HISTORY TEACHERS AND SYLLABUS CHANGE: EXAMINING THE MIDDLE GROUND OF CURRICULUM

Dr Catherine Harris-Hart
History Teachers and Syllabus Change: Examining the Middle Ground of Curriculum

ABSTRACT

This study is about how teachers interpret and enact curriculum. In particular it focuses on the ways in which history teachers have interpreted and enacted the 1998 New South Wales (NSW) 1998 Stages 4-5 (years 7-10) History Syllabus (hereafter, the 1998 syllabus) prior to classroom implementation. The new syllabus is the product of a mandated, top-down syllabus change process. The development of this new syllabus document was highly contested and after much public debate was released to all NSW secondary schools for staged implementation across 1999-2002.

How history teachers individually and collectively perceived and enacted this new syllabus document prior to classroom implementation is of interest for a number of reasons. First, this new syllabus has the potential to impact upon the ways in which history is taught, learnt and assessed in NSW secondary schools. Second, what is largely absent from existing curriculum research is an investigation of how teachers interpret and enact new curriculum prior to classroom implementation: that is, an examination of teachers’ enactment of a new curriculum document before they enter the classroom. Goodson (1994) refers metaphorically to this as the ‘middle ground’ of curriculum. Whilst Goodson introduced this term in the early 1990s, further interest in this field has been scarce.

This study locates the middle ground of curriculum between the high ground of curriculum (the formal construction of the written curriculum) and its ground-level implementation in the classroom. It acknowledges the dynamic interaction between these varying levels of curriculum and the role of teachers as active participants in the interpretation and enactment of curriculum. The study reconceptualises the middle ground metaphor as a means of examining history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. A proposed model of the middle ground of curriculum is developed as a conceptual framework through which the following research questions are addressed:

- What are the sites, contexts and processes that comprise the middle ground of curriculum?
- How have history teachers interpreted and enacted the 1998 syllabus in the middle ground of curriculum?
- How and why do the sites, contexts and processes that constitute the middle ground of curriculum influence the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact this new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom?

To address these questions, a series of interpretive case studies was undertaken. It was assumed that the subject department was a logical and relevant site in which to ground the study. Accordingly three history/HSIE1 departments (Illaingara, Northside and St Bernadette’s), from government, independent and Catholic secondary school contexts

---

1 Structurally, history teachers can be found within distinct history departments or in departments clustered along Key Learning Area (KLA) lines. In NSW, history is part of the broader HSIE (Human Society and Its Environment) KLA.
respectively, were involved in the study over an 18-month period of time. Data collection tools included document analysis, participant observation, interviews and focus groups.

This study demonstrates that the history/HSIE department acts as a concrete and conceptual site that shapes the ways in which history teachers individually and collectively interpret and enact new curriculum. Further, the operation of a history/HSIE department as a conduit for syllabus change centres on the interaction of three inter-related contexts – subject sub-cultures, teacher culture and teacher self-identity. The interaction between these three contexts varied across the three history/HSIE departments studied and thus provided history teachers within each of the three departments with different frames through which they could locate themselves in the process of syllabus change. The study found that such variance was due to the different features and dimensions of these three contexts and the ways in which they interacted within specific history/HSIE departments.

Most importantly the interaction of these contexts shapes teachers’ perceived curriculum decision-making space. Teachers’ individual and collective perceptions of the nature and number of decisions available to them were evident in the micropolitical processes through which they enacted the 1998 syllabus. These processes are theorised along what Goldman and Conley refer to as the ‘zone of enactment’ and include: rejection, resistance, strategic compliance, individualism and pragmatism. Examination of these processes provides valuable insight into syllabus change processes and why the intended and actual outcomes of syllabus change are often divergent. It also provides greater understanding of the individual, collective, personal, professional and political dimensions of syllabus change and the potential cost of syllabus change to teachers.

This study demonstrates the need for revision of formal syllabus development processes to acknowledge and successfully negotiate the contexts through which teachers interpret and enact curriculum. The study also provides a basis for greater research into the middle ground of curriculum. It is suggested that future research needs to cut across traditional school and subject boundaries.
TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration i
Acknowledgments ii
Abstract iii
Table of contents v
List of tables ix
List of figures x
List of appendices xi
List of appendices xii
Abbreviations
# CHAPTER 1 – INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The research problem</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parameters of the study</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rationale for the study</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research aims and questions</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Some relevant literature</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research overview</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

# CHAPTER 2 – THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 1998 STAGES 4-5 HISTORY SYLLABUS: EXAMINING THE HIGH GROUND CURRICULUM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors shaping the development of the 1998 syllabus at an international and national level</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Debate about the nature and purpose of history as a school subject</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The international, national and state politics of curriculum change</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Factors shaping the development of the 1998 syllabus at a state level</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal curriculum structures – The NSW Board of Studies</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Key policy agents in the development of the 1998 syllabus</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The NSW Department of Education and Training</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The NSW Premier and Minister for Education</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academics</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The NSW History Teachers’ Association</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History teachers</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The impetus for a new syllabus</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>An overview of the 1998 syllabus: Chronology, content and form</td>
<td>34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theorising the syllabus development process</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Systemic reform</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandated change</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher participation in mandated curriculum change processes</td>
<td>47</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher accountability</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The reproduction of curriculum control</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum control and subject matter knowledge</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### CHAPTER 3 – THEORISING THE MIDDLE GROUND

#### CURRICULUM

**Introduction**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The subject department</th>
<th>53</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The social component of the subject department</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The political component of the subject department</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The subject component of the subject department</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The contexts shaping teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus at the level of the HSIE/history department**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>59</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Subject sub-culture</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher culture</td>
<td>62</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher self-identity</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of students in shaping teacher practice</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**The syllabus as a site of struggle for meaning**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The micropolitics of change</th>
<th>70</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The processes through which teachers micropolitically negotiate a new syllabus document</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance</td>
<td>73</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Conceptualising the middle ground of syllabus change**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
<th>74</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
# CHAPTER 4 – METHODOLOGY

## Introduction

## Research methodology

- The interpretive paradigm
- Constructivism

## Case study design

## Methods of data collection

- Triangulation
- Ethical considerations
- Member checking
- Limitations of the study

## Data analysis

- The role of theory in data analysis
- Software programs as analytic tools
- First-level analysis
- Second-level analysis
- Third-level analysis
- Metasynthesis

## Summary

# CHAPTER 5 – THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT, ILLANGARA HIGH SCHOOL: RESISTANCE AND PRAGMATISM

## Introduction

## The school context

## The history teachers

- Darryl
- Nadine
- Tom

## The history department

## The sites: department, school and community

## The role of context in shaping history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus: subject sub-culture and teacher culture

## Processes: being pragmatic and making syllabus change work.

## Summary
### CHAPTER 6 – THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT, NORTHBRIDGE LADIES’ COLLEGE: FRAGMENTED INDIVIDUALISM

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school context</td>
<td>142</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The history teachers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jacqui</td>
<td>154</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The history department</td>
<td>159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sites: staffrooms as private places</td>
<td>166</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of contest in shaping history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus: subject sub-culture and teacher culture</td>
<td>167</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject sub-culture</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher culture</td>
<td>169</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processes: competing cultures</strong></td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resistance: a generational issue?</td>
<td>175</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Summary</strong></td>
<td>177</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### CHAPTER 7 – THE HSIE DEPARTMENT, ST BERNADETTE’S COLLEGE: CYNICISM, APATHY AND COMPLIANCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The school context</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The history teachers</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>178</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>179</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>186</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The HSIE department</td>
<td>188</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sites: a common staffroom</td>
<td>192</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The role of context in shaping history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus: subject sub-culture and teacher culture</td>
<td>193</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject sub-culture</td>
<td>194</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher culture</td>
<td>195</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processes: strategic compliance</strong></td>
<td>197</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summary</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER 8 – META-SYNTHESIS: RECONCEPTUALISING THE MIDDLE GROUND OF CURRICULUM

Introduction
Analysing the sites shaping history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation
- Illangara: a single subject staffroom
- Northbridge: multiple general staffrooms
- St Bernadette’s: a common staffroom
- The school and the community

Analysing the contexts shaping history teachers perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation
- Teacher self-identity
- Subject sub-culture
- Teacher culture

Analysing the processes through which history teachers perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation
Reconceptualising the middle ground of curriculum

Summary

CHAPTER 9 – THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction
Research questions, theoretical orientation and methodological issues
Major findings and theoretical contribution of thesis
Implications of thesis for future research

REFERENCES

APPENDICES
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND STUDY OVERVIEW

The research problem

This thesis is about how teachers interpret and enact curriculum. In particular I focus on the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom. In late 1998, the New South Wales (NSW) 1998 Stages 4-5 (years 7-10) History Syllabus\(^2\) (hereafter, ‘the 1998 syllabus’) was released to all NSW secondary schools for staged implementation across 1999-2002. How history teachers individually and collectively perceive and enact this new syllabus document prior to classroom implementation is of interest for a number of reasons.

First, the 1998 syllabus has the potential to impact upon the ways in which history is taught, learnt and assessed in NSW secondary schools. This in turn may have implications for the ways in which history teachers perceive themselves and are perceived by others. Second, studies of curriculum change\(^3\) have typically focused on the formal construction of the written curriculum and its ground level implementation in the classroom (Blase & Anderson, 1995; Cornbleth, 1990; Flett & Wallace, 2001; Goodson, 1994; Jackson, 1995; Pinar, Reynolds, Slattery & Taubman, 1995). What is largely absent from existing research is an investigation of how teachers interpret and enact new curriculum prior to classroom implementation: that is, an examination of teachers’ enactment of a new curriculum document before they enter the classroom. For the purposes of this study, a syllabus document is considered enacted as soon as teachers start talking about, debating and planning for change. This assertion acknowledges that teachers may interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus document long before they enter the

\(^2\) The NSW primary and secondary schooling system has six learning stages; Stages 1-3 comprise primary schooling, Stages 4-5 are covered in years 7-10 of secondary school, and Stage 6 refers to years 11-12 of secondary school.

\(^3\) The term ‘curriculum change’ rather than ‘curriculum reform’ is used throughout this study. This is because the term ‘curriculum reform’ can be politically use to give the impression that curriculum reformers are fixing what is somehow wrong. The term ‘curriculum change’, however, encompasses any alteration made to curriculum practice.
classroom. Goodson (1994) refers metaphorically to this as the ‘middle ground’ of curriculum. Whilst Goodson introduced this term in the early 1990s, further interest in this field has been scarce.4

The middle ground metaphor is one means of exploring the concrete and abstract sites shaping teachers’ interpretation and enactment of a new curriculum document before they implement it in the classroom. It enables the possibility to examine how teachers interpret and enact a new curriculum document, why they enact it in particular ways, and how these initial responses might impact upon their classroom enactment of a new curriculum document.

To further delineate the research problem and how it might be addressed, this chapter outlines the parameters of the study. The study aims and research questions are subsequently introduced. The relevance and importance of this study, as well as the study’s major assumptions are defined through a summary of related literature. Finally, an overview of the thesis structure is given to orient the reader to the framework of the study.

**Parameters of the study**

The focus of this study is the development of the 1998 syllabus throughout late 1997 and 1998, and history teachers’ interpretation and initial enactment of the 1998 syllabus throughout the period February 1999 to August 2000. The 1998 syllabus is an example of a subject-specific curriculum change. The development of the 1998 syllabus was viewed as a critical aspect of the study, as substantial research has shown that the formal development of curriculum and indeed syllabuses is steeped in politics (Bailey, 2000; Ball, 1987; Ball & Bowe, 1992; Brady & Kennedy, 1999; Goodson, 1983; Jackson, 1992; Landman, 2000; Sarason, 1990). Additionally, a number of studies have also shown that teachers’ views of formal curriculum development processes shape their initial responses to new curriculum documents (Hall, 1997; Reynolds, 2001). 5 A number of newspaper articles voicing history teacher

---

4 Some noted exceptions are reviewed in chapter 3.
5 These two specific studies refer to mandated curriculum development processes, which marginalise the role of teachers in formal decision-making processes. In both studies, teachers’ responses to new syllabuses were greatly influenced by their views on how the syllabus was developed, by whom and for
dissatisfaction with the formal development processes surrounding the production of the 1998 syllabus also suggest that the ways in which history teachers enact this new syllabus may be strongly influenced by their perceptions of the formal syllabus development processes (History Teachers Association *Newsletter* 1998a; Jamal, 1998a, 1998b). The development and dissemination of the 1998 syllabus therefore provides a bounded context within which to conduct this study.

The primary site within which this study is conducted is the secondary school subject department, as it is a defining site and context for secondary school teachers. A large body of research has demonstrated that the subject department significantly influences what teachers teach (subject), and where, when and with whom they teach it (Ball, 1982, 1983; Dinham & Green, 2001; Hannay & Denby, 1994; Harris, 1997, 2000; Harris, Jamieson & Russ, 1995; Siskin, 1991, 1994a, 1994b).

Moreover, the subject department is both a concrete and conceptual site within which key contexts such as subject sub-culture, teacher culture and teacher self-identity intersect. This is because the subject department staffroom provides a physical territory which the subject, a social construction maintained and mediated through social interaction, can inhabit (Goodson & Marsh, 1998, p. 57). Various studies have also concluded that the subject department is the primary site within which secondary school teachers are socialised and develop a sense of teacher self-identity (Harris, 2000; Kelchtermans, 1996; Siskin, 1994a). A new syllabus can challenge teachers’ interests and the ways in which they view themselves and their practice. An understanding of the relationship between these contexts may illuminate how and why history teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document in particular ways before they enter the classroom.

The subject department, as a research site has also enabled me to investigate the processes whereby teachers, through individual and collective processes, enact the 1998 syllabus. Too often, classroom-based research only focuses on the perceptions and behaviour of the individual teacher (Flett & Wallace, 2001; Wasley, Donmeyer &
Maxwell, 1995). The middle ground metaphor recognises both the individual and collective dimensions of teachers’ enactment of a new syllabus document. This is because the middle ground metaphor is based on the assumption that teachers’ perceptions and enactment of a new curriculum document are socially constructed.

**Rationale for the study**

This research is new and important for several reasons. First, it challenges the view of the classroom as the main arena of curriculum practice and argues that a new curriculum document such as the 1998 syllabus is enacted as soon as teachers start talking about, debating and planning for change. This assertion shifts the research focus away from teachers’ classroom responses to syllabus change, and sheds light on the ways in which teachers actively interpret and enact a new syllabus both before and beyond the classroom. In doing so, I aim to address a gap in the curriculum change literature and contribute to this body of knowledge.

Second, this study acknowledges that “teachers … hold in their hands the ultimate success and impact of reforms” (Flett & Wallace, 2001, p. 1). Investigating the ways in which teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus are socially constructed is vital if we are to move beyond reproaching policymakers for the continual failure of mandated curriculum change. Instead, we need to move towards understanding how teachers act to interpret a new curriculum document and subsequently identify curriculum change processes that will facilitate effective enactment of curriculum change.

Third, this study focuses on the subject department as the primary site within which history teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document, before it is implemented in the classroom. In doing this, I aim to further understanding of the ways in which subject departments can act to either enable or constrain teachers’ enactment of a new curriculum document. I also aim to further our knowledge of the contexts and processes that shape these interpretations and responses.
Finally, this study builds on and reconceptualises the middle ground metaphor. Because this reconceptualisation is based on qualitative data, it has a number of applications for curriculum policy development and implementation, as detailed in Chapter 9.

**Research aims and questions**

The aim of this study is to examine and better understand history teachers’ initial interpretations and enactment of a new syllabus *prior to* classroom implementation. In doing so, the study aims to contribute to the reconceptualisation and operationalisation of Goodson’s middle ground metaphor. It may also serve to illuminate the sites, contexts and processes shaping this initial enactment. In doing so, it is hoped the study will contribute to a specific body of knowledge – that of interpretation.

To achieve these aims three specific research questions guide the study:

1. What are the sites, contexts and processes that comprise the middle ground of curriculum?

2. How have history teachers interpreted and enacted the 1998 syllabus in the middle ground of curriculum?

3. How and why do the sites, contexts and processes that constitute the middle ground curriculum influence the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact this new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom?

The research aim, parameters and rationale are based on a number of assumptions that stem from a broad base of curriculum change literature. In the following section I briefly describe the relevance of this literature to the aims of this study.

---

7 In this study the term ‘site’ typically refers to the physical sites within which teachers work; for example, schools, subject departments and classrooms. The term ‘context’ on the other hand, refers to those more abstract factors shaping teacher practice. The term ‘context’ is theorised in chapter 3.
Some relevant literature

In important ways, a curriculum document is a socially constructed political text. Understanding a curriculum document as text allows us to theorise the ways in which teachers read or interpret a new curriculum document, and in turn enact it, before they implement it in the classroom. I subsequently refer to this process as the middle ground of curriculum. In this section I argue that the only way to fully understand the middle ground of curriculum is to understand the historical contexts from whence a new curriculum document emerged (the high ground curriculum) and the sites and contexts within which teachers will implement it (the ground level of curriculum).

To articulate this assertion I will first address the perennial question – what is curriculum? Privileging a particular definition of curriculum is a hazard I seek to avoid. This is because one definition could never explain the multifaceted and elusive practice of curriculum (Cornbleth, 1990; Goodson, 1994). Various definitions emphasise curricular content, ideology and pedagogy whilst others stress structure, agency and power (Apple, 1990; Goodson & Ball, 1984; Grundy, 1987; Marsh, 1997; Marsh & Stafford, 1984; Pinar et al. 1995). Grundy reminds us that curriculum “is not an abstract concept which has some existence outside and prior to human experience” (Grundy, 1987, p. 5). She explains that:

(T)o think about curriculum is to think about how a group of people act and interact in certain situations. It is not to describe and analyze an element, which exists apart from human interaction (Grundy, 1987, p. 6).

Today researchers often retreat from defining curriculum and instead they focus on understanding curriculum – where and how it is derived, and its application to practice (Pinar et al. 1995). Understanding curriculum relies on examining the ways in which curriculum is socially constructed, by whom, for what purpose and to what effect. Issues of power and control – who has it, who doesn’t, why and to what effect – are central to the meanings people attach to a new syllabus document. An examination of the formal curriculum clearly explains this. Goodson (1994) refers to the formal construction of the written curriculum as the high ground curriculum. The high ground curriculum is an historically constituted site for ideological struggle. It is considered historically constituted because “(it) can be seen as the culmination of long and continuing effort” (Goodson, 1994, p. 19). This struggle or effort has typically centred
on issues of control (Harris, 2001; Kennedy, 2001). Key agents (such as bureaucrats and academics) typically have the power to control the formal curriculum and the processes through which it is officially constructed. This has meant that teachers are often removed from many of the formal decision-making processes (Bailey, 2000; Sarason, 1990, 1995).

