



Interested and Influential: The Role of a professional association in the development of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography

Susan Caldis

Lecturer in Geography Education, Macquarie University
Head Teacher HSIE, Castle Hill High School, NSW

Abstract

The Australian Geography Teachers Association (AGTA) represents the views of Australian geography teachers on educational matters. AGTA also seeks to improve the capacity of geography teachers to respond to a changing teaching and learning landscape. The Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) is an independent authority operating in a national education context. It was established as a result of political decision-making and charged with developing a world-class national curriculum. Between 2009 and 2013, AGTA Board members and their nominees were extensively involved in the ACARA curriculum development process for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography, and the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum: Geography. A common question asked by key stakeholders has been *how much influence did AGTA actually have?* To respond to this question, the Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience (TSIS) is applied first, to identify the attributes of AGTA as a key interest group and second, to analyse the extent of AGTA's influence in shaping Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography content within ACARA's curriculum development process.

Introduction

This paper communicates the purpose, method, data analysis and conclusions of a research project completed during 2013 as part of a Master of Educational Research degree. Using the work of Kleeman (2005) as a base, this research aims to build on the literature about the influence of interest groups in a Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography context from a New South Wales Geography Years 7–10 Syllabus context. Therefore, the Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience (TSIS) was applied to a national educational context with dual purpose. Firstly, to identify the attributes of the Australian Geography Teachers Association (AGTA) as a key interest group; and secondly, to analyse the extent

to which AGTA was able to shape Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography content within the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority's (ACARA) curriculum development process.

There was a multidimensional aspect to my interest in developing and conducting this project. Firstly, my employment at ACARA as Senior Project Officer (SPO) for Geography meant that I led the development of the *Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography* from shaping through to implementation. Secondly and earlier, I was a school-based Geography educator, leader and mentor, and was subsequently involved with the professional association (AGTA). Thirdly, there was interest from the local to international geography education community about who had input into the Australian Curriculum and to what extent. There was, finally, the opportunity to extend the work of Kleeman (2005).

The specific time frame for this research is between December 2012 and May 2013 when ACARA led an out-of-session targeted and collaborative consultation process with the state and territory curriculum authorities and AGTA ahead of it being presented to the ACARA Board and Ministers for endorsement and publication.

Purpose

According to business and political science literature, stakeholder theory confirms the need for businesses to identify and manage stakeholder relationships in response to three attributes: power, legitimacy and urgency (de Bussy & Kelly, 2010; Ingenbleek & Imminck, 2010; Mitchell, Agle, & Wood, 1997). However, more recent research from Myllykangas, Kujala, and Lehtimäki (2011) supports the importance of these attributes but proposes that they alone are not enough to understand why particular stakeholder or interest groups are important to and for the business. They suggest an appreciation about the nature of the stakeholder relationship, and

how this relationship has developed over time and become valuable to the business are also necessary.

Ingenbleek and Imminck (2010) used the Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience to focus on stakeholder management by investigating firstly, the importance of processes for consultation with stakeholders, secondly, how to manage their (sometimes conflicting) views, and thirdly to become more aware of who the important stakeholders are, why they are important, and when it is appropriate to include them as part of or outside of a formalised consultation process.

My research applies TSIS to an educational context. It focuses on the identification of a key interest group, their attribute(s), and their role in influencing the outcomes of curriculum development for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography. TSIS provides a theoretical lens to examine the curriculum development processes of ACARA which is a business operating in a national education context and established as a result of political decision-making. TSIS is also used to explain and describe the relationship between ACARA and AGTA and, therefore, explore the methods and extent to which AGTA was able to remain prominent and influential to ACARA in shaping the content for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography during the designated time frame.

The evidence gathered from this research can be used to enhance understanding about the agency of such groups in an Australian educational context rather than in a business or political context. This is of particular interest because it is the first time competing opinions between state and territory curriculum authorities and professional associations have influenced a curriculum development process across Australia. The evidence also responds to the literature suggesting businesses (such as ACARA) and interest groups (such as AGTA) require an appreciation about the nature of the stakeholder relationships, how the relationship developed over time, and became valuable to each other.

