Content choice: A survey of history curriculum content in England since 1944. A relevant backdrop for South Africa

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Abstract

What history should be taught is a question that has vexed curriculum designers from the earliest days of mass education. The question of content becomes particularly pertinent when applied to Key Stage 3 (ages 11-14) as learners are old enough to begin appreciating historical concepts and it is usually the last age at which many learners will be exposed to history in their formal schooling. Decisions about the content of history curricula themselves have a curiously circular history. Although these questions have been discussed consistently throughout the approximately one hundred years that mass schooling has been in place in England, the inferences are fairly uniform. The conclusion that has now generally been reached is that children should be exposed to a healthy balance of world and British history; that they should be patriots, but not narrow-minded in their patriotism and that the procedural nature of history must be taught alongside the substantive content. These conclusions have not been reached without considerable debate and the question of what history should be taught has particular current relevance in light of the controversy around the national curriculum reforms in Britain in 2013 and 2014. There are important lessons to be drawn for South Africa.

Keywords: History education; Curriculum development; History Content; England; Key Stage 3; Curriculum revision.

Introduction

As the Department of Basic Education currently considers the idea of making history a compulsory subject for the National Senior Certificate in response to calls from, amongst others, the South African Democratic Teachers Union (SADTU), the role of history as a tool to shape national consciousness has come to the fore. In particular, the question of what content should populate this extended compulsory syllabus is under discussion. The goal of extending the teaching of history would be specifically to expose learners to more *South African* history. It is, as expressed in the SADTU draft proposal on "The

Importance of teaching History as a compulsory subject":

> *The future preservation of our culture and heritage lies in the preservation of our heritage, culture and values through education, and that means teaching History as a compulsory subject at school level to provide a foundation of much needed celebration of our past* (SADTU, 2014:2).

Debates on the content of school history have been and are being played out in the British arena. They provide both a backdrop to and a convenient resource for the exploration of what content choice can teach South Africa as it faces similar discussions about the history curriculum.[1]

Post-war discussions of Secondary School History content: 1944-1964

In the years from 1900-1918, when history was first introduced as a school subject, the general purpose and tone was set by government publications such as *Suggestions for the consideration of teachers and others concerned with the work of Public Elementary Schools* (1905). Although these publications had a somewhat limited impact on classrooms, they set the terms of the discussion of school history which continue even today. James Wycliffe Headlam, an influential Permanent Staff Inspector of Secondary Schools at the Board of Education, made specific recommendations for the curriculum of lower secondary school age children between the ages of twelve and sixteen. His suggestions were that children should be given a chronological study of English history but that European history needed to be studied in depth in order to understand "Britain's place in the world" (Wilbur, 2008:106). It is interesting that at this early stage history was "not just about character or patriotism or citizenship, it was also about curiosity, and imagination and life-long learning" (Cannadine, 2011:25). This vision for lower secondary history (ages 11-16) would remain the pattern for recommendations by government and educationalists throughout the rest of the century.

Post World War Two, for the first time in history, secondary level schooling became a reality for more learners as the school leaving age was raised from fourteen to fifteen (Cannadine, 2011:12). This was accomplished through the Butler Act of 1944, which also split schooling into primary, secondary and further education (BoE, 1944:online). The other significant component of this legislation was the requirement for three types of secondary schooling appealing to three posited types of minds: those who were technically minded;

1 In the writing of this article, I have drawn on the history of British history education written by D Cannadine, J Keating and N Sheldon, *The right kind of History* (2011) to provide the bedrock of chronology for my analysis.

those whose powers lay in academic thought and logic, and those who needed education in "concrete things rather than ideas" (BoE, 1943:3). Children would be divided into these technical, grammar and secondary modern schools through an intelligence test taken at age eleven ("eleven plus") (BoE, 1943:15-16).

The government recommendations for history content were published in a pamphlet titled, *Teaching History* in 1952 (MoE, 1952:7). The pamphlet outlined a detailed curriculum for lower secondary school history. The recommended curriculum for grammar schools was as follows:

Table 1: *Teaching History* Grammar School Curriculum 1952

Year group	Content
11 – 12	Pre-history Ancient civilisations Medieval history
12 – 13	Tudors Stuarts
13 – 14	Eighteenth century England Some American and Empire history

Source: Adapted into table format from MoE, 1952:11.

This content would then dovetail with the required material for the School Certificate examination, written at age 16. By contrast, secondary modern schools (secondary schools for those who did not qualify to enter grammar schools) were to cover history in more "concrete" terms (MoE, 1952:11). The schools would, therefore, be more likely to follow the topical approach, for example "clothing, trade, food or government", which would allow for content to be reconciled with the present day (MoE, 1952:31). The hope was that this education would expose learners to the "sweep of history" so as to put their lives "into some kind of perspective" (MoE, 1952:13-20).

The Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools published *The teaching of History* in 1950. This book was primarily a handbook for history teachers in grammar schools, who followed a more "academic type" education (Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters, 1950:xiv). The book outlined various sample syllabuses to help history departments develop their own. Two such contrasting syllabuses are listed below:

Table 2: Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters: Syllabus A

Year group	Content
11 – 12	England before 1485
12 – 13 (Upper IV B and C)	English and European History from the Discoveries to Napoleon
12 – 13 (Upper IV A)	England and Europe in Tudor and Stuart times
13 – 15 (Lower V C)	England and Europe from Captain Cook to the present day
13-15 (Lower V B)	Europe from the Renaissance to the present day
13 – 15 (Lower VA)	England, 1688 to 1815, with a digression into American history

Source: Association of Assistant Masters, 1950:26-29.

Table 3: Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters: Syllabus B

Year Group	Content
11 to 12 (Form III)	A general outline of English history by way of biographical treatment of selected individuals.
12 to 13 (Form IVB)	1) Houses and habits: 2) The spirit of adventure and exploration
13 to 14 (Form IVA)	1) Transport through the ages 2) On earning one's living
14 to 15 (Form VB)	1) An initial sketch of the interdependence of the modern world. Man's gradual growth in organization from primitive man by himself through such important landmarks as the discovery of agriculture marking the beginning of settled communities – the Greek city-states-the Roman Empire-the feudal system. With the rise of nation-state and of a commercial class, there begins in England an opposition to the unlimited authority of the Crown. Eventually authority is transferred to the King in Parliament. With the development of the Cabinet System and the Industrial Revolution there comes a great transference of power in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries to an educated democracy based on adult suffrage. 2) The lesson of the American Revolution was learned and there grew up a Second British Empire based on full self-government culminating in the Statute of Westminster, 1931, and the co-operation of the great dominion in the War of 1939-1945. 3) Meanwhile there have been various experiments in international co-operation e.g. the Congress System, the League of Nations, U.N.O.

Source: Association of Assistant Masters, 1950:38-39.

The aims of syllabus A were outlined as being to:

> *Encourage an awareness of man's achievements in the past, a lively interest in at least some features of that story, and a fuller understanding of the social, economic and political set-up of the modern world* (Association of Assistant Masters, 1950:29).

As can be seen in the difference in detail between the topics outlined for Lower V B and C versus Lower V A in syllabus A, the higher ability learners were exposed to a greater range of topics. The content outlined for the Lower IVA and VA shows a focus on political and economic rather than social histories. This shows the general view of history as being about the actions of the politically powerful. The lower set classes were focussed on making links with understanding the present day, which reflected the trend in thinking that history needed to be linked with modern experience in order to be useful. The variety in topics between the various history sets shows that learners could have a very varied experience of history even within one school. The streaming of learners amongst different kinds of schools and within schools showed a presumption that there were certain topics in history which could only be dealt with by the brightest of learners, which was underpinned by the Norwood Report. This idea would continue to influence history syllabuses until the progressive education movement gained greater influence in the 1960s and 1970s.

The overarching trajectory of syllabus A for all learners was chronological, moving from Ancient history to the present day. The syllabus focussed on British history across all of the ability groups. Although there was a substantial focus on the history of America, the other colonies received only cursory attention; European and world history was only covered in so far as it related to British history. Syllabus B contrasts quite sharply with syllabus A. It makes use of the "lines of development" approach in all of the classes whereas syllabus A focussed on a more traditional chronological narrative. syllabus B is also different in that it makes no distinction amongst different sets of history classes; all learners are therefore taught the same history. There were no explicit aims outlined for syllabus B, but they are embedded in the syllabus itself in the language of clear narrative and "lessons" that have been learnt. The aims could easily have been the same as syllabus A, but they are reached through simpler narrative. Both syllabuses, however, show evidence of a very British history bias and a tendency to overload learners with content. The lack of focus on world history for its own sake reveals an Anglo-centric view of history which correlated with Britain's sense of its precarious position

after the end of the war.

Both sample syllabuses show a correspondence with the topics as recommended by the government pamphlet, *Teaching History. The teaching of History* was published in 1950 and predates the pamphlet. The government recommendations were therefore reinforcing what was already happening in schools rather than trying to radically alter and impose new ways of doing things.

The Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) to be written at age 16 by the 40% of learners below the top 20% was introduced in 1963 and first written in 1965 (Gillard, 2012:online). The top 20% would take the General Certificate of Education at Ordinary Level (O-Level). The inspectors continued to report that there was too much content being covered in secondary schools and that the teaching was overly focussed on preparing learners for their public examinations. For most learners, their experience of history was almost entirely British. Even in secondary modern schools, where many pupils were not expected to take these external examinations, the curriculum still often tended towards a "watered down" version of the kind of intensive grammar school curriculum seen above. For most eleven to fourteen year olds, history was still filled with minutiae of British history often without any real understanding of the significance of the facts being learnt (Cannadine, 2011:127-135).

The influence of the Schools Council History Project: 1964-1979

The decline of the British Empire and the new era of European cooperation generated renewed discussions around how British national history should be taught in schools. During the 1960s and 1970s, there was a movement towards comprehensive secondary schools and away from the tripartite division of schooling according to aforementioned "eleven plus" examinations (Cannadine, 2011:141-143).

The Newsom Report, published in 1963, made recommendations for the weaker learners over the age of eleven. The Report highlighted that learners in this category should not be overloaded with content which would have no relevance to their later working lives. As such, any history taught should be focussed on the relatively recent figures and events (MoE, 1963:164). This would hopefully serve the goal of setting ordinary minds "real world of human problems" (MoE, 1963:165). This view corresponded with the approach taken

in syllabus A discussed above. Another Department of Education publication, *Towards World History* (1967) argued that secondary schools needed to teach British history so as to avoid weakening a "sense of national consciousness" (MoE, 1967:4). It did, however, also advocate that more world history needed to be taught to acknowledge the reality that "twentieth century history *is* world history" (MoE, 1967:16.) The concern of this new approach becoming unwieldy in the breadth of its content was mitigated by recommendations to study only a selected range of topics. The major contrast between these two publications and those of the 1950s was a recognition that the history syllabus needed to appeal to a wide range of learner ability rather than being differentiated between higher and lower ability learners.

A significant turning point was Mary Price's 1968 article, "History in Danger" (Price, 1968:342-347). It highlighted the possibility that history would become diluted out of the comprehensive schooling curriculum in favour of broader humanities approaches. Price argued that, as much history teaching was still "excruciatingly, dangerously, dull, and what is more, of little apparent relevance to learners", its place in the curriculum would need to be increasingly defended (Price, 1968:344). In terms of curriculum content, she also argued the relevance of history for learners would only be achieved through allowing a correct balance of world and British history. If not, history education would not actually help to "explain the world which the child is to enter" (Price, 1968:345). As Britain is "part of one world... the centre of gravity must shift and the drama be shown as played on a bigger stage" (Price, 1968:345). Price's recommendations therefore echo those made by earlier educationalists that the focus on British history needed to be tempered with a real understanding of world history.

The Curriculum Study Group was set up in 1962 and later became the Schools Council for the Curriculum and Examinations (Cannadine, 2011:138). The Schools Council History Project (SCHP) had been set up in 1972 to create a history syllabus for comprehensive schools for learners aged 13 – 16 (Shemilt, 1980:1). After four years of experimenting with new approaches to history teaching, "experimental" O Levels and CSEs were written in 1976 (Shemilt, 1980:83). In *A New Look at History* published in 1976, the SCHP gave an outline of its approaches to history teaching and curriculum development. As the programme was focussed on learners aged 13 – 16, much of the initial work done by the SCHP is not entirely relevant to my discussion of content for learners aged 11 – 14. However, the general approach taken by the project

was so influential that it had a major long-term impact on the teaching of lower secondary learners.

A New Look at History picked up on the concerns for the relevance of history in the curriculum as expressed in Mary Price's article (Price, 1968). Five "needs of learners" which can be met through history education were outlined. According to SCHP, learners have:

1. The need to understand the world in which they live.
2. The need to find their personal identity by widening their experience through the study of people of a different time and place.
3. The need to understand the process of change and continuity in human affairs.
4. The need to begin to acquire leisure interests.
5. The need to develop the ability to think critically, and to make judgements about human situations (SCHP, 1976:12).

The possible syllabuses used these needs as a framework for what kind of history should be covered. History would help to expand learners' views of "what it meant to be human because it forges connections and explores differences at one and the same time" (Shemilt, 1980:3). This was possible because through history education learners have "access to a vast pool of real human experience" (SCHP, 1976:13). These goals were fundamentally different to the goals of previous educationalists and government reformers. Whereas in the past, the teaching of history had been seen as a means to impart knowledge about what had happened in the past, SCHP history was more interested in learners understanding the "nature of the subject" (Shemilt, 1980:4).

