

Whose history and who is denied? Politics and the History Curriculum in Lebanon and Australia

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This paper seeks to explain and develop a better understanding of the relationship between the History curriculum and the consequences of political motive. It compares the History curricula of Australia and Lebanon, and is relevant to understanding the purpose of the History curricula in the two countries as well as, more generally, other countries. In Lebanon, the teaching of that nation's experience of the 1975-90 Civil War has been withdrawn from schools. In Australia, meanwhile, it now appears that the national curriculum that took shape in 2010 under the Rudd Labor Government has been replaced by what the new Federal Coalition Government wants. Important changes have been made to the nations' History curricula with different political groups urging the inclusions of different topics.

This paper considers the question of the effect of wholesale deletions from the curriculum of a nation's history, as in the case of Lebanon. Will such changes affect the development of students' higher-order historical understanding, historical consciousness and historical literacy? And will such changes influence students' appreciation of historiography? Advanced in this paper is an argument that, generally, History curricula are so politicised that there should be a historiographical component that requires students to understand that history is about many different points of view. Furthermore, students should be taught that it is the understanding of the development of evidence for the various perspectives that matters.

Keywords: History curriculum; national History curriculum; contested History curriculum; comparative education; comparative curriculum; development of historical literacy; historiography

INTRODUCTION

The advent of Australian Federal Governments' national History curriculum emerged during the Howard Coalition Government of 1996-2007, and the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd Government of 2007-2013. It was spearheaded by the establishment of the Australian Curriculum and Reporting Authority (ACARA) in 2008. Much public discourse and questions regarding political motive surrounded the nature of the national History curriculum authorised by ACARA. This wrangling over the contents of Australia's History curriculum can be compared to the discussions in Lebanon, where the politics are such that no decisions regarding a national History curriculum can be made. The Lebanese case described here has been informed by research by Bahous, Nabhani and

Rabo (2013). These authors used curriculum theory as the tool to analyse their data; the same approach is adopted for this current paper. Bahous et al.(2013) were concerned with questions that draw “attention to the tensions between different decision-making levels (international, national, individual schools, local conditions, specific classroom contexts) and different actors (politicians, professionals, citizens in society) and their importance for curriculum issues” (p. 58). In this paper, the Lebanese case is informed by interviews conducted by Maadad in 2013 with Lebanese school principals. The research by Bahous et al. (2013) substantiates Maadad’s (2013) findings. Since the demise of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd Governments following the 2013 election, the veracity of Bahous et al.’s (2013) statement becomes manifest, illustrating the stark contrasts between the issues included in the History curricula of Australian and Lebanese schools.

This paper will proceed with an analysis of the political difficulties and compromises associated with the History curriculum of the two countries and then offer a possible alternative for curriculum policy-makers as well as improved development of historical literacy.

A TALE OF TWO COUNTRIES: NATIONAL TIPPING POINTS

There is symmetry between Lebanon and Australia in respect to national events—national tipping points—which brings issues associated with national History curricula into focus.

For many Lebanese, 13 April 1975 marks one of the darkest dates in the country’s history. An attack on a busload of Palestinians in Beirut sparked a civil war that raged for 15 years, leaving some 150,000 people dead, the capital divided along sectarian lines and sections of the country ruined. Maadad (2016) remembers vividly these terrible years and struggles to forget the suffering, confusion and depression that people faced during the brutal war. Maadad adds that 13 April 1975 not only sparked a civil war in Lebanon but completely changed the country’s dynamics as a whole, affecting its politics, economy, education, schooling, communities, people and values. Her memories are of being a young child, trapped with her family in their apartment in Beirut, not knowing if they will survive, and later being in their small village amongst family and neighbours living under constant attacks from land, sea and air. She still dreams of sounds of gunshots and bombs exploding around her, mixed with the sounds of people crying, whispering and praying. Even now, Maadad (2016) still experiences fear and anxiety when watching fireworks or fighter jets performing sky shows, and refers to them as moments of embarrassment triggered by the past.