Smith and Lovat (1990) contend that teachers need to have curriculum decision-making space to feel that they have autonomy and can actively make decisions that are relevant to their practice. They argue that decision-making space is for each individual a perceptually defined space. Two things affect this perceived space: the number of curriculum decisions that a teacher perceives have already been made by people or groups other than themselves, and those decisions which they perceive have not been made by others (Smith & Lovat, 1990, pp. 118-119). The high ground curriculum can set parameters for, and consequently control the amount of decision-making space teachers perceive is available to them. This in turn can influence the ways in which teachers interpret and enact new curriculum. Curriculum control is seen as valuable because those who control the curriculum control the definition and promulgation of knowledge (Apple, 1982, 1990; Young, 1971). It is for this reason that curriculum has been described by many as innately political (Ball, 1987; Goodson, 1994; Jackson, 1992, Pinar et al, 1995).

Policy agents have their own cultural, social, economic, political, professional and personal agendas. In this study I concentrate on the political, professional and personal agendas of policy agents and how these are manifested in issues of curriculum control. Typically, these agendas are played out through debate over the nature and purpose of knowledge. This is because the written curriculum legitimates certain kinds of knowledge and access to knowledge while de-legitimising others. Debate over the nature and purpose of school knowledge is not the only vehicle through which issues of control are played out. For example, Kennedy (2001) concludes that Commonwealth government attempts to control the development of civics education in Australia reveal a desire to address economic priorities and to control how education serves the ‘market state’.
The decision-making processes influencing the high ground curriculum are also related to issues of power and control. Typically, the formal development of NSW curriculum documents is mandated and relies on top-down change processes. An inherent outcome of such processes is the marginalisation of teachers and their participation in the development of the formal curriculum (Bailey, 2000). By limiting participation in change processes, policy-makers have thus sought to limit teacher decision-making and silence teacher and student voices in curriculum change processes. Further, increasingly rigorous accountability mechanisms, such as the institution of high-stakes examinations, can be seen as an attempt to control the ways in which teachers implement curriculum change. It has been suggested that the aim of this is “to ensure curriculum dissemination without ‘distortions’, a version of teacher proof curricula” (Pinar et al. 1995, p. 263).

Policy-makers can sometimes assume the written curriculum is implemented as intended (Cornbleth, 1990; Frenette, 1999, 2000; Peshkin, 1992). This assumption reveals policy-makers’ lack of understanding about the contexts and processes through which teachers interpret and enact a new curriculum document. Whilst many studies have shown that the ways in which teachers interpret and enact a new curriculum document often bears little semblance to the changes intended by the document, many policy-makers continue to mandate curriculum change with little thought about the ways in which teachers make meaning of new curriculum (Bailey, 2000; Hall, 1997; Sarason, 1990). Even less thought is given to the ways in which teachers make meaning of and enact a new syllabus document before classroom implementation. I believe one way to address the lack of research into the sites, contexts and processes through which teachers interpret the written curriculum before classroom implementation is to view the 1998 syllabus document as a socially constructed political text that is negotiated at various formal and informal levels across a number of arenas (such as government departments, schools, subject departments and classrooms). According to Ball and Bowe (1992), a policy text such as the 1998 syllabus is an expression of political intent and a political resource for continuing debate. It is also a political resource for teachers to interpret and re-interpret at the micro level of practice (Ball & Bowe, 1992; Goodson, 1983).

To understand and make meaning of a new syllabus document requires ‘reading’ the syllabus text and the often competing discourses from which it emerged. Curriculum texts are open to multiple readings, and the ways in which teachers read or interpret
them depends upon teachers’ purposes, commitments and strategies (Sachs, 1995). Therefore, for any text, a plurality of readers yields a plurality of interpretations (Codd, 1988). As Sachs (1995) points out, however, teachers are often positioned to interpret policy texts in an unquestioning or non-critical manner. This is because teachers have been historically socialised into acquiescing to the demands of policy documents. Particular policy documents also give way to preferred readings. Additionally, “policy texts are normally articulated in the language of (a) general public good” (Bowe et al. 1992, p. 20), which can also influence the ways in which a syllabus text is read. A new curriculum document is therefore a text that represents a complex web of events, personalities, competing agendas and interest groups with often differing ideologies, all competing for the right to determine the dominant and accepted conception of curriculum at both policy and practice levels.

I suggest the metaphor of the middle ground of curriculum provides a framework through which to examine history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus document prior to classroom implementation. The concept of a middle ground allows a focus on the sites (primarily the subject department), the contexts (subject sub-cultures, teacher cultures and teacher self-identity) and the individual and collective political processes through which teachers initially interpret and enact a new syllabus document. It is important to note that the middle ground is not conceptually discrete. As this brief literature review has argued, the ways in which teachers enact the written curriculum are influenced by the high ground curriculum (Hall, 1997). Similarly, the ways in which teachers read any political text is shaped by their ground level experiences, that is, their experience of teaching in particular schools, subject departments and classrooms. From this brief literature review we can summarise that the varying levels of curriculum – high, middle and ground – are interrelated and act together to inform the processes through which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus. Figure 1.1 displays the relationships between these levels of curriculum and the sites within which teachers and others engage with curriculum.
Figure 1.1: Levels of curriculum

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Levels of curriculum</th>
<th>Sites</th>
<th>Key players</th>
<th>Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HIGH GROUND</td>
<td>Bureaucracies</td>
<td>Policy agents(^8)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Universities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MIDDLE GROUND</td>
<td>Subject department</td>
<td>Head Teachers(^9)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GROUND LEVEL</td>
<td>Classroom</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the right hand side of figure 1.1 the processes through which teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document are shown to be both continual and dynamic. Figure 1.1 is a foundation for the theoretical framework of this study, which is developed and theorised in chapter 3.

**Research overview**

This section provides an overview of the study by describing the main goals and

---

\(^8\) Policy agents include bureaucrats, academics and to a lesser extent teachers.

\(^9\) Elsewhere departmental leaders have been broadly labeled Department Chairs, Department Coordinators or Heads of Department (HOD). For consistency I shall use the term Head Teacher to refer to the formal department leader throughout this study.
direction of each chapter. To understand how history teachers might interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus document before they enter the classroom (the middle ground curriculum), one must first have an understanding of the high ground curriculum. This argument is presented in chapter 2. In chapter 2, I examine the development of the new syllabus with specific reference to the factors influencing its formal construction at a national and state level, the processes underlying its development, and the issues of power and control pervading these processes. In view of the development processes underlying the formal construction of the new syllabus, I argue that teachers’ initial interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus document will be shaped by their views of the high ground curriculum.

The theoretical orientation of the study is presented in chapter 3 and a theoretical case for the metaphor of the middle ground curriculum is established. In this chapter I address the first research question, arguing that the middle ground encompasses the sites, contexts and processes through which history teachers interpret and socially reconstruct the 1998 syllabus. The subject department is examined as the primary site within which teachers engage with a new syllabus document, and subject sub-culture, teacher culture and teacher identity are identified as critical contexts shaping this process. The micropolitics of this process are subsequently investigated. For reader clarity, a conceptual diagram of the study and its theoretical assumptions is presented in this chapter. This diagram visually displays the sites, contexts and processes pervading the middle ground of curriculum, and their inter-relationships. I then develop an argument for the middle ground as a site of struggle between the interplay of these three critical contexts. This interplay provides the conditions whereby teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom.

A case for the chosen research methodology is presented in chapter 4 in which I argue for a constructivist methodology. This is because constructivism has a relativist orientation, in that no single ‘reality’ or worldview exists; rather, there are multiple realities or worldviews which are continually constructed, refined and reconstructed (Harris & Jimenez, 2001). The current study is founded on the ways in which teachers perceive and interpret curriculum – in effect, how different teachers construct reality in terms of a new syllabus document. This methodology is therefore a relevant one. As chapter 4 will explain, three case studies were undertaken in order to more clearly
understand what these multiple realities might look like – what history teachers’ varied interpretations and enactment of 1998 syllabus might be – and how they are constructed prior to classroom implementation. Three different subject departments from three varied secondary school contexts participated in this study over a period of 18 months. A number of key informants also participated in the study. The selection criteria and processes of negotiating access are outlined in this chapter, as are related ethical issues. The trustworthiness of the study is subsequently established through an examination of the potential limitations to the study and the ways in which I methodologically address these limitations through data analysis.

In chapters 5 and 6 and 7, I present the three case studies. These chapters examine the sites, contexts and processes through which history teachers individually and collectively perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus within each of the three case studies. In Chapter 8 I synthesise within-case findings and present the main findings of the study. A reconceptualised model of the middle ground of curriculum, based on thesis findings, is subsequently presented.

Finally, in chapter 9, I present the main conclusions of this study. This chapter highlights the theoretical contributions of the thesis and identifies where thesis findings might be of practical use in the arenas of policy formation and teacher practice. I also highlight areas for further research.

Summary

In this introductory chapter I have introduced the research problem and identified a series of research aims and research questions to address these aims. The study rationale was presented and the literature supporting this study and its approach were overviewed. Each chapter of the thesis was then outlined to provide the reader with a clear overview of the thesis. In the following chapter I examine the formal development of the 1998 syllabus (the high ground of curriculum).
CHAPTER 2

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE 1998 STAGES 4-5 HISTORY SYLLABUS: EXAMINING THE HIGH GROUND OF CURRICULUM

Introduction

It will be recalled that in the previous chapter I argued that an examination of history teachers’ perceptions and responses to the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation (the middle ground curriculum) must be embedded within an understanding of both the high ground curriculum and its ground level implementation in the classroom. In this chapter I examine the high ground of the 1998 syllabus. This chapter comprises several sections that build this argument and guide the reader.

In the first section I examine the formal construction of the 1998 syllabus document and the international, national and state trends and policies shaping its development. At an international and national level, debate about the nature and purpose of history as a school subject, broader international trends in history curriculum change, and almost universal concern over a perceived drop in educational standards framed the development of the 1998 syllabus. At the state level influential factors included the formal curriculum structures governing syllabus development in NSW and the roles of policy agents involved in the development of the 1998 syllabus. To explicate issues of control – who has it, who doesn’t, why and to what effect – the structure and role of the NSW Board of Studies (hereafter BoS), the agency responsible for curriculum development in NSW, is examined. The various key policy agents involved in the development of the 1998 syllabus, their often competing agendas, and their relationship to the BoS are also examined. The impetus for syllabus revision is subsequently investigated. This is important because, as Hall (1997) has previously argued, the ways in which teachers view syllabus development processes and the impetus underlying them shapes their enactment of syllabus change.
In the second section a chronological overview of the development of the 1998 syllabus is presented. This allows for the key policy agents to be placed within an historical context in terms of the role/s they played in the development of the 1998 syllabus. A tabulated content analysis of the 1998 syllabus is also presented. This provides a clear summary and analysis of the content and form of the 1998 syllabus.

The processes underlying the development of the 1998 syllabus are discussed in the third section of this chapter. It is here that I contend that the international, national and state forces shaping the development of the 1998 syllabus have resulted in a continued reliance on system-wide, mandated curriculum change processes. This section critically reviews literature that supports the view that such change processes typically marginalise teacher participation and undermine the effectiveness of change initiatives (Ball & Bowe, 1992; Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; House & McQuillan, 1998; Sarason, 1982). Accordingly, research on systemic reform and mandated change processes is examined, highlighting the role of teachers within these processes. This is significant as varied studies have shown that mandated change processes influence the ways in which teachers interpret and enact curriculum change (Fink & Stoll, 1998; Goldman & Conley, 1997; Sarason, 1990). Specifically, such research has shown that when teacher decision-making and autonomy has been formally limited, teachers exercise their autonomy through a number of informal pathways; resistance to change is an example of this (Giacquinta, 1998).

Further, it is argued that the structures and processes underlying the development of a new syllabus document support the preservation of historically constituted control mechanisms. In relation to the 1998 syllabus, these control mechanisms are evident in the marginalisation of teacher participation in decision-making processes and the introduction of increasingly rigorous accountability mechanisms, such as the Australian History, Geography and Civics and Citizenship School Certificate Examination (HGCCC School Certificate Examination). Issues of curriculum control are also evident in debate over subject knowledge – what historical knowledge is and how that knowledge is best taught, learnt and assessed.
Finally, I argue that history teachers’ responses to a syllabus document are initially driven by their perceptions and experiences of the high ground of curriculum. Further, the high ground of syllabus change powerfully shapes the concrete formation of teachers’ perceptions of new curriculum and their enactment of it. This argument acknowledges the centrality of teachers as active participants in the development and enactment of curriculum change. This is because teachers’ views of their role and that of other teachers in formal syllabus decision-making processes shapes the ways in which they enact a new syllabus document. This section therefore asserts that a study of history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus is dependent on their understandings and experiences of change processes.

Factors shaping the development of the 1998 syllabus at an international and national level

Debate about the nature and purpose of history as a school subject

Debate about the nature and purpose of history as a school subject emanates from broader contestation over the nature and purpose of history as an academic discipline. In the 1960s and 70s the emergence of the ‘new history’ heralded challenges to the academic historical canon often referred to as ‘Great tradition’ history (Ahonen, 2000), with its reliance on key personalities and events as a foundation for national identity. The power of history as a tool for the maintenance of the nation-state was fervently debated and history became immersed in a perception of crisis (Seixas, 1993).

At the same time, there were attempts to reorient the focus of school history curriculum away from ‘history as an academic discipline’ towards an emerging recognition that school history is distinctly different to academic history. These attempts are evidenced firstly in the emergence of the ‘new social studies’ in the United States (US) in the 1960s, and later in the development of school history standards in the US and the British School Council vision of history in the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1980s, as this chapter will later discuss (Jenkins, 1995; Phillips, 1998; Seixas, 1993). The emphasis of school history became “the use of ‘inquiry’ to gain an understanding of the problems of historical interpretation” (Seixas, 1993, p. 238). Rather than being seen as vesicles for historical knowledge, students were encouraged to enter the interpretive fray and develop their own, evidenced historical perspectives. This has and continues to have
significant implications for the content and form of school history. This is because competing conceptions of school history now prevail. For the purposes of this study these conceptions can be broadly grouped into:

1. *Traditional conceptions*: history as grand narrative, typically Euro-centric, marginalises competing perspectives of the past.
2. *Inquiry-based/interpretive conceptions*: history as a dialogue between the past and the present, different interpretations of historical events encouraged, supports multiple conceptions of history.

Whilst this dichotomy may seem simplistic it is not within the scope of the present study to delineate the various factionalised conceptions of history that undoubtedly pervade these two supra-categories.

Internationally, the content and form of school history curriculum has also been a point of continuing contention amongst bureaucrats, policy-makers, history teachers, academic historians and a host of other policy agents. This contention reflects the importance traditionally attributed to history in terms of the construction and maintenance of a cohesive national identity, and concerted efforts to either maintain or revise this role through the school history curriculum and the dominant conception of history it promotes.

This contention has given rise to a number of federal inquiries into the teaching, learning and assessment of both school history K-12 and the tertiary preparation of teachers of history. In short, concern about the content and standard of history education is an international phenomenon. In the late 1980s the United States National Commission on Excellence in Education published *A Nation at Risk*, which portrayed a damaging picture of public education (Halse, Jimenez & Simpson, 1997, p. 7). The publication of the *Bradley Commission Report* (1989) focused on issues of educational standards. *America 2000* (Stedman, 1991), a response by the first Bush Administration to these reports, set forth a comprehensive strategy calling for the development of standards in five subjects – English, maths, science, history and geography (Halse et al. 1997).
In 1994 the key national body for the development of history standards, the US National Center for History in Schools (NCHS), released the 1994 NCHS National Standards. Upon their release, the National History Standards garnered significant criticism. Lynne Cheney, the Bush-appointed head of the National Endowment for the Humanities, claimed the standards were “too critical of all things white and too uncritical of all things brown, black and other” (Chapin as cited in Halse et al. 1997, p. 8). Additionally, there were concerns that the standards were too rigorous and would inevitably lead to inequity. As a result of these concerns, the NCHS reviewed the 1994 National History Standards and subsequently released the 1996 NCHS National History Standards. A study of American history and world history is currently mandatory in Grades 2-11, although differences between US states may exist.

In Europe 27 nations participated in the 1996 Youth and History Survey. The findings of this report comprise *The State of History Education in Europe* (van der Leeuw-Roord, 1998) and in the UK the introduction of the National Curriculum sought to standardise the teaching and learning of all subjects, including history, through greater curriculum prescription and more rigorous accountability and evaluation mechanisms. Currently it is mandatory to study history in the UK in Key Stages 1-3 and an optional study of history is available in Key Stage 4.10

Within Australia discussion about school history has maintained a lower profile than in Europe or the US until recently (Taylor, 2000). Taylor suggests that there are a number of reasons for this. First, in Australia there are limited publishing opportunities in the area of history education. Second, history educators are scarce and have no peak body representation. Third, there are few formal structural links between communities of academic historians and communities of history teachers and history educators. The findings of the National Inquiry into the Teaching of History – *The Future of the Past* (Taylor, 2000) – have, however, highlighted the steady increase in public and political interest about the teaching and learning of history. Significant international events such as the Sydney Olympics in 2000 and national events such as the Centenary of Federation in 2001 have fuelled this interest, as have key political figures such as the current Australian Prime Minister, John Howard, and the current Premier of NSW, Bob

---

10 Key Stages 1 and 2 represent the primary school years, and Key Stages 3 and 4 comprise the secondary school years to the age of 16.
Carr. Australian and NSW curriculum trends have also been influenced by international curriculum trends (Harris, 1996). The phenomenon of ‘policy borrowing’ therefore provides further motivation for a greater focus on school history. Intensified interest in history as a school subject is not surprising given the nature of history – it is often seen as a vehicle through which nationalist goals can be achieved and a conduit through which effective citizenship and political ends can be met.