1. Summary of Literature

The difference between *stakeholder* and *interest group* has been defined across business, political science and education literature. In de Bussy and Kelly (2010, p. 292) Freeman's definition of a stakeholder, coined in 1984, is cited: "any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the firm's objectives". Within an educational context, Kleeman (2005, pp. 111–115) argues that interest group is the preferable nomenclature. An interest group seeks to

influence public policy, and is characterised by the depth of relationship developed between itself (the interest group) and the government as it seeks to exert its opinion and influence over government decision-making on a particular issue. Kleeman (2005) also suggests interest groups are those who play a key role in shaping the development and implementation of curriculum in terms of what and how students should learn. Due to the educational context of this research, interest group is the preferred terminology.

From the business literature, Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997, pp. 853–857 & 865–867) suggest stakeholders or interest groups have three attributes, or some combination of the three – power, legitimacy, urgency. *Power* refers to the ability of the stakeholder to impose its will to get a desired outcome. Often this is achieved through financial or material resources. *Legitimacy* relates to what is desirable, proper or appropriate in the context of business operation and goals. It is not as absolute as power but legitimacy and power can often be combined although they are separate stakeholder attributes. *Urgency* is expressed as requiring immediate attention in relation to time or if the relationship is of a critical nature to the business – that is, greater problems will be caused for the business if a deadline is not met and/or the relationship is broken off. Once stakeholders have been identified, it is then up to the manager to apply the attributes and determine which stakeholders should be paid more attention compared to others, or whether they should be acknowledged at all. Businesses are more likely to respond to, and foster a relationship with, a stakeholder who has a higher number of attributes which typically indicates greater levels of salience. TSIS leads to a business being able to develop more effective stakeholder management plans.

Ingenbleek and Imminck (2010, pp. 53–56 & 63) applied TSIS to discuss how a business managed, and responded to, conflicting stakeholder group views on the development of corporate social responsibility standards in the Netherlands. Their findings revealed some stakeholder groups yielded more power and urgency than others, and a structured decision-making process helped a business control and settle conflicting stakeholder views.

Myllykangas, Kujala, and Lehtimäki (2011) defined stakeholders according to the definition framed by Freeman in 1984, as cited in de Bussy and Kelly (2010, p. 292). They also drew on research from Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997, pp. 856–857) to support the use of power, legitimacy and urgency as attributes to identify and categorise key stakeholders and to understand relationships between the business and its stakeholders – the *who* and the *what*, as coined by Mitchell, Agle,

and Wood (1997). However, Myllykangas, Kujala, and Lehtimäki (2011, pp. 65–66) contended TSIS was not sufficient to ascertain the value of a stakeholder relationship to a business even though TSIS was useful for identifying and prioritising stakeholder groups. In their research about stakeholder relationships in Finland, they proposed TSIS did not explain the dynamics of the stakeholder relationship or *how* the relationship between the business and the stakeholder group(s) developed and created value for the business. Their research confirmed stakeholder relationships developed and changed over time, in response to the three attributes of the stakeholder. However, it was the cooperational aspect of the stakeholder relationship that created value in the relationship – for both parties – cooperation based on a combination of factors including history, objectives, interaction and mutual sharing of information, trust and the potential to learn from previous events (Myllykangas, Kujala, & Lehtimäki, 2011, pp. 68–71).

In the Australian educational context, Kleeman (2005) used interest group theory to explore the nature and perspectives of interest groups involved in shaping the 1992 New South Wales Geography Years 7–10 Syllabus. In his work, Kleeman examined the dispute over the mandating of curriculum perspectives to gain an insight into the dynamics of the curriculum development process. The importance of the perspectives held by key interest groups (including specific individuals) was explored and an account was provided about how their worldviews influenced curriculum development and content. In a Canadian higher education based setting, Powell (2008) applied TSIS to discuss the perceptions interest groups had about decision-making processes in publicly funded post-secondary education institutions, and their beliefs about who had the greatest influence in these decision-making processes. Powell, and later work by Ingenbleek and Imminck (2010), noted that the importance of a balanced and mediated process became evident when dealing with powerful and conflicting stakeholder views about a particular issue.

