History curriculum development in New South Wales: Issues of control and its impact on teachers

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Abstract
The increasing bureaucratisation of the New South Wales [NSW] Board of Studies [BOS], the statutory body responsible for curriculum determination in NSW, has led to a tightening of curricular controls and the further marginalisation of teacher participation in curriculum decision-making processes. The prevalence of acontextual mandated curriculum change initiatives compromises teacher professionalism and undermines teacher practice and student learning.

These issues are examined through the lens of recent history curriculum change in NSW. The development and dissemination of the 1998 Years 7-10 History Syllabus provides insight into the control mechanisms underlying the construction of curriculum in NSW – who controls it, how, why and to what effect. Further, it also reveals that teachers experience curriculum control in two particular ways, the first is through marginalisation in change processes and the institution of increasingly rigorous accountability mechanisms. The second is through the mandating of specific subject matter knowledge. The effects of curriculum control on history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the new syllabus are subsequently explored.

Introduction
This paper examines issues of curriculum control and its impact on history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of a new syllabus. To provide background, this paper overviews the broader subject debates and the international, national and state educational structures, policies, and changes framing the development of the new syllabus. Specifically, it is argued that the international trend towards standards based educational reform has seen the strengthening of stringent curriculum development processes as evidenced in efforts towards systemic reform and mandated change. The power relationships embedded within these approaches to curriculum change have implications for the development of curriculum in NSW. They also have implications for the role and status of teachers in change processes. Accordingly, this paper examines research into systemic reform and mandated change processes highlighting the role of teachers within these processes. This is important, as the new syllabus is a system wide, mandated curriculum change.

This paper subsequently examines the recent nature of history syllabus development in NSW with specific reference to the processes and structures underlying the development and dissemination of the new syllabus. In an effort to explicate issues of power – who has it, who doesn’t, why and to what effect - this paper explores the multiple stakeholders involved in the syllabus development process and the varying coalescing and contesting agendas driving it. It contends that the change structures and

1 For reader ease the 1998 Years 7-10 History Syllabus shall subsequently be referred to as the new syllabus.
processes underlying the development of the new syllabus support the preservation of historically constituted control mechanisms. Further, it is argued that curriculum control is broadly manifest in the marginalisation of teacher participation in decision-making processes and the consolidation of rigorous accountability mechanisms. Issues of power as they relate to the development of the new syllabus are also evidenced in debate over subject knowledge as various key agents struggled for the right to determine what historical knowledge is and how that knowledge is best taught, learnt and assessed.

Finally, this paper contends that history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of a new syllabus are initially driven by their experiences of the syllabus development process and that these initial experiences powerfully shape the concrete formation of teachers’ perceptions of change and their enactment of it. This argument acknowledges the centrality of teachers as active participants in the change process.

Factors shaping the development of the new syllabus

(a) History as a school subject

History as a school subject has been the focus of increasing professional and public debate in recent years. This debate, evidenced in international and national arenas, emanates at a broader level from a perceived crisis in the teaching and learning of history. Some scholars interpret this crisis as the immanent death of history (Fukuyama, 1992) whilst others view this debate as part of wider contention over the nature and purpose of history as an academic and school subject at a broader societal level (see for example, Young, 1990, Jenkins, 1995).

In Australia and elsewhere, this perceived crisis has given rise to a number of federal inquiries into the teaching, learning and assessment of both school history K-12 and the tertiary preparation of teachers of history. In the United States for example, the publication of the Bradley Commission Report (1988) focused on issues of national standards and this report along with the subsequent release of National Voluntary Standards (1994) and Revised Basic Standards in 1996 re-oriented debate about the nature and purpose of history as a school subject more narrowly on issues of curriculum content. In Europe, 27 nations participated in the 1996 Youth and History survey whose findings comprise The State of History Education in Europe (van der Leeuw-Roord, 1998) and in the United Kingdom the introduction of the National Curriculum sought to standardise the teaching and learning of all subjects including history, through greater curriculum prescription and more rigorous accountability and evaluation mechanisms. Intensified interest in history as a school subject is not surprising given the nature of history – it is often seen as a vehicle through which nationalist goals can be achieved and a conduit through which effective citizenry and political ends can be met.

In NSW this debate has been evidenced in the development of the new syllabus. In fact the recently released DET funded, Monash University researched, Report of the National Inquiry into School History entitled The Future of the Past (Taylor, 2000) specifically acknowledged conflict over both history and the new syllabus in NSW as an issue of consequence, as this paper will overview. This conflict is in part due to the structure of history as a school subject in NSW. NSW is the only Australian state in which history remains a discrete secondary school subject. In other states, history has been partially or fully subsumed into social studies based Key Learning Areas [KLA’s]. Attempts to cluster history under the Human Society and Its Environment [HSIE] KLA in NSW have been successful in name only although the structure of secondary school departments is starting to reflect these attempts with many schools, particularly Catholic
Education Office [CEO] schools, opting for a department structure based on KLA’s. Debate over the role and purpose of school history is also embedded within international concerns about falling educational standards.