In the 1960s and 1970s, Piaget provided a challenge to history teaching as it was argued by some that rigorous historical thought was not possible in learners under 15 (Cannadine, 2011:159). Any work which was "over-abstract in form" (Hallam, 1970:170) or required learners to hypothesise or generalise was beyond younger learners (SCHP, 1976:9). The SCHP syllabuses therefore suggested concretised versions of history in particular through using "studies in development" on a particular topic, such as medicine (SCHP, 1976:43-44). Learners would be able to understand chronology in terms of one concrete area rather than in the traditional overloaded chronological overview. The syllabus also included a "study in depth" of a past period (SCHP, 1976:46). This component allowed learners to understand change from the more distant past to the present. However, it would also allow learners to develop ideas of "empathy" and focus on strengthening skills in using evidence and "the

exercise of enquiry skills" through working with primary sources (SCHP, 1976:46). Although these ideas were not new to history teaching, as could be seen in syllabus B outlined above, the SCHP was the first to formalise this approach for the Certificate of Secondary Education (CSE) examination. This meant that the "lines of development" approach would replace the frantic cramming of content which was generally the experience of learners at CSE level.

In terms of the recommended content for 11 – 14 year olds, the SCHP provided possible schemes of work for 13 year olds, as this age group fell within their area of research. Here is one example of the suggested syllabuses:

Table 4: Schools History Project: Syllabus A

Year 13 -14	*Uses for Pupils*	*Framework*	*Example of Content*
Term 1	It helps pupils to develop analytical skills and to see what history is.	Introductory course	"What is history?"
Term 2	It helps pupils to understand people of a different time and place.	Enquiry in Depth	Either Ancient Egypt Or Edwardian Britain Or Russia 1905 – 1924
Term 3	It helps pupils to understand their present world.	Either Studies in Modern World History Or Studies in local history	Two of the following: 1. The United Nations Organisation and the sample studies of some of its problems and activities 2. World War II and a divided Europe 3. New States in Africa Industries, Communications, Recreational Facilities (football, theatre etc.)

Source: SCHP, 1976:29-30.

These sample syllabuses were devised with the goal of being somewhat self-contained; this 13 – 14 age group was the last before learners could choose

to drop history for their CSE or Ordinary (O)-Level examinations, but for many it would also be the first year of secondary schooling (SCHP, 1976:28). The SCHP was clear that each history department would need to tackle the problems of developing an appropriate syllabus according to their own particular circumstances (SCHP, 1976:28). The looseness of the content recommendations for the SCHP syllabus is in part attributable to their understanding of history as a "heap of materials which survives from the past" (SCHP, 1976:36). The notion of history as a "body of knowledge structured on chronology" which could be passed on to learners was criticised (SCHP, 1976:36). The SCHP recommendations did, however, include a balance of British history, such as "The Making of the British landscape" and true world (as opposed to just European) history, such as in the studies of the Aztecs or "new states in Africa" (SCHP, 1976:29, 31).

A comparison of the syllabus recommendations of the Assistant Masters Association in 1975 with the 1950 edition is instructive. Whereas the 1950 publication provided nine detailed sample syllabuses for schools to emulate, the 1975 edition simply laid out principles for how to approach the creation of a syllabus (Assistant Masters Association, 1975:12-13). The traditional chronological scheme outlined in the 1950 publication, which "ranges from early civilisation to the second world war" was still seen in 1975 as being "well-tried" and effective when well-taught (Assistant Masters Association, 1975:16). However, this view was tempered by a concern that the chronological approach generally left out important events in global history and focussed too heavily on British history (Assistant Masters Association, 1975:16). The recurrent problem of giving learners a solid grounding in their own country's history versus exposing them to vastly different cultures was raised as "teachers no longer have the confidence that it is British history that matters" (Assistant Masters Association, 1975:17).

> *It has been well argued that people that were highly civilised when all our fathers worshipped sticks and stones are usually mentioned in European books only when they happen to have a quarrel with emissaries of some European country* (Assistant Masters Association, 1975:18).

There was therefore an increasing recognition that learners needed to be exposed to world history for its own sake rather than simply for its bearing on British history (Assistant Masters Association, 1975:18). The shift in these concerns reveals the general shift in thinking about world history which had taken place in the years from 1950 to 1975.

Although many learners were being exposed to history in new and exciting ways, concerns about perceived lowered standards in education produced early calls for stricter government control and standards of accountability for teachers (Cannadine, 2011:178). The Prime Minister, James Callaghan, announced in a speech in 1976 at Ruskin College in Oxford that there would be a "great debate" around the question of a core curriculum and for assessing the competence of teachers (Keaton & Sheldon, 2011:12). The debate took place in the form of a series of regional conferences with employers, parents, trade unions, teachers and other interested parties. The stage was set for Margaret Thatcher's Tory government (1979-1991) to try that which had never been attempted before and introduce a national curriculum.

