



History curriculum: literacies and democracy in NSW syllabuses

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Abstract

A relationship between school history and notions of citizenship is evident in the Australian context. In this way, it is important to reflect on the nature of the subject of history (Körber, 2011) and how socio-political forces have impacted discourses relating to its aim and purpose (Goodson & Marsh, 1996). This paper seeks to consider how literacies are historically embedded in history (mandatory) syllabuses in New South Wales (NSW), and the implications of this for a conceptualisation of literacy that acknowledges the changing nature of communication, and as a result, participatory citizenship. Following the linguistic turn, and acknowledgement of the importance of language to social practice, a successful approach to literacy in secondary school contexts should consider the language and literacies required for specific subjects, rather than common or foundational areas of literacy (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001), as are often the focus of standardised literacy assessments. Positioned as a history of the present (Popkewitz, 2011), official curriculum documents are examined covering the period of the 1990s to the early 2000s, prior to the implementation of the first national curriculum. It was found that there was a distinct and explicit separation of notions of literacy and understanding in official curriculum, as well as presenting information communication technologies (ICTs) and literacy as distinct (and separate) competencies. It is argued that if history education is to contribute to active citizenship, there is a need to reconceptualise this idea to align with emerging civic practices of the twenty-first century.

Keywords History education · Historical literacy · Curriculum history · Citizenship education

Introduction

Due to the rapid evolution in communication technology over the past three decades, there has been a distinct shift in the way that people communicate and receive information. The texts we interact with day-to-day are far more likely to be multimodal and predominantly visual, while at the same time interactive and instantly accessed (Kellner & Share, 2007; Mihailidis & Thevenin, 2013; Stoddard, 2014). Referencing the ever-growing media culture, Morimoto and Friedland (2011) explain how influences on the socialisation of young people impacts on their development while increasingly being viewed through a mediated lens. Young people are embedded in more non-physical communities, and while entering these social spaces they have more freedom to express themselves and form identities through

varying types of interests and expression. Consequently, there have been assumptions made about the generations growing up in the digital era. In particular, conceptions of young people as the net generation (Tapscott, 2009) and/or digital natives (Prensky, 2012) have remained influential in education discourse. Such a characterisation of young people as experts in digital culture is problematic due to the assumptions underlying this view. While young people are certainly more immersed in interactive technologies than previous generations, this does not mean they are the experts in the current digital landscape. For example, Milton and Vozzo (2013) argue that this view assumes that all learners are experts, immersed in the use of technology. This assumption obscures unequal access to education and technology, and subsequently that all learners should be able to critically evaluate information found online. Moreover, this idea implies that experiences with technology are universal, a notion that was refuted by an empirical study of Australian first-year university students that found a wide diversity in media skills and participation (Kennedy et al., 2010). Despite the concerns that have arisen in relation to

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the uses of technology by young people, one idea seems to be enduring, that the connections that are made through these technologies are dramatically altering the modes of communication and social connection that have been known in the past, and as a result, altering civic engagement and political organisation.

Australia, the focus of this research paper, has experienced debates over curriculum as part of larger history culture wars from the 1990s and early 2000s (Macintyre & Clark, 2003; Parkes, 2011; Sharp, 2013). Arguments have been buoyed by community, government, and sector concern and interest over the purpose of schooling and the function of curriculum content—especially as it relates to history teaching and learning. Focussing specifically on the school subject of history in the state of New South Wales (NSW), this paper is concerned with the way literacy has been conceptualised in official discourses in subject syllabuses over time. School curriculum controversies are often a result of competing ideas about what kind of knowledge should be taught and how it should be taught. In the twenty-first century, the purposes of schooling are further complicated due to the rapidly changing nature of social and cultural practices. At the same time, equating literacy to global economic competitiveness has resulted in major developments in education policy in Australia over the last few decades. For example, the introduction of Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA) and the National Assessment Program—Literacy and Numeracy (NAPLAN)¹ controversially increased the role of the Commonwealth Government in education, despite the nation's constitution stating that education is a state and territory jurisdictional responsibility. Added to that, the publication of comparative data on the *MySchool* website is argued by some to increase transparency and public accountability for teaching and learning (Yates, 2013). In Australia, there is bipartisan support for accepting schooling to be framed in a national context since the establishment of ACARA (Lingard, 2018).

