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THE INTEGRATED EXPRESSIVE ARTS AND HUMANITIES: COPING WITH CURRICULUM CHANGE

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INTRODUCTION

The concept of curriculum integration in education has recently received increased attention. This has been largely due to the introduction of Learning Area Profiles, Statements and Outcomes, and most recently the Curriculum Framework. 'Integration, breadth and balance' is one of the seven key principles underlying The Curriculum Framework for Western Australian Schools. (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998). Collectively, these documents emphasise the integration of knowledge, skills and values in the eight key learning areas of the curriculum. Such a holistic view of the curriculum is considered to be fundamental to sound educational practice.

Whilst curriculum change is urging teachers to look more closely at the integration of knowledge, skills and values across and within learning areas, so too is an innovative program in Early Childhood Education at Edith Cowan University. Teacher education programs at Universities have often been criticised for not 'practising what they preach'. Fullan (1993, p114), is one such critic who believes that "Faculties of education should not be advocating things for teachers or schools that they are not capable of practising themselves." Curriculum integration has been highlighted as an approach that better reflects how children learn (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1995; Stone, 1995; Brewer, 1995). However, universities have seldom presented their own courses in such a manner. Macdonald and Glover (1997), have highlighted the need for universities to present their courses in more unified and collaborative ways. They argue that integration is critical if teachers are to develop the knowledge and skills necessary to structure and implement their teaching within the guidelines of the new curriculum documents. It was in this context, that the decision was taken to examine methods of facilitating and improving curriculum integration in the expressive arts and humanities units at Edith Cowan University.

Supposedly, any curriculum reform, such as curriculum integration, is made in the best interests of students, schools and communities. As Smith and Lovat (1990) state, it is ... *about trying to achieve educational ideals more closely*. Whilst the Curriculum Framework for Western Australian Schools (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998) is well intentioned in terms of its educational ideals for students, it appears that the process for its implementation has not been a straightforward one for teachers. This is not surprising, as a number of authors (Smith & Lovat, 1990; Fullan, 1991; Hall, 1997; Brady & Kennedy, 1999), acknowledge that curriculum change is highly complex. They claim that any change has an impact on those directly involved in its implementation. Fullan (1991), believes that there are high personal costs to teachers when innovation is introduced. This belief is supported by Smith and Lovat (1990), who emphasise that peoples' feelings and perceptions are central to change in curriculum. Any successful approach to curriculum reform should take these factors into consideration. Hence with any curriculum change, both the content of such a change and the process whereby the change comes about needs to be considered.

Hall (1997) maintains, that technical, political and cultural factors impinge on those managing curriculum change and suggests that an understanding of these factors could assist educators to cope better with change. In light of the articles mentioned above, this paper will introduce the concept of curriculum integration and its inclusion in university teacher education programs. Specifically, it will outline how Edith Cowan University has endeavoured to break down existing subject barriers to facilitate the integrated teaching of the Expressive Arts and Humanities. As part of the process of coping with change, this discussion will highlight the technical, political and cultural challenges confronting the staff involved in its implementation.

THE CONCEPT OF CURRICULUM INTEGRATION

The concept of curriculum integration derives from an understanding of the integrated nature of child development and learning (Bredekamp & Rosegrant, 1992; Brewer, 1995; Krogh, 1995). It is well known that learning in one developmental domain inevitably influences learning in other domains. This is most noticeable in young children whose increasing mobility allows them to not only develop physically but also enhances their cognition, language and social development skills. Curriculum integration recognises that children's learning is holistic. It is not divisible into subject areas. This holistic approach to learning demonstrates the interdependent nature of subject areas. It attempts to make learning relevant and meaningful to children by multi sensory exploration of various themes, topics or concepts. Overall, it is compatible with our understanding of the ways children learn and develop.

The call for curriculum integration is not new. At the turn of the century, John Dewey advocated that the education of young children be organised around projects or curriculum themes in order to make their learning more meaningful (Dewey, 1902). Likewise, in the 1960's, curriculum leaders such as Jerome Bruner designed curriculum experiences around the key concepts of various subject areas (Bruner 1960). More recently, Martinello and Cook (1994), have espoused the importance of interdisciplinary thematic curriculum development in children's learning. The issue of curriculum integration is at present taking on new significance as educational authorities propose policies that mandate or encourage subject integration (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998). Whilst these curriculum directions may be met with opposition by some teachers, most early childhood teachers will acknowledge that this has long been the approach adopted in early childhood education.