History in the National Curriculum: Origins

During Margaret Thatcher's period as Prime Minister, history came under new pressures as the government began setting the standards rather than allowing the curriculum to be at the discretion of individual teachers and schools. Thatcher's aims of stopping "the rot of national decline" and hoping to make Britain once again into a great nation meant that she would target history. She viewed history as a straightforward, uplifting, important "account of what happened in the past" as a story of imperial greatness and progress which should therefore be understood in terms of monarchs, politicians and important events (Cannadine, 2011:182).

In 1988, the external General Certificate of Secondary Education (GCSE) was written for the first time. It also saw the establishment of the National Curriculum for three core subjects (English, Mathematics and Science) and seven foundation subjects, including history. The first three Key Stages would be assessed in Benchmark Tests at ages seven, eleven and fourteen. Key Stage 4 would be assessed in the GCSE (ages 14 – 16) (Phillips, 1998:4). Baker, the Education Minister who oversaw the changes, was interested in history as a means of providing a "timeline from whenever you started whether it was pre-Roman Britain or Roman Britain up to today" so as to give children "an idea of the continuum of history" (Baker, 1993:167-168). He was sceptical of the value of the so-called skills approach, the focus on source work, brief periods in depth and child-centered learning and therefore called a History Working Group (January 1989-April 1990) to develop a curriculum for his vision of history, which should be at least half British history (Cannadine, 2011:194).

Although the History Working Group appointed amended their recommendations in the Final Draft to include a greater chronological focus and increased the ratio of British to world history, it steadfastly refused to make knowing particular content the chief goal of history assessment (Phillips, 1998:69). The National Curriculum would contain a programme of study which would carry "statutory force" in which the attainment targets would test "historical understanding and skills," not content (DES, 1990:8). The attainment targets were laid out in vast detail, but at the most simplified level they are summarised as:

> Attainment Target 1: Understanding history in its setting;
>
> Attainment Target 2: Understanding points of view and interpretations of history;
>
> Attainment Target 3: Acquiring and evaluating historical information;
>
> Attainment Target 4: Organising and communicating the results of historical study (DES, 1990:5).

Balance was provided in the optional history study units through the choice of another British area, one European, one American and one non-Western area of study. However, the Working Group was definite in their assertion that, while British history has been placed "at the centre" of the content recommendations, this does not mean that it should be seen as "pivotal" (DES, 1990:17). The curriculum therefore continued in the long tradition begun in the early 20th century that, while school history should focus on British history, it should leave learners with a notion of Britain in the context of the world. The recommendations followed fairly closely on the kind of syllabus envisioned by Headlam and other early reformers. There were early concerns that the curriculum was overloaded with content, but the general feeling was that the recommendations would provide an "acceptable framework" if teachers were allowed room to interpret and adapt the curriculum to their particular school context (Slater, 1991:22; 25).

The first National Curriculum for History (1991)

The National Curriculum for History was ratified in the Statutory Orders of March 1991. However, the next Education Minister, Kenneth Clarke, made a fundamental change in that history was not compulsory until age 16, but that either history "or" geography needed to be taken for GSCE (Guyver, 2012:160). This change went against the carefully ordered curriculum of the

National Working Group and resulted in a far more superficial covering of many topics. It also resulted in many topics in the 20th century being repeated for Key stage 3, GCSE and Advanced (A)-Levels (examinations written at age 18) (Cannadine, 2011:197). The decision resulted in many issues for history teaching in England down the line.

The core study units remained mostly unchanged, with the exception of the tacked on 20th century study into the Second World War. The overloaded Working Group recommendations had been dramatically slimmed down, particularly with regard to the Optional History Study Units, which were now known as Supplementary Study Units. Whereas the original recommendations would have seen all learners covering one topic on non-Western civilisations, one European, one British, one American and one local area of study, the new requirements meant that the balance of world and British history had shifted even more towards a British-focussed curriculum.

Revisions to the National Curriculum for History (1995-2007)

The revised National Curriculum for History, which was published in 1995, saw The Roman Empire and the depth study in British history being dropped as units for Key Stage 3 (11 – 14 years) (DFE, 1995:10). The idea of Supplementary Study Units was dropped and all topics became compulsory. The unit on the Second World War was broadened to be "The Twentieth century world" (DFE, 1995:10). The unit on a "turning point in history before 1914" remained as did the unit on "A past non-European society" (DFE, 1995:10). On balance, the ratio of British to world history had remained much the same.

