A Framework for Researching Syllabus Development and Curriculum Change

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The framework in Figure 1 below is a very simple representation of how syllabuses are developed, and its generic nature would suggest that it could be applied to curriculum investigation generally. It is proposed that any understanding of syllabus development should involve the environment in which it was developed, the processes involved in syllabus development, the individuals associated with the development of syllabuses and their life experiences, and the actual text that is produced. The life experiences of the researcher involved in turn influence the manner in which the area is investigated.

Although seemingly simplistic, the segments of the framework developed as a result of grounded research studying changes in social education syllabuses in New South Wales (NSW) over a 22-year period from 1967 to 1989, and proved a useful guide to understanding an extremely complex set of events. The SOSE or social education (HSIE or Human Society and Its Environment in NSW) area of the curriculum was examined from the perspective of how it changed over this period, why it changed and how the changes inform current practice. Working with quite a number of different HSIE syllabuses at the primary and secondary level led to questioning the connections between them and consequently the histories of these syllabuses. The impetus for this study was to inform current practice. As Popkewitz points out:

Our questions about the present require that we recognise that the present is not just our immediate experiences and practices. Part of our historical consciousness is to recognise that the past is a part of our everyday discourse, structuring what can be said and the possibilities and challenges of our times. (Popkewitz, 1987, p.1)

The framework evolved from two directions. Firstly, from reading literature in the policy, curriculum, educational history, social science pedagogy, and sociology areas, and examining primary documents such as committee minutes. Secondly it evolved from talking to syllabus committee members from the period, reading their responses to a survey they were sent, and examining the syllabuses produced. There were 19 interviews held and 61 surveys collected, all of which were kept anonymous. A brief overview of the sorts of issues involved, along with a case study of a specific syllabus, is provided.

Environment

The facets of the environment for syllabus development or syllabus change comprise the social, political, economic, and cultural factors of the period and the ideology in educational circles that is pre-eminent at the time. These are all inter-related. In the period from 1967 to 1989 in Australia there was economic plenty followed by economic shortfall, and social welfare programs in abundance followed by cuts in social welfare programs. It was a period of increased diversification of culture in the population of Australia, as well as acknowledgment of the Indigenous contribution to Australian culture. There were also some major shifts in the thinking as to what mass education should aspire to achieve. These were all factors shaping school syllabuses. There are a variety of studies from Western education that provide examples of some of the facets involved in this aspect of curriculum development.
Studies such as those of Kliebard (1987) offer an explanation of curriculum based on differing philosophies of education. In his view curriculum development in America was explained by three major reform movements arising at the turn of the twentieth century (the child-study movement, social efficiency educators and the social meliorists) that were aligned against the traditional humanist curriculum. He argued that the humanists wanted to maintain the status quo and...
were the guardians of a tradition linked to intellectual reasoning and thus to the Western cultural heritage. They exerted much power through their standing in the academic world. One group contesting the supremacy of the humanists in the curriculum was the child-study movement. Advocates promoted a curriculum reformed along the lines of the natural order of development of the child. They felt that the curriculum could be adapted to the natural needs and interests of the child and that the school should encourage but not direct the child. The second reform group, called by Kliebard the social efficiency educators, were strongly influenced by scientific methodology and were intent on creating an efficient, smoothly running society. Techniques of industry were to be applied to schools and the curriculum was to be made more directly functional to adult roles. The third reform group were the social meliorists. They saw the school as a major force for social change and social justice. This group came to the fore at the end of the 1920s and was associated with social educators like George Counts (1952) and Harold Rugg (1936) in the United States. In Kliebard’s view, the present curriculum is the result of conflict among the four philosophies of education:

In the end, what became the American curriculum was not the result of any decisive victory by any of the contending parties, but a loose, largely unarticulated, and not very tidy compromise (p.29).

Another researcher, Goodson (1983), examined the development of geography, biology, ‘rural studies’ and ‘environmental studies’ as they became established subjects in schools. He postulated that school subjects belonged to one of three traditions—academic, utilitarian or pedagogic—and that advocates of these subjects used these traditions at various times to advocate their subjects and to defend them against contenders. As an example, here in Australia the debate between the traditional history teachers and those teachers advocating the new history approach in the 1970s reflected a debate between academic and the utilitarian philosophies (Taylor, 2000).