In scholarly research into literacy learning, the value of acknowledging the multiplicity of discourses in modern society, and the importance of including these in literacy pedagogy, has been largely recognised since the mid-1990s with the seminal work of the New London Group (1996), specifically the cultural and linguistic diversity of globalised societies, as well as the increasing variety of textual forms. Despite this, in many contexts, subject-specific literacy education has remained constrained by government initiatives, including a public and often-political focus on formal

assessment regimes such as high-stakes testing through NAPLAN (Faulkner, 2012). Such focus has a tendency to prioritise particular (more traditional) textual forms, suggesting that some students may be enfranchised, with others disenfranchised depending on the literacy practices that they are familiar with in their lifeworld (Henderson, 2011). In addition, Honan (2012) found that there was a sense of reluctance for teachers in seeing the relevance of their existing digital skills in their literacy lessons. More recently, 2020 saw the release of the first comprehensive and independent review of NSW curriculum since the Carrick report (Committee of Review of New South Wales Schools, 1989), finding current syllabuses to be overcrowded, to separate knowledge and skills, and time-limited (Masters, 2020). For these reasons, it is unsurprising that many of the literacies practised by students outside of school may be left unacknowledged in the classroom as teachers work to meet the many competing demands of the current curriculum. As a consequence, there is the potential to impact students' abilities to connect disciplinary knowledge to everyday situations, or more specifically, navigating across textual forms typical to the discipline or school subject, and those found in representations in out-of-school contexts (Moje, 2008). Further to this, there have been significant changes in epistemological considerations in the creation of digital texts, as emerging technologies have diversified communities of practice, as well as seemingly valuing impact, through gaining attention and engagement rather than concerns about demonstrating justification of claims (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). It is in this way that this paper seeks to consider how literacies are historically embedded in history syllabuses and the implications of this for a conceptualisation of literacy that acknowledges the changing nature of communication, and as a result, participatory citizenship.

COVID-19 and the digital divide

The year 2020 brought with it the global pandemic of COVID-19, resulting in a swift move to online modes and remote learning across many countries and contexts. While this undoubtedly caused stress for many teachers who had to work from home in trying times, there have also been early reports that a potential positive impact of this context is the impetus for teachers to embrace digital modes of learning, where perhaps they may have been hesitant before, resulting in an increased interest in the use of technology and digital tools, further prompting reflection on the skills that students will need in the twenty-first century (Ziebell et al., 2020). The Australian Information Industry Association (AIIA) released a white paper in anticipation of Australia's recovery in a post-COVID world, where they similarly supported the notion of reforming curriculum to better prepare students (and their teachers), and prioritise the digital economy and

¹ NAPLAN was introduced in 2008. These standardised assessments of literacy and numeracy are held annually for all students across states and territories in Australia in years 3, 5, 7 and 9.

industry, with a particular focus on underprivileged schools (AIIA, 2020). This issue of equity in digital access has also been discussed in relation to COVID-19 and the rapid shift to learning from home, as teachers reported concern about the negative impact of remote learning for vulnerable students, such as, a lack of stable access to internet connection and/or devices, as well as unequal access to support and resources in the home (Ziebell et al., 2020). However, as Selwyn (2020, para. 6) notes, “the most compelling technology-related lessons to take from the pandemic involve the informal, improvised, scrappy digital practices that have helped teachers, students and parents get through school at home.” This context has seen many schools and teachers forced to make the best of whatever technologies were immediately at hand for both themselves and their students. Importantly, this opportunity may help to shape students’ understandings of the potentials of their technologies (that they use in their everyday lives). This may be a catalyst to consider how education may be reformed to better serve the needs of students in the twenty-first century, particularly in the way that literacies are enacted in curriculum.

Is democracy in danger? How can history help?

The explosion of digital technology over the past three decades has increased access to scholarly history (Rosenzweig, 2011) as well as redrafting non-traditional historical forms through popular culture (Cauvin, 2016; de Groot, 2009; Rosenstone, 1998). Rapid technological change and globalisation are “changing the very nature of the way in which we communicate and understand and organize ourselves” (Reid, 2005, p. 27). These changes also significantly impact the private spheres of life and identity formation. Therefore, the explosion of new media interactivity should have a significant impact on curriculum development in terms of reconstructing curriculum to acknowledge and account for the now-multilayered dimensions of identity in non-traditional social spaces (Rosenzweig, 2011). While in the current knowledge society context, young people experience an increased need to be media savvy for economic success, Manderino and Castek (2016, p. 79) argue that, “access alone does not raise literacy levels, build political or social consciousness, increase civic engagement, or generate solutions to problems facing communities and the world at large.” Rather, there is a need to revisit the concept of historical literacy in light of the changes to consuming history in the digital age. In their comprehensive report on Australian literacies, Lo Bianco and Freebody (2001) argued that a successful approach to literacy in the future will consider the language and literacy demands of each subject area, not just common areas of literacy.

It is argued that in order to meet the needs of students studying history in NSW, particularly in regard to the

