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The fourth dimension: Constructions of the identity of history

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Introduction

THE UNRESOLVED TENSION between the professional practice of a school subject and society’s desire for its children to learn something about that subject has been an important and longstanding issue in the field of curriculum theory (Leinhardt, Stainton & Virji, 1994; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1996). Following Hirst (1975), Steedman (1988) argues that the traditional notion of a liberal education was that the content of school subjects should be based on the knowledge in the disciplines underpinning those subjects. The argument that school subjects ought to reflect their academic disciplines was exemplified during curriculum debates in the United States during the 1980s and 1990s. Elmore and Sykes (1992) concluded the most successful interventions in identifying what knowledge was of most worth for schools came from “the guardians of the ancient tradition of power and reason and the finest elements of Western cultural heritage” whose argument was that “the liberal learning represented in the college curriculum is the best guide to the curriculum for secondary education, perhaps even for elementary education” (p. 197).

The notions that historical theory and history education are interrelated and that there are connections between the work academic historians do and how school history should be conceptualised and taught have been disputed. For instance, writing about the New South Wales context, Young (1997) argued that theories about the identity of history in the discipline of history and school history were and should be separate and different. Young argued that while academic expertise and input were essential to school history, issues of “relevance, content, and learnability should surely be predominantly the responsibility of those who have professional knowledge and skills in education”, namely, teachers. Other scholars of history education have positioned academic history and school history in a hierarchical relationship on the grounds that the heuristics employed by historians and by students appeared to differ so greatly that only explicit teaching of methodologies might be able to equip students with the historians’ skills (Wineburg, 1991a, 1991b; VanSledright & Brophy, 1992; Greene, 1994).
Arguments about the construction of history and the relationship between the views of history held by academic historians, scholars of history education, and stakeholders from schools, education bureaucracies, and the community became especially pronounced during the 1998 review of the New South Wales Stage 4–5 (Years 7 to 10) history syllabus for the compulsory years of secondary schooling. The New South Wales government included as part of the syllabus review a consultation process whereby stakeholders with a record of interest and involvement in history curricula were invited to present their views on history and to identify what should be included in the school history curriculum. Although the consultation process has been criticised (e.g. Harris, 2003), different views about the identity of history and the different professional and political perspectives of stakeholders meant that a variety of ideologies were represented in the consultation process. The debate about what kind of history should be taught and how historians, academic scholars of history education, and stakeholders conceptualised history became an underlying tension during the 1998 syllabus review.

The consultation process was conducted by the New South Wales Board of Studies (BOS), the statutory body responsible for curriculum development in the state. The BOS approached groups with a longstanding involvement in history education in New South Wales and who had contributed to the 1992 review of the syllabus. These groups included academic historians, bureaucrats, representatives of government and Anglican, Catholic, and independent church school systems, and Aboriginal community groups. The BOS sent draft copies of a Writing Brief (a document outlining the broad directions established for the syllabus review) and a draft of the proposed syllabus to these groups for discussion and feedback. Stakeholders’ representatives were involved in a series of one-on-one discussions with BOS officers and in public forums, and presented written submissions that outlined their conceptualisations of history and responses to the draft syllabus (see Simpson & Halse, 2006).

Understanding the constructions of history invoked during the 1998 syllabus review is important because these constructions had a far-reaching impact on the content of the history curriculum and on the status of history in New South Wales secondary schooling. As a result of the 1998 review, the new history syllabus described the aims, outcomes, content, and assessment of history in New South Wales; history was established as a mandatory subject for all secondary students in the compulsory years of schooling, namely Stages 4–5 or Years 7 to 10; Australian history since 1901 was made the compulsory core for study in Stage 5; Civics and Citizenship education became a mandatory component of the history curriculum, and a common public examination was introduced at the end of Stage 5 (Year 10) to assess student learning, in line with the other core subjects of the curriculum: English; mathematics; science; and geography.