The next revision to the National Curriculum for History came in 1999. Here, more space was given to world history. An additional unit on "a world study after 1900" replaced the unit on "The twentieth-century world" (DfEE, 1999:22). This unit could cover an individual, event or development (DfEE, 1999:22). These areas could be British, but the balance of the examples was of non-British figures or events. The examples outlined for the unit on "A world study before 1900" included a wider range of example topics including "the West African empires, Japan under the Shoguns, Tokugawa Japan, the Phoenicians, the Maoris, Muhammad and Makkah, the empires of Islam in Africa, the Sikhs and the Mahrattas, the Zulu kingdoms" (DfEE, 1999:23). These topics generally reflected the histories of the increasingly diverse British

immigrant population and Tony Blair's New Labour (1997-2007) focus on the "ethnic minorities and the disadvantaged" (Cannadine, 2010:190). The Labour concern with social justice was also expressed in the inclusion of "the changing role and status of women, the extension of the franchise in Britain, the origins and role of the United Nations, including the UN Charter and Universal Declaration of Human Rights" in the "world study after 1900" unit (DfEE, 1999:23). Although none of the examples listed here were compulsory, and there was always a more conservative and euro-centric option, the increase in the range of examples listed showed a shift in British thinking towards a more inclusive version of being British.

The 2007 curriculum revision took into account the Ajegbo Report on citizenship. It required "cultural, ethnic and religious diversity" to be built into the curriculum development (Ajegbo, 2007:38). More attention was paid to the historical impact of migration both to and from the British Isles and the conflict-solving role of European and international institutions. In particular, the slave trade and the Holocaust were expected to be dealt with in some detail (Cannadine, 2011:201).

Most recent curriculum revisions of the National Curriculum and the History Curriculum (2011-2014)

In 2011, the Department for Education appointed an expert panel to review the National Curriculum. A reworking of the curriculum in its entirety was begun. The goal was to "slim down the statutory requirements for schools" so that schools can be "given freedom over the curriculum" (DfE, 2011:6). The language of the curriculum revision is very much that of devolving the responsibility of the content of the curriculum back to schools. However, the central concern is still "to raise standards" (DfE, 2013b: n.p.) The panel outlined its aims to limit the National Curriculum to simply, "the essential knowledge (facts, concepts, principles and fundamental operations)" (DfE, 2011:6). These ideas of giving greater freedom to schools whilst heightening expectations of raised standards seem to be somewhat contradictory. The idea of "essential knowledge" is a problematic one for history and, as has been discussed, had always proved very difficult to pin down. It would remain a controversial issue in the formation of the new curriculum for history.

The revisions of the history curriculum have been contentious in the public sphere. Michael Gove, The Education Secretary, argued that too many children

were finishing compulsory education "lacking the most basic knowledge of the past because existing syllabuses had been stripped of core content" (Patton, 2011: online). Gove said that the need was for history to be reformed to ensure that "GCSE and the national curriculum are better aligned... so that our learners have a better understanding of the linear narrative of British history and Britain's impact on the world and the world's impact on Britain" (Gove in Vasagar, 2011:online). These concerns were raised in light of studies on the GCSE examination.

> *For AQA [The Examinations board], 92% of pupils studied either the American west or Germany 1919-1945 while just 8% chose British history for in-depth study. In the Edexcel exam board's version, only 4% chose Britain for their in-depth study while 96% did either Germany or the Wild West* (Vasagar, 2011:online).

Although these concerns were centred on the GCSE examination, Gove also expressed concern that "for those who leave the subject behind earlier, the picture must surely be bleaker still" (Gove in Patton, 2011: online). The history syllabus was therefore to be radically reformed. The recurring concerns about a lack of historical content being taught had been revived. The responses of learners in the study Gove references showed that "Almost twice as many learners thought Nelson was in charge at the Battle of Waterloo as named Wellington, while nine learners thought it was Napoleon" and "almost 90 per cent of the learners could not name a single British Prime Minister from the 19th century" (Patton, 2011: online). The underlying assumption was therefore still that learners who have mastered history have mastered a particular set of content. These questions were multiple-choice and in no way would have tested the learners' ability to reason and "do" history in the way that the curriculum had taught them. While it may be considered regrettable that learners' general knowledge of history was not sound, the comments Gove makes reveal a fundamentally different view of what constitutes a history education, one that revives the so-called "knowledge" side of "the knowledge versus skills" debate.

