

## **A reply to Peter Kallaway: 'History in High School 2012: A comment. Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement. History Grades 10-12'**

School of Education, University of Cape Town, Seminar, 9 May 2012

I reply to Peter Kallaway's paper as one of the writers of the CAPS [Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement](2011) history curriculum and as a history educationist.

Kallaway opens a space to discuss and debate very important issues in the South African FET (Grade 10-12) history curriculum. This is a most welcome opportunity, as the debate is both essential and long overdue.

I respond in three ways. First, to consider the directions that the SA history curriculum has taken since 1995; secondly, to consider the disciplinary knowledge of history, and, finally, to comment on the choice of appropriate content for the curriculum. There are many other aspects of Kallaway's analysis that I agree with. Those are not the subject of my reply, however, as I believe that there are fundamental flaws in his account which require response and correction.

### **The post-1995 SA history curriculum**

Kallaway's paper begins with reference to *Curriculum 2005*, the 1997 GET (Grade 1-9) outcomes-based curriculum, which remained in place till 2006, but had no effect on Grade 10-12 history. What he ignores in his discussion is the place of history in that curriculum. History as a subject was eliminated from *Curriculum 2005*. There was one Specific Outcome in the Human and Social Sciences Learning Area of the curriculum which contained *suggested* historical content themes and a set of generic skills, some of which were directly relevant to history, and very little else. It was possible to teach the curriculum faithfully with some reference to the past but never actually teach history. Each school and teacher was responsible for the construction of their own learning programmes, so there was no way of assuring any consistency in how the past was taught at all. There was far more that one might have labelled 'geography', 'environmental education' and 'social/civic education' in the Human and Social Sciences than history.

Kallaway has chosen to leave out what happened next, but it's central to understanding the future of the history curriculum. All accounts speak of how Kader Asmal, as the second Minister of Education, rescued history and restored it to the curriculum, something with which I concur. What is crucial to understand, however, is the manner in which that occurred. It began with Asmal's *Values in Education* (2000) initiative. The working group, which at short notice and very little research or investigation, drew up a report, which amongst other things recommended the appointment of a panel to examine the teaching of history. The consequent *History and Archaeology Panel* (2000), at similarly short notice but with more opportunity to draw on relevant work, produced a report that argued strongly for the place of history as a school subject and recommended the establishment of a national history commission. The *SA Schools History Project*, a unique ministerial project which was (unusually) located in the Department of Education was the result. The project staff carried a number of responsibilities, one of which was to be involved in the construction of the new Revised National Curriculum Statements for Social Sciences (RNCS) (2002) and the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (Grades 10-12) History (2003). Members of staff played leading roles the history curriculum working groups for both. It should be noted that the project had also values and heritage hats to wear and that these aspects of its work found some expression in the history curricula that were designed.

The following, I would argue, were key characteristics of the RNCS history curriculum developed:

- A successful move to keep history and geography as separate subjects within a learning area – the plural Social Sciences was a significant marker of this.
- The separation of the content specification from the learning outcomes and assessment standards – history was the only subject/Learning Area to have no content in its Assessment Standards.
- The alignment of history and geography with natural science and technology as Learning Areas, which had a recognisably similar three-fold Learning outcome structure (investigation, concepts and application/interpretation).
- The relative unimportance of citizenship, heritage, environment and other popular curricular notions – they did not intrude unduly into the curriculum.
- The mixture of familiar and unfamiliar content topics – maintaining a balance between what teachers knew well and they probably didn't know at all.
- The attempt to create narrative threads within the content that linked SA and global history – which had previously always been studied as separate sections.
- The avoidance of controversy, by neither specifying nor removing content topics such as the Mfecane and Great Trek.

A signal achievement of the NCS (Grade 10-12) (2003) history curriculum, which was introduced in Grade 10 in 2006, was its continuity with the RNCS. It looked similar, had, more or less the same Learning Outcomes and a clear progression in the Assessment Standards from Grade 9 to Grade 10. The narrative threads were made more visible in the descriptions provided and, while continuity with the previous *Report 550* curriculum was important to maintain in the Grade 12 examination year, there was enough new content specification to make it a significantly different curriculum. A concession to SA History Project interests was the addition of a fourth Learning Outcome for heritage, which was not aligned at all with the other three skills-based outcomes.

The CAPS history curriculum was a limited revision of the NCS, not a new curriculum – something which Kallaway does not acknowledge. The instructions given to the writers were that, '...you are not starting from scratch. You are rewriting the content as it appears in the National Curriculum Statement in order to make it clearer, to ensure coherence from one grade to the next and one phase to the next, and to fill in content gaps where they exist'. Additionally, the number of topics in the curriculum was to be reduced, repetition eliminated and they were to be specified in far greater detail than (ever) before. Continuity was obviously an important criterion, as the main writer, Gail Weldon, had also been the convenor of the NCS history Working Group in 2002. The curriculum was released for public comment in August 2010 and subsequently thoroughly revised in the light of the comments received. Many of the comments were contradictory (some suggesting that a topic should be omitted, others suggesting more of it, for instance), but the writers went to considerable lengths to accommodate as many comments as possible.