In the area of social education specifically, Johnson (1989) pointed out that the aim of the field he called ‘social studies’ varied between educating for social commitment and educating for social comprehension. Similarly, Wheeler (1967) argued that curriculum aims may be put into two broad categories: aims concerned with producing a certain type of person, and aims concerned with producing people capable of fulfilling a certain role.

These studies provide explanation primarily from a philosophical standpoint. There are also many studies, particularly those based in the policy field, which provide a close examination of the specific political, cultural and economic forces influencing the school curriculum. Combleth and Waugh’s (1995) study of the implementation of social studies curriculum in New York and California demonstrated not only the clashing ideologies associated with the portrayal of multicultural America, but also the economic and political background, and the various factions associated with these different views. Aldrich (1996; 1995) provided evidence of the political and economic forces involved in developing the national curriculum as well as its conservative, nation-building citizenship focus. A similar theme is echoed in Phillips’ (1996) study of the increased emphasis on a traditional view of national culture in the curriculum of the UK. On the other hand, Ball and Bowe (1992) criticised the economic, market-led rationale of the national curriculum. Ball (1994) considers implications of both of these facets of curriculum making in his Education Reform: A Critical and Post-Structural Approach.

Closer to home, the Australian national profiling exercise, a homegrown version of a national curriculum, has been examined from the viewpoints of the political, economic and social forces involved (Ellerton & Clements, 1994; Marsh, 1994). Kennedy (1995) identified economic imperatives as encouraging curriculum initiatives in Great Britain, the United States and Australia in the late 1980s, while Green and Beavis (1996) argued that nationalism and a concern to build an Australian identity and citizenship was a thread running through Australian syllabuses in English. Reports such as that of the Civics Expert Group (1994) promoted similar views in history syllabuses.

Process Explanations

All change cannot be explained by the environment in which it occurred. Syllabus committees are often sheltered from the economic and social realities by administrative constraints or processes. In the 1970s, syllabuses were devised in skeletal form to enable teachers to create relevant school-based programs. In the social science area they often incorporated inquiry approaches and encouraged higher conceptual levels of understanding. These appeared in a period when funds for schools were being cut and there was little professional support for implementation. The documents were ‘out of sync’ with the economic, political and social environment and, as a consequence, some schools floundered.
Ball (1990) developed a schema of associated factors needed for any meaningful analysis of change in policy-making in education. He argued that the relations of change (the power struggles between social groups and the differing vested interests, resources and influence) and the structures of change (the institutions, organisations, procedures, roles and formal channels of policy-making) were important facets for analysis. Bowe, Ball and Gold (1992) argued that syllabuses were the result of struggle and compromise 'made up of groups of actors working within different sites...(and) in competition for control of the representation of policy'. At this level of understanding of curriculum change, Creighton (1983) noted a number of limitations of decision-making within committees. These included failure to give systematic coverage to issues, members pushing their predetermined conclusions, proneness to rejecting innovations, personal feelings of members that they are reluctant to reveal, excessive time taken to make decisions, domination by a few members, and the production of superficial findings and group conformity in order to accommodate all interests.

Various groups are instrumental in promoting change in school subjects. Goodson (1983) pointed to the importance of university pressure groups, particularly in providing the academic status that seemed to be so important for a subject in establishing school-based esteem, and which in turn encouraged students to take a particular subject. In his examination of the development of modern languages, Radford (1985) indicated that the lack of academic prestige afforded to modern languages in the nineteenth century, even when offered at Cambridge in 1886, delayed the introduction of such study in schools. Universities also exert indirect influence on school subjects through control of developments in the subject field, through the preparation of teachers, the publication of textbooks in the field, and the establishment of entrance requirements into university courses (Rosenthal & Bybee, 1987). For a large part of the twentieth century in NSW, the University of Sydney had considerable influence on secondary school syllabuses, particularly through membership on syllabus committees (Brock, 1996). This influence waned in the 1990s when the new Board of Studies established syllabus committees based on writing teams informed by representative advisory groups (Board of Studies, Corporate Plan, 1991.)