CURRICULUM INTEGRATION IN UNIVERSITIES

The integration of early childhood curriculum has been advocated in university teacher education courses for at least a decade. However, while the concept of curriculum integration was lauded, in reality it has only begun to occur in the early 1990's. This was because the various curriculum departments within university teacher education programs, presented their early childhood units separately. As government funding to universities diminished, they were forced to restructure their teacher education programs to include fewer units and or staff, with the view to reducing costs. A positive outcome of this period of economically driven restructuring has been the move towards curriculum integration in many of the traditionally discrete curriculum areas of teacher education programs. In particular, this has occurred in the early childhood teacher education program at Edith Cowan University. Staff representing the Expressive Arts and Humanities curriculum areas now teach within the same integrated curriculum units.

This recent trend towards the integration of early childhood programs is identifiable in a number of Australian universities. At Charles Sturt University, music, art, drama, media studies and movement are studied as one integrated unit (Charles Sturt University, 1996). An integrated approach to curriculum is also evident at The University of Southern Queensland, where the aim is to develop critical awareness and skill development in art, music and drama (The University of Southern Queensland, 1999). Similarly, drama, music, visual arts and dance are integrated within the early childhood and primary teacher education programs at The University of New England (The University of New England, 1999). Edith Cowan University in Western Australia has also adopted an integrated approach to teaching curriculum units within its early childhood teacher education program. An overview of selected curriculum areas involved in this integration and the focus of specific units follow later in this paper.

A number of writers (Friedlander; 1992, Werner, 1994; Rauschenbach, 1996), have expounded the advantages of curriculum integration and provided planning guidelines. However, fewer writers have studied the impact of such an approach on those directly involved in its planning and implementation. The research conducted so far has focussed on curriculum integration at the primary and secondary, rather

than the tertiary level. Placek's work (in Placek & O'Sullivan, 1997), with elementary and secondary teachers, highlighted the time and energy required of staff involved in integrated projects. Other problems noted by these teachers related to: the perceived reduction in time devoted to each specific subject involved in the project; the need for additional teacher knowledge; and the costs associated with new materials such as textbooks.

Macdonald and Glover (1997) drew attention to the problems that may occur when teachers from different subject areas are required to work closely together to achieve common learning outcomes. Reporting on a group of physical education, health education and economics teachers, who share the common *Health and Physical Education* learning area, these writers highlight the conflicts which may occur concerning content and resources when independent subjects are addressing similar content and learning outcomes. Included here were problems related to ownership of content, threats to personal identity or sense of belonging to a particular subject area, and forced collegiality.

Similarly, Williams et al. (1994), gathered information from teachers implementing integrated curriculum in personal development, health and physical education in selected New South Wales schools. Their study identified teachers' perceptions of barriers to the process of successful integration. Despite their overall support for the philosophy of integration, the following barriers were perceived by the teachers:

(i) the possible dissolution of some faculties, in particular home economics, as a result of this integration. The perceived threat to the existence of some departments has caused inter faculty disputes and resulted in unproductive negotiations by the staff involved;

(ii) related to this, the problem of ownership of the new integrated learning area was questioned. Who would coordinate the integrated units and who would be ultimately responsible for them?

(iii) the lack of support by the Department of School Education for the school and staff involved in curriculum integration was noted;

(iv) the difficulty in effectively evaluating the integrated curriculum, for example, what was to be evaluated and how was it to be evaluated?

THE SUBJECTS AND STRUCTURE INVOLVED AT EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

Within Edith Cowan University's Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood), the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units embrace the following curriculum areas: art, music, social science, health and physical education. In 1994, as a consequence of an Early Childhood course review and restructure within the University, these established academic disciplines were challenged by the call to integrate. Five *Expressive Arts and Humanities* (EAH) units are currently studied in the integrated mode over the four year program. Their scheduling throughout the course is outlined in Table 1 (see below).