In NSW this debate has been evidenced in the development of the 1998 syllabus. In fact The Future of the Past (Taylor, 2000) specifically acknowledged conflict over both history and the 1998 syllabus in NSW as an issue of consequence, as this chapter will discuss. This conflict is in part due to the structure of history as a school subject in NSW. NSW is the only Australian state in which history remains a discrete secondary school subject. In other states, history has been partially or fully subsumed into social studies based Key Learning Areas (KLAs). Attempts to cluster history under the Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE) KLA in NSW have been successful in name only, although the structure of secondary school departments is starting to reflect these attempts, with many schools, particularly Catholic Education Office (CEO) schools, opting for a department structure based on KLAs. Debate over the role and purpose of school history is also embedded within international concerns about falling educational standards.

The international, national and state politics of curriculum change
Throughout the 1980s and 90’s educators, parents and government officials across many western nations were concerned that education standards were falling in their country. A result of this has been that efforts at educational reform and change have focused on improving educational standards. One way in which education systems have sought to raise educational standards is through systemic reform efforts and mandated change initiatives. Frequently these reforms take the form of attempts at curriculum change which often rely on mandated content and top-down change processes. Internationally this has resulted in the introduction of bureaucratic management models,

11 There are twelve KLAs in the NSW school curriculum: Aboriginal Studies, Creative Arts, English, Home Schooling, HSIE, Languages Other than English (LOTE), Mathematics, Personal Development/Health and Physical Education (PDHPE), Primary, Science, Technology and Vocational Education and Training (VET) (BoS, 2001c).
the centralised development of outcomes-driven curriculum, increasing control and regulation of assessment procedures, and the forging of a direct link between education, industry and the business sector.

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

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

**Factors shaping the development of the 1998 syllabus at a state level**

At a state level a number of key factors drove the development of the 1998 syllabus. These include the formal curriculum structures governing syllabus development in NSW, and the multiple policy agents involved in the development of the 1998 syllabus. These structures and policy agents are examined in the following pages.

*Formal curriculum structures – The NSW Board of Studies*

In NSW curriculum determination is vested in the NSW Board of Studies (BoS), a statutory body constituted by the 1990 Education Reform Act. Since 1990 the BoS has

---

12 The information presented in this section is the result of both research and information gleaned in
aimed to provide “educational leadership by developing quality curriculum and awarding secondary school credentials, the School Certificate and the Higher School Certificate (HSC)” (BoS, 2001a). The Office of the BoS is highly structured and serves multiple functions.

There are nine branches of the Office of the BoS:
- Curriculum Branch
- Information Services Branch
- Assessment Branch
- Examination Branch
- Planning and Development Branch
- Finance Branch
- Administration Branch
- Media and Public Relations Branch
- Secretariat

(BoS, 2001a).

The Curriculum Branch is responsible for “managing and coordinating the processes for the development of syllabuses and support documents in accordance with the Board’s priorities and policies” (BoS, 2001a). In NSW the term ‘syllabus’ traditionally denotes a subject-specific curriculum guideline. A syllabus is “the document for each course that describes what students are expected to learn in terms of aims, objectives, outcomes, content and assessment requirements” (BoS, 2000). It provides a statement of philosophical orientation, outlines mandated content and gives an overview of assessment procedures. NSW syllabuses cannot explicitly mandate teaching methods; they do however have numerous pedagogical implications, as this study will later explore. It is important to note that the BoS defines syllabus in a very narrow way. It will be recalled that I advocate a much broader and inclusive definition of curriculum in chapter 1.

---

key informant interviews.

13 The School Certificate is awarded to NSW year 10 students upon the completion of School Certificate courses and examinations. The Higher School Certificate is awarded to year 12 students upon completion of the HSC courses and examination.
For each KLA within the Curriculum Branch there are one or more BoS Inspectors who oversee this process. History is subsumed within the HSIE KLA and there are currently two HSIE Inspectors who manage curriculum development in the area of history and other HSIE subjects. Accordingly the focus of continued discussion of the role of the BoS in the development of the 1998 syllabus is focused on the HSIE KLA within the current study.

The 1998 syllabus was developed throughout late 1997 and 1998. Three significant changes occurred at the BoS immediately prior to, and during, the development of the 1998 syllabus that had an impact on the syllabus development processes. These were:

(a) The appointment of a new HSIE Inspector
(b) A revision of the syllabus development process
(c) The subsequent replacement of the Syllabus Advisory Committee (SAC) with the newly developed Board Curriculum Committee (BCC).

Understanding the nature and importance of these changes is critical to understanding both the structure and processes underlying the development of the 1998 syllabus, and the ways in which these processes might shape teachers’ perceptions and responses to this new syllabus document. For this reason, these three changes are discussed in detail on the following pages.

(a) The appointment of a new HSIE Inspector
The accession to power of the NSW Carr Labor government in March 1995 and the findings of Focus on Learning: Report of Outcomes and Profiles in New South Wales Schooling (Eltis, 1995) saw a radical staff overhaul at the BoS. A result of this overhaul was the removal of the former HSIE Inspector and the installation of a new HSIE Inspector in January 1998. The former HSIE Inspector, an executive member of the History Teachers’ Association (HTA), had been in the role since 1994. The decision to replace this person with an HSIE Inspector unaffiliated with the HTA could be viewed as an effort to increase the impartiality of BoS Inspectors and/or an effort to decrease HTA influence in the determination of NSW history curriculum.

---

14 HSIE subjects include history, geography, commerce, business studies, legal studies, Asian studies, Aboriginal studies and studies of religion.
(b) A revision of the syllabus development process

During the development of the 1998 syllabus, the BoS syllabus development policy was also undergoing revision. Following restructuring in the mid 1990s, the BoS sought to revise its syllabus development guidelines accordingly. The 1995 syllabus development policy was consequently superseded by the 2001 syllabus development policy. Several key differences are evident in these two documents (see appendices 2.1 and 2.2), most notably the SACs were replaced by BCCs for each syllabus and an evaluative mechanism involving the evaluation of previous syllabuses to inform the development of new syllabuses was instituted. The structure and process of syllabus development has thus undergone significant revision in terms of both the role of key policy agents in the process of syllabus change, and the nature of the process itself. That this revision occurred during the development of the 1998 syllabus, however, is also important for several reasons. The first is the initial draft of the 2001 syllabus development policy was not available until January 2001 and the final 2001 syllabus development policy was released on the BoS website in November 2001. This has meant that the process of syllabus development was undergoing major change during the development of the 1998 syllabus and crucial aspects of the newly endorsed syllabus development flowchart were not instituted during the development of this new syllabus document. Perhaps the most crucial oversight was that an evaluation of the previous 1992 syllabus to inform the development of the 1998 syllabus was not undertaken. Those key policy agents involved in the development of the 1998 syllabus (particularly teachers) also often lacked information about the nature and form of these changes and, as Evans (1995) warns, a lack of information can cause people to fear and even resist change.

(c) The institution of the BCC

Perhaps the most important change proffered by the 2001 syllabus development flowchart is the formal institution of the BCC. This change has further centralised curriculum development in NSW and has considerably altered power relations in the negotiation of the formal or written curriculum. The BCC was introduced to assume the role previously played by the SAC. Prior to 1998 the History SAC (which was a conglomeration of the formerly separate History 7-10 SAC, the Ancient History SAC and the Modern History SAC) played a critical role in the development of syllabus. The members of a SAC are listed in appendix 2.3.
The SAC also had considerable power in the syllabus development process (see appendix 2.1 for syllabus development process prior to 1998). This power lay in the SACs discretionary power to veto particular writing briefs and draft and final syllabuses. In this sense the development of syllabus documents was a negotiated process. The role of the SAC in this process is diagrammatically displayed in figure 2.1 on the following page.

**Figure 2.1: The role of the SAC in syllabus development prior to 1998**

---

Key informan interviews yielded information that aided the construction of figure 2.1 and figure 2.2.

16. The BoS has an executive committee who are refereed to as the Board of the BoS (or alternately, the Board of the Board). This is confusing as is the naming of the Curriculum Committee of the Board of the BoS. This is not to be confused with the latter BCCs which now sit in the place of the SAC. The
Figure 2.1 reveals the syllabus development process, to be a structured process with the Board of the BoS giving formal directions (as indicated by the solid black arrows) to the Curriculum Committee, who in turn provided formal direction for the activities of the SAC. There was however shared decision-making amongst various policy agents (most notably the BoS and the SAC) as indicated by the two-directional red arrows.

Syllabus documents in NSW traditionally have a life span of nine years before they are revised. The 1982 Syllabus in History: Years 7-10 was superseded by the 1992 syllabus. The 1992 syllabus was, according to a member of the History SAC at the time, the result of a negotiated syllabus development process (as highlighted in figure 2.1) (Young, 2001). The syllabus writers were drawn from the SAC, and a writing brief, draft syllabus and final syllabus were in turn presented to the Curriculum Committee of the Board and the Board of the BoS for approval. This process could perhaps be viewed as one of power-sharing as final syllabus approval and dissemination relied on the approval of all three key players.

It is interesting to note the role of the BoS History Inspector in this process, as shown in figure 2.1. The History Inspector played both an intermediary role between the SAC and the Curriculum Committee of the Board, and an active role in the development of the syllabus within the SAC. During the development of the 1992 syllabus, HTA executive members dominated the SAC, and the BoS History Inspector was himself an executive member of the HTA. This domination was not numerical. Rather, several key HTA identities assumed leadership positions within the SAC. The HTA agenda within the SAC was not however uniformly endorsed. Varying members and factionalised agents (of which the HTA was one) within the SAC all sought to exercise control over the ways in which history was to be taught, learnt and assessed in NSW secondary schools (Harris, 1996). Issues of curriculum control continue to dominate the construction of NSW history syllabuses, as this chapter will establish.

The SAC had, by July 1998, presented various writing briefs for the 1998 syllabus to the Board of the BoS. The Board of the BoS rejected these briefs and directed the SAC to make significant alterations. After several refusals, the SAC was informed (via BoS memoranda) in July 1998 “to assist it to carry out its monitoring and quality assurance

BoS was restructured in 1995 to address this confusion.
role, the Board is to establish Board Curriculum Committees” (BoS, 1998). The BCC was to replace the former SAC. The BCC for each syllabus development project were subsequently appointed by the BoS. The members of a BCC are listed in appendix 2.4.

Whilst the list of policy agents that comprise the BCC are not unlike those of the SAC, the BCC differs from the former SAC in two very important ways. Firstly, former SAC members were only temporarily appointed to the BCC; newly elected members then replaced them. The newly appointed BCC substantially differed therefore, from the SAC in terms of membership and, by association, agenda. Secondly, the role of the BCC was greatly diminished. The BCC, unlike its predecessor, serves an advisory role and has no discretionary power to veto or refuse any syllabus material. Syllabus endorsement now relies on the approval of the Board of the BoS. The BCC can provide recommendations to the Board of the BoS, but the Board is under no obligation to address BCC recommendations. This has resulted in less costly and less time-consuming syllabus development processes. The role of the BCC in syllabus development is diagrammatically displayed in figure 2.2 on the following page.
Figure 2.2 provides a diagrammatic overview of the role of the BCC in the development of the 1998 syllabus.
of the 1998 syllabus. Clearly, the role of the BCC in the development of the 1998 syllabus is, in comparison to that of the SAC, greatly diminished. The BCC does not occupy a central position in this process; rather, the BCC sits to the side of this process and has advisory power only. The syllabus development structure has also, as figure 2.2 suggests, become far more hierarchically structured, which reflects both the proliferation of BoS roles and the movement towards more centralised models of curriculum development, as this chapter will later discuss.

It must be acknowledged however that, whilst responsibility for the development of curriculum is formally vested in the BoS, its bureaucratic function positions it as a middle manager of change processes. The Board of the BoS is answerable to the Minister for Education and Training ‘Minister for Education’ and the endorsement of draft syllabuses only comes after both the Board of the BoS and the Minister for Education have given consent (Brady & Kennedy, 1999). In view of this, the political agenda of the current NSW state government undoubtedly influences the functioning of the BoS. Here, as Goodson explains, the interests of bureaucracies are “loosely coupled with the political regime in government and with the economic structure of the country” (1998, p. 235). As this relates to issues of power, Dougherty warns us of the bureaucratic dynamic – that is, the possibility that within bureaucracies government officials will enact policies that benefit private interest groups with “little or no prior articulation by (other) groups of their interests and preferences” (as cited in Goodson, 1998, p. 236). The bureaucratic dynamic was therefore in evidence throughout the development of the 1998 syllabus.

An examination of the key policy agents involved in the development of the 1998 syllabus and their relationship to the BoS highlights issues of power and agency and also provides background to later examination of the processes underlying the development of the 1998 syllabus.

Key policy agents in the development of the 1998 syllabus
Originally the BoS was designed to be a forum where different groups could put forward their views about the school curriculum and have them debated (Brady & Kennedy, 1999). They suggest that restructuring throughout the BoS throughout the late 1990s sought to limit this participation (Brady & Kennedy, 1999).
The role of the BoS in the development and dissemination of history curriculum has, in the last decade, been broadly contested and the struggle for the right to determine history curriculum has seen the rise and decline of multiple policy agents. The policy agents involved in the development of the 1998 syllabus played multiple and often competing roles within the syllabus development process. The development of the 1998 syllabus was immersed in politics and the central pursuit of various factions involved was that of curriculum control. A list of the various policy agents involved in the development of this 1998 syllabus document is given in table 2.1 below.

Table 2.1: Policy agents: a list of contributors to the 1998 syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Policy Agent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Minister for Education and Training – John Aquilina</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aboriginal Education Consultative Group (AECG)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curriculum Support Directorate, NSW DET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW Teachers’ Federation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NSW HTA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anglican Education Commission</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Equity Review Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Association of Heads of Independent Schools</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Group of Academics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Federation of Parents’ and Citizens Associations NSW</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Board of Jewish Deputies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Simpson, 2000, p. 1).

Several of these policy agents played important roles in the development of the 1998 syllabus and are therefore worthy of further examination.

The NSW Department of Education and Training

Prior to 1990 the NSW Department of School Education (currently known as the NSW Department of Education and Training) was the central agency responsible for curriculum development in NSW. DET is primarily responsible for the “delivery of education and training services across NSW” (DET, 2001). The BoS is responsible for
the development and dissemination of curriculum, whilst DET provides support for the implementation of curriculum in the form of teacher professional development. The power structures that govern the development of NSW curriculum and support for its implementation are therefore dispersed across several organisations.

DET is a government department directly accountable to the Minister for Education. Whilst it can be claimed that the BoS was established as a curriculum and assessment body independent of state governance, it has been suggested that, although the authority of the BoS to initiate and direct change is substantial, ultimately the power to determine policy rests with the Minister for Education (Young, 1993).

The NSW Premier and the Minister for Education
The current NSW Premier, Bob Carr, a keen historian (particularly of American history), has assumed a prominent role in public debate about the role and function of history in both schools and the broader community. Premier Carr has frequently argued for compulsory history across Years 7-10, an increased emphasis on the teaching of Australian history as knowledge or content, and a focus on civics and citizenship within a study of history (Carr, 1995; Carr, 2000). Premier Carr’s intent is to raise the profile, status and academic rigour of history as a school subject. The HTA view the reintroduction of history as an examinable subject in the School Certificate as an attempt to equate curriculum control and increased accountability with academic rigour (HTA, 1998a). The 1998 syllabus and the changes it mandates promulgate many of Premier Carr’s focuses. The agendas of both Premier Carr and the former Minister for Education, John Aquilina, therefore drive education policy-making in NSW. The formal relationship between the BoS and DET, as earlier revealed, is further evidence of state government influence on educational policy and curriculum determination. In fact in NSW a new syllabus must receive the endorsement of the BoS, the Minister for Education and DET, who all play a formal, if not limited, role in the curriculum change process.

Academics
The increasing bureaucratisation and politicisation of the BoS has also resulted in “the

---

17 After five years as NSW Minister for Education, John Aquilina was replaced by John Watkins in November 2001.
inclusion of historians, bureaucrats and politicians in the arbitration of curriculum at the expense of history teachers” (Young, 1998, p. 10). The bureaucratic dynamic is therefore in evidence in NSW and indeed in the development of the 1998 syllabus. That academic historians are policy agents in the syllabus development process reveals another dimension to the history debate – the ‘discipline verses studies’ debate. Often school subjects are publicly and politically viewed as watered down versions of the academic or ‘parent’ discipline. Consequently, academics have traditionally played a large role in the determination of school curriculum. According to Young, history as an academic discipline and history as a school subject are:

- discrete entities, their differences defined by audience, outlook, subject matter and methodology. The first is concerned primarily with the production of knowledge, the second with the production of learning and its relevance to adolescents (1998, p. 9).

The NSW History Teachers’ Association

In view of perceived threats to the integrity of history as a school subject, the NSW History Teachers’ Association (HTA), which represents about 1200 secondary school history teachers in NSW, publicly lobbied for the right to influence history curriculum determination in NSW. It argued that the nature of history teacher participation in the syllabus development process was inadequate and that the changes mandated by the 1998 syllabus would have adverse affects on the teaching, learning and assessment of history in NSW secondary schools (HTA, 1998). It also argued that the 1998 syllabus would damage subject integrity and lead to a decline in student numbers. The HTA’s protectionist role in the change process has been characterised as that of a gatekeeper (Hilferty, 2000).

The altruism of the HTA’s activist role in the development of the 1998 syllabus is questionable in view of the HTA’s role in the development of the previous syllabus. The previous junior history syllabus – the 1992 syllabus – had seen the emergence of the HTA as a key player in the determination of history curriculum. The HTA as a professional subject association therefore had a significant role in the development of the previous syllabus. Restructuring at the BoS in the mid 1990s (the institution of the BCC) has since resulted in the marginalisation of the HTA in formal syllabus development processes. Not surprisingly, the HTA has vigorously opposed this move.
The activist role played by the HTA in the development of the 1998 syllabus was evident in its attempts to generate both a perceived crisis in the media and agitation amongst history teachers in NSW. The political behaviour of the HTA is related to the long-term pursuit of strategic advantage. Arguably, underlying the constant urgings of the HTA president for teachers to veto consultation documents, and attempts to form resistant alliances with teacher unions such as the NSW Teachers’ Federation, were efforts to garner greater curriculum control.

**History teachers**

Teacher participation in the syllabus development process was variable. There are teacher representatives on the Board of the BoS and teachers are frequently seconded to work for the Office of the BoS in times of policy reform. Two practising teachers, one from a government school and the other from an independent school, were selected to write the various draft syllabuses. The BoS claim that teacher consultation for the 1998 syllabus was the most expansive to date and the BoS HSIE Inspector at the time claimed that approximately 350 consultation responses were received in response to the draft writing brief and the draft syllabus (Key Informant A, 1999). Despite this, the HTA has publicly decried teacher participation in the syllabus development process. The HTA disapproves of the survey-style consultation documents that it feels convey a particular agenda by inviting some responses and silencing others (HTA, 1998). The HTA therefore felt that teacher consultation and participation was both non-representative and inadequate. One may wonder, however, if the HTA itself represents the opinions of all NSW history teachers. There are no official statistics, but of the 4,000 or so NSW secondary school history teachers in NSW, only about 1,200 are HTA members (Young, 2002).