(b) The international and national politics of curriculum change
Throughout the 1980’s and the 1990’s, educators, parents and government officials across many western nations were worried that education standards were falling in their country. A result of this has been that efforts at educational reform and change have focused on improving educational standards. One way in which education systems have sought to raise educational standards is through systemic reform efforts and mandated change initiatives. Frequently, these reforms take the form of attempts at curriculum change, which often rely on mandated content and top-down change processes. Internationally, this has resulted in the introduction of bureaucratic management models, the centralised development of outcomes driven curriculum, increasing control and regulation of assessment procedures and the forging of a direct link between education, industry and the business sector.

In Australia, the ‘back to basics’ adage of the 1980’s and attempts at standardising curriculum across Australian states and territories in the 1990’s (National Statements and Profiles) reflect this desire. Despite its limited acceptance in NSW, National Statements and Profiles continues to shape NSW policy and curriculum direction albeit in an indirect way. Its legacy has been an increased emphasis on outcomes driven curriculum, which was one incentive for recent history syllabus revision in NSW.

(c) NSW: The state politics of curriculum reform
National and State educational relations have regularly been a source of conflict particularly in NSW. Traditionally, NSW, the most populous state, has been the state most wary of a national agenda and has vigorously defended its right to maintain independent control of educational policy making (Shearman, 1992). Whilst Australia has a constitutional structure limiting national policy control over state education, the Federal Government has, in the last few decades, increasingly sought to influence state education policy. National agreements such as the 1999 Adelaide Declaration (National and Agreed Goals for Schooling in the 21st Century), the successor of the 1989 Hobart Declaration, which drove attempts at national standardised curriculum, continue to influence state educational policy.

Intra-state tensions between educational organisations also exist in NSW. These tensions promote conflict, and convolute and complicate curriculum development processes. In NSW curriculum determination is vested in the Board of Studies [BOS], a statutory body constituted by the 1990 Education Reform Act. Since 1990, the BOS has aimed to provide “educational leadership by developing quality curriculum and awarding secondary school credentials, the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate [HSC]” (BOS, 2001a). A large part of the role of the BOS in NSW curriculum determination centres on the development and dissemination of syllabus documents. The BOS defines a syllabus as “the document for each course [courses are arranged by subject] that describes what students are expected to learn in terms of aims, objectives, outcomes, content and assessment requirements” (BOS, 2001b).

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2 The School Certificate is awarded to NSW Year 10 students upon the completion of School Certificate courses and examinations. The Higher School Certificate is awarded to year 12 students upon completion of the HSC courses and examination.
Prior to 1990, the NSW Department of School Education [currently known as the NSW Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DET)] was the centralised agency responsible for curriculum development in NSW. DET is primarily responsible for the “delivery of education and training services across NSW” (DET, 2001). The power structures that govern the development of NSW curriculum and support for its implementation are therefore splayed across several organisations. The BOS are responsible for the development and dissemination of curriculum whilst DET provide support for the implementation of curriculum in the way of teacher professional development. This relationship is problematic as the development of the new syllabus reveals.

DET is a government department directly accountable to the NSW Minister for Education and Training [Education Minister]. Whilst it can be claimed that the BOS was established as a curriculum and assessment body independent of state governance, it has been suggested that although the authority of the BOS to initiate and direct change is substantial, ultimately, the power to determine policy rests with the Education Minister (Young, 1993). The increasing bureaucratisation of the BOS substantiates this suggestion, as this paper will later discuss. Additionally, attempts to restructure the BOS in the mid 1990’s have seen the further centralisation of curriculum development processes in NSW.

Syllabus development in NSW has traditionally been both systemic and mandated. The very nature of syllabus development in NSW both presupposes and reproduces unequal power relationships, which marginalise teacher participation in change processes. At the same time, teachers are paradoxically subjected to rigorous accountability mechanisms. Teachers in NSW have thus found themselves implementing syllabuses developed by others and imposed from above. To uncover the role of teachers in curriculum change processes in NSW, research on systemic reform and mandated change processes is overviewed below.