development of civic literacies, there is a need for reflection on the purpose of the school subject in light of the dramatic social and cultural changes that have come with the twenty-first century. Traditionally, history has sought to reflect the academic discipline of history, although described by Retz (2019) as the process of disciplinary distillation, where educators isolate concepts and procedures from a discipline so that they may be assessed in a school context. The aim to teach skills relevant to civics and citizenship from the academic discipline may be lost in the competing demands of the subject, and/or good citizen rhetoric (Vromen, 2003). Gilbert (2011, p. 251) argues that the discipline of history does not provide a model for the selection of content in curriculum (as has often been the focus of public discussions about history), rather it sets out “concepts and thinking skills for analysing questions about the past, but does not in itself, determine which questions are worth asking.” Arguably, in the schooling context the criteria for the selection of content may arise outside of the academy—we need to think about the purpose and aims of the subject here, and the relation of content selection to a modern conception of citizenship. Further, it cannot be assumed that students’ foundational literacy skills will easily transfer to the higher-order demands of subject-specific practices (Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008), as is implicit in current secondary syllabus documents. As Allender and Freebody (2016) assert, the difference between the academic discipline of history and school history is the importance of the interactional exchanges that occur between students and history teachers—the way that teachers destabilise student assumptions from public history or popular historical representation, the questioning of misappropriations of history, and the ability to apply heuristics as a means of generating their own interpretations. However, Seixas (1993) argued that social groups also play an influential role in a classroom community of inquiry, where social group dynamics can result in the potential to constrain more objective thinking as students may be influenced by their friendship or peer group ideologies in secondary school settings. If history education is to contribute to active citizenship, there is a need to reconceptualise our understanding to align with emerging civic practices of the twenty-first century. While opportunities exist in the Australian curriculum for teachers to use some digital media texts for the purpose of civics and citizenship education, this is less likely to be in the form of social media or media forms that students interact with in their everyday lives. To explore this idea further, the following section traces the historic relationship between school history and the imperative for civics and citizenship education in Australia.

The relationship: history and citizenship

Since at least the 1990s and early 2000s, history education has risen in public and political consciousness as a tool for civics and citizenship education, with discourses concerning these aims focussed on what Australians should know about their national past, and a sense of social cohesion leading into the twenty-first century. This era was marked by strong uses of history by both Prime Ministers Paul Keating and John Howard²—linking to their opposing worldviews and agendas for Australia’s identity and place in the globalised world (Davidson, 2000). Following the convening of the Civics Expert Group in 1994 by then-Prime Minister Paul Keating, and the subsequent publication of their report *Whereas the people: Civics and citizenship education* (Civics Expert Group (Australia), 1994), history was endorsed on a national level as the essential subject for civics and citizenship education. Seven question areas were raised in the Civics Expert Group’s (CEG) large-scale, national telephone survey, framed around knowledge of Australian federal systems of government including references to Federation and the constitution; the law and judiciary system; the then-current political issue of the republican debate; and understandings of citizenship and civic duties. The findings of this report initiated a discourse of a civic deficit in Australia, particularly surrounding young people as a result of well-publicised concerns about their apparent lack of knowledge and understanding required for active and informed citizenship (Davies & Issitt, 2005), which was largely based on whether or not facts such as Australia’s first Prime Minister were able to be regurgitated. However, there are critics of the methodology undertaken by the CEG in reaching these findings. For instance, Vromen (2003) argues that language used in the report is reflective of “good citizen” rhetoric, with the apparent purpose being accumulation of social capital rather than exploring other means of participation that young people may be involved in. Arguably, an exploration of participatory citizenship that considered everyday experiences, rather than institutional definitions of active citizenship, would more accurately acknowledge how young people use their individual agency in particular contexts (Vromen, 2003). While the report suggested the level of political ignorance was high, as McAllister (1998) argued, these are fairly consistent with internationally comparable results, while also noting that the issue of compulsory voting in Australia

raises questions over what it means to participate in Australian democracy: does this become a question of informed participation in this context?

Despite these concerns, the CEG emphasis on school history as, “an essential foundation for Australian citizenship. It should be a core element of the curriculum for all students up to school leaving age” (Civics Expert Group (Australia), 1994, p. 52), would come to be enacted, with the inclusion of history as one of the four initial core subjects in the first phase of implementation of the first (national) Australian curriculum in 2012. Furthermore, the report emphasised that in this way, Australian history is conceptualised in the broader definition of history of Australians, including not only the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and migrants in Australia, but also an understanding of the histories of the countries from which they came. Conceptualising the nature of Australian history in this way has implications for the nature of the school subject. Particularly as the (then current) 1992 NSW history syllabus was widely considered a radical departure from previous forms of history education through the incorporation of social histories, promoting the voices of those previously silenced in official narratives of the past (Parkes, 2011; Young, 1993). Discourses present in this syllabus construct history as the study of culturally diverse human experiences, with an explicit rejection of “narrow parochialism” (Board of Studies NSW, 1992a, p. 1) in history, allowing students to develop a deeper understanding, not only of the values, motives and actions of others, but also through the development of “an understanding of their own identity and *shared heritage*” (Board of Studies NSW, 1992a, p. 2, emphasis added). This shared heritage is directly linked to the multicultural nature of Australian society, and the promotion of cultural diversity within the shared national identity.