Prior to the civil war, Lebanon enjoyed one of the highest rates of literacy in the Arab world (97%) and, in the late 1980s, the number of students in schools was over 80% (Library of Congress, 2012). Regrettably, the civil war catastrophically affected educational standards and literacy rates. An important reason for the decline in academic standards was the destruction of homes and schools during Israeli raids on Lebanon. Some *350 out of 1,508* schools were destroyed, forcing a great many teachers, professors and educators to migrate overseas (*Agence France Press*, 2006). The destruction of educational infrastructure and the effective end of schooling for Lebanese students made it difficult for many to continue their education, despite being allowed to return to school to achieve a designated educational level during the conflict because some schools were pressured by militias to enrol unqualified students; some were used as distribution centres for humanitarian aid (Mikdadi, 1983); and some were used as centres for the

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dissemination of propaganda and recruitment of young soldiers to various militias (Brett & McCallin, 1996). By contrast, the background to Australia's tipping point may seem less profound: the 9/11 terrorist attacks on New York and Washington. In addition, Prime Minister Howard was motivated to want more teaching of history in schools after the 2002 Bali Bombings and the 2005 "Skips and Lebs" Cronulla riots in Sydney's southern suburbs between young Australians of Anglo-Celtic and those of Lebanese origin (Curthoys, 2006).

THE AUSTRALIAN CASE: POLITICIANS AND POLICY BUREAUCRATS RESPOND

Howard's approach to the problem of social tensions was to initiate a national History curriculum wherein students would learn about Australian history and the perceived benefits of living in Australia. This was not an approach lost on the incoming Rudd Labor Government; however, the critical issue was whose perspective should the History curriculum include (Guyver, 2011, n.p.). What occurred was that a change in the Australian government from Howard to Rudd brought about a change in emphasis in the Australian History curriculum. Apple's (2004) account of "patriotism, the flag and control of schools" (pp. 164-68) is a revealing account of how politicians seek to control the curriculum of schools in the US. The Howard Government's "functioning flag pole" promotion (discussed further below) is an example of such a desire to influence. Late in 2009 the Rudd Labor Government published its national History curriculum on the back of the initiative begun by the Howard Government, which had determined that History would be a "core" subject alongside English, Mathematics and Science.

In many ways, the Australian History curriculum reflects a triumph of the Centre after a bitter quarrel between Left and Right over the interpretation of Australia's past. Broadly speaking, the two camps were named by each other as "Whitewash" and "Black Armband", with one celebrating the triumph of Western democracy and civilisation, and the other emphasising its drawbacks, especially the History of First Nations Australian-European relations. This was a classic "History wars" scenario, a conflict over school History involving neo-conservative and liberal interpretations of the past, or of approaches to teaching, or both. The public debate has continued from the 1990s to the time of the writing of this paper. At various times, the Australian media weighed in, taking sides on the issue. For example, heading her article "Uncovering history in black and whitewash", Coslovich (2008), in *The Age* [Melbourne], took a "pro-black armband" (pro-First Nations Australian) point of view. *The Australian* (2008), a pro-Conservative Coalition national newspaper responded with an opposing view in an opinion piece labelled "Who's whitewashing the black armband view of history?". Brantlinger (2004) reviewed academic literary works through to 2004 on this issue in Australian historiography and Taylor (2011) describes the impact of the History Wars on the Australian curriculum.

CONTROLLING THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN LEBANESE SCHOOLS

Over a decade ago, Wettig wrote, in the Beirut *Daily Star*, that "few issues in Lebanon are as contested as its national history. Every sect has its own version of the civil wars. But the civil wars is not the only points of contention". Indeed, according to Wettig (2004), there is common disagreement about much of Lebanese history:

“Some call the Phoenicians our ancestors. Others call them the people who were previously in Lebanon. Some say the French were a mandatory power who were here at the request of the Lebanese. Others say they were colonizers,” said the CRDP’s [Center for Research and Educational Development] former president, Nemer Frayha. “Each textbook interprets the events in 1860 differently,” he added, referring to the first civil war between Druze and Christians [1860]. (n.p.)

Wettig (2004) notes: “Masoud Daher, a History professor at the Lebanese University and a member of the committee commissioned to work out the new curriculum, explained further: ‘Actually, all historical periods are controversial, even those before Phoenician times’”. The black armband versus whitewash controversy in Australian historiography confirms this point. Students in Beirut today give mixed responses about the significance of Lebanon’s civil war. For example, Noor El-Hoss, a student in West Beirut’s Al Iman School said: “I think it was a very important occasion for Lebanon. But I don’t know what happened”. A fellow student, Zeina Naous, explained, “We are studying about ... World War Two. We are not studying about the civil war, or what happened to Lebanon” (Maktabi, 2012, n.p.).