Table 1. Expressive Arts and Humanities Units in The Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood)

Year/Sem Unit	Components
1/1 EAH 1100	Art, Music, Physical and Health Education, Social Science
2/1 EAH 2201	Art, Music, Physical and Health Education, Social Science
2/2 EAH 2301	Art, Music
3/1 EAH 3401	Physical and Health Education, Social Science
3/2 EAH 3501	Art, Music, Physical and Health Education

All four curriculum areas are represented in the two introductory *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units (see Table 1). In these units, the principles and concepts common to each subject are the primary means through which integration is organised. According to Miller, Cassie and Drake (1990), there is a variety of ways in which academic disciplines can make connections. One such way is through a study of the interrelationships that exist between subject areas. A theoretical and practical study of concepts such as the creative process, aesthetic elements, multi-sensory stimulation and play environments for the arts, guide the integrated presentation of these introductory units. The mode of delivery includes both mass lecture and group workshops. The inclusion of practical workshops provides the opportunity to demonstrate curriculum integration through the

use of themes. As Wortham (1996), Placek and O'Sullivan (1997) and Rauschenbach (1996) acknowledge, the study of topics or themes are common ways to show connections in development and learning.

The curriculum web presented in Figure 1 illustrates how one theme was used to integrate the curriculum areas. During practical workshops, students participated in a variety of experiences related to the theme 'Environments'. The activities were designed for pre-primary age children and focused on child centred learning strategies. Baker's (1987) book *'Where The Forest Meets The Sea'* was the stimulus for the learning experience.

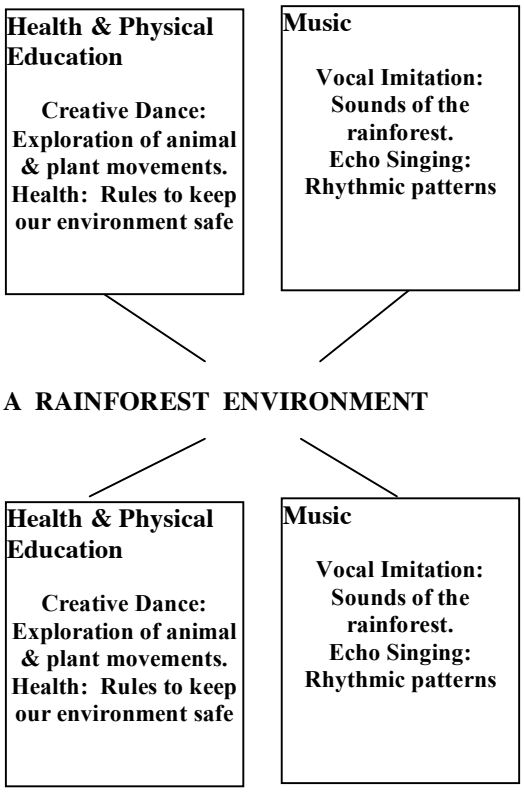

Figure 1. Pre-Primary Curriculum Web

The third and fourth *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units are structured differently (see Table 1). To enable greater examination of each academic discipline, only two curriculum areas are included for study in each unit. Whilst integration is still emphasised throughout these particular units, they are presented as discrete components of the whole. Again, their integration is achieved through the exploration of common themes. It is considered that these units provide students with the depth of curriculum content knowledge necessary to teach them in an integrated way.

An examination of integrated planning, programming and evaluation in the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* for the Early Childhood years is the focus of the final unit. The recent curriculum documentation from both The Arts and Health and Physical Education Learning Areas (Curriculum Council of Western Australia, 1998), serve as the springboard for the material covered in this unit. An integrated *Expressive Arts and Humanities* program designed to meet the developmental needs of an early childhood class, is planned and implemented. Lectures, workshops and school based teaching episodes are the main modes of delivery. The integrated structure of the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units outlined thus far, differs considerably from their previous organisation in the Early Childhood Teacher Education program. Art, music, social science, physical and health education units have traditionally been taught separately by established curriculum departments. Hargreaves (1994) would describe these departments as 'balkanised' structures. He suggests that their strong individual identities may work against integration, and this becomes a key problem in the implementation of any curriculum change.