The Nature of Curriculum change in NSW
(a) Systemic reform
Educational policymakers have “long understood public schools to be a loosely coupled environment, i.e. a realm where local action might or might not follow the agenda established higher up in the bureaucratic hierarchy” (Landman, 2000, p9). One way in which educational policy makers have sought to ensure greater correlation between the intended and actual outcomes of change has been through systemic change processes. Debate surrounds use of the term ‘systemic change’. This debate centres on how the term systemic change has become misused and misunderstood (Carr-Chelman, 1998). Whilst it is not within the scope of this paper to contribute to this debate, a brief discussion of this debate is relevant to understanding the politics surrounding the development and dissemination of the new syllabus. It has been argued, “within education the term ‘systemic change’ is used frequently to refer to almost any large-scale project” (Carr-Chelman, 1998, p369). Carr-Chelman suggests that this is because confusion between ‘systemic’ and ‘systematic’ approaches to change is widespread throughout educational literature. Basing her argument on systems theory, she distinguishes between systemic approaches to change that are “holistic, contextual and stakeholder owned” (1998, p370) and systematic approaches to change which are “presented as linear, generalisable, and typically top-down or expert driven” (1998, p370). The terms themselves highlight this difference; systematic approaches to change assume that change can be developed and implemented in a structured and systematic
fashion. Systemic approaches to change, on the other hand, recognise the embeddedness of the ‘system’ and in so doing “recognize that any system-of-interest is embedded in some larger suprasystem and is made up of sub-systems” (Carr-Chelman, 1998, p371).

Therefore, claims of systemic approaches to change sometimes mask efforts at change that are far more systematic in nature. So, whilst proponents of systemic change have argued for a rationalised educational system, one aimed at reducing the inherent tangles of bureaucracy, proliferating policy, and incoherent governance that would impede reform (Smith 1996); the manner in which they have sought to achieve this has not always been systemic in nature. For example, attempts at systemic change typically rely on the creation of new policy instruments (Cohen, 1995). The new syllabus mandates the introduction of a state-wide public Australian History/Australian Geography, Civics and Citizenship examination. Policy instruments such as this examination purport to foster greater educational equity by raising standards and expectations for all students including poor and minority students (Landman, 2000). Systemic change initiatives are therefore frequently standards based and have implications for teaching and learning. Public examinations designed to examine a common curricular core also increase accountability mechanisms for both students and teachers. A frequent aim of attempts at systemic change therefore, is to ‘tighten up’ the education system. One has to query whether these attempts at systemic change are in actuality, attempts at systematic change. Further, it must be recognised that very different educational aims, processes and anticipated outcomes underlie these different approaches to change.

Another view of systemic change is presented by Squire and Reigeluth (2000). They argue that there are four major meanings for ‘systemic change’ in educational research. These are: Statewide policy systemic change, districtwide systemic change, schoolwide systemic change and ecological systemic change. In articulating the differences between these four meanings, Squire and Reigeluth assert, “the ways that different reformers conceive of systemic change depends largely on their perceptions of what constitutes an education system” (2000, p143). In doing so, they present a convincing argument for ecological systemic change which is similar in nature to Carr-Chelman’s (1998) definition of systemic change. Ecological systemic change incorporates systemic thinking and acknowledges that:

an educational system is a complex social system that can be defined in a number of ways and can be understood only by being viewed from multiple perspectives (Squire & Reigeluth, 2000, p145).

Approached from an ecological perspective, systemic change can therefore, have positive effects.

Systemic change represents and reflects a range of varying and often conflicting interests, influences and agendas. One cannot therefore, examine systemic change in terms of the system alone. Rather, one must acknowledge that the system exists in relationship to other formal and informal structures and agencies. As education is seen to be a public enterprise one of these structures is the State. Cornbleth (1990) argues that the State shapes educational debates and more directly “influences the approach taken to curriculum and the kind of curriculum that prevails” (p119). The State also has an indirect influence on the curriculum in terms of the State’s role as a carrier of hegemonic ideas and values (Cornbleth, 1990, p119). The State here is seen to be “the coalition that exerts its power or control by shaping official or authoritative public policy” (Cornbleth, 1990, p118). For the purposes of this paper, the State is seen to encompass those key stakeholders involved in the development of the new syllabus as
identified in Table 1 later in this paper. Whilst it is beyond the scope of this paper to examine the role of the State in the development of the new syllabus, it must be acknowledged that the relationship between the system and the State and the ways in which teachers perceive this relationship, has implications for the ways in which they perceive a new syllabus. This is largely because systemic changes such as the new syllabus, frequently assume the form of a government mandate.

(b) Mandated Change

Mandated changes conventionally rely on the premise that bureaucratic bodies such as the BOS have the right to dictate what educational changes should occur, how, when and why. The BOS is a State apparatus, established under State legislation and mandate. As such, the BOS is accountable to the NSW state Government and has a legislated requirement to mandate educational curriculum policy. Mandated educational changes are also based on the assumption that schools and teachers can and should do whatever is mandated (Cornbleth, 1990). Mandated changes frequently, although not always, assume the form of top-down change where new policies and assessment procedures are developed by the ‘State’ and implemented by the ‘system’. A major emphasis of the State in educational policymaking is the mobilisation of political support and the minimisation of opposition (Cornbleth, 1990). That the State has the human and material resources to garner political support legitimises government mandates as policies that maintain the status quo of State control of education.