The teaching of History in Lebanon is compromised by the fact that more than two decades after the end of the country’s civil war, generations of young Lebanese are growing up with little formal education about the conflict. Lebanese society contains many deep divisions, and the country’s recent past is widely considered too contentious to examine in depth. In fact, to avoid inflaming old and still deeply felt hostilities, Lebanese History textbooks stop in 1943, the year the country gained independence (Maktabi, 2012). In 2012 the country’s Minister of Education, Hassan Diab, blamed this situation on politics: “After more than 20 years . . . the teaching of History in Lebanon remains, as it has always been, subject to the interests of various political groups” (Maktabi, 2012).

The civil war officially ended with the Taif Agreement, also known as the National Reconciliation Accord or “Document of National Accord” signed on 22 October 1989 and ratified by the Lebanese Parliament on 5 November 1989. With reference to education, the most important aspect was the revision of school curricula to emphasize national unity, with a specific focus on Civics and History: ‘Revision and development of curricula in such a manner as to strengthen national identity and social integration encourage spiritual and cultural openness.’ Unification of textbooks in the two subject matter areas of history and national education (is a must)” (Bashshur, 2005, p. 6.). This same statement marked one of the goals in the *Plan for Educational Revival* approved on 17 August 1994 by the Cabinet of Ministers as a working document. One month later, the Center for Educational Research and Development (CERD), which is responsible for all school curricula, began revising the History curriculum, assembling a team of nearly 350 persons to serve on various committees.

The education system was targeted first, and a new “ladder”, focusing on a new framework for education in Lebanon was produced and approved by the Cabinet on 25 October 1995 (see Bashshur, 2005). Soon after, a plan with specific curriculum targets for various school levels was completed. Subject matter committees began working on revisions and writing new material; committees for all subjects were appointed and approved. However, the subject matter of History was singled out and delegated to a special committee, composed of people representing various religious/political groups. Rumours leaked out concerning arguments and conflicts among its members, and about

reshuffling of memberships and resignations, and, when a copy of the new national curriculum was submitted for government approval (8 May 1997), with a new package of material covering all subjects, the subject matter of History was missing (Bahous et al., 2013). According to Bahous et al. (2013), three years later, the cabinet received and approved, on 10 May 2000, a brief document titled, *General Principles and Specific Goals for the Teaching of History*. When made public, it became clear that it was a very compromised and bland document, having been put together by a committee of six people who convened 50 meetings. When finally presented to the press on 10 May 2000, only one member out of the original six had survived the duration of the committee's work; other members had either resigned or been replaced.

Unfortunately, there is no way of knowing what viewpoints or arguments were exchanged during the long period of the work of the History Committee (three years), and what caused changes in membership and, more significantly, what reasons prevented the original committee from adopting modifications as requested in the 10 May document. The most important point to make is that, despite what the curriculum guidelines state, it remained difficult to translate these guidelines into teaching tools—that is, textbooks. Meanwhile, textbooks in all other subject-matter areas had already been issued and distributed to schools by the start of the 1997/98 academic year. Textbooks in History had to wait until 2001, when the first batch was produced. Even then, contentious issues existed; Wettig (2004, n.p.) writes that “although the Lebanese Curriculum and its Objectives (1997) were finally agreed upon, the concrete writing of textbooks proved impossible”. Wettig (2004, n.p.) explains that “in 2001 new history books were issued for elementary grades 2 and 3 and soon objections were voiced against including ‘Arabs’ among other ‘foreign conquerors’ who ‘occupied’ and then eventually left Lebanon as they had done in previous times”.

Bahous et al. (2013) describe how, in 2000, “the General Principles and Specific Goals of the Teaching of History, i.e. the overarching aim of the school subject, was finally produced and approved by the government” (p. 66). Yet, there was a lack of consensus by the CERD on what constituted the social reality of Lebanon. Should schools teach that Lebanon is a homeland for all of its people and as being “Arab in identity”? CERD insisted that this be changed to become “Lebanese identity” and “Arab affiliation”. For Bahous et al. (2013, p. 66), “this modification shows that the Taif Agreement had failed to solve the historical tension in Lebanon between those claiming that the country is part of the Arab world and those denying it. Terms such as ‘committed to Arab culture’ were removed from other paragraphs as well”. Consequently, for Bahous et al. (2013) “these debates and the changes made by CERD hence underline the fact that Lebanon’s politicians still did not agree about the basic identity, history or destiny of the country” (p.66).