Throughout the 1990s and early 2000s, history for civics and citizenship was emphasised in the rationale and aims of NSW history syllabuses and was particularly strong in the 1998 syllabus. An analysis of the language linking history and citizenship in official curriculum texts indicates a strong emphasis on exploring the lives of historical Others, as well as considering different perspectives in history (Board of Studies NSW, 1992a, 1998, 2003), which in 1998 was expanded to explicitly include such perspectives as, “Aboriginal; gender; local, national and international; multicultural; socioeconomic; and religious” (p. 8), reflecting the increasingly diverse nature of Australia’s population in the lead up to the new millennium. In addition, with the implementation of the 2003 syllabus, this idea was again expanded to allow students to explore the historical impacts of government and policy decisions on different cultural groups over time. In this way, the school subject of history is described as a “frame of reference” (Board of Studies NSW, 1992a, p. 2; 1998, p. 8) against which students can make sense of the

² Paul Keating served as Prime Minister of Australia from 1991 to 1996 as the leader of the Australian Labor Party. The Keating Government was defeated by the Howard Coalition Government (made up of members of the Liberal-National coalition) in 1996. John Howard then served four terms as Prime Minister from 1996 to 2007. For more information about the evocation of history by these leaders, please see Davidson (2000).

past with the development of relevant citizenship knowledge and the skills of inquiry. Federal government investment in history for citizenship is evident in successive government spending, indicating this as an area of bipartisan support by both Labor and conservative Liberal/National coalition governments (Davies & Issitt, 2005), on the development of targeted resources for schools, as well as large-scale campaigns for the commemoration of events of particular significance in the official history of Australia such as the Centenary of Federation in 2001.

Despite the strong emphasis on the value of the study of history for civics and citizenship education in syllabus rationales and aims, these elements are largely expected to *flow* from the study of history. As an illustration, from 1998 outcomes of history were categorised as knowledge and understanding, skills, and values and attitudes. Throughout the era of focus, the stated objectives of history included concepts of civics and citizenship, such as commitment to a just society and consideration of different cultural perspectives. These were included as values and attitudes, which are considered “inherent”—as an illustration, suggesting that “learning experiences and reflection” in history will naturally lead to such “commitments” and “appreciation” (Board of Studies NSW, 1998, p. 16), as opposed to the explicit objectives and assessable outcomes or competencies for student achievement in the knowledge and skills categories. This assumption of the cognitive or intellectual elements as developing naturally as the students engage with historical study would be carried over into the 2003 syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2003) and into the current NSW iteration of the national *Australian Curriculum: History* where outcomes refer to the development of skills in historical inquiry—particularly research and communication.

The potential impact of media manipulation, algorithms and disinformation on democratic processes cannot be ignored. New media and the age of instant communication and access exposes students to the dissemination of information and ideas produced with a variety of purposes, often with unmediated sets of values, creating a powerful public pedagogy (Brodeur, 2007; Kellner & Share, 2007). The proliferation of technology and digital media has meant that long-held systems of evaluation of historical information have been altered, meaning that history education needs to respond to the changed context, and resulting evaluation practices, when encountering sources online (Chapman, 2020; Goulding, 2020). The ease in which digital information is open to alteration or editing, means it is increasingly difficult for the reader to know if they are viewing the original document or an adapted version (Rosenzweig, 2011). Consequently, digital source evaluation requires vastly different approaches when compared to print-based documents or historical sources (McGrew et al., 2019). In a world where competing discourses shape our development in community,

national and international contexts, to be critically literate is to continuously question and monitor ongoing development. Drawing on a Girouxian conception of critical literacy, this study deliberately links notions of citizenship education and the concept of literacy, where, “fundamental to a pedagogy of critical literacy would be the opportunity for students to interrogate how knowledge is constituted as both a historical and social construction” (Giroux, 2016, p. 33). Extending this idea, critical media literacy has the potential to equip students with the necessary skills to consider the constructive uses of media in society, while preparing them to confront media alteration and manipulation in modern democracies. Stoddard (2014) discusses examples of youth avoidance of more traditional means of civic engagement in favour of sharing or liking political memes, images and/or messages, as well as some founding or participating in grassroots organisations aligned with their own interests. There is a need for history education to acknowledge how the uses of history in various social and cultural spaces may impact individual interpretations as a result of powerful social group dynamics.

Arguably, there is a need to consider the situated nature of historical representation, and how the acts of analysis and inquiry practised in classrooms are to be beneficial to students, both immediately and into the future. There are a number of prominent scholars who similarly argue for the potential of history education to provide opportunities for students to develop the kind of reasoning and critical deliberation required for civic life (see, for example Barton & Levstik, 2004; Wineburg, 2016, 2018), but importantly, these approaches acknowledge the situatedness of both historical representation, as well as the individual. Epistemological approaches to historical inquiry, the need to reflect on the interplay between one’s own cultural and historical positioning, while also considering civic and moral responsibility in exercising their civic agency (Haste & Bermudez, 2017), hold potential for students growing up in the twenty-first century to develop their capacity to deal with various modes of historical representation as well as how they are positioned in relation to themselves (their own identity). While history has certainly been impacted by the cultural debates in Australia, so too has the concept of literacy as it is conceptualised in official curriculum documents more generally (Snyder, 2008). The following section outlines the approach taken in this research to explore this issue in mandatory history syllabuses in NSW.

