

Cecelia Bradley

President ,Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE)

8 Galali PI Aranda ACT 2614,

02 62523136

Re: Response to National History Curriculum Framing Paper

INTRODUCTION

The timely publication of the Cambridge Primary Review as The Australasian Association for Progressive and Alternative Education (AAPAE) is finalizing the submissions to the National Curriculum Framing Papers addresses many of the issues which are important to the learners, parents and teachers in alternative, progressive and democratic schools. We urge the Board and the writers of the Curriculum to consider the findings carefully.,

(Alexander, R.J. and Flutter, J. (2009) Towards a New Primary

Curriculum: a report from the Cambridge Primary Review. Part 1: Past and Present.

Cambridge: University of Cambridge Faculty of Education.

<http://www.primaryreview.org.uk/Publications/CambridgePrimaryReviewrep.html>
)

Alexander, R.J. (2009) Towards a New Primary Curriculum: a report from the Cambridge Primary Review. Part 2: The Future. Cambridge: University of Cambridge

Faculty of Education.

By the time I reached the Conclusion section of the History Framing Paper and was feeling overwhelmed by the extent of the proposed plan I was relieved to read the concluding sentence which recognized

(H120) “The approach set out in this paper is premised on schools making a substantial commitment to teaching history. This will require making space in the timetable for a sustained and sequential program. At present there is little guidance for the allocation of time to history.”

Submissions to the Cambridge Primary Review recognize that

“Geography and history were widely regarded as being undervalued in primary

education and under-represented in the curriculum. Many submissions called for a greater emphasis on the humanities....Submissions on the place and teaching of history also criticised the growing marginalisation at the primary stage of a perspective on the world which witnesses believed was of central importance in both education and life.” (Part 1,p32 33)

“The initial promise – and achievement – of entitlement to a broad, balanced and rich curriculum has been sacrificed in pursuit of a narrowly-conceived ‘standards’ agenda. The most conspicuous casualties have been the arts, the humanities and those generic kinds of learning, across the entire curriculum, which require time for thinking, talking, problem-solving and that depth of exploration which engages children and makes their learning meaningful and rewarding. The case for art, music, drama, history and geography needs to be vigorously re-asserted; so too does the case for that reflective and interactive pedagogy on which the advancement of children’s understanding in large part depends, in ‘the basics’ no less than in other subjects.” (Part 2, p3)

(H12-19) AAPAE supports any return of the humanities to significant status, especially in primary education.

Recommendation1: that careful consideration be given to the implications and the effects of unrealistic expectations and overcrowded curricula, also strongly addressed in the UK Report, on learners and teachers which can be damaging to the goals for improved learning.

AAPAE has a general concern, expressed in all our responses to the National Curriculum Papers, that by embarking on a national curriculum to which all schools and individuals must adhere, the very pluralistic, changing, dynamic, diverse educational experience and society which we say we value may be countermanded and parental and learner choice further diminished.

Recommendation 2: that there be “less national prescription and more scope for individual, local variation and flexibility”

The Review also noted the battle happening many countries, between those who see the role of history in creating and transmitting a unified identity especially espoused by media and politicians, and the need to appreciate and value cultural plurality and all its implications. AAPAE is interested to note that The History Framing Paper attempts to weave this into the fabric of its plan rather than confront it as an issue which has also driven the recent ‘history wars’ in Australia.

AAPAE also supports valuing the distinctive features and principles that are intrinsic to History and sees that they add worthwhile dimensions to the learner

AIMS

(H 20-27) AAPAE supports the notion that history helps us make meaning,

develops conceptual thinking and is a valued means of experiencing and understanding cause, consequence, interpretation and evidence.

AAPAE's key ideas of living and learning democratic participation from the earliest stages is supported by the place of history in building and enlightening engaged citizenship in one's community.

AAPAE also appreciates the recognition of the complexity of the world in which learners live and that school can only be one 'agency that shapes historical experience.

Recommendation 3: That factual knowledge be integrated into depth of understanding and play a minimal part in any proposed assessment and requirement for standards.

(H26) The broadness of this world view and Australia's place appears challenging and somewhat daunting. If school is but one agency how can other agencies relieve the enormity of this program?

TERMS

(H29-33) Following on from (H26) the explanation of Overview and Bridging as relying quite heavily on teacher transmission and exposition is a concern to AAPAE. It is probably necessary if all the components of the proposed programme are to be achieved, but our concern is that it will continue and maintain the ongoing disengagement of learners in History and the often expressed concern about boredom and repetition which plague students.

Recommendation 4: That learner involvement and choice and decision-making be more actively involved with in depth studies in all stages.