The Lebanese History Committee attempted to overcome differences of historical interpretation by an appeal to historical processes, presenting the primary documents to students without any interpretation. Wettig (2004, n.p.) reported that, according to Masoud Daher, a History professor at the Lebanese University and a member of the committee commissioned to work out the new curriculum, controversies about the true course of history were overcome by allowing the “documents to speak for themselves in many parts of the new books”. However, as Wettig (2004) observed, “what the controversies within the committee are, however, he [Daher] can’t say” (n.p.).

Wettig (2004, n.p.) reported Daher as stating, in typical bureaucratese: “I don’t speak about difficulties”. Instead, Daher preferred “to talk about achievements”. It appears that Daher and his fellow History Committee moved much of the Lebanese History curriculum content offshore where there was much less controversy. Wettig (2004) reported him as stating:

We included American, European, Asian and African history ... I am sure it will be one of the best books in the Arab world.

We studied books from France, the United States, Germany, Japan to see how they teach ... We didn’t modernize the traditional material, but wrote a completely new book. In fact, maybe this book will be a shock for traditional historians. (n.p.)

But, even then, there was controversy—at least for 1999, with some blatant omissions in content. Dick (1999) reported, in the Beirut *Daily Star*, how the advocated inclusion of “the Armenian genocide of 1915 commemorated around the world every April 24 and often referred to by Lebanese politicians from a range of political affiliations, and is the subject of a 1997 parliamentary resolution”, struggled to be incorporated in either the History or Civics curricula. Dick (1999) anticipated this content would be included in the Civics curricula. The curriculum was one hurdle but a general agreement on textbooks was another and more severe hurdle.

Munir Bashshur, professor of education at the American University of Beirut, is a prolific and articulate researcher of issues in Lebanese education. He describes, in his chapter: “The deepening cleavage in the Lebanese educational system”, published in 2003, how the first curriculum review committee, established in 1995, did not only work much longer than expected on its task but how, then, when finally the first batch of textbooks was produced, a campaign broke out against the new textbooks. (Bashshur, as cited in Bahous et al., 2013, p. 67). Bashshur (2003) explained: “the work of this committee and its deliberations were handled almost like a state secret”. National distrust only increased. According to Bashshur (2003), history as a subject under the new curriculum was inadvertently left out, while all the other subjects were packaged appropriately.

Using Bashshur’s (2003) research, Bahous et al. (2013) go on to describe how “CERD had to issue a statement that those particular pages were to be removed from all existing and future copies of the textbooks” (pp. 69-70). Consequently, Bashshur concluded (2003, p. 167) that more than a decade after the Lebanese civil war ended and after the Taif Agreement, the various Lebanese groups still could not agree on how to write about their history (Bahous et al., 2013, p. 70). It was, however, all to no avail because, for Lebanese students, there was no history after the Lebanese civil war.

In respect to developing higher-order thinking, historical consciousness and historical literacy, do these restrictions on historical content really matter? In other words, can teachers achieve such goals for their students when large sections of historical content are excluded from the curriculum? In 2011, after the Lebanese Association for Educational Studies (LAES) third conference on “Education learning and teaching history: Lessons from and for Lebanon”, a teachers’ guide booklet titled: *Teaching history in Lebanon by creating learning spaces*, was developed. This booklet was created to provide support for teachers of History in Lebanon, providing new practices designed to enhance their classroom learning and engage their students. The booklet also aimed to promote and consolidate relationships between stakeholders in schools, government, communities and universities.

Maadad (2013a, 9 September) reports that, according to a school principal who wishes to remain anonymous and was interviewed privately at a private Maronite school located in the mountains, “this booklet did not travel far”. Concerning the consequence of a variety of textbooks representing various points of view, Maadad (2013) noted: “It brought to surface sensitive topics to the classroom. Teachers also found it hard to apply in their classroom, as it was deeply focused on higher-order of thinking and the learning process model which often requires access to past events in order to think critically”. In an interview with another school principal in south Lebanon in a low socio-economic school, Maadad (2013b, 10 September) quoted the principal as stating: “bringing History back to the classroom created a division between the students especially the year 8 and 9 groups that came from different religious backgrounds and have been informed of the truth of the Lebanese war differently. Letting go of the past is the only way to move forward.”