A history of the present

The concept of historical literacy as presented here draws on postmodern conceptions of history following the so-named linguistic turn, a recognition that language is inherent in

constructions of the individual and normative social practices. Using official curriculum documents as the primary sources of study, historical analysis is applied to discourses surrounding literacy, and the proliferation of technology. This research is positioned as a “history of the present”, where the task is to make visible “the conditions that make possible the thoughts and actions of the present” (Popkewitz, 2011, p. 2). In this analysis, the official curriculum is seen as text informed by historically formed discourses, through which schooling is interpreted and acted upon:

Curriculum deploys power through the manner in which and the condition on which knowledge is selected, organized and evaluated in schools. To do history is to ‘see’ shifting true/false divisions in a society as related to power relations rather than as a direct result of the existence of a given reality (Popkewitz, 1997, p. 155).

In addition, the link between schooling and democratic participation is emphasised, drawing on Giroux’s (1990) work. Within this view, all discourses are informed by context:

this perspective demands the reconstruction of a view of language and theory that establishes the groundwork for regarding the curriculum as a form of cultural politics, as a discourse that draws its meaning from the social, cultural and economic context in which it operates (Giroux, 1990, p. 4).

In this way, everyday language is seen as a potential source of empowerment, as considered in the current context of evolving technologies and knowledge production. Here, the view is taken that literacy in education for citizenship should allow citizens control of their own lives through critical engagement with democratic processes, and an understanding of knowledge production, rather than promoting the production of good citizens (Green, 1993; Parsons, 2018; Vromen, 2003). Additionally, ascribing to the view that teaching historical thinking through the inquiry process gives students the opportunity to engage critically with aspects of the past as well as practising critical thinking processes that are important to civic practices and democratic participation (Parsons, 2018; Wineburg, 2016). While the term critical thinking is not always evident in history education literature, the development of historical understanding through the concept of historical thinking—a term widely used in the field of history education, can allow students to develop a disciplined understanding of the past, while also allowing for reflective analysis on values, social and cultural issues, and other civic matters (Bermudez, 2015). Twenty-first century media culture has led to rapidly evolving forms of representation and communication. It can be argued that there is a need to reconceptualise curriculum in an era of

standardised assessment, where accountability in teaching and learning has become a key element of mass education (Green, 1993). This can be problematic in the subject of history where standard assessment practices need to be reconciled with subject specific aims, such as students learning to think historically, that is, to learning how to apply critical literacy and disciplinary thinking skills as used by historians and more widely (Seixas & Morton, 2013). Through an exploration of historical continuities and changes that occur in literacy discourses for history education, there is a need to include historical perspectives to form a situated view of the present context in regard to literacy in curriculum (Graff, 2009; Green & Cormack, 2015).

While currently operating under the national Australian curriculum, states and territories retain jurisdiction over the interpretation and implementation of the curriculum into state and territory contexts. Differences in approaches between states and territories are apparent (Collins & Yates, 2012), reflecting the ongoing history of distinct state and territory cultures, potentially calling into question whether there is, in fact a cohesive and identifiable national curriculum currently in practice (Tudbull, 2018). The structure of the current Australian curriculum is presented as a three-dimensional design, comprising of eight learning areas in which the following must be incorporated: three cross-curriculum priorities, and seven general capabilities—three of these are literacy, numeracy, and ICT capability (ACARA, n.d.). The subject of history sits within the Humanities and Social Sciences (HaSS) learning area. Historically, in Australia, history education has at various times been a site of intense political and public debates relating to its uses in developing and informing a sense of national identity and collective memory, building on ideas of national cohesion (Sharp, 2015). With consistent political support for measurable outcomes and competencies, it is crucial to reflect on the nature of the subject of history (Körber, 2011) and how socio-political forces have impacted discourses related to its aim and purpose (Goodson & Marsh, 1996). This study considers the school subject of history in NSW in the two decades preceding the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum: History* in NSW (Board of Studies, 2012). The primary sources used as the focus of this research consist of official curriculum documents for the study of mandatory history in NSW secondary schools (years 7–10/stages 4 and 5).³ Syllabus documents were viewed in curriculum, social and political contexts, specifically covering the period of the 1990s and early 2000s, as during this time period information technology innovations increasingly changed the educational landscape.

³ Students at this stage of schooling are typically aged 12–16 years.

Historical literacies or literacy in history?

Findings and discussion

To trace the conceptualisation of literacy in history teaching, a consideration of literacy education more broadly in the national context is required. For decades, and especially growing in the 1970s, literacy education has been a subject of intense political scrutiny, resulting in cycles of media coverage of these controversies extending to incite anxieties in the public sphere of literacy crises (Snyder, 2008). From then, there has been an increasing imperative to move towards curriculum reform to prepare young Australians for their roles in a dynamic and shifting society. Green and Bigum (2003) highlighted the extent to which literacy has become a matter of official national policy. Although, they further explain that the ways that literacy is conceived of in policy is consistent with more generalised “functional literacy” in education literature (p. 211). The authors found that policy documents paid little or no acknowledgement to the incorporation of new literacies, multiliteracies, or emergent literacies, despite their prevalence in education literature (Green & Bigum, 2003). In Australia, political and public discourses about the quality of current education practices are often politicised in the public sphere. Many government education policies, such as in Australia (and the USA), are seemingly driven by a positivist view of literacy. This position is driven by policies advocating “evidence-based” models that may be drawn on for school funding and teaching accountability (Freebody & Luke, 2003). NAPLAN testing and subsequent focus on “back to basics” and “basic literacy and numeracy skills”, as espoused in political rhetoric, is one outcome of such a view.

