assessing so I haven't had much time for HASS… It's an already overstuffed curriculum and normally the term 3 timetable is chock-a-block and term 4 has swimming lessons.*
> *So this is my timetable so as you can see there we have it on Monday and Wednesdays, before lunch, or just after lunch, except they do tend to be timeslots that are eaten into a lot, because math always tends to run over and diary takes a long time. Then we have RE straight after so we can't run over into that.*

The EC teachers in both schools looked to their principals for direction, support and guidance as they transitioned to the 2017 HASS curriculum. The data from School A revealed a laissez-faire approach by Principal A, that is, someone who avoids decision-making and fulfilling supervisory responsibilities (Hartog & Van Muijen, 1997). While the EC teachers in School A did not openly criticise the leadership, some of the principal's comments in his interview were indicative:

> *No there is not set policy or school vision for HASS. I mean our school vision statement is to set the academic bar high and academic excellence is stated on our website… Looking at you know the development of thoughts and ideas and then that brings you to all learning areas, because you have philosophers that were also mathematicians… today is the feast day of the beheading of John the Baptist, so they learn about that. And we have All Saint's Day on the first of*

> *November, where the children come to school dressed as their favourite Saint.*
> *The girls in particular love to come dressed as Joan of Arc. So these are all*
> *parts of western civilisation and history.*

In contrast, Principal B's actions did exhibit preliminary aspects of Pedagogic Leadership (Barblett & Kirk, 2018) by championing professional learning for HASS in his school:

> *We have a PD and we sit down at the start of each term and he'll do it with us.*
> *So he'll ask us, we talk about it, and he'll have a few things there that he thinks*
> *we're doing well and then we go off in our little Cell Groups and then we'll*
> *work out what we need.*

When asked about his approach to the 2017 HASS Curriculum, Principal B reported he had collaborated with his teachers to unpack the curriculum documents and had acquired a good understanding of this learning area. Then, following this collaborative process, Principal B created an alternative HASS Scope and Sequence to the one provided by SCSA, thereby supplying a context for the school and simplifying the contents for easy access and enhanced understanding. Principal B's leadership approach reinforces the research conducted by Soini, et al., (2016), which found success or failure was contingent on the quality of the leadership in schools when implementing change, be it curriculum or policy reforms.

## Recommendations and Conclusions

In the 21st century, there has been limited research in HASS teaching in Australia generally and the dearth of data about HASS in the early years of schooling in WA is significant. This paper offers a start in rectifying this situation and urges more research in EC HASS. We have learned EC teachers are implementing the 2017 HASS curriculum and are trying the best they can to implement it in a way that accommodates integrated, inquiry and play-based pedagogy as best as they can. Nevertheless, it became evident from this research that far more data needs to be collected about HASS in EC schooling to elevate and make HASS a priority in current educational research conversations.

This preliminary study has revealed that in small independent schools a knowledgeable and proactive leadership approach is essential when teachers transition to new curricula. If school leaders champion the HASS curriculum and prioritise it in their schools as a learning area of importance then, even in a crowded curriculum space, HASS can be valued and role-modelled by school leaders as a priority learning area. Furthermore, we learned in this study, that school leaders can play a significant role in assisting PP to Y2 teachers to successfully implement the new WA HASS curriculum. If they are working collaboratively to unpack curriculum documents and ensure teachers can access suitable resources and professional learning opportunities, then hopefully they will succeed. Significantly, our study suggests that if school leaders follow SCSA's time allocation (2016b) recommendations for HASS and seeking opportunities for offering more HASS through curriculum integration opportunities, then young learners are likely to start their school journey experiencing the importance of the HASS subject from a young age.

In conclusion, this study has placed a spotlight on the HASS curriculum area and sought to elevate its importance in EC education. Our study contributes to an under-researched aspect of curriculum change in the early years of schooling in WA. It examined the perspectives of school leaders, Pre-primary, Year One and Year Two teachers as they transitioned to the new WA HASS Curriculum in two case-study schools. The findings extend our existing knowledge of curriculum change at the school level and the impact of

these changes on school leaders and EC teachers. It is hoped that the implications, recommendations and directions for future research will provide guidance for those who seek to teach HASS effectively in the early years of schooling.

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