CHALLENGES AND PROBLEMS OF IMPLEMENTATION AT EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

Data Collection:

Eight staff have participated in the integrated approach to the teaching of the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units commencing in 1994. Evidence relating to the challenges and problems these staff experienced during the initiation and implementation phases of this curriculum reform is largely anecdotal. It is based upon their personal reflections and was collected through detailed discussions. During the planning stages of the proposed curriculum change, staff were regularly involved in meetings and discussion concerning the nature of the change, course design, unit content and sequence, modes of delivery, and assessment. This staff collaboration has continued as part of the process of implementation since the program

commenced. According to literature regarding curriculum change, collaborative cultures are a necessary precondition for change (Hargreaves 1994; Fullan & Hargreaves, 1991). In these units, staff collaboration has been achieved through joint planning, team teaching, observation of each other's lessons and mentoring. A visiting professorial scholar who observed and participated in the integrated program for a six month period reported that:

> *Creativity and communication through voice, music, movement and visual symbolism were experienced in a manner that will aid students to seek novel ways by which young children use play and talk as vehicles for learning. It proved to be a successful approach to the teaching of performance, production and appraisal skills in the expressive arts, but furthermore it developed teaching skills and competencies that students will draw upon for their future work in schools.*
> (Calcutt, Campbell, Kalandyke, & Bloomfield, 1998, p83).

Since 1994, enrolment numbers in the first year of the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) at Edith Cowan University, have ranged from between 80 to 110 students. Student reactions to the integrated curriculum approach have impacted upon staff teaching these units. Throughout the four year program, student views of the integrated units are gathered in two major ways. First, end of unit evaluations require students to respond to questions relating to unit objectives, content, organization, knowledge and skills gained, resources, lecturing techniques and assessment tasks. In addition, these unit evaluations also provide opportunities for students to comment further upon unit strengths and weaknesses.

Second, the inclusion of student journals as an assessment component in the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units, has provided further evidence of students' perceptions of the integrated approach. On a weekly basis, students were encouraged to reflect and comment upon the following: the content of each session, the knowledge and skills gained, relevance to their future teaching, staff facilitation, peer support, unit organization and assessment expectations. Overall the journal allowed the students to document their thoughts and feelings on a range of issues throughout the units.

Feedback from students on the integrated approach to the teaching of the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* has also come about through informal discussions with staff who have attempted to model and develop staff-student collaboration in these units. Likewise, information has been passed on via University Staff-Student Committees, whose function is to listen to and respond to students' concerns on a variety of program matters within the Faculty of Community Services, Education and Social Sciences.

Some of the student data collected and the impact of that data on the staff involved in its implementation, will be discussed under three headings: technical, political and cultural perspectives. As dynamic processes, they have separately and together influenced how staff coped with this curriculum change.

Technical Perspectives

According to Hall (1997), the technical perspective refers to 'what' and 'how' the proposed curriculum changes will be implemented. It includes the staff's understanding of the philosophy and principles underlying the change. It also embraces their understanding and interpretation of the new course material and its requirements. Finally, it addresses the strategies for implementation of the course and student reactions to it. Each of these factors will influence how staff cope with the change to an integrated teaching model.

Gill (1990), acknowledges that curriculum change can upset teachers' sense of security when the status quo is threatened. Furthermore, he believes that change can threaten the status of particular disciplines. The changes proposed for integrating the Expressive Arts and Humanities curriculum areas were met with some ambivalence by curriculum departments. Perhaps these departments considered the status of their discipline was at risk. While there was some uncertainty amongst the specific staff involved in the proposed change, they required little convincing as to its value. The teaching staff acknowledged that the introduction of this innovative approach relied heavily on their ability to broaden their teaching perspective. They were required to become not only

knowledgeable with new subject matter, curriculum documentation and teaching strategies, but also to develop working relationships with 'new' colleagues. Staff commented that these aspects of change placed substantial demands upon them, in particular on their non-teaching time. This was compounded by the additional time required each week to plan, discuss and evaluate lecture sessions with colleagues.

Hall (1997) acknowledges that content selection problems are associated with curriculum development and implementation. It would be unrealistic to imagine that problems of this nature would not occur when combining four disciplines into integrated units of study. Staff engaged in considerable discussion and debate concerning unit content during initial course planning meetings. They considered two major factors created content selection problems. First, the expressive qualities and aesthetic elements common to music, art and movement provided a strong foundation for compatibility of content selection in terms of the expressive arts. However, this compatibility did not carry over to the humanities subjects (ie social science, health education and specific components of physical education). Staff coped with this content selection problem by using thematic approaches to make curriculum connections throughout the units, thus providing a partial solution to this issue.

Second, staff expressed difficulty in determining the amount of content to include during their first attempts at presenting the integrated units. There appeared to be insufficient time to cover all of the content that was considered essential for each discipline involved in the integrated units. The staff have endeavoured to solve this problem by accepting that they need to be more selective in terms of the content covered. The use of prescribed readings to be completed by students in their own time, has become a necessity to 'fill in any gaps'. A distinct lack of suitable integrated texts has necessitated a more subject based reading list for the students. The development of an integrated curriculum workbook is considered a priority to help resolve this problem.