The mid-1990s brought the introduction of key competencies in the NSW curriculum structure, broadening to include cross-curriculum approaches. Potentially emphasised by the proclamation in the *Words at Work* report that students do not receive a “lifeboat model” of education (House of Representatives Standing Committee on Employment Education & Training, 1991, p. vii); or, more specifically that while at school, students should learn all of the skills that they will need for the rest of their lives. This entails recognition of the need to increase skills and continue learning throughout life. At this time, there was no explicit mention of literacy in the 1993 history syllabus document (Board of Studies NSW, 1992a) or support documents (Board of Studies NSW, 1992b, 1994). The 1998 history syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 1998) saw literacy explicitly introduced as a key competency. These competencies are defined by the *Curriculum Keys* report (Board of Studies NSW, 1997), as related to capabilities judged necessary for essential participation in education,

work and society. In the secondary context, this is implemented through an approach to “locate the students within a whole, unified curriculum” (Board of Studies NSW, 1997, p. 11), where students are able to make connections between the application of knowledge in the different contexts of their learning areas, aiming to develop “subject expertise” and a more holistic understanding of education, and the recognition of how they are developing a specific competency in different subject contexts (Board of Studies NSW, 1997, pp. 16–17). This recognition suggests a level of reflection required of students to develop metacognitive awareness of these learning processes. The 1998 syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 1998, p. 19) outlined how literacy as a key competency is embedded in history:

History is ideally suited to develop students’ literacy skills including the comprehension of texts, use of specific historical language, analysis and use of sources and historical texts, research and communication.

The proceeding sections will discuss discourses present within curriculum documents, connecting these to the concept of historical literacy.

The nature of history

As stated previously, it is important to reflect on that nature of the school subject of history as a means of considering historical literacies in this context. While the subject undoubtedly takes direction from the inquiry process undertaken by the historian, there are also parallel objectives for the study of history in the mandatory years of schooling in NSW. An analysis of the discourses present in the aims and rationales of syllabus documents characterises history strongly as a process of inquiry, specifically linked to the history of human experience as the content. Themes present in these descriptions also include the objective for students to link their learning from history to understandings of their lifeworlds. Over time, this consideration has expanded to include explanations of the ways that history can develop students’ critical capacities and intellectual development. This is evident in the strong statement in the rationale of the 1998 syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 1998, p. 6):

History is a process of inquiry into questions of human affairs in their time and place. It explores the possibilities and limits of comparing past to present and present to past. It allows students to develop their critical powers and to grasp the superiority of thinking and evaluation over an impulsive and uninformed rush to judgement and decision. It allows students to gain historical knowledge and skills, and to evaluate competing versions of the past within a rational framework of inquiry.

The inclusion of such language implies the aim of deliberation over social issues, emphasising the importance of thinking and evaluation over rushes to judgement, linking to deliberation on civic issues (particularly as this syllabus was the first released following the CEG report), as well as making informed judgements on contested areas of the nation's past. This idea is built upon in the 2003 syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p. 8), which stated:

The study of history provides the intellectual skills to enable students to critically analyse and interpret sources of evidence in order to construct reasoned explanations, hypotheses about the past and a rational and informed argument. History also enables students to understand, deconstruct and evaluate differing interpretations of the past. The cognitive skills of analysis, evaluation and synthesis underpin the study of history and equip students with the ability to understand and evaluate the political, cultural and social events and issues that have shaped the world around them.

Enduring purposes for the study of mandatory history involve emphases on concepts such as empathy, focussed on the understanding of different perspectives and the lives of historical others. Through studying history, it is suggested that students gain understandings of different cultures and ideology, with underlying themes of understanding and social cohesion in the increasingly multicultural nature of Australian society throughout this period. In addition, the development of critical capacities through a focus on the inquiry process suggests that the study of history enables students to have a greater understanding of the world around them and their place within it. History is portrayed as providing a space for students to practise political literacy. Links are established between the analytical process of historical inquiry and understanding and evaluating social and political issues in the present.