Through the literature, AGTA was identified as a prominent key interest group. AGTA is an association of geographical educators who seek to serve geography teachers and tertiary educators. More specifically, according to their website, AGTA also seeks to “represent the interest of its member affiliates on national education decision making bodies” (<http://www.agta.asn.au/About%20AGTA/mission.php>).

AGTA lobbying was responsible for having Geography included in the Phase 2 suite of subjects to be developed as part of the Australian

Curriculum. AGTA was also responsible for shaping the conceptual framework of the curriculum by publishing Towards A National Geography Curriculum Position Paper (McInerney, Berg, Hutchinson, Maude, & Sorensen, 2009). This project involved significant research, mapping of international curricula, and nationwide consultation workshops with geography teachers and academics. As a result, AGTA proposed the scope for the national geography curriculum should foreground key concepts such as place and space; include the use and application of inquiry methods, spatial technologies and fieldwork; develop the ability of students to think geographically and encourage informed decision-making for the future based on a variety of perspectives; and, draw on content from an integration of physical and human geography disciplines with a local, national and international focus (McInerney, et al., 2009).

ACARA, previously known as the National Curriculum Board, has a curriculum development process specifying stakeholder consultation and engagement at particular points throughout the shaping and writing phases (ACARA, 2012 April). The ACARA website indicates engagement and consultation with interest groups “plays an integral role in establishing the directions for the design and development of the curriculum” (<http://www.acara.edu.au/curriculum/consultation.html>). Consultation reports (National Curriculum Board, 2009, and ACARA, 2012 August) indicated some interest groups had emerged from the wider stakeholder group as being particularly prominent in shaping the Australian Curriculum overall. In the context of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography and the Senior Secondary Australian Curriculum: Geography, these interest groups included state and territory curriculum authorities such as the Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, and professional teacher associations such as AGTA. According to TSIS literature, this is because each interest group demonstrated a combination of attributes and had a valuable relationship with ACARA.

In applying the TSIS literature, the attributes put forward by Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997) can be applied to the key interest groups associated with ACARA and from that, conclusions can be drawn about the priority with which ACARA responded to the concerns of these groups. The argument put forward by Myllykangas, Kujala, and Lehtimäki (2011) about value of a relationship can also be applied to ACARA’s key interest groups to provide a richer explanation about the priority with which ACARA responded to concerns raised. The importance of a structured decision-making process to settle conflicting stakeholder views (Ingenbleek & Imminck, 2010) can also be applied

to ACARA's curriculum development process and the associated opportunities for consultation and engagement.

2. Overarching Question and Hypothesis

In response to the literature, research was framed around two overarching research questions:

- What attribute(s) particularly apply to AGTA between December 2012 and May 2013, according to the Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience?
- How, and to what extent, was AGTA able to influence the direction of content for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography between December 2012 and May 2013?

My hypothesis is that between December 2012 and May 2013, AGTA can be identified as a salient interest group based on their attributes of legitimacy and urgency. As a result, AGTA will be able to influence the direction of content for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography to a significant extent. This will be achieved through AGTA representatives being involved in a number of activities associated with the ACARA-led out-of-session targeted consultation process.

Method

1. Research participants, instruments and design

The research participant population was sampled from the AGTA Board: a purposeful/criterion-based sample for the qualitative component of research, and a non-random purposive sample for the quantitative component of research (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, pp. 231–235). This resulted in two female and five male geographical educators being recruited. They were located in New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia and Victoria.

AGTA is the peak national professional association for geography teachers and comprises seven member affiliate associations. I chose to focus on this interest group because AGTA has a longstanding commitment to promoting Geography as a relevant, distinct and unique discipline. AGTA Board representatives were appointed to the ACARA advisory panel, curriculum writing team, and media consultation contacts.

Three instruments were used in the research. The first was an online discussion forum with three open-ended questions plus the opportunity to put forward any further thoughts the participant felt could not be expressed as part of the questioning

sequence. This instrument was of a qualitative nature.

The second instrument was a questionnaire with twenty-four mostly closed questions. This instrument was predominantly quantitative in nature and some questions were informed from responses received from the online discussion forum.