This paper discusses part of a larger qualitative study that examined the constructions of history and history education by community and education stakeholders who participated in the BOS consultation during the revision of the 1998 mandatory history Stages 4–5 syllabus (see also Simpson & Halse, 2006). The paper reports on a conceptual analysis of debates in the literature and on empirical data involving interviews with key stakeholders involved in the 1998 BOS review. The paper is structured in four parts. Part 1, Academic Constructions of History, illuminates the intersections between conceptualisations of history by historians and by history educators documented in the literature. In particular, it identifies that both groups deploy three main constructs to conceptualise history by defining it in terms of a product, process, and political purpose. Part 2, Exploring Stakeholders’ Constructions of History, provides an overview of the data collection methods and analysis of the interview study with key stakeholders involved in the NSW BOS consultation process. Part 3, The Fourth Dimension: Stakeholders’ Constructions of History, reports on a grounded theory analysis of the interviews and identifies the relationship between these three constructs and stakeholders’ views of history, and accounts for the differences in stakeholders’ constructions. Part 4, Conclusion, discusses the implications of the analysis.

Part 1: Academic constructions of history

Theorising about the nature and identity of history has a long established place in national and international debates about history syllabus design. In New South Wales, the British Schools’ Council History Project (BSCHP) ‘new history’ approach was
influential in history education during the 1980s (Fitzgerald, 1982). The BSCHP was developed during the 1970s and 1980s and modelled on an interpretation of history that emphasised the problem-solving nature of the discipline (Shemilt, 1983, 1987; Booth 1987, 1994). The historiography of R.G. Collingwood (1961), particularly his advocacy of empathy as part of the historian’s role, provided a substantial foundation for the BSCHP’s view that school history should be a process of inquiry and that there should be a correspondence between school history and how historians practised history. The New South Wales History Teachers’ Association (HTA) championed the BSCHP approach and sponsored a series of lecture tours from Britain to Australia by its advocates. The BSCHP notion of school history as a process of inquiry informed the 1982 and 1992 New South Wales Years 7–10 history syllabi, both of which emphasised the use of inquiry methods and organised areas of study according to ‘Focus Questions’ and ‘Problems and Issues’ rather than blocks of factual content (Halse, Khamis, Dinham, Harris, Buchanan, & Soeters, 1997). Similarly, the HTA’s submission to the BOS during the 1998 syllabus review, Best practice (HTA, 1998), also reflected the historical influence and investment in the BSCHP model of history.

The organisation of curriculum development in New South Wales provided another forum for bringing together the work of academic historians and school history. Historians were involved in the development of various history syllabi as consultants, invited stakeholders, through submissions by groups like the Australian Historical Association (Roe et al., 2000), and as members of BOS curriculum and examination committees. Moreover, the majority of school history teachers had been trained as historians, with 83% of respondents to a state-wide survey in 1997 reporting that history was their major area of undergraduate study and 15% reporting that they had postgraduate degrees in history (Halse et al., 1997, p. 37). During the 1998 syllabus review, teachers had the opportunity to express their individual views about the construction of history through submissions, responses to BOS surveys, and at focus group meetings held by the BOS. They were also represented as a group by the HTA and the New South Wales Teachers’ Federation (NSWTF). Thus, the participants in and mechanics surrounding the 1998 syllabus review provided a series of opportu-
post-colonialism, postmodernism, and poststructuralism, have had a more limited impact on history in the compulsory years of schooling than on the discipline of history. VanSledright (1996) argued that this lag demonstrated Wineburg’s (1991b) contention of a breach between the academy and the school, whereby schools were often slow to absorb the changes in disciplinary communities from which their subject-referents were drawn, partly because of the difficulties of teachers’ working lives. Seixas (2000) acknowledged that postmodernism had challenged many of the assumptions of traditional history but hesitated to embrace it as an alternative pedagogy in schools because of a concern that its relativistic overtones were inappropriate to students’ own developing epistemologies where the quest for certainty was important. Wineburg (1991b), VanSledright (1996) and Seixas (2000) also raised a range of epistemological concerns about the relationship between the discipline of history and school history but based their concerns on different theoretical premises, with VanSledright and Wineburg considering the political pragmatics of translating disciplinary practice to school contexts and Seixas taking into account theories about the psychological and social development of children.