### **The disciplinary knowledge of history**

Kallaway helpfully quotes from a recent article by Christine Counsell, the history educationist at Cambridge University: *Disciplinary knowledge for all, the secondary history curriculum and history teachers' achievement*. The title needs some decoding and it's only the first part that is relevant here. 'Disciplinary knowledge' is the knowledge about how the discipline of history operates (what its disciplinary structure is), the 'secondary history curriculum' is the compulsory curriculum, i.e. Key Stage

3 of the National Curriculum history (Years 7 to 9), 'for all' refers to pupils of all abilities, particularly lower attaining ones and 'history teachers' achievements' describes what history teachers have been able to achieve when teaching lower attaining pupils about the disciplinary structure of history. The article is useful because it is a review both of the course of curriculum development in England since the introduction of the National Curriculum and of the literature of whether and how one can teach history meaningfully as a discipline. Simply put, it's an update on where the teaching of history has come within the tradition of the Schools Council History Project (1972), which effectively started it all.

Counsell's main concern in writing the article is to counter a currently popular UK view that history can be reduced a set of generic cross-curricular skills, by showing that disciplinary knowledge and concepts are necessary to reach or challenge claims about the past, and that, despite the problems of uniting content and disciplinary concepts, history should be retained for the less able. This threat is similar in nature to the threat to history in *Curriculum 2005*. But it's her understanding of the National Curriculum history in England that is most valuable for a discussion of our curriculum.

The clear parallel with the UK is that the Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards in the RNCS and NCS were based on the statements of disciplinary knowledge in the National Curriculum (and other international curricula which had made similar borrowings). It wasn't a particularly easy fit, however, and much of the logic and explanatory power of the National Curriculum attainment target was lost in separating it into the three Learning Outcomes with their grade-based levels. The NCS was a somewhat better attempt than the RNCS, though, and it can be argued that some aspects of its Assessment Standards take the understanding of the disciplinary knowledge of history further than the National Curriculum does.

As Counsell points out, it's the interplay between the content and the apparatus of the disciplinary knowledge on which the success of the curriculum, classroom teaching and all assessment depends. The RNCS and NCS were noble in their intentions but despite detailed curriculum advice (in the Learning Programme Guidelines), there have been notable shortcomings in the implemented curriculum, such as,

- poor textbooks – while some textbooks have succeeded well in encouraging disciplinary knowledge, others have not;
- an inconsistent standard in the setting of NSC examinations, where Assessment Standards have sometimes been ignored or misunderstood, and also in some marking of the examinations;
- a prevalent false belief that history should be taught by identifying the Assessment Standards first, making decisions about the content to be taught.
- general misunderstandings both of the purpose of the Assessment Standards and they ways in which they were intended to guide teaching and assessment.

It was intended that the CAPS curriculum should rectify problems such as these by simplifying the curriculum specification and providing more detailed information. Assessment Standards were replaced by 'aims' 'skills' and 'concepts', which made the language easier to understand, but removed the notion of progression through the grades. It remains to be seen if this strategy will be more successful at securing disciplinary knowledge in the curriculum. The CAPS table of skills is a great deal simpler than anything in the NCS and contains explanations that are absent in it, but there's no means to tie it to the content. The great danger is that it will become regarded as an ornament, leaving us far behind the kind of teaching, learning and assessing that Counsell writes about with passion.

### The choice of appropriate content for CAPS FET history

Beyond their instructions (that the content was intended to be a rewrite not a de novo start, with a reduction in the number of topics, no repetition and much more specific content detail, that would fill in perceived gaps), there were three broad guiding principles that the writers recognised. They were,

- that the structure of the exam papers should be established before the content was approached
- that the current division of topics for the NSC exam did not allow much scope for changes to be made to Grade 12,
- that the idea of posing questions to frame content topics would be retained and that they would be provided with an explanatory initial paragraph to provide background and direction – something that they had not seen in any other history curricula.

All my experience of history curriculum committees has taught me one inescapable truth: that it will never be possible to create the ideal history content, nor to satisfy all the members of a committee, let alone the academic and teaching professions or general public. (The horizontal knowledge structure of history allows for an infinite range of possibilities.) There is much that Kallaway points to with which I agree completely, particularly regarding the difficulty of selection when trying to provide sufficient background and topic progression for both pupils and teachers. But, it is worthwhile to track the main decisions that were made when arriving at the CAPS content specification.

The following tables contrast the CASPS curriculum and the NCS from which it was developed.

