



Kate Cameron looks at some issues, approaches and opportunities in the History 7-10 syllabus...

The NSW 7-10 History Syllabus: Getting it Right

The new *NSW 7-10 History Syllabus* is based on the content, skills and concepts of the *Australian Curriculum: History*, yet it retains familiar key features of the earlier NSW syllabus, such as the inclusion of outcomes and the organisation of content in stages. This was the result of extensive consultation with teachers by the NSW Board of Studies.

Teachers' experience with what it is possible to teach within the 100 hours available per stage in NSW schools informed the decision to include only four depth studies in Stage 5. This allows more time in Years 9 and 10 for deeper investigation of content and the development and application of historical skills and concepts. This should help strengthen the transition to Stage 6 work. The 'achievement standards' of the national curriculum are presented as 'stage statements' in the NSW Syllabus, so despite the different terms, teachers of history across the country are aiming for the same standards.

While these statements inform teaching and learning programs, NSW teachers report student achievement in history for the Record of School Achievement using A-E grades based on the history course performance descriptors. These descriptors have been aligned to the stage 5 statement. It is important for teachers to be aware of these key differences between the *Australian Curriculum: History* and the *NSW 7-10 History Syllabus* when accessing and using online material relating to programming and assessment.

Challenges of implementation

Overviews

Overviews are designed to provide a context for the depth studies to be undertaken. There are two overviews for each stage. Teachers should spend around 10% of teaching time on the overviews, i.e. 5 hours per year or 10 hours per stage. An overview can be taught separately, as an introduction to the depth studies to be taught in a semester or a year; it can be split to provide separate introductions to different depth studies; or parts of an overview can be integrated into a Depth Study.

Last year many teachers found they spent too much time on the overviews. Useful strategies for dealing with overviews include informed teacher exposition, activities based on relevant websites or audio visual material, together with a skeletal timeline that can be added to as the depth studies progress.



Historical concepts

The key historical concepts, continuity and change, cause and effect, perspectives, empathetic understanding, significance and contestability, will be familiar to experienced teachers of history. They are the underpinning 'big ideas' of history; they provide a focus for historical investigation, a framework for organising historical information and a guide for developing historical understanding.

The new NSW syllabus prominently features these concepts at the beginning of each stage and provides a K-10 continuum suggesting how students might develop and demonstrate their understanding of the concepts. Teachers do not need to feature all the concepts within each Depth Study, but should choose those that are most relevant and can be integrated most appropriately into each Depth Study. By the end of each stage, each historical concept should have been featured at least once. The Australian Curriculum History Units website, www.achistoryunits.edu.au, provides additional explanation and strategies for teaching these important key concepts.

New content in Stage 4

This is the second year of implementation for Year 7 and most teachers have accommodated the new syllabus quite readily and are now consolidating and refining their programs and resources. The historical skills to be taught will be familiar to teachers and the six depth studies for Stage 4 present little change in content from the previous syllabus, apart from two areas that teachers may not have taught previously:

- Depth Study 1 *Investigating the Ancient Past* requires a study of sources relating to ancient Australia and related heritage issues. The website www.achistoryunits.edu.au has a 'ready to go' learning sequence that supports this study very well;
- Depth Study 3 'The Asian World' requires a study of either China or India.

Depth Study 6 *Expanding Contacts*, elective 6d, 'Aboriginal and Indigenous Peoples, Colonisation and Contact History', requires a comparison of the nature and impact of colonisation in Australia and one other country. This study, mandatory under the previous syllabus, is no longer mandatory, although many teachers continue to teach it as it provides important knowledge and understanding and a solid foundation for Stage 5.

New content and approaches in Stage 5

Depth Study 1 *Making a better world?* features three new elective topics from which teachers choose one: 'The Industrial Revolution', 'Movement of peoples' or 'Progressive ideas and movements.' This has required teachers to research and develop new programs and to take a more global approach than required by the previous syllabus. Each topic links the relevant global theme to aspects of Australian history.

Depth Study 2 *Australia and Asia* is in fact *Australia or Asia*. Teachers will be familiar with most of the content of the 'Making a nation' elective from the old syllabus, but those who choose 'Asia and the world', will need to develop new programs and resources for a study of the key features of one Asian society from 1750.



Two of the four depth studies are mandatory: Depth Study 3, *Australians at War* and Depth Study 4 *Rights and Freedoms 1945 – present*. Depth Study 5, *The Globalising World* offers three electives: ‘Popular Culture’, ‘the Environment Movement’ and ‘Migration experiences’. All studies contain some content that will be familiar from the old syllabus. However the new studies include a wider range of Australian and international issues, and once again emphasise a more global perspective. This approach is reflected in the broad nature of the syllabus outcomes.

The NSW syllabus requires only four of the six Depth Studies in Stage 5 to be undertaken and mandates only two of these. Schools have the opportunity to develop a Depth Study of their own (Depth Study 6), based on content drawn from either of the stage 5 overviews – together with relevant outcomes, skills and concepts. Many schools are opting to update their existing units on Australia in the Vietnam War era, while others are developing a Depth Study on the Holocaust.

Depth Study 3: Australians at War

Depth Study 3 *Australians at War* has been a challenge for some Year 9 teachers. The study examines aspects of the experiences of Australians in World War I and World War II. Teachers may approach the wars as separate studies or they may be taught as a comparative study. It is not meant to be a senior level study of both wars. The changing scope and nature of warfare and the participation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are new areas. However most of the content echoes the old syllabus, including commemoration and the nature of the ANZAC legend, a topic of special significance this year.

It is important to note that teachers do not need to go into great depth on every content dot point. While some invite deeper source study, others can be treated with a simple graph or mapping exercise. The syllabus does not require each content point to be given equal weight and there is flexibility in the way content can be sequenced. For example, Gallipoli could double as the ‘specific campaign’ for World War I and the evacuation from Gallipoli could be the ‘specific event/incident’. This would help ensure there is not too much overlap with the study of World War I undertaken in Stage 6. With only two Depth Studies to be completed in Year 9, there should be more time for students to develop and apply the relevant skills and concepts to their investigation of the content. This should help them attain the target syllabus outcomes.

Depth Study 4: Rights and Freedoms

The temptation with this mandatory study is to spend too much time on the USA civil rights experience at the expense of the strong history of activism by Aboriginal Australians and their supporters in their struggle for rights and freedoms. The NSW Freedom Ride, inspired by events in the USA, was an important event – but it was only one in more than a century of Aboriginal activism which needs to be acknowledged. There is a global dimension to this study which includes the UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights as well as current efforts to secure civil rights and freedoms in Australia and throughout the world. In developing programs teachers need to allocate an appropriate proportion of lessons to the Australian, US and global dimensions of the study. As with all depth studies, teachers have the flexibility in developing their programs to arrange the content in a way that suits the approach they would like to take. There is no requirement to teach the content in the order that it appears on the pages of the syllabus.



Professional learning opportunities

The Centre for Professional Learning and the History Teachers Association of NSW are conducting professional development days in Sydney and regional areas to familiarise teachers with the requirements of the new syllabus and to share programming, teaching and assessment strategies. Check the CPL and HTA websites for dates and venues. *Teaching History*, HTA's journal, regularly publishes articles, programs and teaching ideas for the new syllabus.

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