Process
One longstanding view of the process of ‘doing’ history sought to embrace empiricist methodology in order to establish history as a scientific discipline (Carr, 1964; Marwick, 1970; Booth, 1994). Green and Troup (1999) argued that contemporary historians typically employ empiricism as a research method, although fewer historians support empiricism as a theory of knowledge. Elements of empiricist methodology include critically studying primary source documents, as well as using chronological narratives and developing empathy to understand the thoughts and motivations of figures from the past. The HTA in New South Wales argued that history was characteristically a critical, problem-solving discipline, underlining the synergies between its position and the views of the BSCHP in Britain and demonstrating the continuing influence of empiricism in school history (Fitzgerald, 1982; Shemilt, 1983, 1987; Booth, 1987, 1994; HTA, 1998). However, some scholars of history education have questioned whether history was better conceptualised as a craft defined by a set of component skills. This group contended that there was no agreement about historical method, that notions about the historical process were constructed and contingent, and that historians and educators continually changed their views about what comprised the essential skills of the historian (Greene, 1994; Levstik & Barton, 1996; Barton, 1997; Jenkins, 1991).

The relationship between teaching factual historical knowledge (or content) and process (or skills or method) has been another contentious issue in history education. Some educationists and teachers who maintained that a correlation existed between the academic discipline and school history have echoed the stance of historians like Hobsbawm (1997) who argued that the teaching of factual knowledge and skills should be integrated (Downey & Levstik, 1991; Wineburg, 1991a, 1991b; Seixas, 1994, 1996; Donnelly, 1999; Bain, 2000). Others, reflecting theoretical developments of Bloom (1956), Bruner (1960) and Hirst (1975) about the critical nature of disciplines and the development of higher-order cognitive skills in adolescents, have contended that developing skills should be given priority in schools because this approach best suits the developmental needs of students (e.g., Hallam, 1970; Shemilt, 1983, 1987; Husbands, 1996). However, education scholars like Egan (1983) and Lee (1983) have pointed out that advocates of history as a set of specific skills have been criticised by the political Right and other education scholars for advocating a view of history education that is bereft of factual content, replaces the preoccupation with learning facts with an equally undesirable preoccupation with process, and introduces an artificial dichotomy to history teaching. This critique was particularly telling because it exposed those who advocated focusing on teaching skills to the charge of establishing an unbalanced, artificial model of history that was contrary to the principles of the discipline of history.

Purpose
There is strong consensus amongst scholars that the discipline of history served an inherently political function in the 19th century projects of nationalism and conservatism and the genealogies of the nation-state (e.g., Iggers, 1997; Green & Troup, 1999; Davison, 2000). In a similar vein, postcolonial scholars have argued that history texts have been complicit in the rise of imperialism and colonialism (e.g., Young, 1990; Moore-Gilbert, 1997; Gandhi,
1998). Yet because history is written within particular political formations, the debate has never been about whether history was or should be political but about what sort of politics should prevail (e.g., Benterrak, Muecke, & Roe, 1996; Reynolds, 1998, 1999, 2000).

Seixas (2000) contended that during the debates about the history curriculum in the United States and Britain, all participants understood that the issue at stake was which side of politics would control school history’s power to define contemporary national identity, individual relations, ethics, and the overall purpose of society. For instance, conservative historians argued that the purpose of history education was to instil an affirmative sense of national identity by presenting a unifying account of the notable events, individuals, and institutions of the nation’s past (e.g., Himmelfarb, 1987; Schlesinger, 1992; Cheney 1994). As such, social and political critiques were not the function of history education and any emphasis on current issues, global education, values education, inquiry, and/or discovery should be resisted.

However, research in the United States and Britain suggests that government efforts to use the school history syllabus to transmit a particular view of national culture and identity for the purposes of nation-building, cultural literacy, and/or social cohesion have had questionable success, particularly in democratic societies where other histories are commonly available and where children are exposed to an increasing proliferation of information about the past, above and beyond that available in the history classroom (McKiernan, 1993; VanSledright, 1995; McCulloch, 1997; Epstein, 1998; Phillips, 1998a, 1998b). Other research has demonstrated that students interpret history in terms of their own experiences and that they select, filter, adapt, and even reject views that seek to stimulate a particular sense of cohesive national identity (Dickinson & Lee, 1984; Ashby & Lee, 1987; Thornton 1994; Barton, 1997; Epstein, 1998). Morris (1998) explained that individuals might not identify with the kinds of history developed by historians or, by extension, policy makers or syllabus designers: “we may want ‘our own’ histories” (Morris, 1998. See also Carr, 1991).