Coping with students' reactions to the integrated units has also affected staff. Overall, students response to the change has been positive. The students have valued the opportunity to experience integrated professional preparation through the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units. Having integration reinforced and demonstrated in their own learning has provided them with a working model of such an approach. Student appreciation of the integrated nature of these units is revealed in the following statements:

> *The unit as a whole not only combined the expressive arts and humanities but also showed us how to plan and teach in an integrated fashion.*

> *The EAH units have supported our educational studies units by providing a practical demonstration of curriculum integration. Using themes to make connections between subject areas has been very effective.*

However, other aspects of the units were open to criticism. Whilst the practical nature of the units and the integrated exploration of themes throughout have been favourably received by students, more negative comments have required staff to respond to specific logistical problems. This is evidenced when one student wrote:

> *It is most annoying having to change rooms half way into a lecture. We are unsure where to meet each week? Can't a suitable space be found to avoid this confusion?*

Each of the four curriculum areas has particular space and equipment requirements. As no multi-disciplinary facility exists, students have often been required to change rooms during sessions in order to experience practical integrated art, music, social science and physical education activities. This shift in location causes inconvenience to staff and students alike. It also creates rooming difficulties for university administration staff responsible for room scheduling across the university. It is generally acknowledged at Edith Cowan University, that the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units require more rooms per unit than others. While these problems may never be totally overcome, attempts have been made to minimise the problems for students.

In the first year of the new program, unit assessment became a problem for both staff and students alike. Concern about assessment is revealed by the following student comment:

> *We found assessment to be very heavy in this unit. While assessment requirements fit the university guidelines of three assessment points, there are too many parts to each assignment.*

From the outset, staff were challenged with how and what to assess in these new units. They devoted considerable time to the planning of assessment tasks which would reflect both the integrated and discrete components. Student criticism of assessment focussed particularly on the amount of assessment required. Upon reflection, staff acknowledged that assessment expectations were too demanding. This was initially caused by endeavouring to combine four curriculum areas into one. Currently, students are being given more choice and more integrated assessments which has gone part of the way to alleviating the problem.

Another assessment problem concerned the inclusion of performance assessment in three of the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units. These performance assessments not only provided students with the opportunity to demonstrate their conceptual knowledge and skills of the specific arts and humanities components within the integrated units, but also to develop their performance and production skills. In addition, the performance assessments have been used to reinforce the concepts of self and peer assessment. The potential of the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units to assist in the development of professional teaching skills and competencies has been a shared belief of staff teaching the units (Calcutt et al. 1998). Consequently, throughout these integrated units, students have been encouraged to show creativity whilst actively participating; to take more responsibility for their own learning; and, to work collaboratively to achieve specific goals. Not all students have valued this performance assessment and the inclusion of self and peer assessment points. The following student statements reflect this view:

> *The practical performance put too much pressure on us. Could assess in a different way.*
>
> *The practical assessment took up too much time and this affected other units of study. Therefore the assessment should be looked into and changed to be less time consuming.*
>
> *Having your peers assess your practical performance is not fair. It is too open to bias particularly if you are not in the 'in' group.*

This criticism has caused further concern for staff who have attempted to introduce new and innovative educational assessment policies (Puckett & Black, 1994). The current trend towards authentic assessment in which both self and peer assessment are highlighted seems to be causing particular concern to students, even though, as Calcut et al. (1998, p79) state, the "... ability to collaborate with children to encourage interaction and evoke peer and self-reflection will be an essential teaching skill."

Political Perspective

As suggested by Hall (1997), the political perspective which includes such considerations as resource distribution and administrative support, also affects how people cope with curriculum change. Central to this perspective and closely associated with resource distribution, are the factors of power, authority and negotiation. The work of Smith and Lovat (1990) on curriculum change in schools, indicates that lack of time, lack of support and lack of resources, might make effective change difficult. From the outset, the university administration strongly supported the proposed change. Staff, facilities, time and resources, were allocated to service the integrated units. However, since the University has moved into a period of increased economic rationalisation, as evidenced through reductions in academic and support staff servicing the teacher education program, it has begun to look more closely at the cost of such change. The perceived high implementation costs of the integrated units, in terms of staff and facility requirements, seems to be placing the program at greater risk. At this point in time, the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units appear to be operating in a less supportive environment.

