


Executive Summary of The History Ministerial Task Team



basic education

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The History Ministerial Task Team (MTT), appointed in 04 June 2015, undertook a comparative case study on compulsory History in thirteen (13) countries. The exercise is similar to an Africa-wide project being conducted by the AU and UNESCO on History curriculums across the continent and the relevance of the subject.

The report provides a systematic overview and analysis on where South Africa falls in terms of the place of History in the school curriculum and whether the subject should be compulsory throughout the school system. The comparative data also considered the question of the place and role of History in the South African curriculum.

Lessons Learned: Comparative Study

- Through comparative analysis of various countries' approaches to include History in the curriculum, it is clear that the question of "compulsory History" at the Upper Secondary level is not a question unique to the South African context.
- There is no single approach to compulsory History and the content of History curricula is generally related to the specific contextual national, educational and civic priorities of a given country.
- Models for compulsory History vary from country to country, and are subject to dynamic review depending on national curricular concerns.
- The broad lesson is that if History is made compulsory in South Africa, all the various contextual factors and concerns or challenges specific to South Africa would have to be carefully considered, for example: capacity, teacher development/training, content, budgetary implications, and planning.
- Budgetary matters will have implications for roll-out and implementation of compulsory History at the FET level and if a phased approach is considered, it will allow for better planning and teachers to be developed/trained to begin the


process of implementing compulsory History from Grades 10 to 12.

Lessons Learned: Reviewing the Curriculum and Policy Statement (CAPS)

The report highlights that History is not solely about the past, as the official Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS) definition seems to suggest. Instead, History is about how we think about the past in the present. The comparative analysis of social, structural and historical injustice in countries such as South Africa, Brazil and the USA will require that the study of political History – which predominates – be balanced with an infusion of content from other branches of the discipline, namely social History; political economy; labour History, gender History and economic History.

The aims and objectives of History education at schools should be to enhance everyday life skills such as vocabulary, reference techniques, comprehension, translation, communication, extrapolation, and judgment. As educators/ teachers, our main aim is to teach learners, through their life experiences, how to use intellectual and social skills to become more effective learners and responsible citizens. Therefore, in terms of teaching the History of Ideas or Philosophy of History as envisaged in the CAPS school History syllabus both educators and learners need to have literary skills to present findings in elegant, accessible prose; and the ability to formulate clear and logical arguments. Methodical and conceptual skills include ability to weigh evidence judiciously and to synthesize voluminous historical evidence.

While CAPS achieved the primary goal of lightening the administrative and content load of the curriculum, there was a marked depletion and fragmentation of credible content, concepts and methods which are foundational to African History. It was noted by the MTT that CAPS tackles the study of 'pre-colonial'



Africa superficially in the early phases of schooling. This means that more than 100 000 years of human biological, social and cultural History that unfolded on the African continent are marginal to the curriculum and is dealt with in the lower grades, resulting in a curriculum that fails to treat Africa adequately as a continent with a rich past. In part, this marginalisation of Africa in CAPS has to do with the excision of archaeology from the curriculum as well as the absence of key concepts in African oral tradition. The absence of archaeology and oral traditions is significant because these are both foundational methodologies. If these are not taught learners are unable to understand how the continent's very long human History can be discovered, given the sparseness of indigenous written records for southern Africa in particular.

What is discernible about CAPS curricula is that the teaching of archaeology in a systematic way is not emphasised, particularly the links between the Cradle of Humankind site and corresponding sites in East Africa, namely, Kenya and Ethiopia. This also includes Egypt, specifically the crucial role of archaeology in understanding the ancient History of North Africa. But even if it can be argued that archaeology is taught at lower grades, the approach is very elementary and therefore unsatisfactory. The MTT regards the History and Archaeology Panel report (led by Professor Njabulo Ndebele) commissioned by the Department of Basic Education as a foundation for reintroducing Archaeology as an integral part of the History curriculum. African historiography is better known for its pioneering work on the use of oral History than for its innovative use of archaeology, palaeontology, linguistics and material evidence to recreate early History. In light of the importance of ancient, 'pre-colonial' and colonial African History, the MTT feel it is crucial that Archaeology be included in the curriculum as a way of deepening the understanding of African History.

Suggested changes in the History syllabus will open up avenues for learners who wish to continue to study History at FET level. For example it will

be possible for them to become policy analysts enrolled in Development Studies at university; a bright future also beckons for these learners to follow careers as economic historians, sociologists, social anthropologists, economists, archaeologists, diplomats and political scientists. Furthermore, History learners have a future in the fields of arts, culture and heritage and thus we need to provide a solid base for them at school. This has to be done to highlight both the intrinsic and extrinsic value of History. Taught appropriately it is the basis for a wide field of professional qualifications at institutions of higher education.

The report also argues that the CAPS content approach is specifically biased towards the Liberal School of thought as a dominant historiographical paradigm in South Africa; yet there are other schools of thought such as the Afrikaner Nationalist, African Nationalist, Black Consciousness and Marxist/Social History schools of thoughts. It is important to note that the original (white) settler/colonial school of thought was absorbed by both the Afrikaner Nationalist and Liberal paradigms. The African Nationalist and Black Consciousness paradigms have been discriminated against and neglected in terms of South African historiography.

Furthermore, it is argued that the current syllabus and content needs to be completely overhauled, restructured and aligned according to proper phases taking into consideration the learners' cognitive development and incremental levels of complexity. This entails separating History from Geography and doing away with the 'subject' Social Science at GET phase. The teaching, assessment, recording and reporting on Geography and History under the guise of 'Social Science' must be remedied. The subjects should be separated into two distinct subjects.

Lessons Learned: Teacher Development

The report highlights the importance of teacher development in History (teachers' skilled as historians). History teachers/educators need to be trained professionals. They should be trained in History, archaeology and possibly even African literature and an African language so they have a comprehensive background in African History. The lack of qualified History teachers poses a serious challenge and naturally, most of the unqualified teachers/educators adopt a negative attitude towards teaching History, ignorant of the fact that History offers life-long learning skills such as writing, comprehension, interpretation, synthesis, problem-solving and analytical skills.

The report recommends that the Department of Basic Education provide bursaries for trainee History teachers to address the challenge of human resources in the subject. Good teacher development programmes offered by universities and colleges should produce History educators with sympathetic and informed understanding of humanity and the human condition.

Summary: Key Recommendations

- Introduce History as a compulsory subject in the FET (Grades 10 – 12) Phase.
- Life Orientation to remain a compulsory subject until Grade 9 (GET Phase).
- At FET Phase, compulsory History to replace Life Orientation as one of the Fundamental subjects.
- At the GET phase, Life Orientation to be maintained as a compulsory subject and the content should be strengthened.
- Life Orientation should be phased-out incrementally from the FET curriculum from 2023 (Grade 10) to 2025 (Grade 12).
- The notional time in Grades 10-12 should be increased from 27.5 hours to 29.5 hours per week.
- Compulsory History to be phased in incrementally from 2023 (Grade 10) to 2025 (Grade 12).
- CAPS curriculum has serious limitations and a complete overhaul of CAPS is required. Africa centeredness should become a principle in revising the History content.
- The 6-7 years towards the phasing-out of Life Orientation in the FET band be used to prepare the system for compulsory History in the FET band.
- The notional time of 4 hours per week for teaching History in the FET band must be maintained.
- History Teacher Development should be strengthened by institutionalising the DBE's Continued Professional Teacher Development (CPTD) programmes.
- Two final year examination papers at Grade 12 with Paper 1 focussing on African History and Paper 2 focussing on History of the wider world including Europe or vice-versa.

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