CONSIDERATIONS

(H34-38) AAPAE supports the recognition of the complexity of the historical world in which learners live, the history of Australia and the place of their country in relation to those immediately in their neighbourhood and further afield.

Recommendation 5: AAPAE supports the notion of experiencing many narratives rather than one national story and thus understand and evaluate all the values implied.

Recommendation 6: That traditions be experienced and understood and that openness to questioning their 'binding' nature be fostered

AAPAE agrees with the consideration that a good understanding of Australian history is essential to civics and citizenship education.

Recommendation 7: consider the experience of AAPAE from many years experience, that genuine participation in democratic decision-making through the whole of education, leads learners to active inquiry and active participation in understanding the history of their world

CROSS CURRICULUM IMPLICATIONS

(H42- 55) AAPAE welcomes the recognition of the “integrated approach to history favoured in primary schools,” and hopes that this will be allowed to thrive. The Cambridge review also noted that the national Curricula have a tendency to ‘push’ downwards the more separate, segmented, secondary culture and practice into the primary and primary into early stages of learning with the consequence of losing the unique cultures of each and adding increasing pressure to conform to one way of doing and being.

Civics and citizenship education

(H54) Recommendation 8: AAPAE can see clearly the place History has in teaching ‘about’ civics and citizenship but we strongly advocate that this be accompanied by the living out of a genuine democracy in schools.

STRUCTURE

(H56-61) AAPAE welcomes the suggestion that the curriculum should be substantial, rich and especially flexible, avoiding excessive prescription and repetition, “allowing all teachers to enhance it with their interests and expertise.”

Of utmost importance to AAPAE is that the curriculum should allow for differences in interests, capabilities, future pathways of students.

Recommendation 9: that it also allows for current pathways not just future ones as real education is for the now as well as the future.

STAGES

As with the other framing papers AAPAE has a problem with a year by year lock step approach to the curriculum.

Recommendation 10: That the curriculum remain as broad and flexible as possible to allow for individual and local community initiatives and input, for in depth long term and diverse study and promote stages as guides rather than prescriptions to be followed and which drive testing regimes.

STAGE 1

AAPAE supports the notions of building on direct personal experience with some national and global (if appropriate) connections to personal family and

local history but minimal moves towards abstraction.

The imposition of standards is a cause for concern at this stage. (See comments for Assessment)

STAGE 2

AAPAE welcomes the continuation of the integrated nature of History with other fields of study and provided it is really feasible also including elements that are specific to History.

The proposed programme appears very dense and will be challenging and demanding that most of Australian History will be covered in the primary stages – too much to ask?

Stage 3 & 4

The writer of this submission is not familiar enough with the current high school History curricula in various states to comment fairly on these proposed stages.

A smooth transition from primary to secondary if they are to continue as discrete entities is necessary. The global context of the studies appears to add the possibility of addressing the repetition problem. The valuing of learner interest and choice and in-depth studies at these stages is also something that AAPAE welcomes and would prefer to see across all stages.

CONCLUSIONS

(H120) As we commented at the beginning, AAPAE welcomes 'doing history' as an essential part of our learning and development as human beings understanding where we have come from and making decisions about the here and now and the future in the light of this knowledge

AAPAE welcomes the statement of the need for appropriate assessment and reporting but is concerned that History will seek the path of standardized and high stakes testing so that it can be seen to match the status of the so called core subjects of English Maths and Science.

As the Cambridge Primary Review says

- an intelligent and flexible approach to curriculum planning and timetabling;
- a refusal to be bound by the government's expectation that literacy and mathematics should be allocated at least half of the available daily teaching time;
- high quality teaching in all subjects.

(Part 2,P13)

We have to be blunt: it is time that ministers and officials started taking notice of the evidence on the necessary relationship between standards and breadth. The evidence may be politically counter-intuitive but it is also well-established, consistent and unequivocal.

(Part 2 P24)

AAPAE believes that assessment is the servant of the learner and direct feedback between those intimately involved in the learning process is the key. Standardised highstakes testing regimes and public reporting have been shown over and over to narrow curriculum, stress teachers and learners into test focus, labelling and categorization as less than or outright failure, threats of punishment, criticism, strip self esteem and instil a lifelong distaste for anything academic.

“Tests exist for their own sake they measure the ability of the entire school community, learners, parents, teachers administrators to focus all their efforts on producing good results on tests! Nothing more, nothing less!”

Ackoff.R.L & Greenberg.D 2008 Turning gninraeL Right Side Up

Wharton School Publishing, New Jersey p27

Recommendation 11: Self assessment of goals and achievement and diagnosis of new directions within the context of the learning/ teaching relationship works to engage and encourage the learner to further inquiry.