Systemic and mandated changes can yield positive outcomes (see for example, Stiegelbauer and Lacey, 1992). The fact that a particular change is systemic or mandated doesn’t mean that particular change is bound to failure. Rather, it is the processes through which policymakers attempt to define and realise the intended outcomes of change that contribute to the success or failure of change initiatives. Research has proven that choice not mandation is a critical part of success (House and McQuillan, 1998). Despite this, current reform initiatives, as evidenced in the development of the new syllabus, continue to mandate change. Why is this so? An investigation of the multiple impetuses and agendas driving the development of the new syllabus addresses this question, below.

The impetus for a new syllabus

The development of the new syllabus resulted from various competing and complimentary factors. First and foremost the development of the new syllabus emerged in response to broader trends towards standards based reform and debate about the nature and purpose of school history, the BOS commenced work on the new syllabus in early 1998. Syllabus documents in NSW traditionally have a life span of nine years before they are revised. The 1982 Syllabus in History: Years 7-10 was superseded by the 1992 History Syllabus: Years 7-10. The development of the new syllabus was therefore, perceived by some teachers as premature.

The Syllabus Advisory Committee [SAC], an elected BOS committee, was subsequently asked to construct a writing brief for the new syllabus. In response to ministerial pressure, the BOS decreed that the new syllabus had to incorporate 100 hours of mandatory history in Stage 4 (years 7 and 8) and 100 hours of mandatory Australian history in Stage 5 (years 9 and 10) and that Civics and Citizenship had to be embedded within a study of history. Students would then be required to sit a newly introduced School Certificate examination in Australian History, Australian Geography and Civics and Citizenship commencing in 2002. The BOS also directed the SAC to
incorporate key competencies and literacy initiatives within an outcomes based syllabus document. The committee and individuals within it had to therefore, adapt to fit a series of group agendas and pressures. As Creighton (1983) observes, the political dynamics of committees and their decision-making abilities are characterised by:

- a failure to give systematic coverage to issues, members pushing their predetermined conclusions, proneness to reject innovations, personal feelings of members that they are reluctant to reveal, excessive time to make decisions, domination by a few members, and the production of superficial findings and group conformity in order to accommodate all interests (as cited in Reynolds, 2000, pp5-6).

In view of Creighton’s assertion, one has to query whose agenda was advanced during the process of syllabus development and whose voices were silenced as an examination of the key stakeholders in the development of the new syllabus reveals.

**Key stakeholders in the development of the new syllabus**

The role of the BOS in the development and dissemination of history curriculum has, in the last decade, been broadly contested and the struggle for the right to determine history curriculum has seen the rise and decline of multiple stakeholders. The stakeholders involved in the development of the new syllabus played multiple and often competing roles within the syllabus development process. The development of the new syllabus was immersed in politics and the central pursuit of various factions involved was that of curriculum control. A list of the various stakeholders involved in the development of the new syllabus comprises Table 1 below.

**Table 1 Stakeholders: a list of contributors to the History Stages 4-5 Syllabus**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>NSW BOS</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Minister for Education and Training – John Aquilina</td>
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<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Education Consultative Group [AECG]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Curriculum Support Directorate, NSW Department of Education and Training [DET]</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW Teachers’ Federation</td>
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<tr>
<td>NSW History Teachers’ Association [HTA]</td>
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<tr>
<td>Anglican Education Commission</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equity Review Group</td>
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<tr>
<td>Association of Heads of Independent Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Focus Group of Academics (representatives from The University of NSW and Macquarie University)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Federation of Parents’ and Citizens Associations NSW</td>
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<tr>
<td>Board of Jewish Deputies</td>
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(Simpson, 2000, p1)

Several of these stakeholders played important roles in the development of the new syllabus and are therefore worthy of further examination. The role of significant BOS personnel in the development of the new syllabus was the target of much teacher angst. The accession to power of the NSW Carr Labor Government in March 1995 and the findings of *Focus on Learning: report of Outcomes and Profiles in New South Wales Schooling* (Eltis, 1995) saw a radical staff overhaul at the BOS. A result of this
overhaul was the removal of the former HSIE Inspector who was seen to be an HTA sympathiser and the installation of an HSIE Inspector who was viewed as more impartial. Following her appointment the current HSIE Inspector has been the target of much unjustified criticism, not because of any obvious failing on her part, but because she replaced the previous HSIE Inspector who positioned himself as a history teacher advocate and HTA loyalist.