The professional associations also are influential in the development of school subjects. Ball examined the National Association for the Teaching of English in the 1960s and 1970s and its influence on school curricula. McCulloch (1989) examined the considerable role of the Association of Heads of Secondary Technical Schools in promoting curriculum for technical education in England. Likewise Goodson (1983) recognised the importance of the Association of Teachers of Gardening and Rural Subjects in the promotion of rural studies. Teacher associations were not the only groups involved in negotiating school syllabuses. Whitty (1985) recognised the lobbying of the Royal Geographical Society against social studies in secondary modern schools in the 1950s.

Cooper (1984), in his study of a new mathematics curriculum in the United Kingdom, found the personal relations between people pursuing the various segments of the subject (with their distinct perspectives and material interests), and their alliances with groups inside and outside the subject as the major factors in explaining change in that area. Similarly, Lybarger (1987) found that a number of people on the 1916 Committee on Social Studies in the United States were interested in charity work, partly explaining the reasoning behind that committee's argument that the needs of students should be a criterion when devising social studies curriculum.

Administrative structures also influence school curriculum. In a study by Stray (1985), the change from grammar school to comprehensive school resulted in changes in the administrative hierarchy whereby pastoral concerns, as opposed to subject specialist concerns, became of major importance. In his study in one school in the 1970s, this administrative change led to the downgrading of classics education.

Australian studies of curriculum indicate that administrative concerns feature prominently. Young (1993) showed that the NSW Board of Studies (BOS), the curriculum committee of the Board, the Key Learning Curriculum Committee for Human Society and Its Environment, the Years 7–10 History syllabus committee, professional historians, historical and professional associations were all instrumental in producing a new junior history syllabus in New South Wales in 1996. However, the Board of Studies had mandated the hours to be devoted to history, had decreed that a key learning structure would be established, and had also laid down the assessment procedures, and it was these administrative constraints that were the major forces in developing a syllabus document. Brock (1996), in his study of the development of secondary English curriculum in New South Wales, also noted the importance of the directives from the Secondary Schools Board (SSB) when designing syllabuses, particularly in allocating content for particular
levels of study. In an earlier period Graham (1995) specified the importance of the Inspector-General and his team of school inspectors in establishing curriculum in Western Australia. Also in Western Australia, but in a different era, Marsh (1987) pointed to the influence of the Education Department and the external examination and certification boards, as well as the professional associations, the tertiary institutions, and the textbook publishers and authors, on the development of a senior school geography curriculum. The list grows even longer in his later study of groups and influences involved in the national profiling exercise, with federal agencies, national commissions and councils, and State accreditation and assessment agencies often playing a large part in the process (Marsh, 1994).

What has become most obvious, however, is the increased role of politicians in curriculum development. There was some foretaste of this in the 1970s with the intervention of the Premier of Queensland and the consequent banning of 'Man: A Course of Study' (MACOS) in schools because of pressure from conservative religious groups. Winder (1991) found that in NSW, curriculum was influenced by direct party politics, the electoral platform policies of a political party and policy created by an oligarchy within a party. He also found that interest groups, such as teacher unions and parent organisations, and the bureaucracy, also affect education policies.

Individuals

Archer (1985) wrote of the 'politics of aggregation' or the 'dumb pressure of numbers' whereby educational demography is shaped by the sum of unorganised individual actions. There are a number of studies of the individuals involved in curriculum change. Ivor Goodson and Rob Walker (1991) edited a collection of studies of curriculum in 1991, exploring the historical changes in curriculum study since the 1970s. Their overall theme was that people play a central role in the educational process and in educational systems. The focus on the personal nature of action and interaction was a point of access into broader social contexts and structures. As an example, Goodson's (1983) study of the school subject 'rural studies' explored the development of a school subject that was, in the 1920s, a utilitarian subject based on gardening, through to its being offered in A and O levels within environmental studies in the 1970s in the United Kingdom. He collected the life histories of the innovators of change in the subject as well as those who represented the traditions of the subject.