The first draft of the new history National Curriculum (2013) created a furore in the media and amongst historians and educationalists. In pursuing his goal of "rigour", Gove's new history curriculum had become dense and almost entirely British-focussed. One of the key aims of history as it was to "know and understand the story of these islands: how the British people shaped this nation and how Britain influenced the world" (DfE, 2013a:165). I have quoted the broad outline of the content to be studied at Key Stage 3 Level:

The development of the modern nation

- Britain and her Empire;
- the Enlightenment in England;
- The struggle for power in Europe from the French Revolution to the Congress of Vienna;
- The struggle for power in Britain;
- The High Victorian era;
- The development of a modern economy;
- Britain's global impact in the 19th century;
- Britain's social and cultural development during the Victorian era;
- The twentieth century;
- Britain transformed;
- The First World War;
- The 1920s and 1930s;
- The Second World War;
- Britain's retreat from Empire;
- The Cold War and the impact of Communism on Europe;
- The Attlee Government and the growth of the welfare state;
- The Windrush generation, wider new Commonwealth immigration, and the arrival of East African Asians;
- Society and social reform, including the abolition of capital punishment, the legalisation of abortion and homosexuality, and the Race Relations Act;
- Economic change and crisis, the end of the post-war consensus, and governments up to and including the election of Margaret Thatcher;
- Britain's relations with Europe, the Commonwealth, and the wider world, the end of the Cold War and the fall of the Berlin Wall (DfE, 2013a:169-171).

What is particularly significant is that the attainment targets had been reworked to require that "By the end of each key stage, pupils are expected to know, apply and understand the matters, skills and processes specified in the relevant programme of study" (DfE, 2013a:165). Although skills are included here, the primary outline in the various programme of study is of a list of content points to be studied. As such, this curriculum demonstrated a return to the idea of history as a "narrative" of what had happened and the way for it to be assessed as factual recall.

The responses from the public were vehemently against the curriculum. In particular, there was a concern about the "Anglo-centric" nature of the content, its almost entirely political focus, as well as the overloaded content outline (Mansell, 2013:online). It was classed as being "old-fashioned" and more akin to the curriculum of the grammar schools of the 1950s (Boffey, 2013:online).

The Historical Association (HA) went about gathering responses through holding forums across England with over 500 teachers, an online forum with over 100 written responses and an online poll with over 1600 responses. They also made national curriculum the focus of the HA annual in-depth survey of history teaching in secondary schools as well as carrying out a short survey of primary teacher's responses to the draft curriculum (HA, 2013:online). The responses were overwhelmingly critical of the draft curriculum with "only 4% responding that the proposed curriculum was a positive change" (HA, 2013:online). The detailed response entered by the Historical Association argued forcefully that the outlined content would not achieve the aims of the curriculum (HA, 2013:online). Rather than providing the "freedom" which the curriculum reform had promised, the history curriculum "constrains teachers more than ever" (HA, 2013:online). Through alluding to the history of the national curriculum itself and the pitfalls that had been overcome in the past, the Historical Association response made it very clear that the draft curriculum did not learn from the strengths of the previous national curriculum and was a massive step backwards (HA, 2013:online).

The concerns raised by the Historical Association were echoed by, among others, Sir David Cannadine, the primary author of *The right kind of History* (2011). This work is a detailed history of history education in England. He argued that revising the national curriculum would not necessarily solve the problems facing history education in England. Cannadine believed that the national curriculum in its 2007 form had as good a balance of content as could be expected, as it covered a "long, sequential span of the nation's history from the early times to the present" while leaving "ample provision for European history across a similarly broad span and of the history of the world beyond" (Cannadine, 2011:233). He urged instead for a review of the time allowed in the curriculum for history teaching and a decision to extend history as a compulsory subject until age 16 (Cannadine, 2011:236). Cannadine's overarching recommendation to reformers of the curriculum was that they need to pay attention to the history of history education before setting out to change things (2011:229-230). This seems to have gone largely unheard by Gove and those who drew up the draft curriculum. It is not surprising then that Cannadine's voice joined the chorus of criticism against the draft curriculum (Mansell, 2013:online).

Given the dissatisfaction with the draft history curriculum, Gove had no choice but to order the redraft of the curriculum (Mansell, 2013:online). The

revised curriculum was much more closely based on the previous national curriculum. The long lists of specific content were now included as examples rather than requirements (Mansell, 2013:online). The core topics for study for Key Stage 3 are:

- The development of the church, state and society in Medieval Britain (1066-1509);
- The development of the church, state and society in Britain (1509-1745);
- Ideas, political power, industry and empire: Britain (1745-1901);
- Challenges for Britain, Europe and the wider world (1901 to the present day);
- A local history study;
- The study of an aspect or theme in British history that consolidates and extends pupil's chronological knowledge from before 1066;
- A study of at least one significant society or issue in world history and its interconnections with other world developments (DfE, 2014:2-5).