The nature of literacy

As discussed above, the 1992 syllabus had no explicit mentions of literacy and this syllabus was described as a radical departure from previous approaches to history teaching (Parkes, 2011; Young, 1993). An analysis of this syllabus and the companion supporting documents (Board of Studies NSW, 1992b, 1994) reveals a strongly student-centred approach to teaching, while acknowledging the diversity of different schooling contexts. In this way, the 1992 syllabus encouraged schools to meet the needs of their students, with skills focussed on the process of inquiry, rather than any specific emphasis on texts or genres. This would come to be very different with the release of the 1998 syllabus with the explicit inclusion of literacy in history as a key competency, and the release of a support document, *Teaching literacy*

in year 7 (NSW Department of Education and Training & Curriculum Support Directorate, 1998). This document coincided with the implementation of the state-based English Language and Literacy Assessment (ELLA), sat by all year 7 students in government schools by 1998. This support document included the following statement conceptualising literacy in history:

Nowadays the term literacy as a word is used with broad meanings. We hear people speak of scientific literacy, computer literacy, media literacy. When literacy is used in these ways it is a metaphor for “understanding” and what we really mean is understanding science, understanding computers or understanding how the media work. This is not what we are talking about here. What we are dealing with in this book is knowing how to go about teaching in a systematic and explicit way so that teaching of the content is not impeded by students’ lack of ability to read and write appropriately in the subject area. This is how we are defining literacy (NSW Department of Education and Training & Curriculum Support Directorate, 1998, p. 6).

Arguably, such an explicit separation of literacy and understanding is a rejection of conceptualisations of literacy that acknowledge the epistemological underpinnings of different subject disciplines, or the ways of knowing in these subject areas. Instead, the focus is on developing functional literacy skills where literacy is taught to the degree that the teaching of content is not impeded. It may be suggested that as the external ELLA assessment was designed to provide information about students’ literacy skills in reading, language, and writing, that these would also be emphasised in planning for classroom practice. It is noted that the definition of reading provided in this document does acknowledge the identification and location of resources, including from internet and CDROM resources (NSW Department of Education and Training & Curriculum Support Directorate, 1998), reflecting the rise in prominence of these mediums in society. The key competency approach to literacy in secondary education has continued through to the present, with NAPLAN superseding the ELLA test in 2008. Literacy remained a key competency of the 2003 history syllabus; however, the skills associated with history are further explicated with the specific inclusion of, “comprehension of texts, use of specific historical language, analysis and use of sources and historical texts, research and communication” (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p. 19). Whereas the preceding 1998 syllabus suggested that these skills would implicitly be learned through the inquiry process, there is now a consideration of explicit texts and genres of the subject.

In addition, the 2003 syllabus included the cross-curriculum content focus of information communication technologies (ICTs), reflecting the 2001 national literacy report

Fig. 1 Texts for literacy in history (Board of Studies, 1998, p. 9)

Texts	Forms	Tasks
<p>Students should have experience in interpreting and creating and critically analysing the texts below. Teachers would use variations and combinations of these texts.</p> <p>Texts that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • retell history • describe history • explain history • argue, challenge and discuss history. 	<p>Different written, oral and visual forms in which these texts may be explored:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • multimedia • video • audio tape • performance • two- or three-dimensional model • photography • cartoon • textbook • first-hand account • painting • newspaper • interview • debate • discussion • database. 	<p>Tasks in which these texts may be put into practice:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • timelines • paragraphs • mind maps • diagrams, charts and graphs • maps • reports • source-based studies • research • oral tasks • locating • note-taking • formal essays • structured essays.

where recommendations were made for incorporation of ICT literacies in subject areas, including the navigation of multimodal (and multidirectional) texts, as well as the need to acknowledge how the literacy demands on students vary greatly between different subjects (Lo Bianco & Freebody, 2001). Despite this, it is significant to note the separation of literacies and ICT capability, a distinction that still exists within the current NSW history syllabus with both of these concepts implemented through a general capabilities approach. At the same time, the description of ICT capability implies a critical approach to evaluating digital sources:

History is uniquely placed for students to discover, evaluate and apply ICT, such as a relevant CD-ROM and the internet, to their investigations of the past. These are legitimate sources of history, and, as such, need to be evaluated for their reliability and usefulness in the same way as the more ‘traditional’ primary and secondary sources and texts have been. In addition, a site study may be investigated using the internet or relevant CD-ROM (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, p. 16).

The specific skills noted for the ICT capability include evaluation of a website or historical source; building on visual literacy skills such as the use of image banks as sources of historical research; create documents for particular audiences; and practising ethical online behaviour (Board of Studies NSW, 2003). In this way, this approach seemingly encourages students to extend their historical inquiry (and communication of findings) into digital spaces. Although, this description is vague regarding the type of ICT

representations that students may encounter, or that a teacher may incorporate into the classroom. Therefore, there is the potential for ICT skills to become a superficial addition to the curriculum, rather than incorporated into students’ historical literacy repertoire.