One aspect of the personal side of syllabus construction is the importance that teachers attach to their teaching subject. Teachers' identities can be established by their teaching subjects and their various teaching methods. Changes to these can sometimes be seen as personal threats (Ball & Goodson, 1985). David Saxe (1991) examined the social construction of social studies in Social Studies in Schools. He examined the documentation of the establishment of 'social studies' as a school subject, but also looked at the role of particular personalities and their individual interests. Cooper (1984), in his study of a new mathematics curriculum in the United Kingdom, saw relations among people pursuing the various segments of the subject, and their alliances with groups inside and outside the subject, as the major explanatory factor for changes in the curriculum. Issues such as perceived career consequences for individuals also affected curriculum change.

The danger with a narrow focus on the people involved in the process is that it can atomise the study and make what is a very complex issue seem too simple. Goodson (1991; 1987; 1983) not only collected the life histories of the innovators of change in the school subject (as well as those who represented the traditions of the subject) but also developed a detailed documentary history of the school subject and of the conflicts over the innovations. He saw the combination of a group of life stories and a subject history as a strategy to triangulate the data and thereby strengthen the findings. As he noted, curriculum change comes from 'a story of action within a theory of context' (2000). No doubt we can all name an insightful or enterprising individual who appears to have a major force on curriculum development at some point.

Syllabus Text

The syllabus text itself can be a meaningful story. The text of syllabus documents can be deconstructed. The term 'deconstruction' was first coined by Derrida (1973) to indicate the relationship between experience and language. He argued that deconstruction of text lays bare the construction of the text and reveals multitudes of meanings and interpretations. It is not simply understood as ideologically constructed, but is seen as a series of narratives superimposed upon each other with layers of story merged and separated (Pinar & Reynolds, 1992). Wade (1993) has categorised studies analysing school texts in these ways as being divided into three major types.

There are those where the purpose is to describe the attributes of a given topic, such as
Fleming’s (1983) study that attempted to ascertain the extent to which nuclear war was mentioned in texts. In the present study of NSW syllabuses this entailed tracking certain concepts and themes through a variety of syllabuses. For example, none of the history syllabuses mentioned ‘poverty’ or ‘wealth’. Nor was ‘duty’, ‘morality’, ‘justice’ or ‘welfare’ mentioned in history syllabuses. These results would seem to suggest that social values were not stressed in history syllabuses of this period, whereas in the early 1970s these terms began to emerge, at least in junior geography.

Then there are studies whose purpose is to make inferences about the causes of the findings. For example, Gilbert’s (1984) study of school syllabuses and texts was to ascertain the underlying ideology of these texts. Once again, looking at the present study of NSW syllabus change, it is insightful that the term ‘modern history’ has meant different things at different periods of time. The 1962 junior history course in NSW was called Modern History with topics from the fifteenth century (New South Wales Department of Education for the Secondary Schools Board, 1962). This document justified the choice of content by pointing out that these topics were relevant to present-day society because they helped students understand developments in politics, industry and science which affected everyday life: ‘It is felt that teachers and students are most interested in the past that affects the present’ (New South Wales Department of Education for Secondary Schools Board, p.1).

The 1978 senior Modern History syllabus began with topics on the French Revolution in the eighteenth century. When the next syllabus was developed, in the early 1980s, many of the arguments held in the syllabus committee centred on this issue of when modern history really began and essentially why we study modern history. Could ‘modern’ be later than the French Revolution? What will a citizen of the twenty-first century need to know about the past of his/her society to better understand the present? The 1982 junior syllabus claimed that twentieth century world history was valuable as an aid to ‘assist students to understand their present world’ (Secondary Schools Board, p.18), thus implying that only knowledge of the twentieth century was important to contemporary life. Thus, while attempting to make their study contemporary and relevant to current society, historians were on shifting ground in defining the content and purpose of history. This represented changes in the philosophy behind what was being taught.