CONTROLLING THE TEACHING OF HISTORY IN AUSTRALIAN SCHOOLS

In Australia, the divisions caused by the History curriculum controversy were largely a result of disputes between politicians and policy bureaucrats. Liberal Prime Minister John Howard’s 2006 Australia Day address to the National Press Club decried the “black armband” approach to teaching Australian History and the accompanying downplaying of the importance of the Australian national identity (Howard, 2006). Indeed, Barry Cassidy (2006), on the ABC national *Insiders* television program, asked rhetorically: “John Howard and his handpicked bureaucracy will decide what is taught in our schools? Is that what will happen in our classrooms?” (n.p.). The outcome dictated by those in political authority was to use History to produce national stories that do not challenge the status quo. Speaking to the National Press Club in Canberra on the subject of the national curriculum on 24 February 2010, Julia Gillard, then Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Education in the Rudd Labor Government, announced that the teaching of History would be mandatory from 2012 (for a comprehensive press coverage of the speech, see Ferrari, 2010). However, the seeds for the making of the national History curriculum were in train long before Gillard’s speech.

Prior to introducing the national History curriculum, the Howard Coalition sought to impress on schools a sense of definite values in the form of a National Values Framework. According to Clark (2006), in June 2004, John Howard and his Minister for Education, Dr Brendan Nelson, announced a \$31 million education package in which funding would be tied to the Framework. Increased Commonwealth support—commonly labelled “piggy-back” grants—was contingent upon the states implementing several policy initiatives underpinning the Australian government’s national priorities, and shaping the nation’s schools over the next decade. Contingencies included: a compulsory two hours of exercise for students every week; adoption of a national safe schools framework; and installation of a “functioning flag pole”. The initiative was designed to support “greater national consistency in schooling”, such as a standard school starting age and the promotion of educational standards, better reporting to parents, transparency of school performance and making values a core part of schooling framed the policy (Clark, 2006, pp. 162-3)—the critical question is: whose values? Clark (2006) argues that the intended values to be implemented in the nation’s schools were those of the ruling political elite, which, at the time, was the Howard Coalition Government.

In the lead-up to the 21 August 2010 federal election, South Australian Liberal MP Christopher Pyne, the Federal Opposition's education spokesman, declared: "the new national school curriculum over-emphasises indigenous [sic] culture and history and is a 'disaster'". For Pyne it "has been skewed to a black armband view of Australian History . . . The national curriculum appears quite unbalanced as it stands at the moment". He added: "We have a seemingly over-emphasis on indigenous [sic] culture and history and almost an entire blotting out of our British traditions and British heritage" (Hudson & Larkin, 2010). Over three years later, but now in sight of a Coalition victory in the forthcoming election on 14 September 2013, Pyne restated his claims, in *The Australian*, that the ACARA National History Curriculum "was being rolled out in a 'patchwork' manner". Moreover, "he wanted to see Anzac day treated with more prominence" (AAP, 2013). For Pyne, "Anzac Day was currently listed alongside many other days, such as Harmony Day and Reconciliation Day, in the school curriculum". Indeed, "Anzac Day is very central to our understanding of our Australian character and our Australian history". Moreover, Pyne was reported as stating: "A Coalition government would also review elements of the curriculum that presented a 'black armband view' of Australian history . . . We think that of course we should recognise the mistakes that have been made in the past" (AAP, 2013). Thus, within a year of the introduction of the mandatory teaching of History in Australian schools, political squabbles began to emerge concerning the content of the Australian History curriculum. It appears, now, that every change of government at a national level may be accompanied with a rewriting of the Australian History curriculum.

What do these political changes to the Australian History curriculum add to our understanding of History curriculum theory? To what extent is this change in content and values of the curriculum actually reflected in classroom practice? While there is no empirical research to answer these questions, from our anecdotal evidence there seems to be a general acceptance by students, parents and teachers that this is the way it must be with regard to political influences on the curriculum. Perhaps, with such a massive swing by Australian voters to the Coalition at the 2013 federal election, it is not surprising that so many Australians might support changes to what is taught in history classes in schools. However, only empirical research will show how this translates into classroom practice. Only time and relevant empirical research will show whether or not Australians are prepared to accept this state of affairs with every change in government, and whether or not teachers, accordingly, alter their practices. How does the case of the History curriculum in Lebanon compare with the school History curriculum controversies in Australia?