The third instrument was a focus group with five open-ended questions and one closed question. This instrument is qualitative in nature and some questions were informed by responses received from the questionnaire.

Johnson and Christensen (2012, p. 212) indicate existing data, which would have been originally recorded or left behind at an earlier point in time, are also able to be used with other data for corroboration as part of the study. In this particular case, secondary data include annotated meeting notes, email discussions, and written feedback submitted to ACARA by their interest group(s).

A mixed-methods research design was chosen for this research after consideration of recommendations by Johnson and Christensen (2012, p. 439) and other educational research completed by Germeten (2011), and McInerney, et al. (2009). The latter researchers used similar methodologies to focus on stakeholder opinions about curriculum. Johnson and Christensen (2012) indicate a more reliable evidence base is often achieved from a mixed-methods design compared to a single method of research. A mixed sampling design was adopted – identical-sequential – thus quantitative and qualitative data were collected sequentially, and the same individuals participated in each research activity associated with the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2012, p. 238).

Data Analysis

1. What attribute(s) particularly apply to AGTA, between December 2012 and May 2013, according to the Theory of Stakeholder Identification and Salience?

All research participants in the online discussion forum responses and the focus group affirmed AGTA was engaged by ACARA in all consultation processes. In addition, ACARA was *genuinely interested* in the feedback and opinions provided by AGTA. For example,

Members of AGTA had expertise and familiarity with the school education context. There was recognition on ACARA's part that they had to accommodate AGTA because to alienate them would have

derailed the process because AGTA had acted in a political manner in the beginning through their deputation to ministers (online response, Question 4, discussion forum).

Approximately fifty per cent of the research participant group referenced the importance of the relationship developed over time between AGTA Board members and such key ACARA staff as the Senior Project Officer (SPO), in ensuring AGTA was included in, and responded to, in the consultation processes.

One of the strengths was the personal relationship between the ACARA officer and AGTA, and this provided AGTA with a greater degree of influence than it may have otherwise enjoyed had that relationship not existed. That was the key to AGTA's influence (online response, Question 4, discussion forum).

Secondary data confirmed ACARA was interested in and valued AGTA's feedback and was willing to engage AGTA in the out-of-session consultation process. Internal ACARA documents, including informal notes scribed at meetings between Curriculum Managers and the SPO during the weeks of 10 and 17 December 2012, revealed the request from the SPO to Curriculum Managers concerning the importance of including AGTA in the targeted consultation activities; secondly, the approval of this request from managers; and thirdly, telephone conversations between ACARA staff and the AGTA Chair about the upcoming targeted consultation process, expectations of involvement including participation in a formal teleconference in early 2013, and an agreement that AGTA Board members will be engaged in the process. However, more than half of the research participants believed the views of AGTA were not as important to ACARA compared to other interest groups, as indicated in this quote: *There is a tension between AGTA wanting to push geography forward and to excite students, and what jurisdictions feel comfortable with* (verbal response, Question 3, focus group).

Data from the questionnaire revealed 100 per cent of respondents expected ACARA to include AGTA in targeted consultation activities. Whilst as AGTA Board members, they *strongly agree* AGTA is an important interest group to ACARA, the respondents indicated equally they *agree* or *strongly agree* that ACARA sees AGTA as an important interest group. The most popular reason, equally chosen by participants was *representation of teachers and therefore teacher voice, and professional expertise in Geography and geographical education*. One respondent suggested AGTA was an important interest

group to ACARA because AGTA's advice *curtails conservative advice from jurisdictions*. Eighty-three per cent of respondents believed a valuable relationship had been created between ACARA and AGTA. The most popular reasons (57%) identified were *collaboration*, and *history*. Half of the respondents penned an additional reason as *personal relationship* for example, *personal, long-term relationships between AGTA Board and ACARA staff* (written response, Question 14, questionnaire).

Whilst there was clear and positive acknowledgement of AGTA being included in consultation activities, eighty-three per cent of respondents felt that ACARA did not incorporate feedback equally from all key interest groups. Only forty per cent of the respondents believed *all the advice* provided by AGTA was incorporated in the published Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography, however, sixty per cent of respondents believed most of the advice was incorporated in the final document.