The texts of secondary history

Alongside the inclusion of literacy as a key competency in history in 1998, was an overview of the types of texts students may explore, as well as a selection of task suggestions that may be put into practice (see Figure 1). Although the textual forms presented in the middle column include multimedia and visual texts, little information is provided about where these may be sourced, or the genre of the text. For instance, it is unclear whether popular culture historical representations are to be included, such as films or historical fiction novels. By purposefully incorporating popular culture representations of history, including controversies and conspiracies in public history, in classroom practices and discussions, history teachers can aid critical evaluations of the histories encountered most often (Parkes, 2015). In reference to the use of historical film in the history classroom, Donnelly (2014, p. 4) describes modern society as “ocular-centric, privileging predominantly visual texts on electronic platforms...”. Furthermore, the digital era has presented a challenge to the epistemologies on which schooling has traditionally been based, particularly surrounding knowledge and notions of truth and validity (Lankshear & Knobel, 2003). Arguably, the interpretation of curriculum documents

will determine the types of texts teachers incorporate within their classrooms, and that popular culture forms of history may be considered to fit within the textual forms listed in Figure 1, though there is little certainty that this will occur.

Moreover, the tasks column indicates tasks that students may complete while using the textual forms outlined. The tasks described in 1998 are largely restricted to print-based and oral tasks. It may be argued that the separation of literacy and ICT may have a detrimental impact on the types of texts students interact with and create in history classes, particularly when considering how these tasks will be beneficial to students when encountering historical representations in their everyday lives, or political evocations of history to attempt to persuade or mislead.

Conclusion: a case for historical literacies

At a national level, since the 1990s, the study of history in school has been linked to the accumulation of civics and citizenship knowledge and skills. The CEG report highlighted the apparent civic deficit in the Australian population, concerning knowledge about Australia's political foundation and constitution (Civics Expert Group (Australia), 1994). History curriculum has also been evoked as a political tool to foster a sense of national pride, and a distinct Australian national identity (see, for example Howard, 2006), becoming increasingly prominent throughout the 1990s and 2000s. Such political and public interest in the national history being taught in schools has raised the profile of history education in Australia, making it one of the initial core subjects for the implementation of the first national curriculum in 2011. This focus entailed a particular interest on the accumulation of knowledge of the national past and political institutions, despite the emphasis on the processes of historical inquiry as valuable for civics and citizenship education in both curriculum documents and history education research. Instead, the values, attitudes and skills for citizenship are largely expected to flow from the study of history.

Taylor and Young (2003) called for an index of historical literacy, arguing that many of the public discourses about concerns over school history relate to a sense of historical illiteracy without actually outlining what this type of illiteracy means. Building from a scientific literacy model, they presented a case for an index of historical literacy as a basis for the school subject (see also, Taylor in The Australian History Summit: Transcript of proceedings, 2006), holding the potential for a deeper reflection on the purpose and aims of history education, rather than a simplification of this idea as being primarily concerned with historical knowledge. It may be argued that this type of approach may further serve as a tool for reflection on the ways that school history links to the kinds of knowledge students encounter in their

everyday lives. As argued by Moje (2007), it is not enough to purely focus on disciplinary literacy in school subjects if students are to be able to use their knowledge in everyday contexts. Students need to have the opportunity to connect their disciplinary understandings to everyday knowledge, as well as being able to “navigate across disciplinary and everyday forms of representation, including print, numerals, and other inscribed symbols” (Moje, 2007, p. 33). The findings of this research reveal a distinct separation of literacy and ICT in NSW curriculum structures, since the inclusion of ICT as a cross-curriculum priority in the 2003 syllabus, which has continued in the current syllabus (Board of Studies NSW, 2003, 2012).

Moreover, since the explicit introduction of literacy in secondary history in 1998, conceptualisations of literacy reflect an approach to literacy consistent with external assessments (such as ELLA and later NAPLAN). For a greater emphasis on historical literacy to occur in the school subject, there is arguably a need for history education to acknowledge uses of history in various social and cultural spaces and how this may impact individual interpretations of history. The explicit separation of literacy and understanding can be seen as a rejection of conceptualisations of literacy that acknowledge the epistemological underpinnings of different subject disciplines, or the ways of knowing in these areas, an idea vital to students understanding the role of different subjects in their developing understanding of the world and their place within it as citizens of Australia. This idea is further complicated by the dynamic shifts in social and cultural communication and participation, with students often experiencing a digital divide in the texts they engage with in and out of school (Henderson, 2011; Honan, 2012). This is potentially detrimental to civic understandings and competencies as students need to be able to navigate and connect their subject learning to everyday experiences (Moje, 2007).

Following the review of NSW curriculum and the determination that current syllabuses are overcrowded, separate knowledge and skills, and are time-limited (Masters, 2020), it is hoped that a revised curriculum development acknowledge the need to reflect on the aims and purpose of the subject of history, and how a stronger focus on historical literacy may aid students in the development of their critical capacities, through the opportunity to engage with texts concerning history that they are likely to encounter in everyday contexts (Barton, 2012). As the literature shows, historical literacies require both functional literacy and critical literacy (Virta, 2007), as well as examinations of values in historical contexts to avoid imposing moral judgements on past actions in uncritical ways (Henderson, 2019). Through a greater emphasis on the processes of history, as well as eliminating the distinctions between literacy and ICT, as well as knowledge and skills, students may be able to develop the kinds of

reasoning and judgement required for successful democratic participation in the twenty-first century.

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