Lastly, there are those studies whose purpose was that of making inferences about the effects of text upon students. For example, Luke (1988) studied the influence of the Dick and Jane school texts on social relations and perceptions of what counted as appropriate reading. Examination of the text of some NSW geography syllabuses provides insight into how reading the text of a syllabus can change perceptions of what that subject could involve. Geography in the 1960s was encouraged as an active study of the local area. In the 1966 junior geography syllabus, teachers were encouraged to promote interest by:

...the use of active methods, such as observation outside the classroom, practical work in the construction and interpretation of maps and graphs, and description from photographs and films. (New South Wales Department of Education for the Secondary Schools Board, p.2)

However, terms associated with student activity thereafter began to disappear from the ensuing syllabuses. The 1975 syllabus incorporated the skill of ‘observation and recognition of phenomena in real and representative form’ (Secondary Schools Board, p.5), but it tended to emphasise cognitive skills. However, although the words ‘experience’ or ‘active’ were rarely used in the 1984 syllabus, the photographs in this syllabus emphasised the active nature of geographic study. By adding a different medium to the language, a different perception of the intended study can be gained. Without the photographs it appeared that the child’s own experiences were not very important in the study of geography. The pictures and the text sent out different messages. This is a fascinating example of how either pictures or language can belie intended meaning.

The following study provides more specific details of how consideration of all four facets—the environment, the process, the individuals and the syllabus text—have to be considered to appreciate the true complexity of syllabus development. It also reflects the researcher’s interests and concerns in the choice of subject matter and approach to gathering information.

A Case Study—The 1986 Modern History Syllabus in NSW

Environment

The revision of the 1986 Modern History syllabus in NSW began in 1981. It was a period of economic downturn and accountability had become a catchcry. Becher (1984) categorised the period as a time of ‘keeping down budgets and keeping up appearances’ (p. 7).
In the curriculum area this meant that the wide variety of course offerings catering to individual differences and various school needs was to be curtailed. The federally funded Curriculum Development Centre in Canberra produced a model for a core curriculum in 1980. This proved to be a curiosity and was by no means adopted en masse, but it was nevertheless an indicator of the feelings of the time. In NSW the diversity offered by the 1973 Modern History syllabus was to be constrained. Comparative assessment of the results achieved by this diversity had proved to be impossible. Using Kliebard’s (1987) terminology, it was a period of ‘social efficiency’. The unprecedented numbers of students now going on to complete secondary education also put new demands on the senior syllabuses. For a start, senior students were now experiencing literacy difficulties (Barcan, 1980).

Process

The examination controversy (the lack of ability to compare students doing different options in the course) and the lack of a suitable course for 2 Unit general, lower ability, students put pressure on the Modern History Syllabus Committee to undertake a major review as quickly as possible. The Board of Secondary School Studies (BSSS) applied direct pressure. At the end of 1981 the chairman of the Modern History Syllabus Committee, Bruce Mitchell from the University of New England, was shown a paper, presumably by the BSSS, which was a ‘devastating critique’ (Carter, 1991) on the marking and scaling procedure used in Modern History at the time. Accordingly, at the end of 1981, he gave an undertaking to the BSSS that the Modern History Syllabus Committee would conduct a major review of the Modern History syllabus (Mitchell, 1983). In 1982 some short-term revisions were made to the options and a major review was undertaken. He dismissed the effectiveness of the changes made in the 1970s, arguing that the addition of options to the World History syllabus was undertaken without a consideration of the whole subject or of the problems that options would create. Mitchell claimed that the review he instituted was the first major review since the revision of the mid-1950s.

A research questionnaire by the syllabus committee was sent to all schools in 1981, and they received data from 389 schools. One of the main aims of this review was to ensure that all candidates were treated fairly and consistently in the examining process. Thus what should be done about assessment was a major issue, but Mitchell noted four other issues for review. A general course was required to cater for the large proportion of Year 11 and 12 students who did not go on to tertiary level education. Many of these students did not have the literary skills to write history essays. The reviewers also needed to consider whether it was better to have a two-year course or more one-year courses, whether there should be alternative courses or options, and if a common course was agreed upon, what form this should take. Mitchell concluded that:

There is a perceived social need to have a Modern History course which has a core of skills and information appropriate for today’s young students and which can easily, fairly and consistently be examined in a state-wide external system. (p.44)

It was a completely new syllabus with many innovations, including its aims and objectives, core studies, and examination with some non-essay questions for the first time. It was described as a syllabus that all teachers could teach well and that could be examined fairly and consistently. It was revolutionary in some ways. Inquiry-based learning, a key feature of social science methodology, was one of its foundations (Anonymous survey—member of the syllabus committee). It was strongly influenced by similar developments in the junior History 7–10 syllabus (Carter, 1991).