Secondary data such as email trails, diary entries and notes scribed from telephone conversations, support the existence of a respectful, valued, strong relationship between the SPO and the AGTA Board. Email trails between the SPO, AGTA Chair and other AGTA Board members between January and May 2013 indicate regular discussion and clarification about the iterative revisions to the curriculum. In addition, there were requests from ACARA to AGTA Board members for further advice in response to recommendations provided by the state and territory curriculum authorities. These inquiries particularly related to the inquiry and skills strand, overarching inquiry questions, conceptual understanding, and content for Year 8 Landforms and landscapes and Year 9 Geographies of interconnections.

Conclusion to the First Overarching Question

Data and information gleaned from qualitative and quantitative research activities, secondary data, and the body of referenced literature identify two attributes emerging in the identification of AGTA as a salient key interest group. The dominant attribute is legitimacy with AGTA being a collective of geographical educators who was clear, well researched and articulate about providing a rationale for Geography being part of the Australian Curriculum, and what should be the focus of content throughout the curriculum development process. Additionally, ACARA's receipt and use of McInerney et al. (2009) that became the blueprint about what a Geography curriculum could look like, also contributed to the legitimacy of AGTA as a key interest group to ACARA.

The other attribute is urgency. AGTA Board members had a critical relationship with ACARA staff because of their legitimacy and if ACARA had removed AGTA from the consultation process, the quality of the curriculum and reputation of ACARA would have been compromised. This reflects research from Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997), and de Bussy and Kelly (2010). In determining whether an additional attribute of value in the relationship existed between ACARA and AGTA, the research from Myllykangas, Kujala, and Lehtimäki (2011) suggested a valuable relationship was evident. This is principally due to the following two factors. First, AGTA's objectives are congruent with the subject currently being developed (Geography). Second, the history and nature of the relationship between AGTA Board members and ACARA staff is due to the length of time these two groups worked closely together developing the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography.

The ACARA-led out-of-session targeted consultation activities also reflect the research from Ingenbleek and Imminck (2010) about the importance of an institution with many interest groups like ACARA having a process for consultation with significant key interest groups to manage their different and often conflicting views. It was through the targeted consultation activities the two significant interest groups to ACARA (state and territory curriculum authorities and the peak professional association) were able to provide input to the revisions of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography even though ACARA may not have considered and responded to the feedback from each interest group with equal weight.

In response to the first overarching question, the TSIS confirms the attributes of legitimacy and urgency applying to AGTA, and also suggests the *value and nature of the relationship* between AGTA and ACARA enhances the salience of AGTA as a key interest group to ACARA. The first part of the hypothesis is, therefore, confirmed.

2. How, and to what extent, were AGTA able to influence the direction of content for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography between December 2012 and May 2013?

Comments reflective of the opinion articulated below – AGTA being an important but not the most important interest group to ACARA – were expressed by fifty per cent of participants in the online discussion forum and during the focus group.

the views of AGTA and GTA's were of a lesser status compared to the jurisdictions – quite understandably because it was the jurisdiction

who needed to sign-off on the curriculum (online response, Question 1, discussion forum).

Therefore, whilst AGTA Board members were able to participate in such targeted consultation activities as teleconferences and one-to-one discussions with ACARA staff, participants believed AGTA was able to influence the direction of the content for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography to only a moderate extent. During the focus group, an average rating of three out of five was given from research participants about the level of influence they believed AGTA had in shaping the direction of content for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography.

The majority of responses on the online discussion forum indicated participants saw the strengths of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography as being the underpinning concepts and the focus towards using them to frame geographical thinking; spatial technologies; and the inquiry methodology. Participants believed this was related to AGTA's feedback being reflected in the published document and are areas of the curriculum the participants thought AGTA was able to influence with success. These responses correlate with revelations from the focus group where participants expressed support for the way in which ACARA had listened and responded to AGTA feedback about fieldwork, spatial technologies, skills and inquiry in the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography.

At one of the teleconferences we were insistent about fieldwork and the use of spatial technologies. This came through clearly in the document (verbal response, Question 2, focus group).