The only specified content for these is that the Holocaust needs to be taught in the section on "Challenges for Britain" (DfE, 2014:4). The new curriculum was therefore essentially an about turn on the part of the government and was met with approval. It again allows for a balance of local, national and world history and provides more freedom for teachers.

Conclusion: Lessons for South Africa

In his 2012 paper critiquing the new Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAPS) document for Further Education and Training History, Peter Kallaway argues, much as David Cannadine has done, that effective revision of the history curriculum in South Africa requires a careful study of the history of history education in the country (Kallaway, 2012:31). One should also question any underlying purpose put forward in curriculum documents or any echo in SADTU's call for history to be compulsory that the history classroom's purpose is to "politically inculcate contemporary values" (Kallaway, 2012:28). If under apartheid, history was used to bolster the underlying ideologies of the policy, it is dangerous to use the history classroom unquestioningly in a similar way to provide support for vested interests in South Africa today (Kallaway, 2012:28, 30). Although history is perhaps the most inescapably ideological school subject, the major problem of using it so blatantly to serve the current political ideology is that it will produce narrow history teaching, which cannot do justice to either its substantive or procedural nature.

The ideas of the British Schools Council History Project revolutionised the purpose of history education as not simply the learning of a chronological narrative, but rather "the active and engaged exploration of the structure and forms of historical knowledge, using concepts and attendant processes" (Counsell, 2011:207-217). Writers such as Michael Young argue for a return to a view of subjects as drawing on disciplinary concepts which need to be sequenced, selected and organised according to "pedagogic criteria" (Young, 2013:109). History is not merely the selection of a narrative sequence of facts which will bolster either the "celebratory version of British past" (Counsell, 2011:201) which Gove tried to engender through his British only curriculum, or the "celebration" of South Africa's past called for by SADTU (2014:2). Gove's concern about a lack of knowledge of certain facts of British history is echoed in SADTU's concern that young South Africans cannot explain about the "brutal murder of Dingaan and the history of Shaka" (2014:6). However, good history teaching allows learners to understand how histories are created through an understanding of different interpretations rather than the imparting of a particular national story (Counsell, 2014:12 July). Although many history teachers in South Africa would hope that the learners in their classes would be less judgemental, less racist and sexist and better able to understand the world around them, this is not the "primary purpose" of history education.

The initial denial of history as a subject in place of the learning area of the Social Sciences in *Curriculum 2005* was defended by the ANC because "the Nationalists had always needed history to shore up at times a precarious position. The ANC's never been in such a precarious position since 1994, so it's got less of a need" (Grundlingh (2010) in Siebörger, 2012:147). The "liberationist" aims of *Curriculum 2005* (Siebörger, 2012:147) reflected the belief that radical politics should be expressed through radical education (Young, 2012:online). Perhaps the urgency of the current discussion about making history a compulsory FET subject (i.e. beyond the current compulsory age in South Africa and England) reflects a shift in the ANC's unassailable position and an increasing need for a story to enhance the goal of nation building. Although history does possess the power to do this, it seems doubtful whether SADTU's conception of history as being "taught in unbiased way that presents all the facts as they happened" (SADTU, 2014:3) (the caveat to this being that the unbiased version is the one which SADTU ANC approves) could be achieved. Instead, history is at risk as being a political football in a game where those best qualified to regulate it: history educationalists, historians and history teachers, are excluded.

The discussion of history as a compulsory subject as taught in England reveals that many of the debates that rage in South Africa around content versus skills, the role of history as forming national consciousness and the question of balancing world and national history are not unique. At the *Schools History Project Annual Conference*[2] in July 2014, there was a spirit of exultation amongst both teachers and educationalists at the overturning of what was perceived as government meddling (and ignorance) in the first draft of the 2013 National Curriculum. In particular, there was a strong sense that history should not be allowed to serve a purely instrumental purpose in engendering national pride. In terms of the method of teaching, the importance of maintaining the link to history as a discipline which allows for interpretation was stressed; in terms of content, there was a clear sense that there needed to be a balance between British and world history in order to give learners an even-handed sense of their own position in the world. The presence of a strong community of educationalists, teachers and historians in the discussions around history curriculum in Britain has ensured that the government's curriculum revisions do not take place without considerable public debate.

The calls for history to be a compulsory subject in South Africa provide opportunities for the history community of South Africa to engage with a similar discussion around the role of history in this country, but also to consider afresh what the principles are by which curriculum content is chosen, given the circular patterns so evident in this survey and the many lessons to be learned about political interference.

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