**The impetus for a new syllabus**

The development of the 1998 syllabus resulted from various competing and complementary factors. In response to ministerial pressure, in mid-1997, the BoS formally decreed that the 1998 syllabus had to incorporate 100 hours of mandatory history in Stage 4 (years 7 and 8) and 100 hours of mandatory Australian history in Stage 5 (years 9 and 10) and that civics and citizenship had to be embedded within a study of history. Students would then be required to sit a newly introduced School Certificate HGCC Examination commencing in 2002. The BoS also instructed that the
1998 syllabus document must incorporate key competencies and literacy initiatives within an outcomes-based framework. The initial SAC and later the BCC, and the individuals within these committees, had to therefore adapt to fit a series of group agendas and pressures. According to Creighton (1983), the political dynamics of committees and their decision-making abilities are characterised by:

A failure to give systematic coverage to issues, members pushing their predetermined conclusions, proneness to reject innovations, personal feelings of members that they are reluctant to reveal, excessive time to make decisions, domination by a few members, and the production of superficial findings and group conformity in order to accommodate all interests (as cited in Reynolds, 2000, pp. 5-6).

These dynamics are more clearly revealed in an overview of the syllabus development process.

**An overview of the 1998 syllabus: chronology, content and form**

An overview of the syllabus development process is presented in table 2.2 on the following page. This overview details the chronology of this process and identifies key policy agents involved in the process.
Table 2.2: The development of the 1998 syllabus: A chronological overview

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>November 1997</td>
<td>The SAC submitted a Stages 4-5 History work in progress to the Board of the BoS. The Board rejected work in progress and suggested the SAC rework it.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 March 1998</td>
<td>The BoS met with the SAC and outlined the 1998 syllabus development process. The new process disbanded the SAC and the BCC was instituted. The BoS project team assumed responsibility for employment of syllabus writers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April 1998</td>
<td>Draft writing brief released.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June-July 1998</td>
<td>Consultation on draft writing brief – BoS Bulletin Board, mail out to schools and consultative network.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>July 1998</td>
<td>Writing brief released.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 August 1998</td>
<td>The BoS approved the writing brief as the basis for the development of the draft syllabus.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1998</td>
<td>Draft syllabus constructed. BCC provided comment on the document as it was developed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August 1998</td>
<td>Draft syllabus released.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 August 1998</td>
<td>HTA, NSW Teachers’ Federation and the Independent Education Union (IEU) hold a forum at the University of Sydney criticising and disputing the syllabus development processes and the role of history teachers in this process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August - September 1998</td>
<td>Media articles emerge espousing HTA opinions and concerns.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 September – 15 October 1998</td>
<td>Teacher consultation of draft syllabus. Consultation is largely through written survey.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December 1998</td>
<td>The ‘History Stages 4-5 Syllabus’ is released to schools for implementation at beginning of 1999 school year.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>The first relevant textbooks emerge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October 2000</td>
<td>DET releases sample years 9-10 history programs to all schools.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.2 documents the timeline within which the 1998 syllabus document was formally constructed and released to NSW secondary schools. It also gives a chronological overview of the conflict between the previous SAC and the BoS. Whilst
Table 2.2 provides clarity regarding the timeline and events involved in the formal construction of the 1998 syllabus, it says little of the content and form of this new syllabus document.

I contend that teachers, as recipients of imposed change, will respond pragmatically to a new syllabus. I subsequently anticipate that the ways in which history teachers will interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus will very much depend upon how they see their current practices fitting in with the new syllabus in terms of the conception of history evident in the syllabus document and its pedagogic implications. This hypothesis stems from previous research to this effect (Giaqquinta, 1998; Harris, 1999; Hilferty, 1997). To understand how history teachers might interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus, we must therefore have an understanding of the content and form of this syllabus document. As previously argued, syllabus texts lend themselves to preferred readings. What preferred reading does the 1998 syllabus document lend itself to? To address this question a content analysis of the 1998 syllabus is presented in table 2.3 on the following page.

Rather than interrupt the current flow of argument, I will address the methodological issues of content analysis in chapters 4 and 5. Suffice it to say that the technique I employed is based on that of Lupton (1999). It is also adapted from an analytic frame developed by Hilferty (1997). Hilferty analysed the content of the 1992 syllabus as part of a broader examination of NSW history teachers’ conceptions of history. The results of her content analysis are relevant to the current study. This is because, in responding to the 1998 syllabus, teachers may rely on their feelings and attitudes towards the 1992 syllabus. An overview of the content of the 1992 syllabus (as provided by Hilferty, 1997) is therefore a useful comparison to that of the 1998 syllabus (table 2.3) and is included as appendix 2.5.
Table 2.3: Document analysis of the 1998 syllabus

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1998 syllabus</th>
<th>Conception of history</th>
<th>Pedagogical implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Structure**          | Highly structured document – structure overview for teachers in diagrammatic form. Outcomes-driven structure.  
Outlines aims, objectives, outcomes, values and attitudes and content and skills for each of Stage 4 and Stage 5 (mandatory course and elective course).  
Content is structured chronologically.  
Assessment and course performance descriptors are outlined. | Outcomes-based syllabus is indicative of an inquiry-based conception of history. | Advocates student-centred teaching and learning. |
<p>|                        |                                                                                | Highly structured chronological syllabus may promote linear vision of history.        | Chronological structure of syllabus may equate to a chronological teaching of history. |
|                        |                                                                                | Syllabus is structured towards assessment. This may result in teachers ‘teaching to the exam’. |                                                                                         |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Rationale</strong></th>
<th><strong>Pedagogical implications</strong></th>
<th><strong>Conception of history</strong></th>
<th><strong>Syllabus</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rationale stresses the relationship between the past and present and vice versa.</td>
<td>Teacher’s role is to engage students with issues of the past and present and emphasise the interpretive nature of history – students’ experiences are drawn upon.</td>
<td>History is a dialogue between the past and the present. Students reinterpret the past and apply this to the present – interpretive view of history.</td>
<td>Multiple perspectives (as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History encompasses a number of perspectives: Aboriginal, gender, local, national and international, multicultural, socio-economic and religious.</td>
<td>Syllabus can support multiple conceptions of history. Teacher’s role is to communicate these multiple perspectives and allow students autonomy to critically evaluate them.</td>
<td>History is inclusive as it encompasses multiple perspectives – traditional and marginalised.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emphasises role of students as ‘historians’ of contemporary Australia.</td>
<td></td>
<td>History is interpretive – emphasis on students’ engagement and interpretation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A study of history encourages “students to gain historical knowledge and skills and to evaluate competing versions of the past within a rational framework of inquiry” (p. 6).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1998 syllabus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conception of history</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pedagogical implications</strong></td>
<td><strong>Syllabus</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Rationale (continued)</strong></td>
<td>Emphasis on the role of the historian – academic or traditional conception of history.</td>
<td>Emphasis on role of student as historian could be interpreted as promoting student-centred investigation of historical sources or as a traditional conception of student historian as ‘scientific’ researcher.</td>
<td>Multiple perspectives (as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encourages the development of empathy, values, attitudes and a commitment to life-long learning.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher’s role is to socialise students to become productive and informed ‘citizens’. Emphasis is placed on acquisition of civics knowledge.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Furnishes students with a liberal education”, “allows students to develop their critical powers and to grasp the superiority of thinking and evaluation over a … rush to judgement and decision” (p. 6).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History “Is essential to the development of an active and informed citizenry” (p. 6).</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>features</td>
<td>outlined above).</td>
<td>History is about the promulgation of a specific national identity.</td>
<td>Role of teacher is to impart generic and pragmatic student competencies through history curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------</td>
<td>------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Civics and citizenship education.</td>
<td>Key competencies – development of general competencies through a study of history.</td>
<td>The teacher’s role is to engage students with varied primary and secondary sources with the local community.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Literacy.</td>
<td>Site studies.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mandatory study</strong></td>
<td>Stage 4 (years 7-8) mandatory ancient and medieval history</td>
<td>Stage 5 (years 9-10) mandatory Australian history</td>
<td>Historical knowledge (especially Australian historical knowledge) is essential knowledge.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A study of history is now mandatory across years 7-10. This has changed the student candidature in years 9-10. Where previously students elected to study Stage 5 history, it is now compulsory. This means that history teachers are teaching non-voluntary students and that classes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>1998 syllabus</strong></td>
<td><strong>Conception of history</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pedagogical implications</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Mandatory study (continued)</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>may be mixed ability where previously many had been streamed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content</strong></td>
<td><strong>Stage 4 Mandatory Study</strong> Ancient and medieval history (100 hours allocated) Structured chronologically to include: 1. Introducing history 2. Ancient societies 3. Medieval societies, the Early Modern Period 4. Indigenous peoples, colonisation and contact history 5. Optional Study – the shaping of the modern world. For each section teachers are given approximately 12 different events or peoples to choose from. A great majority of these are South-East Asian in nature.</td>
<td>Inquiry questions attached to each section suggest a conception of history as interpretive and inquiry-based. Amount of content, however, may suggest a knowledge-centred conception of history. Emphasis on South-East Asian events and peoples acknowledges a conception of history as encompassing multiple perspectives.</td>
<td>Teachers may interpret the chronological structure as an instruction to teach content chronologically. Stage 4 encourages student inquiry through its diverse choice. Stage 5 is content heavy – this may lead to an overemphasis on instructive and teacher-centred pedagogy. The role of the teacher is to incorporate the five Stage 5 themes as</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5 Mandatory study</td>
<td>Conception of history</td>
<td>Pedagogical implications</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Australian history</td>
<td>Emphasis on military history could lend itself to a focus on British history and a traditional westernised conception of history.</td>
<td>they see fit within their teaching of the seven sections. Three of the five themes are identified as examinable in the School Certificate HGCC Examination. This may result in teachers selecting only three of the five themes in their teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(100 hours allocated)</td>
<td>All Stage 5 content is examinable. This may translate to a ‘history as measurable knowledge’ conception.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structured chronologically to include:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. Australian social and political life to 1914.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Australia and WWI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Australia between the Wars</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Australia and WW II</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Post War Australia in the 1970s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Contemporary Australia</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A number of themes run through these 7 sections although it is left to the discretion of the teacher to embed these themes within each section. These themes include: Australia and the world, Australia’s political History, Australia’s social and cultural history, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal relations, changing rights and freedoms.</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1998 syllabus</th>
<th>Conception of history</th>
<th>Pedagogical implications</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Attitudes and values</strong></td>
<td>The values and attitudes promote a “democratic and just society” (p. 6). These are seen to include:</td>
<td>Encourages teachers to personally engage students in a study of history. This engagement is based on students developing the following skills: identifying, clarifying, analysing and evaluating values and attitudes they and others hold.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Commitment to informed and active citizenship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Commitment to a just society</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- An appreciation of the study of history</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Empathetic understandings</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Commitment to life-long learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Conception of history for social good: “values and attitudes are inherent in the subject matter of History and the skills that are developed” (p. 6).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Varying interpretations of historical sources and events enable students to examine and develop their own values.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes</th>
<th>Outcomes reflect desired balance of knowledge, skills, and attitudes and values in a study of history.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes are categorised into knowledge and understanding, skills (interpretation, analysis and empathy, research, communication), and attitudes and values.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Assessment and course performance descriptors

The School Certificate HGCC Examination is introduced. Every NSW Year 10 student will sit for this exam as of 2002. Draft exam papers reveal the exam to be made up of multiple-choice questions, short-answer questions and source-based questions.

Conception of historical knowledge, skills, values and attitudes as measurable.

Emphasis placed on teaching to the syllabus to cover content and hence address the assessment component.

To allow teachers time to prepare for the implementation of the 1998 syllabus, the BoS decreed that the 1998 syllabus would be phased in over a period of four years. The implementation process is seen in Table 2.4 on the following page.

Table 2.4: The 1998 syllabus implementation phases

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1999</th>
<th>2000</th>
<th>2001</th>
<th>2002</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Year 7</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stage 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 8</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stage 4)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stage 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Year 10</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Stage 5)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2.4 highlights that the 1998 syllabus implementation process consists of four stages spanning four years, and that in 2002 students will sit for the School Certificate HGCC Examination for the first time. The implementation process is designed to enable history teachers to successively design new programs and resources for each year of the syllabus (years 7-10). This is important, as it will be recalled that data collection was undertaken February 1999 – August 2000. The data collected therefore centres on history teachers’ interpretations and enactment of years 7 and 8 (Stage 4). This will be discussed at length in the results chapters.
The processes underlying the development of the 1998 syllabus provide greater insight into how issues of curriculum control are negotiated throughout the formal construction of NSW syllabuses. This is critical as history teachers’ initial interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus might be shaped by their perceptions of curriculum control and how much ‘decision-making space’ teachers are officially given and how much decision-making space they can create for themselves. An exploration of these processes allows the key policy agents outlined above to be further examined in terms of who had power, why and to what effect. Content analysis of the 1998 syllabus reveals the pedagogic changes heralded by this new syllabus document and allows us to have a starting point from which to examine how history teachers might interpret and enact this new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom. Before looking at this, however, I will expand upon issues of power and control as evidenced in the syllabus development processes and how they might impact upon history teachers in NSW.

**Theorising the syllabus development process**

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

**Systemic reform**

Educational policy-makers have “long understood public schools to be a loosely coupled environment, i.e. a realm where local action might or might not follow the agenda established higher up in the bureaucratic hierarchy” (Landman, 2000, p. 9). One way in which educational policy-makers have sought to ensure greater correlation between the intended and actual outcomes of change has been through systemic change processes. In order to discuss the 1998 syllabus as a systemic curriculum change, it is first necessary to provide a definition of the term ‘systemic change’. Debate surrounds
the use of this term, centring on how the term has become misused and misunderstood (Carr-Chelman, 1998). Whilst it is not within the scope of the present study to contribute to this debate, a brief discussion of this debate is relevant to the purposes of the present study as it can be argued that the developers of the 1998 syllabus posit syllabus change as systemic without fully understanding the meanings underlying systemic change.

It has been argued, “within education the term ‘systemic change’ is used frequently to refer to almost any large-scale project” (Carr-Chelman, 1998, p. 369). Carr-Chelman suggests that this is because confusion between ‘systemic’ and ‘systematic’ approaches to change is widespread throughout educational literature. Basing her argument on systems theory, she distinguishes between systemic approaches to change, which are “holistic, contextual and stakeholder owned” (1998, p. 370), and systematic approaches to change, which are “presented as linear, generalisable, and typically top-down or expert driven” (1998, p. 370). The terms themselves highlight this difference; systematic approaches to change assume that change can be developed and implemented in a structured and systematic fashion. Systemic approaches to change, on the other hand, recognise the embeddedness of the ‘system’ and in so doing “recognize that any system-of-interest is embedded in some larger suprasystem and is made up of sub-systems” (Carr-Chelman, 1998, p. 371).

Another view of systemic change is presented by Squire and Reigeluth (2000). They argue that the term has four major meanings in educational research. These are: state-wide policy systemic change, district-wide systemic change, school-wide systemic change, and ecological systemic change. In articulating the differences between these four meanings, Squire and Reigeluth assert, “the ways that different reformers conceive of systemic change depends largely on their perceptions of what constitutes an education system” (2000, p. 143). In doing so, they present a convincing argument for ecological systemic change which is similar in nature to Carr-Chelman’s (1998) definition of systemic change. Ecological systemic change incorporates systemic thinking and acknowledges that:

An educational system is a complex social system that can be defined in a number of ways and can be understood only by being viewed from multiple perspectives (Squire & Reigeluth, 2000, p. 145).
‘Systemic change’ can therefore have two meanings. The first meaning is that attached to system-wide mandated change, and the second is that true systemic change is, according to Squire and Reigeluth (2000), ecological systemic change that can have positive outcomes.

The ways in which reformers perceive the education system therefore reflects different values about the purpose and nature of educational change. Furthermore, different perceptions of what a system is have important ramifications for how systemic change is instituted (Squire & Reigeluth, 2000), as the construction of the 1998 syllabus clearly demonstrates. Defining the ‘system’ in systemic reform is difficult. In NSW the education system may be seen to encompass multiple ‘systems’, including government, Catholic and independent primary, secondary and tertiary educational institutions. Alternately, the term ‘the system’ is sometimes used to refer to the administrative and structural functioning of the state education ‘system’. For the purposes of the present study, the term ‘system’ is an inclusive term that accommodates the diversity of definition attached to it. It is acknowledged that the ‘system’ comprises a suprasystem, in this case the NSW education system, and many sub-systems. The system in this sense has both concrete and symbolic significance, as it is more than the educational institutions it encompasses. This is an important assertion, as the way in which teachers understand and experience the system and the change processes pervading it shapes their perceptions of change and change processes. Teachers do not view the system in a socio-political or socio-cultural vacuum; rather, they define and experience it as a series of constraints and opportunities, difficulties and rewards. Not surprisingly, a consequence of this is that teachers experience the system in terms of structure and agency¹⁸ in a variety of different ways.

Systemic change represents and reflects a range of varying and often conflicting interests, influences and agendas. One cannot therefore examine systemic change in terms of the system alone. Rather, one must acknowledge that the system exists in relationship to other formal and informal structures and agencies. As education is seen to be a public enterprise, one of these structures is the state. Cornbleth (1990) argues that the state shapes educational debates and more directly “influences the approach

¹⁸ McKay provides a useful definition of the relationship between structure and agency: “In an organization, human agency (individual intent) can be limited by structure – the system of relationships
taken to curriculum and the kind of curriculum that prevails” (p. 119). The state also has an indirect influence on the curriculum in terms of the state’s role as a carrier of hegemonic ideas and values (Cornbleth, 1990, p. 119). The state here is seen to be “the coalition that exerts its power or control by shaping official or authoritative public policy” (Cornbleth, 1990, p. 118). For the purposes of this study, the state is seen to encompass those key policy agents involved in the development of the 1998 syllabus as identified in table 2.1. Whilst it is beyond the scope of the present study to examine the role of the state in the development of the 1998 syllabus, it must be acknowledged that the relationship between the system and the state and the ways in which teachers perceive this relationship, has implications for the ways in which they perceive the 1998 syllabus. This is largely because systematic changes such as the 1998 syllabus frequently assume the form of a government mandate.