Constant harping on about the place of spatial technologies, fieldwork and inquiry was listened to and ended up more in there than I thought it would. Some of the fundamental things we wanted to see in the curriculum from the Towards A National Geography Curriculum Position Paper project are there (verbal response, Question 2, focus group).

However, all participants believed the weaknesses of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography related to AGTA's advice not being adequately reflected in the published document. Moreover, ACARA had not incorporated enough of AGTA's feedback and advice about the direction of content for Year 9 and obtaining a mandated status for fieldwork and spatial technologies, even though both of the latter are mentioned and represented in the curriculum.

To see fieldwork in content descriptions would have been the aim. The same could be said for spatial technologies (verbal response, Question 3, focus group).

It is disappointing that personal geographies (in Year 9) is not as heavily represented as it should have been (verbal response, Question 3, focus group).

Participants were of the opinion that if academic geographers had been included, and ACARA targeted consultation had comprised a wider variety of activities such as forum meetings of geography teachers, AGTA may have had more success in influencing the direction of content, particularly for Year 9.

During December 2012 and February 2013, the relevant secondary data would support the perception that whilst AGTA was valued and their advice was listened to, there was, however, another interest group who had greater say about the content of the Geography curriculum. Internal documents received by ACARA from state and territory curriculum authorities – including formal letters, tracked change versions of the revised curriculum with comment boxes, and email trails between Curriculum Managers from both organisations – indicate significant concern with content about personal geographies because it is outside the scope of what is known as Geography in schools. Meeting notes scribed during teleconferences between ACARA and the state and territory curriculum authorities reveal reluctance from the latter to sign off the curriculum if the content was not revised in accordance with their recommendations.

Data from the questionnaire revealed sixty-seven per cent of respondents felt AGTA made a *good* contribution to the content revisions between December 2012 and May 2013. Eighty-three per cent of respondents believed the summary sheet of AGTA feedback was an accurate reflection of advice provided to ACARA during an ACARA initiated teleconference on 13 February 2013. However, only fifty per cent of respondents felt *most of the advice* from the teleconference had been reflected in the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography. This reflects participant views, outlined in the previous section, that a clear majority (83%) believed ACARA did not consult equally with all key interest groups, and neither did ACARA incorporate feedback equally from all key interest groups. Overall, fifty per cent of respondents indicated they believed between 50 and 75 per cent of total advice AGTA provided to ACARA, between December 2012 and May 2013, was incorporated in the published Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography.

Conclusion to the Second Overarching Question

Data and information gleaned from qualitative and quantitative research activities, secondary data and the literature review suggests the level of salience accorded to AGTA by ACARA is relative to the number and combination of identifiable attributes; and to their power compared to another key interest group – the state and territory curriculum authorities. This reflects the research findings of Mitchell, Agle, and Wood (1997). Whilst AGTA can be identified as a legitimate and urgent interest group, comparatively greater salience was found in the state and territory curriculum authorities who ultimately had to sign-off on the curriculum. Therefore, AGTA lacked power as an attribute and was unable to influence the direction of all content in the curriculum as desired. This was despite AGTA having provided McInerney et al. 2009 to ACARA and this document becoming the reference point for Australian curriculum development in Geography. However, there were crucial aspects of Geography, included in the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography, that are attributable to the value ACARA placed on AGTA as a salient key interest group.

Overall Conclusion

As referenced in the analysis of the first overarching question, the research from Ingenbleek and Imminck (2010) identifies the relevance and importance of an institution like ACARA (which has many interest groups), for having a consultation process with significant key interest groups to manage their different and often conflicting views. It was through the targeted consultation activities that two salient interest groups to ACARA were able to provide input to the revisions of the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography, even though participants perceived ACARA did not consider and respond to the feedback from each interest group with equal weight.

In response to the second overarching question, AGTA was able to influence direction of content for the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography between December 2012 and May 2013 through their involvement in formal (such as teleconferences) and informal (such as email exchanges and one-to-one telephone conversations) consultation activities. The extent to which AGTA was able to influence content could be said to be significant because they were one of two key interest groups involved in targeted consultation activities in that timeframe. However, compared to the other key interest group involved in the process, AGTA was less influential and it is suggested the extent of

AGTA's influence in shaping curriculum content was moderate. Therefore, the second part of the hypothesis is confirmed with qualification.