It was, however, a syllabus which took a number of years to develop, and the final product emerged after bitter battles. The main disagreements were between teachers who wanted relevant courses which even less academically gifted students could complete, and academics who wanted to maintain some of the traditional content area and approaches of the academic subject. Many teachers were also concerned because they had invested time and energy into the options and now they were to be changed. The new skills-based approach meant that much work had to be done on assessment techniques (McMullen, 1986). According to one academic member of the committee:

By the time I left in 1984 the teachers were well in control...there was a view that we should be interested in areas which were of economic or political importance rather than those which were perhaps more culturally significant...and some of the people on the committee would have liked to have a content free syllabus if they could, and that left me shuddering quite frankly. (Interview—anonymous, 1997)

The NSW history consultant, Laurie Tabart, the chairman, and the History Teachers Association (HTA) members were mainly
responsible for the structure and the wording of this syllabus. The non-essay assessment was derived from the British Schools Council History 13–16 project. The representatives of the universities, the representative of the headmasters’ conference, the independent schools and many teachers objected to the lack of nineteenth century material advocated by the HTA. The university group and the representative of the headmasters’ conferences also objected to the pervasive ‘process of inquiry’ approach of the syllabus (Carter, 1991). Their differing philosophies about the purpose of the syllabus naturally led to conflict. A member of the geography syllabus committee recalled: ‘The history syllabus committee was in a terrible mess. We heard about it from hearsay. They just couldn’t agree on anything’ (Interview—anonymous, 1996).

The depth of feeling associated with the changes can be gauged by the newspaper report (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1984) that some universities were considering not recognising the syllabus for admission purposes unless some nineteenth century content was included. One syllabus committee member remembers the constant arguments: ‘I remember the bitterness... we argued and argued and argued (Interview—anonymous, 1997).

Another syllabus committee member recalled the discussion on the core study as being ‘log jammed’ until World War One was decided upon as a core study. This decision was based mainly on the fact that there were plenty of resources and that it could, given the upsurge of interest in ANZAC Day, ‘also grab students emotionally’. It was to be heavily evidence-based, and World War One had plenty of material from which to choose (Interview—anonymous, 1996).

A draft syllabus was sent to schools for comment in 1984. There were calls for the inclusion of nineteenth century content, examination of the core study (which had been established as World War One), the nature and range of content in Modern World Studies, and assessment procedures. There were reports in the press at the time and an editorial in the Sydney Morning Herald claiming that history had become trivial pursuit:

The tired old warhorse relevance is being dragged out once more to do battle for educationists who are overly concerned about levelling down the education system and taking the intellectual content out of it. (Sydney Morning Herald, 7 December 1984.)

There was also a furore about the abolition of the nineteenth century history section of the paper (Sydney Morning Herald, 5 December 1984).

At the March 1985 meeting the Modern History Syllabus Committee chose a new structure for Section C, and it included four nineteenth century electives and retained the original eight twentieth century electives. The BSSS’s Planning and Development Committee announced that the revisions would be examined by tertiary institutions, especially the University of Sydney. There was consternation from teacher representatives on the syllabus committee. This special preview appeared to indicate that the university sector had some special overriding influence over the content of the syllabus (Carter, 1991). A special meeting for the universities was held on 29 May 1985. The meeting comprised four designated committee members and representatives of the five NSW universities (the University of Sydney, the University of New England, the University of Newcastle, New South Wales University, and Macquarie University). It was chaired by Bob Winder, the Director General of Education at that time. The university concern was with both the nature and the quality of the syllabus (Paige, 1985). The universities saw the syllabus as pragmatic, catering for students without catering for the development of an historical perspective (Carter, 1991). They refused the NSW Teachers’ Federation’s request for an observer at this meeting. The Federation then passed a resolution condemning what they called the undue influence of university representatives on the syllabus committee:

This conference of Syllabus/K–12 Committee Representatives rejects any influence brought to bear on the work of syllabus committees by tertiary institutions. This Conference reaffirms that the present composition of syllabus committees adequately represents the interest of tertiary institutions and that these institutions should voice their opinions on syllabus matters through their representatives on the committees. (Resolution of the Board/Syllabus Committee K–12 Committee Teachers’ Federation Representatives conference, Gazebo Hotel, 20 June 1985.)