Whilst responsibility for the development of curriculum is formally vested in the BOS, its’ bureaucratic function positions the BOS as a middle manager of change processes. As this paper has previously established the BOS are answerable to the Education Minister. In view of this, the political agenda of the current state Government undoubtedly influences the functioning of the BOS. Goodson explains that the interests of bureaucracies are “loosely coupled with the political regime in government and with the economic structure of the country” (1998, p235). As this relates to issues of power, Dougherty warns us of the bureaucratic dynamic – that is, the possibility that within bureaucracies government officials will enact policies that benefit private interest groups with “little or no prior articulation by [other] groups of their interests and preferences” (as cited in Goodson, 1998, p236).

Whilst multiple impetus drove the development of the new syllabus, the current NSW Premier Bob Carr, a keen historian (particularly of American history), has assumed a prominent role in public debate about the role and function of history in both schools and the broader community. Premier Carr has frequently argued for compulsory history across years 7-10, an increased emphasis on the teaching of Australian history as knowledge or content, and a focus on civics and citizenship within a study of history (Carr, 1995; Carr, 2000). Premier Carr’s intent is to raise the profile, status and academic rigor of history as a school subject. Many people see the re-introduction of history as an examinable subject in the School Certificate, as an attempt to equate curriculum control and increased accountability with academic rigor. The new syllabus and the changes it mandates promulgate many of Premier Carr’s foci. The agendas of both Premier Carr and the current Education Minister, John Aquilina, therefore drive education policy making in NSW. The formal relationship between the BOS and the DET as earlier revealed is further evidence of State government influence on educational policy and curriculum determination. In fact, in NSW, a new syllabus must receive the endorsement of the BOS, the Education Minister and the DET who play a formal, if not limited, role in the curriculum change process.

The increasing bureaucratisation of the BOS has also resulted in “the inclusion of historians, bureaucrats and politicians in the arbitration of curriculum at the expense of history teachers” (Young, 1998, p10). The bureaucratic dynamic is therefore in evidence in NSW and indeed in the development of the new syllabus. That academic historians are stakeholders in the syllabus development process reveals another dimension to the history debate - the ‘discipline verses studies’ debate. Often school subjects are publicly and politically viewed as watered down versions of the academic or ‘parent’ discipline. Consequently, academics have traditionally played a large role in the determination of school curriculum. According to Young, history as an academic discipline and history as a school subject are:

- discrete entities, their differences defined by audience, outlook, subject matter and methodology. The first is concerned primarily with the production of knowledge, the second with the production of learning and its relevance to adolescents (1998:9).
In view of perceived threats to the integrity of history as a school subject, the NSW History Teachers’ Association [HTA], who represent 1200 secondary school history teachers in NSW publicly lobbied for the right to influence history curriculum determination in NSW. They argued that the nature of history teacher participation in the syllabus development process was inadequate and that the changes mandated by the new syllabus would have adverse affects on the teaching, learning and assessment of history in NSW secondary schools (HTA, 1998). They also argued that the new syllabus would damage subject integrity and lead to a decline in student numbers. The HTA’s protectionist role in the change process has been characterised as that of a gatekeeper (Hilferty, 2000).

The altruism of the HTA’s activist role in the development of the new syllabus is questionable in view of the HTA’s role in the development of the previous syllabus. The previous junior history syllabus – the 1992 History Syllabus: Years 7-10, had seen the emergence of the HTA as a key player in the determination of history curriculum. Several members of the Syllabus Advisory Committee [SAC] who have a stake in the writing of draft syllabi, were executive members of the HTA. The BOS Inspector for Human Society and Its Environment [HSIE] the Key Learning Area [KLA] within which history is subsumed, was also an HTA member. At the time of writing the 1992 syllabus, the SAC also had the right to veto draft syllabi. The HTA as a professional subject association therefore had a significant role in the development of the previous syllabus. Restructuring at the BOS in the mid 1990’s has since resulted in the marginalisation of the HTA in formal syllabus development processes. Not surprisingly, the HTA have vigorously opposed this move.

The activist role played by the HTA in the development of the new syllabus was evident in their attempts to generate both a perceived crisis in the media and agitation amongst history teachers in NSW. The political behaviour of the HTA is related to the long-term pursuit of strategic advantage. Arguably, underlying the constant urgings of the HTA President, Denis Mootz, for teachers to veto consultation documents and attempts to form resistant alliances with teacher unions such as the NSW Teachers’ Federation, were efforts to garner greater curriculum control. The HTA, like any other political organisation are not wholly altruistic, the acquisition of greater control benefits both the HTA and the teachers it represents.