**Mandated change**

Mandated changes rely on the premise that bureaucratic bodies such as the BoS have the right to dictate what educational changes should occur, and how, when and why. As the BoS is accountable to the NSW state government who which is an elected government, the BoS has a legislated duty to mandate educational curriculum policy. Mandated educational changes are also based on the assumption that schools and teachers can and should do whatever is mandated (Cornbleth, 1990). Mandated changes frequently, although not always, assume the form of top-down changes where new policies and assessment procedures are developed by the state and implemented by the system. A major emphasis of the state in educational policy-making is the mobilisation of political support and the minimisation of opposition (Cornbleth, 1990). That the state has the human and material resources to mobilise political support legitimises government mandates as policies that maintain the status quo of state control of education.

Not all systemic and mandated changes are exclusionary, and not all yield negative outcomes. The fact that a particular change is systemic or mandated doesn’t mean that it is bound to fail. Rather, it is the processes through which policy-makers attempt to define and realise the intended outcomes of change that contribute to the success or failure of change initiatives. In some cases, systemic and mandated changes have yielded positive outcomes for teachers (see, for example, Stiegelbauer & Lacey, 1992).
Research has proven, however, that choice not mandation is a critical part of success (House & McQuillan, 1998). Being able to exercise choice relies largely on being allowed to participate in change processes and in particular to participate in decision-making processes.

**Teacher participation in mandated curriculum change processes**

Pinar et al. explain that, by controlling participation in change processes, policy-makers have thus sought to silence teacher and student voices, the aim of which is “to ensure curriculum dissemination without ‘distortions’, a version of teacher proof curricula” (1995, p. 263). Teacher participation in change processes allows teachers to make choices and voice their decisions. In fact, Hall’s 1989 study of NSW geography syllabus change concluded that teachers’ views of the syllabus development process and their role in it affected their initial responses to the change. Negative views of the process by which the syllabus had been developed were more likely to produce resistant attitudes, whilst positive views produced commitment (1997, p. 36). Pervasive inequalities are therefore ingrained in the curriculum change process itself and one manifestation is the marginalisation of teacher participation in planning for change.

The marginalisation of teacher participation in planning for curriculum change is often justified through the stigmatisation of teachers as resistant, intransigent and perhaps too old to change (Bailey, 2000). Teachers are also marginalised in more subtle ways. For example, it has been claimed by the HTA that teacher consultation for the 1998 syllabus was at best non-representative and at worst superficial (HTA, 1998). Fullan (1990) claims that policy-makers often make “the naïve assumption that involving some teachers on curriculum committees … (will) facilitate implementation, because it (will) increase acceptance by other teachers” (p. 127). Policy-makers such as the BoS are therefore able to protect themselves against claims of teacher marginalisation by creating the façade of representative teacher participation when in fact teacher participation in the development of the 1998 syllabus was minimal.

The role that teachers played in the development of the 1998 syllabus was dependent on their own political orientation. For example, a teacher who was an HTA member and affiliated with the Teachers’ Federation was far more likely to assume an activist role in this process and respond to consultation surveys than a teacher who was unaffiliated.
with these organisations. Other teachers became politically active only when mooted changes appeared to directly affect their practice. Still other teachers suffer from change fatigue and become apathetic in the face of change (Edwards, 2001). Teacher participation in syllabus development reveals much about issues of power as it relates to agency and control. Here agency and control are interrelated. They who have control also have agency and vice versa whilst they who do not have control also find their agency is limited. Paradoxically, whilst teachers have a limited role in the decision-making processes associated with syllabus development, responsibility for the success or failure of syllabus change is vested in teachers through increasingly rigorous accountability mechanisms.

Teacher accountability
Policy-makers often assume that the outcomes or products of change are tangible and measurable. This focus on the products of change is often at the expense of a focus on the processes of change. The dynamic relationship between change processes and change outcomes is thus often ignored. Rather, policy-makers assume that rigorous accountability mechanisms will lead to greater correlation between the intended and actual products or outcomes of change.

Efforts to strengthen accountability systems may stem from a belief that increased accountability ensures greater educational standards. However, practitioners often experience accountability as ‘teacher policing’, according to McNeill (1986). This is because mandated change initiatives frequently:

- draw on a political model of accountability. This model assumes that the larger community and its elected representatives have a right … to hold public institutions answerable (Smith as cited in Landman, 2000, pp. 10-11).

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

- the application of professional judgment to individual clients’ needs requires judgment, so it cannot be reduced to rules or prescriptions for practice; thus professionals require autonomy from external political control in determining how the products of their expertise should be used (as cited in Landman, 2000, p. 11).

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

Current moves to increase teacher accountability as seen in the introduction of the School Certificate HGCC Examination (which accompanies the introduction of the 1998 syllabus) reflect the view that “teachers are accountable for the implementation of the curriculum and for conforming to system expectations” (Earl and Katz, 2000, p. 109). McNeil (1986) offers an alternate view claiming that top down controls “ignore the common wisdom that measurable outcomes may be the least significant results of learning” (1986, p. xviii).

Mandated change processes therefore have a number of negative implications for teachers; they force teacher compliance through rigorous accountability measures and then blame teachers when the actual outcomes of change are divergent from the intended outcomes. The change processes underlying the development of the 1998 syllabus are based on unequal power relationships and result in the maintenance of bureaucratic control of curriculum determination. The very nature of the structures governing curriculum determination in NSW reproduces the paradox of teacher marginalisation and accountability. The paradox is that teachers have little decision-making power in change processes yet they are still held accountable for the outcomes of curricular and other changes.

**The reproduction of curriculum control**

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

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

Blasé and Anderson (1995) explain that the result of control-oriented processes is subordination. Top-down, hierarchical relationships foster dependency. This dependency is a form of subordination because teachers are forced to ‘receive’ curriculum change from above. Stringent accountability mechanisms and curriculum control limit teachers’ decision-making space and in doing so, limit teacher autonomy. It must be acknowledged, however, that power relations are dialectic, where someone or something is dominating, and someone or something is consequently subordinated. Those dominating have power and their continued domination relies on the continued subjugation and powerlessness of their subordinates (McKay, 2001). Blase and Anderson refer to this as the dynamics of subordination and argue that they necessarily result in “unauthentic behaviours based on the need to survive” (1995, p. 26). The contradiction here is clear. Paradoxically, teachers therefore often contribute to their own subjugation and deprofessionalisation by relying on well-worn avenues of control, rather than seeking out new spaces for political action. This once again emphasises the dialectic nature of power relations.
Curriculum control and subject matter knowledge

Curriculum control as evidenced in curriculum change processes is linked to issues of subject knowledge, as those who control what counts as curriculum and what does not also control what counts as knowledge and what doesn’t. A curricular focus on the production and reproduction of school knowledge therefore brings to the fore issues of control. Curriculum control assumes many interrelated forms, as chapter 2 highlighted, and one of those forms is the control of knowledge. The struggle to define what historical knowledge is, and how it is best learnt, taught and assessed is therefore immersed in broader subject debates and what ‘history’ as a school subject should mean, to whom and why.

Curriculum documents impose or reflect various understandings about the nature and uses of knowledge (Schrag, 1992, p. 282). Goodson (1983) refers to this as the knowledge debate and claims that this debate is not one-dimensional; rather it is played out in different arenas, including curriculum and subject. If you control what is defined as knowledge you therefore control who is defined as knowledgeable and thus legitimate the function of bureaucracies and the social reproduction of the class system. If we perceive of knowledge as Young suggests, “as neither absolute, nor arbitrary, but as ‘available sets of meanings’, which in any context do not merely ‘emerge’ but are collectively ‘given’”(1971, p. 3); those who control curriculum and thus define or ‘give’ knowledge assume a superordinate position in power structures.

The way in which knowledge is positioned within the written curriculum gives way to preferred readings. This is particularly the case with subject-specific curriculum change, where issues of what constitutes subject knowledge, why and how it is best taught, learnt and assessed are the source of contestation, as this study reveals. Such contestation can be either conflicting or consensual. How individuals and groups navigate these tensions, contradictions and power relations at varying levels and in differing settings can have positive or negative effects on teacher commitment and motivation to change, as well as teacher morale. Additionally, Lortie (1998) explains that top-down change processes contravene teacher autonomy and agency in two important ways. First, it circumscribes teacher autonomy related to content, to what is taught. Second, close control by prescribed curriculum developed by others results in a reduction of teachers’ pedagogical autonomy. Lortie argues that teachers should at least
be able to make decisions about how to teach material prescribed by others. Curriculum control is thus transformed into the control of subject knowledge and how that knowledge is best transmitted.

The reintroduction of history as an examinable subject in the NSW School Certificate is an example of this that has numerous implications. First, teachers may view the 1998 syllabus as an accountability mechanism used to measure not only student performance but teacher and school performance as well. Second, the 1998 syllabus may be seen as assessment driven, and teachers may have to conform to this notion in their teaching practice. Third, an examination diminishes teacher resistance as teachers are forced to comply or risk letting down their students. These implications are evidence of power issues, power over teachers, not power with teachers as curriculum control is positioned firmly away from teachers. Teachers’ perceptions of control relate not only to who has control but how far that control is situated from them. In other words teachers’ concerns centre not only on the form of control, they also centre on the locus of control. The high ground of curriculum is therefore a political arena that can certainly impact upon the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation.

**Summary**

In this study I examine the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. In chapter 1, I argued that the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document are socially constructed in the middle ground of curriculum and that the middle ground of curriculum is conceptually and empirically an under-researched area of curriculum change. To understand the middle ground curriculum I contend that an examination of the high ground of syllabus change is necessary, as teachers’ perceptions of the high ground curriculum shape the ways in which teachers view and enact the 1998 syllabus (Hall, 1997). Accordingly, I have examined the high ground of syllabus in this chapter. The formal construction of the 1998 syllabus has consequently been investigated. The agendas and processes underlying the syllabus development process were highlighted, as were the ways in which history teachers were positioned in this process, how, why and to what effect. The issue of control emerged as a critical factor shaping both the syllabus
development process and teachers’ interpretations of it. Issues of curriculum control were manifest in the marginalisation of history teachers in decision-making processes and the institution of increasingly rigorous accountability mechanisms.

In chapter 1, I argued that the middle ground of curriculum encompasses the sites, contexts and processes that shape history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. Chapter 3 builds on this argument and presents the theoretical orientation of the thesis. In chapter 3, I argue that the middle ground is the site for struggle between the interplay of subject sub-culture, teacher culture and teacher identity. This interplay provides the conditions whereby teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document.
CHAPTER 3

THEORISING THE MIDDLE GROUND OF CURRICULUM

Introduction

In this chapter I present the theoretical orientation of the thesis. Specifically, I argue that the middle ground metaphor provides this thesis with a conceptual framework through which data can be analysed. To articulate this framework I examine the sites, contexts and processes that may shape the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus before they implement it in the classroom.

This chapter comprises five major sections. The first section examines the subject department as the primary site shaping history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. In this section I argue that the dynamics, both individual and collective, of the subject department can act to either enable or constrain history teachers’ perception and enactment of the 1998 syllabus. The subject department is both a physical and conceptual site within which the key contexts of subject sub-cultures, teacher culture and teacher self-identity intersect to produce a dynamic which influences how teachers think, behave and negotiate curriculum.

In the second section I elaborate on these contexts. First, I provide a definition of the term ‘context’ and briefly examine how ‘contexts’ broadly act to influence teacher practice. I then investigate subject sub-cultures, teacher culture and teacher self-identity as salient factors operating within the subject department. I argue that the interplay of these factors significantly influences the everyday practice of teachers, and more specifically, the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom.

To distinguish between the physical and conceptual functions of the department, I shall use the term...
In the third section I acknowledge that curriculum change is an innately political activity that has both political and personal effects. Any change has an emotional impact. This is because syllabus change challenges the interests of policy agents and teachers. The interests of these key players may be quite divergent. As such, the construction and implementation of curriculum change is a site for struggle.

In the fourth section I examine micropolitical theory. Micropolitical theory helps to understand the nature and dynamics of this struggle. A micropolitical perspective acknowledges that curriculum change disrupts existing patterns of preferment and influence, and that different spheres of interest converge in curriculum change processes (Ball, 1987, 1991; Blase, 1998; Reay, 1998). A micropolitical perspective allows an examination of these convergent interests and the processes through which teachers negotiate their own political and personal interests, and those of others, in the middle ground curriculum.

I end the chapter by presenting a diagram that builds on figure 1.1 and conceptualises the complexity of the middle ground in shaping teachers’ interpretation and enactment of a new syllabus document. The diagram represents the study’s theoretical framework and provides a scaffold upon which study findings can be presented and theorised.

The subject department

The subject department comprises the workplace of greatest significance to secondary school teachers, as it “collects teachers of like subject-area interests, expertise and professional language” (Grimmet & Neufeld, 1994, p. 34). Various researchers have identified its importance (McLaughlin, Talbert & Bascia, 1990; Little & McLaughlin, 1993; Siskin, 1994a). Needham (1997) suggests that:

‘staffroom’ to refer to the physical site the subject department occupies.
When teachers portray the world of the high school, the subject department is a highly visible feature; it appears prominently in their depictions of what matters to teaching, both as a subject – it is what they teach – and as an organisational setting – it is where and with whom that teaching takes place” (p. 57).

The subject department and the staffroom it occupies is, therefore, the primary site within which to investigate history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. As a research site the subject department also illuminates the importance of examining context, as there is great variance within and amongst subject departments in terms of the socio-political, economic, ideological and professional environment and opportunities they provide their members (Ball, 1981; Ball & Bowe, 1992; Siskin, 1994a). For Siskin (1994a) there are three dimensions to the subject department:

(a) The social – the social community surrounding the school; school community; teacher culture at the level of the department; student population; social class issues, teacher variations such as experience, career stage, gender, race and subject specialism; external affiliations with unions, associations and networks.

(b) The political – leadership/head teacher role; issues of power and autonomy; responsibility for time and space in terms of staff and students - class allocation/teaching roster; allocation and distribution of resources; professional development opportunities; promotion, accountability and appraisal.

(c) The subject – mixed or single-subject department; internal and external status of the subject – academic or vocational; perceptions of and beliefs about the subject; power and influence within the school and subject community; discipline/subject-matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge; teaching practice.

The social component of the subject department
The social component of the subject department transpires at formal and informal levels. For example, the subject department acts as both a formal and informal reference group for teachers. Nias describes reference groups as follows:

Understood as a perceptual device, a reference group may therefore be seen as a filter, determining what information individuals place upon it, and as a conduit, shaping the nature of the responses such information evokes and the audiences to whom they are directed. Reference groups are often then an important means of self-protection, for individuals supported by them can easily ignore or misinterpret messages sent from outside the group. People’s reality becomes and remains that which is confirmed through interaction with other group members, whether or not the latter are also a salient group member (1989, p. 46).

It is within sub-groups such as departments that individual teachers find an identity (Nias, 1998). Notions of ‘subject’, ‘learner’ and ‘teacher’ are often further defined and developed within subject departments, and are powerful socialising agents aiding the development of what Nias calls a ‘self as teacher’ identity (1998, p. 1263). The subject department is also the site in which teachers most often form collegial relationships and develop shared social norms (Hargreaves, 1992; Siskin, 1994a). These social norms can promote cohesion and support but they can also work against it. This is because subject departments are political organisations. Invariably, subject departments benefit some teachers and constrain others.

**The political component of the subject department**

The political role of subject departments is of particular importance because the subject department exercises power in two critical ways: “it plays a primary role in the accumulation of resources (some departments get more than others) and then again in their allocation (some teachers get more from their departments)” (Siskin, 1994a, p. 114).

Siskin (1994a) argues that subject departments function as political units that can be broadly classified into four categories; these are bonded departments, bundled departments, split departments and fragmented departments. Bonded departments are those in which members work collaboratively and exhibit a high degree of

---

20 Nias’ research (1986, 1989, 1993, 1998) has focused on the work of primary teachers. Undeniably the work of primary teachers and secondary teachers is very different. I believe, however, that her emphasis on reference groups is relevant to the work of secondary school teachers.
commitment towards departmental goals. Bundled departments are those in which inclusion is high but commitment to departmental goals is low. Split departments are those which exhibit strong commitment to common goals, but inclusion is low, resulting in the formation of conflicting factions. Finally, fragmented departments are those low in both commitment and inclusion (appendix 3.1 for further details).

Siskin (1994a) identifies commitment and inclusion as key styles of social interaction within subject departments. These styles of interaction “translate directly into modes of governance” (Siskin, 1994, p. 134). Departmental leaders (Head Teachers) therefore play a critical factor in the political and social life of a subject department (Hannay & Denby, 1994; Hannay & Erb, 1999; Hannay & Ross, 1999; Harris, 2000). Further, Siskin (1994a, 1994b) argues that an additional factor shaping interaction and relationships both within and between subject departments is status. Departmental status can be measured in many ways, for example: budget allocation, numbers of students electing to study within a particular subject department, student results, compulsory subject versus elective subject, the allocation of physical space, and/or departmental representation on school executive committees. Varying levels of commitment, inclusion and status both between and within subject departments make for very different working environments:

At one extreme, where commitment, inclusion, and status are all high (a bonded department) … teachers find few problems they cannot overcome. At the other extreme, where all are low (a fragmented department) teachers are likely to be over whelmed, inhabiting a strikingly, almost palpably different environment (Siskin, 1994a, p. 135).

Additionally, teachers within the same subject department may have different views on its function and their role in it. The subject department as both a physical site and a conceptual context has the power to either enable or constrain the work of teachers. It follows that subject departments can also act to facilitate and/or hinder the ways in which teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document.

Ball (1981) maintains that different departments can and do respond to change in different ways. Furthermore, different departments adopt different interpretational
stances towards curriculum change; some departments are reactive and passive in the face of change whilst others take a proactive stance (Ball & Bowe, 1992). Some subject departments are therefore more receptive to curriculum change than others. It is important to note, however, that a bonded department is not one that is automatically more receptive to curriculum change. Similarly, commitment to curriculum change is dependent on much more than intradepartmental commitment.

**The subject component of the subject department**

The ‘subject’ component is evident in the structure and sub-cultures of subject departments. A subject, or in this case history as a school subject, is a powerful organisational and socio-cultural context. History signifies not only what teachers teach; it also plays a role in the socialisation of teachers and the development of teacher identity.