An alternative, student-centred approach has focused on facilitating the construction of meaning by learners (Downey & Levstik, 1991). This view contends that the purpose of history education should be conceptualised around students’ questioning of their own culture and experience but employ relevant components of historical understanding to make sense of their lives and their situation in the world in the context of historical time. Student-centred arguments reject the concept of a syllabus based on a core body of knowledge, historical concepts or generalisations, and invoke an integrated model of history that relates the teaching of product and process to a broader purpose of explaining and understanding the society in which students live.

As the preceding discussion of the literature illuminates, the conceptual framework underpinning the construction of the identity of history within the discipline and schools held by historians and scholars of history education comprises three dimensions, namely product (factual knowledge), process (skills or method), and purpose (intent), but there are diverse and sometimes conflicting views within and between groups about the emphasis that should be given to various elements within each dimension.

**Part 2: Exploring stakeholders’ constructions of history**

This phase of the study set out to compare the conceptual framework of history deployed by historians and scholars of history education with the perspectives of key stakeholders involved in the development of the 1998 New South Wales Stages 4–5 history syllabus. Data collection involved focused interviews with representatives of the stakeholder groups involved in the 1998 syllabus review and analysis of the submissions by stakeholders made to the BOS during the 1998 review.

All the stakeholder groups are public organisations whose position on school history is in the public domain and familiar to scholars and practitioners in the field. Stakeholder groups were invited to participate in the study and for their spokesperson to address the interview questions in terms of their organisation’s stance on the 1998 syllabus. Only two stakeholder groups who participated in the 1998 review declined to participate in the study. In addition, two academic historians who contributed their individual scholarly perspectives to the 1998 review were also interviewed for the current study. Table 1 (overleaf) details the stakeholder groups involved in the 1998 review who participated in the current study. The study was
Table 1: Stakeholder groups who participated in the current study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder group</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)</td>
<td>A community-based body with a central committee and 18 regional committees in New South Wales. Advises the Minister for Education and Training on matters concerning Aboriginal education and training, and represented Aboriginal perspectives during the 1998 consultation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican Education Commission (AEC)</td>
<td>Represents the educational concerns of the Anglican Diocese of Sydney.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA)</td>
<td>Professional association for principals of independent and private schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catholic Education Office, Sydney (CEO)</td>
<td>Responsible for the operation and management of 151 parish and regional high schools in the Archdiocese of Sydney.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Support Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Training (DET)</td>
<td>Supports implementation of curriculum in NSW and provides materials and professional development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity Review Group (ERG), Office of the Board of Studies</td>
<td>Informal group of representatives from BOS units that evaluated draft syllabuses to determine the extent to which they were inclusive of the needs of all students and reflected a broad variety of perspectives relating to equity, gender and culture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation of Parents’ and Citizens’ Associations of NSW (P &amp; C)</td>
<td>Represents parents’ associations in all NSW government schools.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic historians</td>
<td>Professor John Ingleson, Dean, Faculty of Arts, University of New South Wales.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Professor Jill Roe, Head, Department of Modern History, Macquarie University.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales History Teachers’ Association (HTA)</td>
<td>Professional association of history teachers in NSW with approximately 1000 members. Conducts inservice training, produces a professional journal, Teaching History, and has representation on the BOS History Curriculum Committee and the History Council of NSW.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New South Wales Teachers’ Federation (NSWTF)</td>
<td>Industrial organisation representing teachers employed in government schools in NSW. Represented on the BOS History Curriculum Committee.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

approved by the Human Research Ethics Committee at the University of Western Sydney. As public organisations commenting in a professional capacity about a topical educational issue of public concern, stakeholder groups are identified by name but the spokespersons for each group have not been identified.

The intent of the study was not to explore whether stakeholders’ views had remained the same or changed since 1998, or to examine the impact of the new syllabus on teachers, students, classroom practice, or schools. These issues have been addressed in other forums (e.g., Harris, 2003; Simpson & Halse, 2006). Rather, the current study used the 1998 syllabus review as a convenient and educationally important focus for considering stakeholders’ conceptualisations of the identity of history and of history education.