Teacher participation in the syllabus development process was varied. There are teacher representatives on the Board of the BOS and teachers are frequently seconded to work for the Office of the BOS in times of policy reform. Two practicing teachers, one from a government school and the other from an Independent school were selected to write the various draft syllabi. The BOS claim that teacher consultation for the new syllabus was the most extensive to date and the current BOS HSIE Inspector claims that approximately over consultation responses were received in response to the draft writing brief and the draft syllabus. Despite this, the HTA have publicly decried teacher participation in the syllabus development process. The HTA (1998) disapprove of the survey style consultation documents, which they feel convey a particular agenda by inviting some responses and silencing other responses. The HTA therefore felt that teacher consultation and participation, was both non-representative and inadequate.

How do history teachers’ experience curriculum control?

(a) Teacher participation in mandated curriculum change processes
Hall's 1989 study of NSW geography syllabus change concluded that teachers' views of the syllabus development process and their role in it, affected their initial responses to the change. Negative views of the process by which the syllabus had been developed were more likely to produce resistant attitudes whilst positive views produced commitment (1997, p36). Pervasive inequalities are therefore ingrained in the curriculum change process itself and one manifestation is the marginalisation of teacher participation in planning for change.

The marginalisation of teachers in curriculum change processes is falsely justified by an educational discourse that increasingly derides teachers and their professionalism and leads among other things, to low morale and feelings of disaffection. Terms such as ‘educational reform’ and ‘innovation’ frequent media reports and orchestrate a crisis of confidence in the education system at a broad level and more specifically in teachers. The education system it seems is in need of reform and policy makers publicly position themselves as those most fit to mandate ‘innovative’ solutions.

The marginalisation of teacher participation in planning for curriculum change can therefore be rationalised in terms of preserving educational quality and justified through the stigmatisation of teachers as resistant, intransigent and perhaps too old to change (Bailey, 2000). Teachers are also marginalised in more subtle ways. For example, it has been claimed by the HTA that teacher consultation for the new syllabus was at best non-representative and at worst superficial. Fullan (1993) claims that policy makers often make “the naïve assumption that involving some teachers on curriculum committees … [will] facilitate implementation, because it [will] increase acceptance by other teachers” (p127). Policy makers such as the NSW BOS are therefore able to protect themselves against claims of teacher marginalisation by creating the façade of representative teacher participation when in actuality teacher participation in the development of the new syllabus was minimal.

The role that teachers played in the development of the new syllabus was dependent on their own political orientation. For example, a teacher who was an HTA member and had unionist leanings was far more likely to assume an activist role in this process and respond to consultation surveys than a teacher who was unaffiliated with these activist factions. Other teachers became politically active only when mooted changes appeared to directly affect their practice. Teacher participation in syllabus development reveals much about issues of power as it relates to agency and control. Paradoxically, whilst teachers have a limited role in the decision-making processes associated with syllabus development, responsibility for the success or failure of syllabus change is vested in teachers through increasingly rigorous accountability mechanisms.

(b) Accountability
Policy makers often assume that the outcomes or products of change are tangible and measurable. This focus on the products of change is often at the expense of a focus on the processes of change. The dynamic relationship between changes processes and change outcomes is thus often ignored. Rather, policy makers assume that rigorous accountability mechanisms will lead to greater correlation between the intended and actual products or outcomes of change.
Efforts to strengthen accountability systems may stem from a belief that increased accountability ensures greater educational standards. However, practitioners often experience accountability as ‘teacher policing’ according to McNeill (1986). This is because mandated change initiatives frequently:

[D]raw on a political model of accountability. This model assumes that the larger community and its elected representatives have a right … to hold public institutions answerable (Smith as cited in Landman, 2000, pp10-11).

Smith (1996) contrasts this model of accountability with an alternate ‘professional’ model that recognises that:

[T]he application of professional judgment to individual clients’ needs requires judgment, so it cannot be reduced to rules or prescriptions for practice; thus professionals require autonomy from external political control in determining how the products of their expertise should be used (as cited in Landman, 2000, pp11)

As both systemic and mandated change initiatives are founded on the preservation of historically constituted control mechanisms, as will be examined later, a political model of accountability often prevails. Landman (2000) argues that this model of accountability ignores teachers’ mastery of a specialised body of knowledge. The effect of a political model of accountability is that whilst teachers are increasingly held accountable for the implementation of change, teachers’ roles in decisions about change and planning for change remain limited. Policy makers are therefore attempting to force teachers to deliver pre-determined change outcomes without addressing the real problem – that is, the marginalisation of teacher participation in change processes.

Current moves to increase teacher accountability as seen in the re-introduction of the School Certificate History/Geography Examination reflect the view that “teachers are accountable for the implementation of the curriculum and for conforming to system expectations” (Earl and Katz, 2000, p109). Curriculum control is therefore often at the expense of teacher choice. McNeil (1986) offers an alternate view claiming that top down controls “ignore the common wisdom that measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning” (1986, pxviii). This assertion is part of broader debate over what effective learning is and how such learning should be assessed. Whilst this is not the focus of this paper, it is important inasmuch as this debate shapes teachers’ perceptions of a new syllabus.