Structurally, the staffrooms teachers inhabit are often organised along traditional subject divisions. For example, history as a school subject has traditionally occupied its own department and staffroom or has joined with English to function as an English/history department and staffroom. Whilst this has been the norm across NSW comprehensive high schools for many decades, the movement towards grouping school subjects by KLA has, in the last decade, seen the emergence of new departmental and staffroom structures that may challenge teachers’ long-held conceptions of ‘history’.

Increasingly, history, which is subsumed within the HSIE KLA, is also being subsumed within HSIE departments. The changing structure of subject departments is also evident in schools where attempts to break down subject divisions and increase interdepartmental interaction have seen the growth of common staffrooms. It is interesting to note that structural patterns are evident across the three schooling systems in NSW – the government system, the independent system and the Catholic system. Typically, NSW government schools retain independent history departments. The independent and Catholic systems variously rely on common staffrooms and/or classification and departmental grouping by KLA. Subject divisions as evidenced in departmental structure have implications for the ways in which teachers view themselves, their students and their practice.
Subject sub-cultures exert powerful influence on teacher, student and general community conceptions of history. Whilst these sub-cultures are most evident in the subject department, subject sub-cultures are more generally one of the most important contexts of secondary school teachers’ work (Goodson & Mangan, 1998; Grossman & Stodolsky, 1994; Stodolsky & Grossman, 1995).

I argue that, within the history/HSIE department, subject sub-culture, teacher culture and teacher self-identity are crucial contexts shaping the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation.

The contexts shaping history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus at the level of the history/HSIE department.

The term ‘context’ is frequently used in educational research, and numerous authors use context as a way of explaining similarities and differences in teacher practice and indeed the divergent ways in which teachers interpret and enact educational change (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2000; McLaughlin, Talbert & Bascia, 1990; Seddon, 1993).

The contexts of teachers’ work are physical and abstract in nature, and historical, socio-political, psychological and cultural in origin (Gerber, 1995; McLaughlin, Talbert & Bascia, 1990). Broadly these contexts are seen to encompass multiple sectors: systems, individual schools, departments, professional associations, unions and communities (Talbert & McLaughlin, 1996). Context here is also seen to encompass the social, cultural and intrapersonal world of teaching (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1993). These various and interrelated contexts are imbued with different meanings by the teachers working within them, and are dependent on a variety of values. Contexts are therefore highly variable and can exhibit positive and negative effects on both teacher identity and teacher practice. They are also influential mediating forces that work both for and against change (Siskin & Little, 1995).

I acknowledge that gender, social class and ethnicity may play important roles in shaping subject sub-cultures, teacher culture and teacher self-identity (Acker, 2000; Metz, 1993; Paechter, 1995).
Bascia and Hargreaves, however, caution that the notion of contexts as nested or embedded layers of influence runs the risk of oversimplifying the “highly complex, spatially penetrating and rapidly shifting patterns of influence in today’s informational society” (2000, p. 15). They also reject the other side of the coin, that is, the designation of context as so complex it is seen as erratic and indefinable. This raises an important question – what is context? Seddon (1993) offers a useful explanation. She argues that contexts appear as social, institutional and discursive settings that constitute, shape and constrain teaching practices and the people who enact them. Seddon asserts that a context is simultaneously a matrix for action and a textual medium for creating meaning and understanding (1993, p. 6). As such contexts are seen as discursive realms embodying not only unique discourses but also the variety of things that people take into account and perceive to be related to a particular discourse (Young, 1998). Further, contexts are seen to have an intertextual nature, in that they are interrelated and often appear in more than one space.

They are therefore best understood relationally. Consequently, I avoid privileging any one context in my examination of history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus. Rather, I aim to explore the reciprocal relations amongst these contexts and how, together, they inform the ways in which history teachers perceive and respond to a new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom.

**Culture**

In studies of schools, culture is a term used frequently to broadly describe the school ‘environment’, ‘ethos’ or overall ‘way of life’. These definitions are both diffuse and undifferentiated. This is largely because conceptions of culture are the focus of much intellectual debate. The ideational and phenomenal bases of culture have long been elaborated (Geertz, 1973; Goodenough, 1981; Sachs, 1990). De Lima (1997) argues that a characteristic of all major conceptions of culture in schools is that they are essentially ideational. Ideational conceptions portray culture as “not behavior itself but a set of interpretive frames for making sense of behavior” (Erikson & Erikson, 1981, p. 13). Phenomenal theories of culture, on the other hand, focus on observable patterns

However, it is not within the scope of the study to examine these factors.

23 A discourse may be defined as “a particular discursive practice, or a form of articulation that follows certain rules and which constructs the very objects it studies” (Pinar et al. 1995, p. 7).
of behaviour associated with particular groups. Advocates of phenomenal conceptions of culture argue that meanings are not in people’s heads, “they are shared by social actors – between, not in them, they are public, not private” (Keesing, 1974, p. 79). Schneider (1972) offers a useful vision of culture which synthesises these conceptions. He distinguishes:

A level of ‘how-to-do-it’ rules or norms that tell an actor how to navigate in his world. But he wants in cultural analysis to take one step further back, to distinguish the system of symbols and meanings embedded in the normative system (Keesing, 1974, p. 81).

Here, the normative system refers to decision-making capabilities and provides a useful insight into the interactions within and between social actors. Culture is therefore a system of meaning encompassing words, stories, myths and objects, events and activities. Further, as Goodenough notes, such symbols may take the form of recipes (ideas and understandings about how to do things) and routines and customs (the actual doing of them) (1981, pp. 84-5). It is through this system of meaning that people “communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life” (Geertz as quoted in Henry, 1993, p. 20).

Many authors (Geertz, 1973; Keesing, 1974; Goodenough, 1981; Hargreaves, 1992) make the vital distinction between the content of culture and the form of culture. The content or substance of culture “consists of the substantive attitudes, values, beliefs, (knowledge,) habits, assumptions and ways of doing things that are shared within a particular group” (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 218) that ultimately shape the way teachers perceive their work, and especially the way they see their relationships with students, teachers and people in leadership roles (Fieman-Nemser & Floden, 1986). The form of culture refers to “the characteristic patterns of relationships and forms of association between members of the culture” (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 219). This division between cultural content and form also emphasises the interactional nature of teacher culture. As De Lima asserts, “defining culture as meaning and action, brings issues of interaction and interdependence into the researcher’s perspective” (1997, p. 44). Teacher cultures, therefore, are not merely sets of values, beliefs and representations, they are also “regular modes of action and patterns of interaction that teachers internalise, produce and reproduce during (and as a result of) their work experiences” (De Lima, 1997, p. 44).
**Subject sub-culture**

Distinct differences have been found between the cultures of departments of varying subjects within schools (Ball, 1981; Siskin, 1994b; Grossman & Stodolosky, 1995). Ball and Bowe (1992) found cultures within subject departments that supported or resisted curriculum policy changes. These sub-cultures can, for example, differ according to competing conceptions of subject. Different teachers conceive of history in different ways. These varying conceptions give rise to different subject sub-cultures or cultures based on differing conceptions of history. These sub-cultures also influence how teachers conceive of history as a school subject.

Goodson (1981, 1983) suggests that subject debates are founded on competing conceptions of ‘history as an academic discipline’ versus ‘history as a school subject’ (Stengel, 1997). Wilson and Wineburg (1988) argue that that the disciplinary perspectives teachers are exposed to during their undergraduate training influences the process and content of their instruction. Understanding the relationship between history as a discipline and history as a school subject, and how this relationship is manifest in practice, is therefore important. Far from being a dichotomous debate founded on dueling visions of history, multiple conceptions of history can be found on both sides of this debate. Indeed, academic history and school history “can be seen as social systems sustained by communication networks, material endowments and ideologies” (Musgrove as quoted in Goodson, 1983, p. 163). These social systems comprise a range of conflicting sub-groups, segments or factions that fluctuate considerably over time (Goodson & Mangan, 1998). Academic history and school history as social systems compete for control over a prevailing curriculum discourse and this contestation is most often borne out in the development of history curriculum.

Goodson postulates that one of the main sources of interaction and argument between the various sub-groups within subject departments is the nature and purpose of the school curriculum (1983, p. 27). This is because subject sub-cultures are embodied with the subject matter knowledge and pedagogical content knowledge of teachers (Chen & Ennis, 1995). This is of particular interest when exploring history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus, as syllabus documents make both explicit and implicit assumptions about what knowledge is of worth.
Jackson (1992) argues that often there exists a lack of fit between the dominant vision of knowledge contained within the curriculum (a new syllabus document) and that espoused by the subject sub-culture. In view of the importance of subject sub-cultures in shaping teachers’ perceptions of themselves, their students and their practice, subject sub-cultures are powerful enablers of or constraints to curriculum change.

**Teacher culture**

Teacher culture, much like the broader term ‘culture’ has been extensively documented and various issues and tensions have been highlighted in the literature (De Lima, 1997; Hargreaves, 1992; Lortie, 1975; Sarason, 1990). These are summarised below.

(a) The individual and the collective in teacher culture

Goodenough questions the traditional anthropological view that “culture pertains to and characterizes a community or society as distinct from the individual” (1981, p. 54). He claims that, as culture is learned and people learn as individuals, the ultimate locus of culture must be in individuals rather than in groups (Goodenough, 1981).

Keesing explains that culture is simultaneously a common and individualised experience:

> treating the realm of cultural symbols as shared and public, as transcending the minds of individuals hides diversity and obscures change as it encourages a view of culture as spuriously integrated and internally consistent … It seems likely that a range of diversity in individual versions of the ‘common culture’ is not simply a social imperfection, but an adaptive necessity; a crucial resource that can be drawn on and selected from in cultural change (1974, p. 88).

In this sense not every individual shares precisely the same theory or understanding of the cultural mode (Keesing, 1974). Van den Berg, Vanbenberghe and Sleegers relate this concept specifically to teachers when they explain, “teachers construct their own subjective educational theories and derive both knowledge and experiences from these to further shape their professional behavior” (1999, p. 333). That teachers bring with them their own subjective educational theories (which certainly have cultural bases) that constitute their personal working concepts highlights that teachers view ‘teacher culture’ in different ways. A cultural description is, therefore, always an abstracted composite
(Keesing, 1974).

(b) Teacher culture: homogenous or heterogenous?
Whilst teachers do perceive of teacher culture in individualised ways, there has been strong debate about uniformity of teacher culture. Some authors argue that teachers are united by a strong cultural consensus and that cultural homogeneity is a key feature of teacher culture (Lortie, 1975; Sachs & Smith, 1988). Advocacy for uniformity of teacher culture is based on the belief that “teachers and schools are characterised by uniformity rather than pluralism – that schools have a certain sameness about them, no matter where they are located” (Sachs & Smith, 1988, p. 425). A number of researchers, however, stand in opposition to this view. Fieman-Nemser and Floden (1986), Hargreaves (1992, 1994a), Grossman and Stodolosky (1995) and De Lima (1997) repeatedly document differences amongst cultures in different schools and even differences amongst sub-groups of teachers within a school.

(c) Forms of teacher culture
Hargreaves (1992) argues that teacher culture assumes many forms, and he has identified four broad forms of teacher culture, each of which “has very different implications for teachers’ work and educational change” (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 166). These are briefly outlined below.

1. Fragmented individualism: individualism centres on issues of privatism and isolation and is a pervasive characteristic of teaching. Hargreaves explains that individualism is often used as a perjorative term and explains that some teachers work in solitary ways (1992, pp. 178-182). Further, citing Lukes (1973), he argues the distinction between individualism as “social atomisation” and individuality as “personal independence and self-realization” (Hargreaves, 1992, p. 178).

2. Balkanisation: sub-groups are strongly insulated from one another and these sub-groups (which are most often found as subject departments in secondary schools) display low permeability and high permanence, members personally identify with the sub-group and the sub-group acts as a micropolitical unit.
3. **Collaborative cultures**: collaborative working relationships between teachers and their colleagues tend to be spontaneous, voluntary, development oriented, pervasive across space and time, and unpredictable.

4. **Contrived collegiality**: evolves from an administrative imposition that requires teachers to work together, and is implementation oriented, compulsory, fixed in time and space, and predictable.

The forms of teacher culture have significant effects on teachers’ individual and collective perceived decision-making space. Teacher culture is therefore an important factor in shaping teachers’ enactment of syllabus change.

**(d) Teacher culture and career culture**

Whilst teacher culture refers to the norms that influence and regulate teacher thinking and behaviour both inside and outside the classroom, McLaughlin and Talbert identify a related but distinct ‘career culture’ amongst teachers. They argue that:

The notion of “career culture” refers to teachers’ shared understandings and expectations for relations with colleagues, teaching assignments, and professional rewards (McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001, p. 68).

Most importantly McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) contend that career cultures mediate teachers’ opportunities for intrinsic professional rewards. The intrinsic or ‘psychic’ rewards of teaching can be seen to include teacher-student interaction, relationships with significant others such as colleagues, parents and principals, and professional growth (Lortie, 1975; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001). Differences in career culture may be attributable to teacher age and experience, tertiary training and/or teacher expectations. These differences can significantly alter the ways in which teachers perceive their role in syllabus change processes.

Subject sub-culture and teacher culture are therefore important contextual factors shaping history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus. These contexts cannot, however, be conceptually separated from the ways in which teachers view themselves (teacher self-identity). Teacher identity and teacher culture are therefore symbiotic:
Teachers are socialized (willingly and unwittingly and in large measure by students and organizational and societal norms) to locate the subjective experience of the real self in institutional values … It is circular in that there is (also) a strong tendency to incorporate behaviors and attitudes related to the teaching role into the overall framework of the self (Blase, 1986, p. 111).

**Teacher self-identity**

Briton argues that identity is most often sought in terms of a set of invariable, and readily discernable, a priori features (1997, p. 3). This conception of identity is limiting. Relying on prescriptive ‘characteristics’, ‘traits’ and ‘features’ as indicators of identity suggests that identity is a cultural given with little implication for the individual (Schmidt, 2000). The idea of teacher self-identity must capture the dynamic interaction of the individual and the collective.

From a traditional anthropological perspective Sokefeld, Chaudhary, Driessen, Pratt and Ewing (1999) explain the relationship between self, identity and culture. They argue that identity has conceptually been reoriented to focus on difference, rather than the traditional definition of identity as constituent of sameness. This has resulted in attention to a personal or individual identity which is often referred to as the ‘self’ (Sokefeld et al. 1999; Thoits & Virsup, 1997; Wenger, 1997). The concept of the self acknowledges the plurality of identity. It also implicitly maintains that the subject (in this case the teacher) has an identity shared with others, derived from a culture (Sokefeld et al. 1999). These understandings of identity are complementary rather than contradictory, as the group to which a person belongs constitutes an important part of the social environment in which and through which personal identity is formed. This understanding is relevant to the current study, whose focus is teacher self-identity. This focus acknowledges both the cultural dimensions of identity and the sameness and difference identity is constituent of.

Teacher self-identity, then, is “the ideology or, to put it another way, the conception of their professional role” (Vulliamy, Kimonen, Nevalainen & Webb, 1997, p. 111). Furthermore, teacher self-identity plays the most fundamental part in determining what teachers do (Nias, 1986; 1993; Vulliamy et al. 1997, Wenger, 1997). Identities provide us with a perceptual framework that shapes our understandings and behaviours (Goodson & Cole, 1994). The connection between perception and behaviour
is an important one, as self-identity is not just what we think of as ‘us’, it is also a lived experience, and our identities are constructed and reconstructed as we engage with the social world. Teacher self-identities are adaptive, in that teachers experience qualitative shifts in self-perception over time, which in turn shapes their behaviours.

Blase and Pajak (1982) talk of teacher self-identity in terms of ‘the social self’ and ‘the psychological self’. They explain that:

(These concepts) are actually quite compatible if we think of ‘the social self’ as ‘how we usually describe ourselves to ourselves’ which corresponds roughly to ‘how we are described by others’ and think of ‘the psychological self’ as the non-accessible, often unconscious part of the self that cannot be directly observed (Blase & Pajak, 1982, p. 66).

The social-psychological distinction made in studies of identity has drawn much criticism. Wenger (1997) argues that dichotomous definitions of identity too heavily focus on the division between the individual and the social. Her position is that:

The concept of identity serves as a pivot between the social and the individual, so that each can be talked about in terms of the other. It avoids a simplistic individual-social dichotomy without doing away with the distinction. The resulting perspective is neither individualistic nor abstractly institutional or societal. It does justice to the lived experience of identity while recognizing its social character – it is the social, the cultural, the historical with a human face (Wenger, 1997, p. 145).

Wenger’s conceptualisation of identity is significant for several reasons. First, as she states, “it narrows the focus onto the person, but from a social perspective” (1997, p. 145). Second, this definition acknowledges the inseparable duality of the individual and the collective. Rather than assuming teacher subjectivity and agency are associated with the individual teacher, emphasis is placed on how teacher subjectivity and agency are constructed through engagement with the social world. Teacher identity can therefore be seen to encompass the individual, the group or the collective, and the relational, that is, “the various permutations of relations between individuals, between groups and collectivities, and between individuals, groups and collectivities” (Goodson, 1990, p. 306).
Third, teacher identity is seen to encompass the personal and the professional, as the separation of one’s personal and professional identity once again provides a false dichotomy which relies upon a narrow conception of teacher identity. Teachers make little distinction between their professional and personal identities, according to Nias (1998). The impact of teacher’s personal life factors on their professional lives, and vice versa, is well documented (Pajak & Blasé, 1989).

Fourth, teacher identity is seen as pluralistic rather than singular. Woods (1981) has distinguished between ‘situated’ and ‘substantial’ identities. Substantial identities are more stable and enduring whilst “situated identities are more transient, more dependent on time, place and situation” (p. 296). Our situated and substantial identities dynamically interact. Teacher identity therefore has temporal and spatial dimensions. This focus contextualises teacher identity and grounds it within the historical, social, psychological, political and cultural dimensions of teachers’ worklives. Wenger offers a succinct summary of her conceptualisation of teacher identity that is relevant to the aims of the present study. Teacher self-identity is seen in various ways:

- **Teacher identity as negotiated experience.** We define who we are by the ways we experience our selves through participation as well as the ways we and other … (perceive us).

- **Teacher identity as community membership.** We define who we are by the familiar and the unfamiliar.

- **Teacher identity as a learning trajectory.** We define who we are by where we have been and where we are going.

- **Teacher identity as a nexus of multi-membership.** We define who we are by the ways we reconcile our various forms of membership into one identity.