DOES THE EXCLUSION OF A NATIONAL HISTORY FROM A HISTORY CURRICULUM REALLY MATTER, AND WHAT ABOUT HISTORIOGRAPHY?

This paper has detailed developments in the Australian national History curriculum which occurred as different political parties won office at the Federal level. Inter alia, a conservative Coalition will tend to have the History curriculum downplay a black armband view of Australia's Indigenous history, and will seek to place greater emphasis on Australia's European history, particularly through an emphasis on what ANZAC Day really means; that is, memory of the fallen, sacrifice and comradeship. There is, however, no suggestion, for example, that Australia's Indigenous history should be deleted

altogether, which is significantly different from the Lebanese case in which the Lebanese post-civil war history now does not exist at all in the History curriculum.

Some researchers have considered the national consequences of omissions of significant events in history. According to Braslavsky et al. (2006): “Education has historically played an important role in the promotion of principles and values that contributed to social cohesion through the construction of ‘imagined communities’” (p. 91). Indeed, Braslavsky et al. suggest that, in the 19th Century, many of these imagined communities were erected on the notion of the “nation-state worth dying for” (p. 91). As generations of Australian History students will attest, in respect to the dominance of British values in the curriculum and knowledge of the British Empire, “in such a context, the purpose of education was mainly “to transmit the culture of adult generations to younger generations” and promote social cohesion through the promotion of cultural homogeneity and the embedding of socio-economic and political stratification” (Braslavsky et al., 2006, p. 91).

For politicians, the teaching of History has a special place in this process. Their concern, however, is with content. There are other important objectives—perhaps not so politically disputed. Braslavsky et al. (2006) explain the special role that a study of history has in the development of students’ higher-order historical consciousness, or literacy. They state that by thinking in a “rigorous, conscious, constructive and critical manner ... taking historical processes as a reference for their present acts, the holders of these competences are provided with more tools to stand for their rights and to respond to their duties” (p. 97). In a separate study for UNESCO, Braslavsky (2003) insists that a unified multi-cultural society depends on an open and nationally agreed-upon curriculum promoting open discussion and understanding of all cultures and religions with a country’s national boundaries. In this respect, what is taught in schools is vitally important. It is the discourse in schools between teachers and students justifying what is included or what is excluded that is vital to a dynamic curriculum. Of course, this applies to any discipline and not simply History. In the History curriculum, this discourse develops a teacher’s substantive historical knowledge and historical literacy generally.

TOWARDS HISTORICAL LITERACY AND THE DEVELOPMENT OF HISTORIOGRAPHY IN A HISTORY CURRICULUM

In explaining how teachers move in a cognitive and affective manner through substantive content knowledge, we can refer to research by Lee and Ashby (2001), who explain this process:

Substantive history is the content of history, what history [is] ‘about’ . . . procedural ideas about history . . . concepts like historical evidence, explanation, change are ideas that provide our understanding of history as a discipline or form of knowledge. They are not what history is “about” but they shape the way we go about doing history. (p. 215)

Any History teachers’ knowledge of his/her subject and, indeed, the content of most curricula is constantly in the process of change and continual development as social and cultural factors impact on and change current understandings and, consequently, on how we interpret the past. Rodwell (2013) argues that writing history is what people do to persuade others that events are knowable and that life and civilization has some direction and purpose. That is why events are being reinterpreted continually, as society’s values

and knowledge constantly change, allowing for an expression of new prejudices (see Rodwell, 2013, chap. 11).

Consequently, substantive history content knowledge is dynamic, constantly undergoing change as historians re-examine the past and respond to how social and cultural groups are increasingly given a voice in history or have it taken away from them in subsequent power struggles. For example, arguably, Indigenous Australians have only, since the 1960s and, in particular, as a result of the 1967 referendum, progressed to attaining their rightful place in Australian history. This, arguably, has occurred because of social, cultural and political changes (see Hirst, 2005), such as Indigenous activism—that really got underway in the early 1970s, and the writing of more sympathetic histories (e.g., Attwood, 2005; Reynolds, 1981/1982/2006; Reynolds, 2012). This, in turn, influences, and is influenced by, our procedural concepts of, for example: change, evidence and continuity. We come to understand these are transient and problematic terms. The relevance to the teaching of History is contextualised by a particular socio-political and cultural setting. Currently in Australia, with the implementation of the ACARA History Curriculum, considerable emphasis is being placed on these procedural concepts. For example, Taylor (n.d.), from the Australian National Centre for History Education, addressed the issue of developing “historical literacy” in our school students, and proceeded to outline a list of necessary components of historical literacy; these included: research skills, language of history, historical explanation, making judgements in history, and connecting the past with the self and the world today (Taylor, n.d., n.p.).