Mandated change processes therefore have a number of negative implications for teachers; they force teacher compliance through rigorous accountability measures and then blame teachers when the actual outcomes of change are divergent from the intended outcomes. The change processes underlying the development of the new syllabus are based on unequal power relationships and result in the maintenance of bureaucratic control of curriculum determination. The very nature of the structures governing curriculum determination in NSW reproduces the tension of teacher marginalisation and accountability. History teachers also experience curriculum control in the mandating of specific subject matter knowledge.

(c) Subject matter knowledge
Curriculum control as evidenced in change processes is linked to issues of subject knowledge as those who control what counts as curriculum and what doesn’t, also
control what counts as knowledge and what doesn’t. Curriculum documents impose or reflect various understandings about the nature and uses of knowledge (Schrag, 1992, p.282). Goodson (1983) refers to this as the knowledge debate and claims that this debate is not one-dimensional; rather it is played out in different arenas including curriculum and subject. If you control what is defined as knowledge you therefore control who is defined as knowledgeable and thus legitimate the function of bureaucracies and the social reproduction of the class system. If we perceive of knowledge as M.F.D Young suggests, “as neither absolute, nor arbitrary, but as ‘available sets of meanings’, which in any context do not merely ‘emerge’ but are collectively ‘given’”(1971, p3); those who control curriculum and thus define or ‘give’ knowledge assume a superordinate position in power structures.

The way in which knowledge is positioned within the written curriculum gives way to preferred readings. This is particularly the case with subject specific curriculum change where issues of what constitutes subject knowledge, why and how it is best taught learnt and assessed are the source of contestation. Such contestation can be either conflicting or consensual. How individuals and groups navigate these tensions, contradictions and power relations at varying levels and in differing settings can have positive or negative effects on teacher commitment and motivation to change, as well as teacher morale.

Additionally, Lortie (1998) explains that top-down change processes contravene teacher autonomy and agency in two important ways. First, it circumscribes teacher autonomy related to content, to what is taught. Second, close control by prescribed curricula developed by others, results in a reduction of teachers’ pedagogical autonomy. Lortie argues that teachers should at least be able to make decisions about how to teach material prescribed by others. Curriculum control is thus transformed into the control of subject knowledge and how that knowledge is best transmitted.

**The processes and structures that reproduce curriculum control**

*(a) Processes*

Returning to Carr-Chelman’s (1998) discussion of systemic and systematic efforts towards change, the new syllabus could arguably fall under the category of systematic change. The new syllabus is the result of a top-down change process and is therefore, the product of an expert-driven reform. The change processes undergirding the new syllabus also fit fits Squire and Reigeluth’s (2000) description of statewide policy systemic change. Statewide policy systemic changes aim to improve the entire educational system by formulating consistent Statewide tests, curriculum guidelines, teacher certification requirements and other Statewide policies, mandates and regulations. An examination of the construction of the new syllabus at a macro level uncovers how top-down change processes act to mitigate conflict and dissent and maximise compliance and conformity. In doing so the locus of curriculum control is simultaneously positioned near policy makers and at a distance from teachers. This results in the continued legitimation of bureaucratic control over education and the perpetual subordination of teachers.

Centralised curriculum controls also have the effect of undermining or upstaging serious educational purposes according to McNeill (1986). She explains that when curriculum control is denied to teachers in the planning or development stages or change, “teachers set about to create their own authority … to do so they need to control students [and] … their solution [is] to control knowledge, the course content, in order to control students”(1986, pxx). Effectively, teachers also undermine educational purposes aimed
at doing ‘good’ for students by attempting to reclaim curriculum control in the only
arena they feel they can – the classroom.

Blasé and Anderson (1995) explain that the result of control-oriented processes is
subordination. Top-down, hierarchical relationships foster dependency. This
dependency is a form of subordination and Blasé and Anderson argue “the dynamics of
subordination result necessarily in unauthentic behaviours based on the need to survive”
(1995, p26). The contradiction here is clear. Educational policy makers publicly
denigrate teachers for their emphasis on curriculum content, yet it is the educational
policy makers in their exclusionary attempts to retain curriculum control, who force
teachers to rely on other means of asserting control over their worklives, namely
classroom control. Paradoxically, teachers therefore often contribute to their own
subjugation and deprofessionalisation by relying on well-worn avenues of control,
rather than seeking out new spaces for political action. This once again emphasises the
dialectic nature of power relations.

(b) Structures
The variegated structure of the BOS (see for example, BOS, 2001a) has resulted in
multiple branches with varying responsibilities. Whilst the approval of draft syllabi
involves numerous branches and levels of the BOS, the Curriculum Branch is
responsible for the development of syllabi with primary responsibility placed with the
Human Society and Its Environment [HSIE] Inspector. The Inspector subsequently
selects syllabus writers and oversees the functioning of the SAC.