Changing economic circumstances have impacted upon staff implementing the integrated curriculum units. Any changes to the administration personnel involved in decision making and the allocation of resources during the process of change, may also hinder the change process. As administrators change, as has

occurred at this University, political 'power plays' often lead to the need to renegotiate in an effort to maintain support for the allocation of resources. Over time, changing relationships between colleagues may also impact on the continued support by administrators in resourcing the change. While concerns of this nature are distant from the day to day implementation of the change, they are a reality to be faced by the staff involved.

The staff have expressed disappointment that university administrators have often lacked the necessary awareness of the depth of knowledge required to teach in the integrated program. In particular, suggestions that a single member of staff has the expertise required at the tertiary level to integrate four curriculum areas, has not been well received. The staff believe this suggestion has been economically driven. They concur that there are specific skills and concepts critical to each particular discipline, that are best taught in the context of those subjects. Bredekamp and Rosegrant (1992), draw attention to the possible neglect of skills development through integrated curriculum approaches. They maintain, as have Pigdon and Woolley (1992), that process subjects have specific skills and concepts which are best developed within their own conceptual framework. It is imperative therefore, that staff teaching in such integrated programs have the depth of knowledge and skills in their own curriculum area.

Cultural Perspective

The cultural perspective is very people oriented. It includes the beliefs and values held by those involved in the implementation of the proposed changes. Communication, respect and cooperation between staff is at the centre of this perspective (Firestone & Corbett, 1988). With four 'balkanised' curriculum areas combining into one, it could be assumed that cultural factors would have a significant effect in shaping the reactions of staff to the curriculum change.

Contrary to what might have been expected, staff directly involved in teaching the new units reacted positively to the proposed changes. The concept of integration was highly valued by each one. The considerable collaborative discussion engaged in during the planning stages only strengthened their commitment to the new approach. Commitment to any change was identified by Hall (1997), as a key cultural factor in the change management process. The retirement of one staff member during the second year of the program tested the resolve of the group. There was concern that a new staff member joining the group might not have the same commitment to curriculum integration. Fortunately, this has not been the case. The University administration supported the integration of these units and considered this a priority in the appointment of new staff members at that time.

Overall, through continued collaboration, a strong feeling of collegiality has developed amongst the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* staff involved. As suggested by Macdonald and Glover (1997), their collaboration and collegiality has reinforced their commitment to the initiative and assisted the implementation of the curriculum change. Staff have become mutually supportive. It could be suggested that they have begun to develop their own sense of 'department'. In addition, there have been other 'flow on' benefits from this integrated approach to teaching. In particular, the collaboration of the staff involved seems to have promoted better communication across the four curriculum departments generally.

CONCLUSION

Integration and coping with curriculum change have become issues for staff involved in the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* units within the Bachelor of Education (Early Childhood) at Edith Cowan University. The purpose of this paper has been to outline the nature of the curriculum change, in particular the integrated model and how staff have responded to it. Most outcomes of the curriculum change have been positive for staff. Continuing on a positive note, the adoption of an integrated approach to the teaching of these units has enabled students to see the connections between curriculum areas and experience meaningful learning. As an outcome, teaching graduates may be more confident to adopt the broader teaching perspectives suggested in recent curriculum documents. The break down of 'balkanised' curriculum departments into more unified, collaborative ones is an additional bonus.

As the literature on curriculum change suggests, a variety of factors have impinged on the staff attempting to implement the new units.

Technical factors such as what and how course content will be taught, and students' responses to it have also shaped staff perceptions and reactions to the changing course. It has been noted that the availability of resources to implement curriculum change is largely dependent upon the support of the administration. This support may change as Universities undergo economic rationalisation and as administrators come and go. Cultural factors have also impacted upon those implementing change. It appears that curriculum change will be facilitated if those involved in its implementation share similar beliefs and values about the proposed change. The ability to communicate and collaborate will enable staff to cope better with any curriculum changes encountered.

In being challenged with curriculum change, the *Expressive Arts and Humanities* staff at Edith Cowan University have successfully developed an organisational program which requires collaboration across departments and curriculum learning areas. In doing so, staff have provided a more integrated professional preparation that can prepare teachers to meet the integrated requirements outlined and emphasised in recent curriculum documents.

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