- **Teacher identity as a relation between the local and the global.** We define who we are by negotiating local ways of belonging to broader constellations and of manifesting broader styles and discourses. (Wenger, 1997, p. 149).

Wenger (1997) explains that living is a constant process of negotiating meaning. If we are to accept that cultural beliefs and norms govern our behaviour, we must also accept that the process of negotiating meaning can alter cultural patterns or norms and give rise to new meanings. In this sense living is, as Wenger (1997) suggests, a constant process of negotiating meaning. To talk of teacher identity without talking of teacher culture
would be misleading, as teacher identity is rooted in issues of cultural participation, membership and belonging.

**The role of students in shaping teacher practice**

The role of teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture in shaping teacher practice and teachers’ perceptions and enactment of syllabus change has been established. One cannot ignore, however, the role of students in shaping teacher practice. Student demography, motivation, receptivity and ability have been identified as factors shaping teacher practice (Metz, 1993; Seashore Louis, 1990). McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) acknowledge the central role of students in teacher practice by arguing that “the classroom triangle of teacher, content and student forms the core of professional practice and the essence of the schooling enterprise – the ‘stuff’ of teaching” (p. 18). How teachers’ perceptions and beliefs about students affect their interpretation and enactment of a new syllabus document prior to classroom implementation is, however, largely unknown. As students are an integral part of teachers’ worklives, this study will address this issue in the context of broader study aims.

**The syllabus as a site of struggle for meaning**

A new syllabus can discredit the experience and learning of history teachers and challenge their purposes and identities (Marris in Evans, 1996). Giacquinta (1998) asserts that teachers need to understand what new patterns of interaction explicitly stated or implicitly embedded in a syllabus document need to be enacted and what old patterns need to be eschewed. This encourages role clarity and commitment towards a new syllabus document, as teachers are pragmatic in their response to change in that they assess what the probable benefits and/or losses to them will be in their most direct teaching tasks (Giacquinta, 1998).

A new syllabus not only challenges teachers’ interests, it challenges their sense of self-identity (Nias, 1998). This is because so much of teachers’ self-identity is dependent on conceptions of subject, pedagogy and self. Responses to or enactment of curriculum change are perhaps, then, exercises in risk management, with the protection of self and political interests, and the preservation of a stable sense of self, important goals.
In view of the threats accompanying a new syllabus document and the fear that syllabus change generates, understanding history teachers’ perceptions of and receptivity to change also relies on understanding how change affects them emotionally. Considerations of how people change and what people need as they go through a process of change has been a focus of educational research.

The emotions of change can also shape how teachers take up an initiative. Evans contends that teachers’ responses to change primarily centre on feelings of loss, confusion, conflict and challenges to competence (1995, p. 29). The personal side of change, which is often in conflict with the political side of change, should not be underestimated.

If teachers perceive the potential personal and professional cost of a new syllabus to be high, their receptivity will be low. Similarly, if it threatens the status or position of an individual teacher or subject department through the loss of student numbers or contact hours, for example, teacher receptivity to change is likely to once again be low.

Commitment to a new syllabus document may, on the other hand, be fostered when teachers have a decision-making role in the syllabus development process, when professional development opportunities and resources supporting the implementation of change are available, and when teachers’ philosophical and pedagogical orientations are congruent with those a particular change advocates and with the prevalence of norms that support discussion (Harris, 2001).

“Crucial to any policy implementation between a central (state) Government and thousands of teachers is the glue or cement of trust” (Edwards, 2001, p. 11). Drawing on the work of Albach (2000), Edwards contends that a relationship between policy agent and teacher based on mutual trust and confidence is necessary to effect curriculum change (2001, p. 11). He refers to this as ‘trust capital’ and suggests that it is a vital ingredient in elevating teacher receptivity to curriculum change and in encouraging commitment.

I argue that Edward’s notion of trust capital also relies on teachers’ perceptions of control and power. If teachers perceive the locus of curriculum control to be removed from them they are more likely to be less receptive to change. Gauging teachers’
receptivity to a new syllabus is vital, as a dialectic relationship exists between teachers’
cognitive orientation to change (their receptivity) and their behavioural orientation to
change (enactment or response to change). Conley and Goldman (1998) talk of this as a
continual cycle of processing and enacting change.

The micropolitics of change

The micropolitical perspective “takes the idea of different interests amongst members of
an organization as the central focus in its understanding of organisational behaviour”
(Kelchtermans & Ballet, 2002, p. 106). The politics of change, therefore, are largely
seen to encompass “conflict, representation, stakeholders, partnerships, collaboration
research must specifically look at the ways in which the inequalities and power
imbalances of the curriculum change process permeate the politics of change within the
school itself, and in particular the manifestation of power in change processes – how
power has been defined and utilised, by whom, for what purposes and to what effect.
There is diversity in how the term ‘power’ has been used. Sarason (1990) defines power
as the ability to act or produce effects (p. 49). He juxtaposes this against another, more
coercive, form of power which he defines as “possession of control or authority or
influence over others” (Sarason, 1990, p. 49). Another way of describing this power
differential is offered by Blase and Anderson (1995), who distinguish between ‘power
over’, ‘power through’ and ‘power with’ others. Sarason’s second definition of power
fits well with Blase and Anderson’s ‘power over’ others, and this form of power is
evident in efforts at mandated change in which policy-makers exercise ‘power over’
teachers by marginalising teacher participation in decision-making processes and by
forcing compliance through increasingly rigorous accountability and assessment
strategies.

Blase and Anderson (1995) concede that different forms of leadership reflect different
forms of power. Research has documented the importance of leadership in curriculum
change initiatives and has almost unanimously concluded that the role of the Head
Teacher is crucial to both whole-school and department-level curriculum change
initiatives (Ball, 1981, 1982; Blase & Anderson, 1995, Busher & Harris, 1999; Hannay
& Ross, 1999). Different Head Teachers embody different leadership styles, which can
be manifested as dictatorial, managerial, facilitative, non-leader and collaborative, for example.

So, too, different change processes embody different styles of leadership and hence reflect different forms of power. For example, top-down or mandated change initiatives are frequently a form of domination, which is, according to Freund, “the practical and empirical expression of power” (as cited in Ball, 1991, p. 170). Sarason views this as a violation of the political principle, stating that “if you are going to be affected, directly or indirectly, by a policy, you should stand in some relationship to the decision-making process” (1995, p. 165).

Power resides in individuals, groups, social organisations and systems and is evidenced in both formal and informal roles and relationships, according to Cornbleth (1990). It is also manifest in the historically shaped and socially shared conceptions and understandings of these roles and relationships (Cornbleth, 1990). Power therefore operates through the definition of roles and relationships and patterns of interaction within schools and the schooling system. The micropolitics of change, then, typically reflects “the strong advocacy of some and the strong opposition of others” (Mangham as quoted in Blase, 1998, p. 545). Hence, curriculum change often corresponds to the interests of powerful groups.

Inasmuch as micropolitical processes relate to power, they benefit some and not others, and this influence shifts over time. The political, social and cultural constitution of power is therefore a central concern of micropolitical research. Power can be expressed in multiple ways.

The politics of change are not always conflictive. As Blase (1998) argues:

micropolitics refers to the use of formal and informal power by individuals and groups to achieve their goals in organizations. In large part political actions result from perceived differences between individuals and groups, coupled with the motivations to use power to influence and protect (p. 545)

This definition stresses both sides of micropolitics – the conflicting and the consensual. In light of this clarification, a number of emergent and interrelated tensions in the change process are made apparent; these include power versus powerlessness, conflict versus control, choice versus compliance, and lack of autonomy versus professionalism,
to name but a few. This study is concerned with the processes through which teachers negotiate these tensions in their interpretation and enactment of a new syllabus document.

**The processes through which teachers micropolitically negotiate a new syllabus document**

Just how might we expect the struggle over a new syllabus to play itself out amongst history teachers? The micropolitical processes through which history teachers interpret and enact a new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom can take many forms. The forms these processes take depends on what happens in the middle ground curriculum. Goldman and Conley (1997) suggest a useful frame for examining the processes through which teachers micropolitically negotiate change. They refer to this as the ‘zone of enactment’. They argue that the zone of enactment is a continuum of possible responses to or enactment of change which posits indifference at one extreme and acceptance at the other. Spillane (1999) argues that there are multiple zones of enactment and that these are the:

- spaces where reform initiatives are encountered by the world of practitioners and ‘practice’, delineating the zones in which teachers notice, construe, construct and operationalize the instructional ideas advocated by reformers (p. 144).

Research has repeatedly noted that teachers often go through a process of resistance when interpreting and enacting mandated change initiatives (Giaquinta, 1998; Gitlin & Margonis, 1995; Gross, Giaquinta & Bernstein, 1971; Van den Berg et al. 1999).

**Resistance**

Teacher resistance can assume a range of forms, including reticence to implement change, procrastination, inactivity, and hostile opposition. These forms are further explored throughout this study. There are also many sources of resistance, of which Field (1988) offers the following categorisation:

- **Organisational sources of resistance**: structural characteristics, complexity, unclear definitions of decision-making authority which can lead to uncertainty, inadequate communication, gate keeping and issues of power and control.

- **Social sources of resistance**: teachers’ imperfect awareness of their own interpersonal processes and their lack of a frame of reference in which to judge their
performance and their possibilities for improvement, influence of reference groups and groups solidarity, a lack of compatibility with existing norms and guidelines.

- **Psychological sources of resistance**: perception is perhaps the most important psychological barrier towards change. Indeed Bassi and Watson (1974) argue that selective perception and retention may act to prevent an individual from seeing that the existing situation is inadequate. Further, as Van den Berg et al. (1999) acknowledge, the personal working concepts of teachers strongly influence the realisation of innovations. Teachers can ultimately choose not to implement change.

Sources of resistance may also be built into the change itself. For example, the design of the change might be weak and often the initiators of change underestimate the degree of difficulty or complexity change heralds (Van den Berg et al. 1999). Increasingly, the change processes underpinning attempts at educational change have come under scrutiny, and teacher resistance has been reconceptualised as a reasoned response to the continued marginalisation and exclusion of teachers from decision-making processes. Gitlin and Margonis (1995) provide a good example of this reconceptualisation when they query whether teacher resistance is obstructive or good sense. They suggest that perhaps teacher resistance to change is a way of teachers expressing legitimate concerns about authority and power imbalances.

Goldman and Conley (1997) suggest that teachers’ responses to change incorporate diverse processes which can be located along the zone of enactment. For example, at one end of the continuum is rejection of change and/or refusal to implement it. At the other end lies acceptance and commitment towards implementation of proposed changes. I argue that in between these two extremes lie numerous processes through which teachers may negotiate a new syllabus document, including (in no particular order) reactivity, reticence, compliance, indifference and pragmatism. These processes are best examined in light of data. Consequently, I return to a discussion of these processes in chapters 5, 6 and 7.
**Conceptualising the middle ground of syllabus change**

Below I present a diagram (figure 3.1) that conceptualises the complexity of the middle ground in shaping teachers’ interpretation and enactment of a new syllabus document. This diagram represents the study’s theoretical framework, outlining the sites, contexts and processes the middle ground encompasses.

**Figure 3.1: Conceptualising the middle ground of curriculum**

The middle ground is the site of struggle between the interplay of subject sub-culture, teacher culture and teacher identity. This interplay, diagrammatically presented in Figure 3.1, provides the conditions whereby teachers interpret and enact curriculum documents. The middle ground is therefore a framework for teachers to locate themselves within curriculum change processes. The micropolitical processes through which teachers do this are evident on the left hand side of figure 3.1. These processes are dynamic and can, for example, emerge as resistance to or reticence regarding change. Alternatively, these processes may involve compliance with or acceptance of change.
Summary

Chapter 3 has outlined the theoretical orientation of the study. In this chapter I have argued that the history/HSIE department is the primary site in which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus before they implement it in the classroom. I have established that three interrelated contexts—subject sub-cultures, teacher culture and teacher self-identity—permeate the history/HSIE department and that it is through these contexts that teachers’ interpretations and enactment of this new syllabus document are negotiated. I explained that the micropolitics of syllabus change typically revolves around the protection of teachers’ personal, professional and political interests and that teacher and departmental receptivity and commitment to the 1998 syllabus would only be fostered when they perceived this syllabus document to be in their best interests and those of their students. In the following chapter I present the research methodology.
CHAPTER 4

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

This study examines history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus in the middle ground of curriculum. The study is therefore concerned with the interplay between the sites, contexts and processes through which history teachers perceive and enact a new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom. In order to investigate the problem of the study, it is necessary to delineate its research methodology, research design, methods of data collection and data analysis techniques. This chapter is organised around these four areas.

Research methodology

A research methodology provides a research study with a frame through which the phenomena under investigation can be examined. The methodological frame for this study emanates from the interpretive paradigm and is constructivist in nature. Below I explain what these concepts mean and how they interrelate within this study.

The interpretive paradigm

Researchers have long debated distinctions between traditional conceptions of the qualitative and quantitative research paradigms (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Burns, 2000; Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Increasingly this dichotomy has been regarded as artificial and simplistic, although many researchers still concede that the epistemological bases and contributions of these paradigms differ (Bogden & Biklen, 1992; Noblit & Hare, 1988). Whilst acknowledging current paradigmatic debates, I refer to this dichotomy to describe the methodology of this study. The assumptions underlying the current study are traditionally qualitative in nature. Qualitative research “is an umbrella concept covering forms of inquiry that help us understand and explain the meaning of social
phenomena” (Merriam, 1998, p. 5). Other terms used interchangeably include interpretive and/or naturalistic research.24

Interpretive researchers “study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings that people bring to them” (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a, p. 3). Typically, interpretive studies aim at “understanding the phenomena of interest from the participants’ perspective, not the researcher’s” (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). As this study is concerned with the ways in which history teachers make meaning of a new syllabus document, interpretive research is appropriate to the aims of the study.

Two other characteristics of interpretive research reinforce the appropriateness of this paradigm to the study. These characteristics are strengths of the interpretive paradigm. First is a concern for context. Kaplan and Maxwell (1994) believe “that the goal of understanding a phenomenon from the point of view of the participants and its social and institutional context is largely lost when textual data is quantified” (as quoted in Haddon, 2001, p. 126). Interpretive researchers, on the other hand, aim to enhance understanding of a particular phenomenon or situation and the contexts within which it operates, not through the quantification of data but through an in-depth and contextualised investigation. In chapter 3 the importance of context within this study was elaborated.

Second, the interpretive paradigm sits well with constructivism for, as Burns (1995) comments, reality should never be taken for granted and attention should be paid to the multiple realities and socially constructed meanings that exist within every social context. The link between interpretation and theory is a critical element of this study’s design, and concurs with the belief that “the way we analyze and interpret data is conditioned by the way it is theoretically framed” (Kincheloe, as quoted in Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 273).

Whilst these factors are widely acknowledged as strengths of interpretive research, a number of weaknesses have been identified within this paradigm. These weaknesses are

---

24 For consistency, I use the term ‘interpretive research’ throughout this study.
typically defined in contrast to the conventional strengths of quantitative research. For example, quantitative studies often rely on prediction, theory testing, replicability and validity (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Merriam, 1998), concepts that are far more amorphous in interpretive research. Sandelowski (1997) argues that interpretive research is “vulnerable to charges of irrelevance because of continual misconceptions about the generalizability and trustworthiness … and concerns about its status as science” (p. 125).

These misconceptions not only stem from critics of the interpretive paradigm; Sandelowski (1997) argues that these misconceptions are also a product of what she sees as the misuse or inappropriate utilisation of interpretive research. To avoid misuse of the interpretive paradigm within the current study and to strengthen the credibility of this study, I address issues of trustworthiness and generalisability below.

**Trustworthiness**

Traditionally, ‘validity’ and ‘reliability’ have been viewed as concepts through which research methods, data analysis and study findings can be ‘verified’ or ‘reproduced’ and deemed ‘accurate’ (Cohen & Manion, 1989; Holsti, 1969). Quantitative research has focused on internal and external validity as conventional measures of reliability (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). For explanation, Kincheloe and McLaren offer the following definitions:

>(Internal validity is often defined as) the extent to which a researcher’s observations and measurements are true descriptions of a particular reality (whilst) … external validity has been defined as the degree to which such descriptions can be accurately compared with other groups (1998, p. 287).

Paradigmatic shifts and developments in social theory have, however, spurned a crisis in validity (Smith, 2001). This is because constructivist theories, for example, claim that there is no one truth or one correct interpretation to be validated. Further, interpretations are social constructs. In light of this, can we really talk of interpretive accuracy? The aims of validity and reliability are increasingly viewed as antithetical to the aims and assumptions of interpretive research. Many researchers now look instead towards establishing, for example, ‘representativeness’, ‘authenticity’, ‘auditability’, ‘verisimilitude’, ‘resonance’ and ‘trustworthiness’ (Eisner, 1993; Guba & Lincoln,
In this study I use the term ‘trustworthiness’ as it encompasses the methodological assumptions underlying the current study’s aims. Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggest that trustworthiness relies on four basic criteria: credibility, dependability, confirmability and transferability. Credibility refers to the credibility of portrayals of constructed realities (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998). This can be achieved through prolonged engagement in the field, persistent observation, triangulation and member checks. Dependability and confirmability rely on the establishment of an ‘audit trail’ (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Sandelowski (1986) explains that the development and maintenance of a clear analysis trail aids the confirmability of research findings. This analysis trail is outlined in later sections of this chapter. Rather than rely on Lincoln and Guba’s (1986) notion of transferability, I prefer to use the more readily recognised term ‘generalisability’, although not in a traditional, positivist sense.

*Generalisability*

A credible portrayal of constructed realities involves the rejection of external validity. External validity is “the ability to be able to make pristine judgments from one research study to another (which implicitly) accepts a one-dimensional cause-effect universe” (Kincheloe & McLaren, 1998, p. 288). I reject the notion of external validity by asserting that traditional nomothetic generalisations, which rely on techniques such as random sampling, are not relevant to the nature and purpose of this study. I do not, however, reject the notion of generalisability entirely. Sandelowski (1997) is critical of claims that interpretive studies are not generalisable. She argues that generalisations are an important part of enhancing the utility of interpretive research. This is because “the stories collected in most qualitative research encounters are readings of the particular and concrete, but also of the universal and general” (Sandelowski, 1998, p. 127). Generalisations made from interpretive studies are therefore idiographic (‘working hypotheses’) and naturalistic, and provide the means to extend findings beyond the confines of a specific study (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). A number of methodological assumptions underlie the ways in which the interpretive paradigm is utilised in this study. These assumptions are constructivist in nature.
**Constructivism**

A syllabus document is a socially constructed political text that is open to multiple interpretations. This is because different teachers read and interpret a new syllabus document in different ways. Because different people construct ‘reality’ in different ways, strikingly diverse understandings of the same phenomena are therefore not only possible but probable (Crotty, 1998). It follows, then, that history teachers’ interpretations and enactment of the 1998 syllabus will be as disparate as each teacher’s unique construction of reality. This assumption is based on a belief that reality is a socially constructed phenomenon.