Based on the literature review and conceptual framework, a draft set of interview questions was developed, piloted with a sample of senior teachers, and then refined to ensure clarity and coherence. The resulting interview schedule comprised three focus questions related to the three components identified through the literature review as central to the identity of history: product (knowledge or factual content); process (historical skills or method); and purpose (the intent of
history). The three interview questions were framed in terms of soliciting the perspectives of the stakeholders’ organisations, and comprised:

1. What content should students in NSW schools be taught in Years 7 to 10 history?
2. Which is more important, learning content or developing skills? Why? What balance should there be between them?
3. What role should history have for the individual and the wider society? Why?

Stakeholders were interviewed between June and September 2000. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and transcripts were sent to participants for checking and correction. Only one participant made any additional comments or corrections to their transcribed interview.

The method of analysis involved two stages: thematic analysis based on a priori categories and grounded theory analysis. The thematic search of the interview transcripts identified major themes that were congruent with the theoretical debates about the identity of history and with the conceptual framework described in Part 1 of this paper. However, after the thematic analysis had been completed, 29 pages of transcript comments, comprising 18,000 words, remained uncoded because they did not explicitly relate to any of the three conceptual organisers. This development represented an important stage in the research.

The thematic conceptual analysis had tested the conceptual framework emerging from the review of literature but found it was an inadequate map for the totality of stakeholders’ lived experiences of the realities of school life. A total re-analysis of all the data including the uncoded responses was conducted using a grounded theory approach. Grounded theory involved a process of open coding based on the data, followed by a second stage of interpretive coding, involving consolidation and reduction of categories. The categories that emerged from the grounded stage of analysis confirmed those found in the literature review but extended the conceptual framework with the addition of a fourth dimension that we describe as the context of schooling.

**Part 3: The fourth dimension: Stakeholders’ constructions of history**

An additional conceptual construct — the context of schooling — constituted a fourth dimension in stakeholders’ views of history education, underpinning and informing the three components of the original conceptual framework. The fourth dimension comprised a range of contextual concerns such as: how teachers might best program, teach, and assess the mandatory factual content of the history syllabus; the impact of a mandatory examination on the teaching and learning of history; the challenge teachers were likely to confront in terms of covering mandatory content and presenting it in stimulating, interesting ways; how schools could include the requirement for the mandatory teaching of 100 hours of history in Stages 4–5 in an already crowded curriculum and timetable; industrial issues relating to teacher accountability and the role of teachers in the syllabus development process; how to strike a balance between preparing students for the examination and the demands of student equity and welfare that teachers often dealt with in schools; the role, mechanics, and philosophical bases of student assessment; developmental factors affecting adolescent performance; and broader educational and curriculum issues. The data in this fourth grouping were subjected to the same grounded theory approach to coding and analysis, discussed previously. The following section presents some key features of this analysis to illuminate stakeholders’ conceptualisations of the fourth dimension of history.

**Teachers**

Stakeholder groups positioned the 1998 syllabus review as part of a broader political debate about teachers’ roles in curriculum decision-making, as well as in relation to teachers’ views about the identity of history education in schools. Stakeholder groups representing teachers and school and community organisations typically asserted the right of history teachers to play a decisive role in curriculum development, while those representing the government and the bureaucracy, as well as individual academics, contended that teachers must accept greater accountability and accede to the expectations of the community and to government policy. The emergence of different perspectives among stakeholders and the manner in which they clustered in particular ways on different issues was an important trend emerging during the consultation that has been reported elsewhere (Simpson & Halse, 2006).
Teachers' constructions of history as presented by stakeholder groups were obscured because of a focus on detailing the politics around the political role of teachers and teachers' organisations in curriculum development. For example, the NSWTF argued that the government and the educational bureaucracy had seized on the syllabus review as an opportunity to make history teachers more accountable by mandating core content, introducing an external examination, and allocating a mandatory 100 hours for the teaching of history. The NSWTF maintained that the reforms would restrict teachers' professionalism in the sense of teachers' freedom to develop programs that reflected their own interests, expertise, and their students' interests and abilities, obliging teachers instead to place a greater emphasis on transmitting factual knowledge so that their students could pass the mandatory exam:

I think you have to dispense with the exam so that you have time to teach history properly with content that teachers choose from a range in the syllabus, and that you choose depending on how you were going to teach. Every teacher teaches differently. So, you need a much broader field in order to be able to choose and create a program. It's the professionalism of teachers we're talking about here. (NSWTF, 2000)

The HTA and the Anglican Education Commission (AEC) agreed that the 1998 syllabus would impose constraints on teachers' professional practice and undermine the working lives of teachers:

Our view is that the syllabus probably should be fairly carefully pruned to make sure there's no content overload. The history of new syllabuses is that they tend to be too content-heavy and teachers become very stressed trying to get through the mandatory content and rush through and [it has] deleterious effects on their own teaching methodology in the rush. (AEC, 2000)

The Catholic Education Office (CEO), the Association of Heads of Independent Schools of Australia (AHISA), the Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG), and the Federation of Parents' and Citizens' Associations of New South Wales (P & C) also argued that the needs, expertise, and interests of teachers were overlooked during the syllabus review. Stakeholders' concerns that teachers' interests had been marginalised are understandable, given the context of rapid educational change in New South Wales. At the same time as the 1998 syllabus was under review, history teachers were concurrently implementing three syllabi in Stage 6 Modern, Ancient, and Extension History, as well as revising their assessment programs and procedures to meet the demands of a new Higher School Certificate standards-referenced assessment structure.

Despite the "public imbroglio" (Taylor, 2000) about the syllabus and vocal disagreement between stakeholders about its form, the inclusion of civics and citizenship, the introduction of a mandatory public examination in Year 10, and the perceived sidelining of teachers' representatives and interests during the 1998 review, groups like the History Teachers' Association (HTA) argued that teachers would implement the syllabus as designed:

I think teachers are professionals and I think they will work out a way to get around it... as you pull it apart, as teachers know how to do, it will be okay. (HTA, 2000)

On the other hand, groups like the DET argued that the 1998 history syllabus needed to be highly centralised with detailed, explicit statements of knowledge outcomes and a public examination of students' knowledge because of community concerns about declining teaching standards and the public demand for greater accountability for teachers. Other stakeholders also commented on a perceived anxiety within the community about the competence of less able teachers, the need for greater control and monitoring of teachers' classroom performance, the notion that teacher professionalism was often taken as meaning the "right to do exactly what they had always done", and how the lack of close supervision of teachers had the effect of maintaining the curriculum as it was taught 30 years ago.

Students and classrooms

Many stakeholders agreed that whatever view of history developed through the consultation process and articulated in the new syllabus, it was inevitably mediated at the classroom level by students' different backgrounds and abilities, stages of development, preferred learning styles, and by teachers' interests and experience. As one participant argued:

As an academic historian, I do not presume to have views on how teachers teach schools, which is a very big question when it comes
to what should be taught, because there's a question about what can be taught. (Roe, 2000)

The point is that although there might be an important body of knowledge that school students should learn — and this was contested (see Simpson & Halse, 2006) — the complexities of life in the classroom made it unrealistic to insist on this. This recognition represented an important position during the 1998 review because it acknowledged that school history should reflect the academic discipline of history but that this goal might not always be practicable in the school context. It is a position that reflects the awareness of the realities of the classroom and the typical "bunch of kids in an ordinary, comprehensive high school, in Year 9" emphasised by groups like the NSWTF.

Several groups, including the NSWTF, HTA, and P & C, argued that the content of the history syllabus should reflect on and make sense of students' own experiences but that the emphasis on factual content and civics and citizenship in the 1998 syllabus was incompatible with students' needs and interests. The NSWTF argued that relevance to students' lives was important though not sufficient because students needed to have their experiences broadened, but the constraints of the syllabus, particularly in Stage 5, limited teachers' opportunities to do this:

There's certain responsibilities we as teachers and schools have to draw [students] into a much broader framework than our interests might be at the moment. And that's not easy to do, so you've got to do it in a way that's interesting, and that's what this syllabus stops you from doing. (NSWTF, 2000)

According to the AEC, another issue that threatened to lead to student disinterest in history was the repetition of topics studied previously in the K–6 HSIE syllabus, particularly 19th century Australian history. In a similar vein, the NSWTF feared that making history mandatory and introducing a public exam would have a negative effect on students' subject choices in the senior school and beyond:

It would mean that everybody would have to do history and you would have to take it seriously and so on. But I think that's a fearful mistake. If anything, a test like that can end up killing their interest in history, which will kill senior history and history at university... If it's mandatory [and] kids will be forced to do it, it'll be a horrifying and boring experience for them, and they'll never want to do [history] again. So, I think those who think this will save history are wrong. (NSWTF, 2000)

Research indicates that the teaching and learning of history are enhanced if students feel that the curriculum is relevant to their lives, are involved in analysis and explanation rather than acquiring information, and if history syllabi build on students' developing interests in individual agency and social relationships (VanSledright, 1995; Barton, 1997; Halse et al., 1997; Halse, Jimenez, & Simpson, 1998). Yet the perspectives of stakeholders highlight a tension between the will of governments and educational bureaucracies to impose a bounded view of history and to centralise and standardise history curriculum, and the child-centred views of stakeholder groups who favoured a school syllabus that reflected students' interests and abilities. The existence of such a tension opens up the possibility that the bounded view of history resulting from the 1998 syllabus review not be realised in its implementation.

Resources and school structures

Another concern that united many stakeholders was a view that the government had initiated the 1998 syllabus review without ensuring the availability of textbooks, curriculum support materials, resources, or adequate professional support and assistance for beginning teachers or teachers without the training or experience in history to teach the new compulsory subject. The HTA's spokesperson related a series of emerging problems that members had encountered since the introduction of the new syllabus and without any accompanying professional development other than that offered by the HTA to its members:

The concern of course is that you're talking to an experienced teacher. What about someone who's just starting and may not have any support? That support isn't there any more. There isn't a consultant up the road who will call in everybody and say, 'Let's get together and try and teach this syllabus'. There's none of that going on. And that to me is the problem, more than the syllabus. (HTA, 2000)

A related concern voiced by some stakeholders was that the mandated increase in teaching hours for history in the Stages 4–5 syllabus would overcrowd school timetables and mean that Elective World History in Stages 4–5 might not be viable in many
schools, resulting in many students only studying Australian History during the mandatory years of secondary schooling. Others expressed concern that making history mandatory in Stages 4–5 would increase student numbers and require more teachers, some of whom might not have a background in Australian history, and that this development would have a negative impact on history enrolments in Stage 6 and in universities.

**Function of schooling**

Another source of tension between the views of stakeholders related to the purpose of schooling. For many stakeholders, the debate about history was part of wider debates about the function of schooling and about Australian culture, politics and society. One issue that divided stakeholders was whether history teaching in schools should focus on encouraging individual student development and achieving equity and social justice objectives, or using history as a method of social cohesion. For example, one perspective was that history education had a social responsibility and should contribute to the struggle to achieve equity in society. Consequently, the emphasis on factual knowledge that emerged during the 1998 history review was seen as socially undesirable because it would be beyond the capacities of some students:

Some people are pleased to regard history as an elite subject and so forth. We believe that every child has the capacity to learn and to gain the benefits of studying history that have always been there. And it is essential that the study of history include the capacity of all students to access those kinds of thought patterns. (Federation of Parents’ and Citizens’ Associations of New South Wales, 2000)

Similarly, the HTA argued that the study of history should “give everybody a chance” but that the 1998 syllabus disenfranchised the general body of school students because it was too academic, overburdened with factual material, and allowed few opportunities for students to follow their own interests or learn in the style that best suited them. Conversely, the ERG was satisfied that the syllabus met the BOS’s expectations and its own informal charter (see Stevens, Thomas, Maras & Scott, 1998), that it met the needs of all students, reflected a broad range of perspectives, was logical and clear in specifying what students needed to know, and connected students with their previous learning.

