

## History wars: Australia's empty 'defeat' of critical race theory feeds full blown assault on new school curriculum

*With reactions to the draft national curriculum blowing up, reaching a consensus on how to teach children about Australia's past is looking like a testing task.*



*Pauline Hanson's One Nation Celebrated The 'Defeat' Of Critical Race Theory On Social Media Last Month*

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Pressure is mounting on the body developing a new national curriculum as politicians and interest groups try to frame changes introduced in a draft (including the inclusion of more Indigenous culture and problem-solving) as “woke activists” teaching children to “hate Australia”.

In mid-2020, the federal and state education ministers commissioned a review for “refining, realigning and decluttering” the content of the curriculum for preschool to year 10.

The Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) produced a draft with a number of changes, including: teaching mathematics that prioritised problem-solving; introducing digital literacy education earlier on; and, in what was always set to draw attention, including more First Nations culture while replacing

references to “Christian heritage” with terms such as “secular” or “multi-faith” to reflect Australia’s diversity.

While the independent statutory body only stopped accepting submissions about the draft late last week, there’s already signs that the proposed curriculum faces an uphill battle to approval.

Early on, federal Education Minister Alan Tudge signposted his potential opposition to the draft curriculum’s framing Australia’s racial and religious history.

“We have an opportunity to enrich the history curriculum with more emphasis on Indigenous history and Indigenous perspectives. This would be a positive development and build on the progress already made on this dimension,” he said shortly after the draft was released.

“But as our greatest historian, Geoffrey Blainey, has said, it should not come at the expense of the teaching of classical and western civilisations and how Australia came to be a free, liberal democracy.”

While this was always likely to be a hot topic, given Australian mainstream political culture’s inability to reckon with our colonial history, another factor has also played a part: the global right’s newfound obsession with critical race theory.

Conservatives are now pushing to ban the “teaching” of the esoteric academic theory in schools around the world, including in Australia. In late June, government senators joined with One Nation to pass Pauline Hanson’s motion “rejecting” critical race theory from the national curriculum. (Critical race theory is not taught in schools currently, nor does it feature in the draft curriculum).

Passing a senate motion is only ceremonial but that didn’t stop Hanson and One Nation celebrating the defeat of critical race theory on social media. This motion was picked up by right-wing publications around the world, including Breitbart, the influential alt-right publication once helmed by Steve Bannon.

This appeared to have an impact. Soon after the motion, Tudge harshened his opposition to the curriculum. He told Chris Kenny on Sky News Australia on June 24 that he was concerned that the curriculum presents a “negative view of our history”.

“I think students should come out of schooling having learned our history in an accurate manner and to have pride of country coming out of it, a love of country coming out of it, whereas you’d almost have the opposite view by reading the draft history curriculum. In the 84 pages, there’s barely a positive thing said about our country,” Tudge said.

The case against the national curriculum also became a focus of conservative and religious groups.

On June 10, the Institute of Public Affairs and right-wing lobby group Advance Australia released a document called “Activism via education: 7 ways the new Australian curriculum will impact your kids”, which calls it “anti-Australian ideology” promoted by “faceless bureaucrats and university academics”.

These groups led the charge, laying out the arguments that were picked up by Hanson, Tudge and other opponents to the changes.

They even went so far as to target individual ACARA members for their views. Advance Australia posted a graphic to Facebook on July 2 featuring an ACARA advisory board member's 2015 tweet that said "this country is born of racism". The image is captioned: "Meet another one of the activists on ACARA's Indigenous advisory board for the National Curriculum... They want your kids to hate Australia."

Christian groups such as the Australian Christian Lobby and FamilyVoice Australia have both campaigned against the new curriculum, directing their members to make submissions opposing a new national curriculum that "fundamentally redefines Australia".

Even good faith criticisms of the curriculum have been weaponised. After the Australian Mathematical Sciences Institute said they had "considerable concern" about how maths was to be taught, Sky News' Peta Credlin said this was proof that the review had been "hijacked by activists".

ACARA is now preparing a document that must be approved by consensus between state and federal education ministers before being rolled out — approval that may be hard to obtain while teaching an honest version of Australia's history is being framed as negative.