Overall, even though AGTA expressed reservations about some content areas in the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography, the legacy of AGTA feedback is particularly evident in the underpinning conceptual frame; the use and application of inquiry methods, spatial technologies and fieldwork; the integration of physical and human geography disciplines; and the focus on thinking geographically to make informed decisions about the future based on a variety of perspectives.

Significantly, this study highlights the increasingly political nature of curriculum development in the Australian context. It also highlights the challenges of negotiating curriculum within a federal political system. While professional bodies such as AGTA can influence the nature of curriculum, ultimate power rests in the political domain. To be approved, a document must be acceptable to each political jurisdiction. This assigns ultimate authority to state and territory curriculum authorities and their political decision makers. The final stage of curriculum development is dominated by a series of negotiations, concessions and compromises until the document is deemed acceptable by each state and territory. As a result, professional bodies such as AGTA tend to have less influence at this stage of the curriculum development process; however, care is taken not to make changes that would prompt such bodies to withdraw their endorsement.

Ultimately, it is the responsibility of the curriculum writing body (ACARA) to develop documents that are acceptable to each state and territory curriculum authority if the curriculum is to be endorsed by Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood. Nevertheless, AGTA is identified as a salient and influential interest group to ACARA even though ultimate power now rests in the political domain.

This research was consistent with recommendations from Johnson and Christensen (2012, pp. 71–82) – it is a feasible study yielding quality evidence obtained through a mixed-methods design.

The two overarching yet specific research questions were developed on a qualitative and quantitative basis. A mixed-methods design was chosen for its consistency with the research design used by educational researchers Germeten (2011), and McInerney, et al. (2009) who each conducted a study about stakeholder opinion on curriculum development and/or implementation. Additionally, Johnson and Christensen (2012,

p.71) suggested a mixed-methods design as preferable because data gained from quantitative and qualitative research tasks became combined into a single study, leading to a better quality of evidence. The weaknesses or limitations of evidence gained from mixed-methods research were minimised compared to evidence gained from a single research method.

The research participant population was an identical-sequential and purposeful sample. This seven participant sample group was accessible but small. The research participants were directly involved in the development of the curriculum and/or consultation activities with ACARA. They are geographical educators so their expertise is relevant to the research.

The first part of the hypothesis was confirmed – AGTA was a salient interest group with the attributes of legitimacy and urgency. The second part of the hypothesis was confirmed with qualification – AGTA was able to have significant influence in shaping the direction of content for some parts of the curriculum because they were one of two key interest groups included in the ACARA-led out-of-session targeted consultation process. In comparison to the state and territory curriculum authorities, AGTA had a moderate influence in shaping the direction of content, particularly for cultural and personal geography.

This research identified a particular research problem that is the first of its kind in an Australian educational context. The results of this research have the potential to build on the work of Kleeman (2005), Ingenbleek and Imminck (2010), and Myllykangas, Kujala, and Lehtimaki (2011).

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Questions for the online discussion forum

This online discussion forum included four questions: three open-ended questions plus an opportunity to put forward other thoughts that may not have been covered in the questions provided about the type and importance of the relationship between ACARA and AGTA, ACARA's consultation processes, and the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography.

Appendix 2: Questions for the questionnaire

The questionnaire included twenty-four questions about the type and importance of the relationship between ACARA and AGTA, ACARA's consultation processes, and content in the published Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography.

The responses provided in the online discussion forum were used to inform and develop some of the questions. There were two sections in the questionnaire. The first section focused on the involvement of research participants with AGTA and ACARA consultation processes. The second section focused on opinion about ACARA consultation processes and AGTA's involvement in these processes.

Appendix 3: Questions for the focus group discussion

The focus group discussion included five open-ended questions plus an opportunity to put forward other thoughts that may not have been covered in the questions provided about the type and importance of the relationship between ACARA and AGTA, ACARA's consultation processes, and the Foundation to Year 10 Australian Curriculum: Geography.

The responses provided in the online discussion-forum and the questionnaire were used to inform and develop some of the questions.