A second issue was the extent to which the development of the history syllabus should conform to the broader government educational policy agenda. Some stakeholders suggested that the 1998 history syllabus review should more closely reflect contemporary educational debates as well as determine the identity of history. For example, the DET argued that the history syllabus design should be informed by contemporary concerns about middle schooling and the nature of student learning, and that these issues were more important than narrow debates about the nature of history or content versus skills:

We need to be talking about how learners bring [knowledge and skills] together in complex situations of learning, where the task and the complexity of the task, the way they relate skills and attitudes and knowledge together. That’s where the learning occurs and so we need to have more focus on the activity the kids do, the tasks that they’re doing, what they are asking kids to do, than we do on some sort of separate agenda around knowledge, skills and values separately. (DET, 2000)

The DET’s concern for middle schooling draws attention to the question of the relationship between the history syllabus and broader educational policy issues, such as the quality of teaching and learning in schools that the New South Wales Government had been promoting. However, the AEC and the P & C pointed to an inconsistency between two government agencies — the DET and the BOS — with the former’s advocacy of middle schooling and its implied agenda of welfare, compassion, and socialisation, and the latter’s focus on centralised curriculum design and competitive assessment:

Their [the BOS] view is quite clearly that their job is only curriculum, which they interpret narrowly. We’re about to start agitating very strongly to have actually a review of the 7 to 10 curriculum, in the light of adolescence, middle schooling, all the things which kids really need as far as what they’re going to learn. The problem with the Board’s attitude is by looking at curriculum, not at students, they’re going to make something which looks very nice in terms of curriculum but it’s going to have very little relevance to students. (Federation of Parents’ and Citizens’ Associations of New South Wales, 2000)
Part 4: Conclusion

The analysis indicates that are many significant points of intersection in the construction of school history and the discipline of history by historians, scholars of history education, and stakeholders involved in the 1998 review of the history curriculum. The three components of the conceptual framework — product, process, and purpose — were important issues during consultation in New South Wales and contributed to the identity of history established in the 1998 syllabus. For example, the BOS and key stakeholders identified the historical process as one of the essential foundations of syllabus design and historical skills were built into the syllabus as outcomes to be achieved. Furthermore, an important group of stakeholders argued that history education in schools should model its identity and purpose on the academic discipline and criticised the 1998 review for failing to conform with their view of history as an active process of inquiry and for construing history as a narrative of nation-building, a view they attributed to the political agendas of government, as articulated by the BOS and DET.

However, the analysis also indicates that stakeholders’ constructions of school history do not and cannot simply mirror the discipline of history. The conceptual framework of product, process, and purpose informed stakeholders’ views but was not an adequate map for designing the totality of a school history curriculum. Rather, education stakeholders’ conceptualisations of history included a fourth dimension — the context of schooling — that took into account the various positions of different stakeholders and the ways in which they perceived that the syllabus would or might be interpreted and enacted in classrooms and schools.

The findings of the current study take a step towards clarifying a long-term debate about the nexus between history as an academic discipline and history education in schools. At least in the New South Wales context, historians, scholars of history education, and different stakeholder groups involved in the 1998 review of the Stages 4–5 history syllabus share a common conceptual framework of history as concerning issues of process, product, and political purpose. By confirming the relationship between the academic discipline of history and school history, these findings challenge the contention that the academic discipline of history and school history are different and should remain separate, distinct entities (Hallam, 1970; Wineburg, 1991a, 1991b; VanSledright & Brophy, 1992; Greene, 1994; Young, 1997).

The study’s findings also draw attention to the extent to which stakeholders’ views of history were mediated by their understanding of particular contextual conditions and the pragmatic circumstances of schools, thereby reinforcing that the identity of history in schools and, by implication, the development of school history curriculum, cannot be dislocated from the real-life context of students, teachers, schools, and from the perspectives of stakeholder groups. As stakeholders in the current study exposed, the elements comprising the fourth dimension are complex and multi-levelled, and different groups had different perspectives on each element, its relative importance and its relationship to other elements in the fourth dimension. In this respect, the findings build on but extend the work of scholars like Wineburg (1991b) on the difficulties teachers’ working lives present to integrating discipline changes into school subjects and Seixas’ (2000) work on how students’ influence decisions about curriculum content.

While the applicability of the study’s finding to other education contexts and jurisdictions will need to be tested, they suggest that developing a school history syllabus is not merely a theoretical exercise but a program of active engagement with the lived realities of schools and classrooms. Consequently, if governments and curriculum agencies hope to develop history syllabi that genuinely reflect the perspectives of stakeholders, they need to understand stakeholders’ conceptualisation of the fourth dimension and how this mediates the other components underpinning the identity of history in schools.
References