After negotiation, the syllabus included a separate nineteenth century section as well as a twentieth century section.

**Individuals**

Gradually the drama dissipated and Sam Weller, a BSSS curriculum officer who had been brought in
to help mediate, was less needed in these meetings. Laurie Tabart, the NSW history consultant, worked on the wording, and the syllabus was produced (Interview—anonymous, member of Modern History Syllabus Committee, 1996).

The British Schools Council History Project was much admired in HTA and it strongly influenced the design and content of the new syllabus (Carter, 1991). Although essays were still used, there were also structured essays, where the essay questions were broken down into manageable segments for students and also extended objective questions. The examining pattern reflected the development in source-based history test technology, and visits to Sydney by members of the British School Council History project such as Henry MacIntosh, Secretary of the Southern Examination Board (1987), and John Fines, an eminent history educator who had worked on the project and had developed skills questions for the A level examination (1988). It also reflected the time spent in the United Kingdom by Laurie Tabart (1984) and Elizabeth Ward (1987), both members of the HTA and the syllabus committee, who helped refine the processes for effective testing of specifically defined skills (Ward, 1993). It was certainly influenced by the History 13–16 project, modified to suit local conditions and to use existing syllabus resources.

Syllabus Text

However, it was very fragmented and there was confusing programming of the syllabus. The traditional sequence, using chronological content as the basis, would see the ‘core study’ come first in the program, to be followed by the Inter-War Studies and then the Modern World Studies. A sequential approach to assessment—from simple to complex—would see the core study first (document analysis/short questions), followed by the Post World War Two, World Studies or Nineteenth Century Studies (structured essays) and then the Inter-War National Studies (open response essay). The text of the syllabus indicates the lack of cohesion in the approach to its compilation.

Another problem was that some saw the historiography, particularly in relation to the history of the United States, as twenty years out of date (Bastian, 1990). One historian, Tyrell (1990), found the core curriculum of World War One rather unimportant from the perspective of the 1990s. Tyrell argued that the limited study of the nineteenth century indicated a disturbing lack of depth to the syllabus. Complaints like these are readily understood in the broader context. Fewer university representatives in proportion to teachers on the syllabus committees had meant less contact with current academic thinking. This had been exacerbated in recent years by the increased workload of academics, a workload that needed to be justified in terms of grants and financial gains for the universities and which continues to be a problem.

The unwillingness of many academic historians to serve on examination or syllabus committee, to make themselves available for inservice sessions or to write for teaching journal, because they are not seen as academic or prestigious enough is a problem which the profession needs to seriously address. (Bastian, 1990, p.52)

The text thus also demonstrates the philosophical approaches of its writers, with a more child-centred, utilitarian approach triumphing over a humanist approach.

The syllabus was finally released in 1986 and was examined in the Higher School Certificate (HSC) for the first time in 1988. This new Modern History syllabus was strongly influenced by the aims, objectives and philosophy of the 7–10 History syllabus. The focus was on people and the evidence of how they thought and acted in the past. It involved inquiry and asked why. The objectives were listed under the headings of knowledge, skills and attitude. The designers began with basic principles: What is Modern History? What contribution does it make? What are its aims and objectives? There was also an emphasis on alternative means of assessment and ways of assessing a broad range of skills.

Conclusion

The case study thus demonstrates some of the complexities of syllabus development and curriculum change. It highlights the interrelationships between and within the environment of syllabus change, the processes of syllabus change, the individuals associated with syllabus change and the understandings elicited by examining textual changes in syllabuses, and justifies the value of using such a framework. There are numerous examples of research into various elements of the process of syllabus and curriculum development, much of this research emanating from the environment, processes of research and the individual life experiences (including texts read) and interests of the researcher himself/herself. Research into professional associations, key figures, committee procedures, the economic constraints, and so on,
provide guidance as to why there is curriculum change. To ensure that these studies can be validly interpreted, the overall framework suggested in this paper can be used as a contextual tool.

References


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