If a country’s national History curriculum deletes or downplays large sections of its recent history, as does Lebanon, it is difficult to understand how teachers can develop historical literacy and an appreciation of historiography in their students. Maadad’s (2013a, 2013b) research endorses this point of view. The situation in Lebanon contrasts sharply with that in the “black armband” versus “whitewash” issues prevalent in the discourse of the Australian History curriculum. Australian students and teachers are not being denied historical content; it remains highly accessible. The content in question is simply a matter of emphasis, accompanying a downplaying of the importance of ANZAC Day in the Australian national identity. However, from this patchwork of emphases comes an opportunity to develop, in students, the components of historical literacy as well as providing an opportunity to develop, in students, an appreciation of historiography—why some content is excluded (Parkes, 2011; Parkes, & Donnelly, 2014; Rodwell, 2013).

Can a higher-level historical consciousness and historical literacy be created in students in the absence of relevant historical content, such as content that is missing in Lebanon’s national History curriculum? Braslavsky et al. (2006) suggests that, for Lebanon, “carrier” subjects, such as Geography and Social Studies, can provide this level of thinking and conscientiousness for students. Alternatively, subjects such as Civics and Citizenship Education, or Democracy Studies can achieve these ends. Moreover, “themes linked to collective memory, cultural diversity, discrimination, and so on could be introduced in literature (historical novels) or language classes” (p. 100). Either through incidental classroom discussion or through dedicated units of work in carrier subjects, students can engage in discussions which highlight some of the following topics:

- Who should write Lebanon’s history?
- What topics should be included and excluded?
- Why do we study Lebanon’s history?

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- Why do people disagree about what should be taught in Lebanese history?
- How can the study of a country's history heal social divisions?

Of course, there are many more such questions which can be raised with students and they may encourage higher-order historical thinking and an understanding and appreciation of historiography. The same applies to issues of what should be included in the national Australian History curriculum. By focusing on topics excluded from the curriculum, opportunities can be provided to raise similar historiographical thinking and questions promoting high-order historical thinking. Perhaps this point can only be answered through further empirical research in Lebanese and Australian schools.

CONCLUSIONS

Politicians express considerable concern about their nation's History curriculum. There is no doubting they want to control what their nation's students learn about the past. Clearly, there is much at stake. Political reality, presumptions and prejudice can override the needs of students and a nation's collective understanding.

Following the commencement of a national History curriculum in Australia in 2012, prior to the following year's Federal election and flushed with the likelihood of attaining power, the Coalition signalled it would make changes when it came to office. Most likely, these changes would mirror those expressed by Prime Minister John Howard in his 2006 Australia Day address to the National Press Club. These were contested views concerning the place of Indigenous Australian history in the country's history. There were also contested views concerning the place of ANZAC Day and what it means in Australia's history. Yet, compared to the state of Lebanon's national History curriculum, the changes proposed by the contested views seem quite mild.

When considering Lebanon's post-civil war History curriculum, the questions are whether the curriculum denies the birthright of Lebanese? or have generations of students been liberated from sectarian conflict? Removing mention of a large section of Lebanon's recent history is analogous to Australian politicians removing Australia's post-European settlement history of Indigenous Australian from the curriculum or removing the explanation for Australia's ANZAC tradition from the Australian curriculum. Apart from the obvious dire socio-cultural outcome—a nation's collective understanding—this paper argues that classroom discourse concerning these issues, based on open access to varying historical points of view, is essential if students are to develop higher-level historical literacy, historical consciousness and, importantly, general historical and historiographical understanding.

Does it really matter if Lebanese students miss out on the teaching of post-civil war history in their nation's history? Does this compromise the development in students of higher-order historical understanding, historical consciousness and historical literacy? Clearly, there is more at stake than Lebanon's collective national understanding and sense of being; that is, students' substantive historical understanding and appreciation of historiography. The so-called carrier school subjects, referred to by Braslavsky et al. (2006), may assist in the development of certain national ideals, such as democracy and citizenship, but further research is needed to determine if they can contribute to the essential aims of a History curriculum—those higher-level historical and historiographical understandings, and attitudes referred to above.

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