#### Grade 10

CAPS	NCS
1. The world around 1600	1. What was the world like in the mid-fifteenth century? Africa (Songhay); China (Ming); India (Mogul); Ottoman Empire; the Americas; European societies; Southern African societies.
2. Expansion and conquest during the 15th – 18th centuries	2. What was the impact of conquest, warfare and early colonialism in the Americas (Spain), Africa (Portugal, Holland) and India (France, Britain)?
3. The French Revolution	3. Slavery: slavery and the Industrial Revolution; the Atlantic slave trade and racism?
4. Transformations in southern Africa after 1750	4. The quest for liberty: American War of Independence; French Revolution
5. Colonial Expansion after 1750	5. Industrial Revolution
6. The South African War and Union	6. What transformations occurred in Southern Africa between 1750 and 1850?
	7. How did the world change between 1450 and 1850?
	8. What are the constructed heritage icons from the period that are celebrated today?

NCS topics 1 and 2 were retained but shortened in their scope. NCS topics 3 and 5 were dropped as they are covered in Grade 8 and Grade 7. NCS topic 4 became CAPS topic 3 - the American War of Independence was dropped and Napoleon included. NCS topic 6 was a hold-all, completely unspecified topic. As soon as one began to specify it a historiographical can of worms was opened. After much discussion with a range of historians and many differing public comments, CAPS topics 4 and 5 were the result. CAPS topic 6 represented an opportunity to re-insert a key period of South African history, previously in Grade 8.

Grade 11

CAPS	NCS
1. Communism in Russia 1900 to 1940	1. What was the world like by 1850? African state formations; the Americas; Europe; Asia.
2. Capitalism and the USA 1900 to 1940	2. Imperialism: Nature, World War 1, entrench ideas of race and segregation.
3. Ideas of race in the late 19th and 20th Century	3. What were the range of responses to colonialism in Africa and Asia? Resistance – armed, passive, diplomacy; Other.
4. Nationalisms - South Africa, the Middle East and Africa	4. Challenges to capitalism: the Russian Revolution and the establishment of the communist state.
5. Apartheid South Africa 1940s to 1960s	5. Crisis of capitalism: the Great Depression in the USA and its wider impact.
	6. What was the impact of pseudo-scientific racism and Social Darwinism on the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (including the eugenics movement in the late nineteenth century and its impact on ideas of race and racism in Africa, the USA, Australia, Europe and particularly leading to genocide in Nazi Germany)?
	7. Competing nationalisms and identities in Africa: Pan-Africanism to 1945; South African nationalisms; impact of World War 2; construction of heritage and identities?
	8. How unique was apartheid South Africa? How did apartheid entrench ideas of race? What was the nature of resistance to apartheid?
	9. How did the world change between 1850 and 1950?
	10. How has the South African past been publicly represented (e.g. in museums and monuments)

The Grade 11 CAPS attempted to tidy the Grade 11 NCS and did so by using four 20<sup>th</sup> century ‘isms’. NCS topics 4 and 5 were retained. Topic 4 in the CAPS became a combination of elements from the NCS topics 2 and 7 and the removal of the Middle East from Grade 12 (where it was a contentious examination topic). A clear chronology was provided for the history of SA from the 1940s (CAPS topic 5), the former NCS topic 8.

Grade 12

CAPS	NCS
1. The Cold War	1. What was the impact of the Cold War in forming the world as it was in the 1960s? USSR/USA; China; conflict: Vietnam, Cuba, Angola, Middle East; UN, OAU, NAM.
2. Independent Africa	2. How was uhuru realised in Africa in the 1960s and 1970s?
3. Civil Society protests 1950s to 1990s	3. What forms of civil society protest emerged from the 1960s up to 1990? 1960s: civil rights, disarmament, student movements, peace movements, Black Power movement, women’s movements; 1970s: Black Consciousness Movement in South Africa; apartheid South Africa and Eastern Europe in the 1980s.
4. Civil resistance in South Africa 1970s to 1980s	4. What was the impact of the collapse of the USSR in 1989? On South Africa; on Africa; on the dominance of the USA.
5. The coming of democracy in South Africa, and coming to terms with the past	5. How did South Africa emerge as a democracy from the crises of the 1990s? Crisis of apartheid in the 1980s; collapse of apartheid - internal and external pressure; making of the new Constitution; dealing with the past and facing the future; new

	identities and the construction of heritage.
6. The end of the Cold War and a new global world order 1989 to present	6. What do we understand by globalisation? The global economy; information age; globalisation of culture; migration; Africa in the global world; responses and challenges to globalisation.
	7. What are the ideologies and debates around the constructed heritage icons from the period?

The previous examination structure for Grade 12 was retained, viz. CAPS topics 1,2,3 in Paper 1 and topics 4,5,6 in Paper 2. The most substantial change (in response to comment) was to put elements of NCS topic 6 into the examination. There were, however, other smaller examination content changes in topics 1 and 2. NCS topic 3 was split to (1) continue the chronology of SA history begun in Grade 11, which became CAPS topic 4 – so named in order to invite comparison and contrast with CAPS topic 3, and (2) to give more focus to civil rights in the US, a popular theme. Topic 1 was shortened. What is important to realise, however, is that practically no school will teach all six Grade 12 topics, as only four are required for the examination (two in each paper).

Rob Siebörger