Syllabus committees such as the BCC are shaped by economic and social realities and
also by administrative constraints and processes (Reynolds, 2000, p5). Syllabus
development is governed by BOS policy. However, at the time the new syllabus was
being developed the BOS was itself, undergoing policy review. The 1995 Syllabus
Development Flowchart was being re-evaluated and The Review of the Syllabus
Development Policy resulted in the 2001 Syllabus Development Flowchart. The new
syllabus was one of a number of syllabuses that were being developed in what was an
intermediary period in terms of syllabus development policy. A result of this transitional
period was that the new syllabus was commissioned without review of the previous
syllabus. This ‘oversight’ caused enormous consternation amongst history teachers and
the HTA who saw it as an attempt to further marginalise teacher voice in the change
process. It also gave way to suggestions that the new syllabus was pre-determined and
that teacher consultation was superficial. The BOS has since acknowledged this
omission and the current Syllabus Development Flowchart (BOS, 2001c) mandates
review of previous syllabi in the syllabus development process.

The Review of the Syllabus Development Policy resulted in changes to the structure and
processes of syllabus development. Initially, the History SAC were involved in the
initial drafting of the new syllabus. As part of moves to restructure syllabus
development at the BOS, and as a result of the SAC’s unwillingness to approve an
earlier draft version of the 1998 syllabus, the SAC was disbanded in early 1998. The
new syllabus development structure subsequently saw Board Curriculum Committees
[BCC’s] taking the place of the now obsolete SAC’s. Perhaps as a conciliatory gesture,
the person appointed to chair the BCC was a former member of the SAC and an
executive member of the HTA. He too, however was removed from this role when he
once again refused to endorse a subsequent draft version of the 1998 syllabus. To ease
mounting tension between the HTA, teacher unions and the BOS, the 1998-2000 HTA
President was selected as the new BCC Chairperson and the BCC’s right of veto was rescinded.

The role of teachers and the HTA in decision-making processes was therefore diminished. Whilst BCC approval of draft syllabi is no longer needed for syllabus approval the current HSIE Senior Curriculum Co-ordinator at the BOS was adamant that the BOS sought to gain unofficial BCC approval for the new syllabus. New writing teams were subsequently appointed and a writing brief was released for teacher consultation. After much redrafting a draft syllabus was released for teacher consultation. In an effort to quell increasing public disquiet about the new syllabus the BOS employed a team of independent researchers to analyse consultation responses and conduct focus groups with a select number of teachers. The result of this was that after re-drafting, the new syllabus was approved in late 1998 and released to schools in the last week of the 1998 school year for implementation in the 2000 school year. The development of the new syllabus was therefore a difficult process, fraught with conflict. Much of this conflict centred on issues of subject matter knowledge. Furthermore, these tensions are negotiated in what Goldman and Conley (1997) refer to as the ‘zone of discretion’ and can be broadly manifest as forms of conformity or resistance. An example of teacher conformity is offered by Frenette (2000) who argues that teachers are historically pragmatic in their response to curriculum change and this pragmatism initially focuses on issues of content. Teacher focus on content is all the more concentrated when that content is examinable as is the case with the new syllabus. The re-introduction of history as an examinable subject in the NSW School Certificate has numerous implications. First, teachers may view the new syllabus as an accountability mechanism used to measure not only student performance, but teacher and school performance as well. Second, the new syllabus may be seen as assessment driven and teachers may have to conform to this notion in their teaching practice. Third, an examination diminishes teacher resistance as teachers are forced to comply or risk letting down their students. The examination thus minimises conflict and enforces compliance and conformity. The impact of this on teacher professionalism and teacher identity is often damaging. All three implications are evidence of power issues, power over teachers, not power with teachers as curriculum control is positioned firmly away from teachers. Teachers’ perceptions of control relate not only to who has control but how far that control is situated from them. In other words teachers’ concerns centre not only on the form of control, they also centre on the locus of control.

Conclusion
The development and dissemination of the new syllabus provides insight into the increasing politicisation of curriculum development in NSW. It also reveals much about the changing role and nature of the key stakeholders involved in the determination of curriculum in NSW. The processes underlying the development of the new syllabus shape history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of a new syllabus. Issues of curriculum control are embedded in syllabus change processes and are evidenced in the marginalisation of teacher participation in change, the institutionalisation of rigorous accountability mechanisms and the mandating of specific subject matter knowledge. These processes compromise teacher professionalism and force curricular compliance. In view of such compliance one has to wonder how the new syllabus will become institutionalised, if at all.
References


New South Wales Board of Studies (2001c). *The Board’s new syllabus development process*, Sydney: Board of Studies.