In recent decades the emergence and development of constructivist approaches to educational research has been evidenced in a large body of educational literature (Burr, 1995; Denzin & Lincoln, 1994; Lincoln & Guba, 1986). A foundation of constructivism is that no single reality or worldview exists: rather, there are multiple realities or worldviews, and these worldviews are continually being constructed and reconstructed. As a colleague and I have argued elsewhere:

> These worldviews are in effect interpretive lenses, through which we both see the world in a meaningful way and through which interpretation is both constructed and re-constructed (Harris & Jimenez, 2001, p. 80).

Within a research context, a constructivist approach is one that attempts to understand “the complex world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it” (Schwandt, 1998, p. 230). Therefore a researcher working within a constructivist paradigm believes that there are dynamic, multifarious and sometimes conflicting versions of ‘social reality’ and that these can change as research participants and the researcher become more informed and sophisticated (Guba & Lincoln, 1994).

These versions of reality that operate at an individual and collective level are a key component of constructivism (Harris & Jimenez, 2001). Human beings constantly engage with versions of reality and try to make sense of them. It is therefore very likely that seemingly equivalent realities can be perceived of in very different ways. History teachers can therefore interpret a new syllabus document in very different ways, as this study will demonstrate. Constructivism relies on an examination of these different or multiple perceptions and the contexts within which they are continually constructed and reconstructed.
A number of criticisms can be levelled at constructivism, the first of which is that the practical application of this methodology to real research projects is indistinct. For example, capturing teachers’ versions of reality in textual form is difficult. It requires a research design and analytic frame capable of portraying reality as research participants at an individual and collective level construct it. I employ several strategies to address this challenge, including triangulation, and the maintenance of a high trust capital through, for example, member-checking. These are examined later in the chapter.

Another criticism of constructivism is that the term has been used for different purposes (Schwandt, 1998). Specifically, the terms ‘constructivism’ and ‘constructionism’ are often used interchangeably and without an understanding of what Crotty (1998) sees as significant differences between these two theoretical perspectives. Whilst the basic assumptions and tenets underlying constructionism and constructivism are similar, there are theoretical differences between them that are relevant to the aims of the current study. I briefly discuss these differences below.

The constructionist position holds that meaning is not discovered but is “constructed by human beings as they engage with the world they are interpreting” (Crotty, 1998, p. 43). Constructionists assert, “we have to reckon with the social origin of meaning and the social character with which it is inevitably stamped” (Crotty, 1998, p. 52). Fish (1990) argues that these meanings (or truths) are institutions that both precede us and within which we are already embedded (as cited in Crotty, 1998). These institutional systems of intelligibility are the source of the interpretive strategies whereby we construct meaning (Fish as cited in Crotty, 1998). Geertz (1973) and Goodenough (1981) also refer to culture as a system of inherited conceptions in symbolic form that encode meaning. Much like Fish’s notion of institutional systems of intelligibility, culture can be seen as “an historically developed system of symbols, both verbal and non-verbal, which contain a group’s pattern of meanings about the world, others and themselves” (Henry, 1993, p. 20). Henry stresses that, because culture is about social relationships and human thought and behaviour, it can be viewed neither out of context nor in terms of the interrelationships between culture-bearers alone; instead culture must be explored within the ongoing pattern of life (Henry, 1993). Constructionism, as a
theoretical orientation, is therefore very much concerned with culture and the collective construction of meaning and social reality.

Constructivism, on the other hand, “focuses on the meaning-making activity of the individual mind” (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). Crotty believes this distinction is an important one, as constructionism emphasises the hold culture has over us whilst constructivism “describes the individual human subject engaging with objects in the world and making sense of them” (1998, p. 79). His distinction is similarly an important one for this study. The study sought to examine the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. As such, the unit of analysis was the individual teacher. Whilst the unit of analysis was the individual teacher, both individual and relational data were sought. These data were sought so that history teachers’ individual interpretations and enactment of the 1998 syllabus could be grounded and theorised within broader departmental (collective) interpretations and responses to the 1998 syllabus document.

Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe (1993) similarly advocate constructivism as a theoretical approach that focuses on both the cognitive and subjective aspects of teachers’ lives (what happens ‘inside’ the teacher), as well as focusing on the interactionist or relational aspects of their lives (the cultural environment). Kelchtermans and Vandenberghe’s (1993) conception of constructivism encompasses both the social and psychological construction of meaning and avoids this artificial division. This inclusive definition of constructivism is important and relevant to this study, the focus of which was the individual teacher, nested within a collective environment.

A particular strength of constructivism is that the researcher is an active participant in the construction of the realities presented in research findings:

> the researcher no longer sees him/herself as interpreting the world but as fully participating in its social construction and as thus inside the body of their own research (Walker & Dewar, 2000, p. 713).

Participant observation is one way in which I attempted to immerse myself in the world of participants and have direct experience of the activities under investigation. In this
way I was, as Schutz (1967) suggests researchers should do, attempting to identify with research participants and grasp the inter-subjective meanings they give to their actions. Participants’ meanings are frequently opaque, misleading or incomplete (Scott & Usher, 1999, p. 100). Participant observation allows better access to the meanings of participants because it allows researchers to understand the contexts and processes through which observed activities emerge.

Identifying one’s self in qualitative research is a well-canvassed dilemma within the literature, and one that Denzin and Lincoln (1998a) discuss at length in what they call the ‘crisis of representation’. Throughout data collection and indeed the writing of this thesis, I endeavoured to continually reflect on my role in this study and that of research participants. Part of this reflection revolves around the maintenance of trust, as will be examined later in this chapter.

In summary, then, for the purposes of this study a constructivist approach has the following features:

- Reality is a socially constructed phenomenon, and to understand the collective reality of a history department one must first understand the multiple perspectives of the individuals operating within it.
- Teachers’ constructions of reality are shaped by the contexts within which they work. A contextualised understanding of reality is therefore warranted.
- As researcher I played an inherent role in the construction of the realities presented in the findings of this study. The role of the researcher cannot be taken for granted and must be continually analysed and articulated.

I now turn to an elaboration of the research design – that of case study design.

**Case study design**

Case study research is defined as an “intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon” (Merriam 1988, p. xiv). This approach was viewed as being suitable to the aims of this study because the case study approach invites an intensive examination of the phenomena under investigation. Because they are so intensive and generate rich subjective data, they bring to light variables, processes and relationships (Burns, 2000). In fact, Merriam (1998) identifies ‘process’ as a focus for case study
research. Citing Reichardt and Cook, Merriam (1998) explains that there are two meanings of process examined through the case study method. The first involves describing the contexts and population of the study, whilst the second involves causal explanation. This focus fits the aim of this study, which is to examine the sites, contexts and processes (the middle ground) through which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus.

The case study enabled me to ask direct questions of people involved in the study and be guided by what the participants thought was valuable. In effect, the inner dynamics of the phenomena were illuminated through an examination of participant perspectives. In this research, the phenomenon under examination was history teachers’ interpretations and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. The case study approach was seen as a way to intensely explore this bounded system, and to draw attention to the relationship between this bounded system and a broader social world.

Edwards (1998) articulates a series of assumptions that underlie case-based approaches. These assumptions are relevant to the aims of the current study. They include: (a) a philosophical stance that acknowledges and respects the role and importance of participants in the construction of reality; (b) a focus on the socio-psychological and interpersonal processes of human experience; (c) the contextualisation of data to enable the examination of meaningful relationships; (d) and an acceptance of the need to engage deeply with the case study and to theorise data (1998, pp. 37-38).

Distinctions have been made between types of case studies, such as historical, observational, instrumental or collective cases (Stake, 1998; Burns, 2000). Of these, the collective case study suited this study because of its focus on more than one case in an investigation of a phenomenon, population or condition; “the cases may have similar or dissimilar characteristics but they are chosen in order that theories can be generated about a larger collection of cases” (emphasis added, Wellington, 2000, p. 93).

A collective case study suited this study because both the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus and the contexts and processes through which these interpretations are mediated are highly variable. Drawing on multiple cases allowed examination of how different history teachers, located in different subject
departments in different schools, may interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. Case study research also provides researchers with a specific site in which to conduct research. For the current study that site was the history/HSIE department.

Rather than aiming to sketch the entire range of history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus, this study aims at an in-depth and holistic exploration of the history teachers located in three particular history/HSIE departments. The study sought to sketch the nature and range of teachers’ interpretations and responses to this new syllabus document across three history/HSIE departments. Criterion-based sampling was therefore used to select three history/HSIE departments for participation in this study. The criteria that guided selection were as follows.

(a) Varying secondary school contexts

Different schools provide very different contexts within which the department and teachers operate. Secondary schools in NSW stem from three systems: the government, independent, and Catholic systems. Great variance is found both across and within these systems in terms of school and subject department context. Chapters 2 and 3 highlighted that there are differing subject department structures found across these three systems. Typically, government schools in NSW continue to rely on single-subject departments, Catholic schools tend to rely on subject departments grouped by KLAs (in the case of history, the appropriate KLA is HSIE) and Independent schools still tend to vary, although there are definite movements towards restructuring departments on a KLA.

Thus, there were two reasons for selecting one history/HSIE department from each of the three school systems in NSW:

1. It would allow me to probe deeply into the influence different systemic and school contexts have in shaping the ways in which history teachers perceive and respond to the 1998 syllabus.

2. It would allow for an examination of varying departmental structures, as is discussed in greater detail below.
(b) Differing departmental structures
History staff in schools across NSW may be located within a history department, an English/history department, an HSIE department, a mixed history/HSIE department, or a general school staffroom. The organisational structure of the department within which history is located undoubtedly shapes teachers, assumptions about, and images of, the ‘history department’. Similarly, it can either enable or constrain teacher interaction and relationships. To maximize the opportunity to learn from the study, three differing departmental structures were selected for inclusion in this study:

1. One history department.
2. One HSIE department.
3. One history/HSIE department located within a general staffroom.

Chapter 3 clearly demonstrated the powerful effect of subject sub-cultures within and across history/HSIE departments. In view of this I anticipated that history/HSIE departments whose subject structures differed would provide this study with rich and varied data.

(c) Staff numbers
Three history departments with four to six members were selected for this study. An additional criterion was that a high percentage of history teachers in these three departments were actually teaching junior history and hence were implementing the 1998 syllabus. This criterion allowed easier access to staff members. Similarly, as this study seeks to explore teacher interaction, a greater (yet manageable) number of teachers increased the number of observable interactions. In total nine teachers participated in this research.

(d) Staff characteristics
Three history/HSIE departments, whose members were of a diverse age range and had varying experience of change, were selected for participation in this study. Huberman states that teachers at differing stages of their ‘career cycle’ respond in different ways to curriculum change (1995, p. 199). Further, Siskin highlights the critical role of the Head Teacher within the history/HSIE department (1994b, p. 43). Hence, the three departments selected for investigation had Head Teachers with varying experience and number of years’ service at their particular school.
(e) Access

A further criterion was that participating departments were accessible in two ways. First, the school had to be geographically accessible to me. Given time and financial constraints for travel, a radius was set around the central business district of Sydney, with travel time limited to no more than 1.5 hours in each direction. Second, access to departments was potentially constrained by study requirements. For example, the study was conducted over an 18-month period of time in which participating teachers were individually interviewed three times, were asked to participate in focus group interviews and asked to allow me to observe formal departmental meetings. These considerable impositions on time were therefore made clear to potential participants, and in some cases led to a school revoking their interest in the research.

(f) Securing participation

Government, Catholic and independent schools within the identified geographic radius were contacted. Requests for access were made directly to both the history/HSIE Head Teacher and the School Principal, first by phone and then followed up with a letter; these letters contained Information Statements and Consent Forms (see appendix 4.1 for a copy of these materials). More than 50 schools were formally approached in order to secure three study sites. As access for the case studies was negotiated, the conditions for collecting data were also negotiated. This process of negotiation resulted in a re-evaluation of the selection criteria, as it became apparent that few history/HSIE departments would allow the depth of access the researcher initially requested. This negotiation was an important part of establishing rapport with participating teachers as well as ensuring that they were comfortable with the research protocol.

Securing three participating history/HSIE departments was time-consuming and often involved me visiting potential sites and addressing the School Principal and history/HSIE department personally. Securing participation of three history/HSIE departments who fitted the criteria described above was extremely difficult. History/HSIE departments are notoriously protected sites (Siskin, 1994a) and teachers are reluctant to admit outsiders into their department, which is both a personal and professional space for them. Only three of the 50 departments that were approached...
eventually agreed to participate in the study – I have called these three departments Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s throughout this study.26

To fully examine history teachers’ interpretations and enactment of the 1998 syllabus a series of key informant interviews were also undertaken. The use of informants in relation to observational work is, according to Fielding and Fielding, “not only legitimate but absolutely necessary” (1986, p. 47). Key informants often provide “detailed information about a group’s past and about contemporary happenings and relationships as well as the everyday nuances – the ordinary details – that others might miss” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 389). A number of key informants were identified, including:

- **The BoS HSIE Inspector:** this person was responsible for the development of the new syllabus at a bureaucratic level and held insider information as to why and how the new syllabus was constructed at a macro-level. This person also had detailed information about history teacher participation in the process of syllabus development.

- **The BoS executive officer:** This person conducted teacher consultation throughout the development of the new syllabus and, as a practicing history teacher, had a unique perspective of the high ground curriculum and how it might be interpreted and enacted before it is implemented in the classroom.

- **A syllabus writer:** This person provided detailed information about the politics surrounding the drafting of the new syllabus. As a practicing history teacher, they afforded unique insight into the subject debates surrounding school history and how these were manifested in the formal production of the new syllabus.

- **The HTA president and BCC chair:** This person initially led teacher dissention in regards to the 1998 syllabus and was eventually nominated as the Chair of the BCC. The position gave the HTA an informal voice in the process of syllabus development. As a practising and politically active history teacher, this person had a

---

26 To ensure the anonymity of research sites and participants, pseudonyms are used throughout this study, although the gender of participants has not been disguised.
unique insight into history subject sub-cultures and into the identity of history teachers and how they might respond to this new syllabus document.

**Methods of data collection**

A strength of using the case study approach is its reliance on multiple methods of data collection. Multiple methods were used to collect data in the current study. These methods included document analysis, participant observation, interviews and focus groups. The use of multiple sources allows for methodological triangulation.

**Triangulation**

Triangulation is a strategy for improving the trustworthiness of research findings, as the use of various data collection procedures reduces the likelihood of researcher misinterpretation (Stake, 1998). More importantly, however, “what is sought in triangulation is an interpretation of the phenomenon at hand that illuminates and reveals the subject matter in a thickly contextualised manner” (Denzin, 1988, p. 512). As this study examines the sites, contexts and processes through which history teachers interpret and make meaning of the 1998 syllabus, a multi-method approach is highly relevant. Data collection methods for this study are varied and intended to build a multi-layered picture of the study topic rather than to compare cases and generalise findings. These methods are outlined in the following sub-sections.

(a) Document analysis

Document analysis is the analysis of the written or visual contents of a document. A person’s or group’s “conscious and unconscious beliefs, attitudes, values and ideas are often revealed in the documents they produce” (Fraenkel & Wallen, 1993, p. 389). Documents should be used when it appears they will yield “better data or more data … than other tactics” (Dexter as quoted in Merriam, 1998, p. 125). Document analysis is a subjective and intuitive process, as it involves the development of categories to describe segments of text or data. Document analysis is therefore an interpretive act, as it seeks to address “how things are said, and the underlying or symbolic meanings of texts” (Lupton, 1999, p. 453). As Apple (1982) asserts, one needs to examine not only what is said but what is not said, why and to what effect.
In this study, document analysis focused on the new syllabus, and enabled me to have a clearer understanding of the syllabus in terms of intended change, which was vital in gauging history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of it prior to classroom implementation.

(b) Participant observation

Participant observation is a method of data collection traditionally used by ethnographers. This method involves the researcher “taking part in the daily activities of people” (Burns, 2000). The manner in which participant observation is undertaken depends upon the nature of a particular study and the amount and depth of data required to address the study’s aims. My role as participant observer within the present study revolved around observation of formal departmental meetings. These observations provided information about incidents and histories (Wolcott, 1992, p. 21). Department meetings tended to focus on administrative and resource-based problems, which were often a result of the new syllabus. Observation of informal meetings or incidental conversations both in person and on the phone also yielded detailed contextual information and provided insight into the nature of inter- and intra-departmental politics. Goetz and LeCompte (1984) assert that observation is particularly useful when examining curricular change, as participants tend to respond to change in a variety of unintended ways, which the researcher can observe.

(c) Interviews

A series of interviews were undertaken with all participating history teachers. These interviews represented phases of data collection and each interview was sequential and built upon information gleaned through participant observation and prior interviews. The interview protocol for this study comprised a semi-structured set of questions that served as a guide only. Teachers’ responses to open-ended questions initiated a flow of conversation that focused on highlighted issues in each interview. The focus areas for each interview were:
• **Interview 1**: teachers’ career history, current teaching context, teaching philosophy (vision of self, vision of history as a subject, vision of history/HSIE department, vision of students), past experiences with change and perception of the role of teachers in the syllabus change process.

• **Interview 2**: the new syllabus change process and teachers’ role in this process, the bureaucratic function of change, teachers’ perceptions of change and what shapes these perceptions, responsibilities in view of change and feelings towards change, and teacher and departmental needs in view of change.

• **Interview 3**: Teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the new syllabus over time, programming to meet the learning needs of students, evaluation of initial programs, and the role of teachers in the preparation of new programs to address the requirements of the 1998 syllabus.

These protocols did form the basis for each interview, but interviews 2 and 3 were tailored to meet individual needs and to follow up on the prior responses of each teacher. Similarly, interview protocols provided broad parameters for each interview and within these parameters no limit was placed on the responses of participating teachers, nor on follow-up questions I posed. Interview protocols for all three interviews are included in appendix 4.2.

As previously discussed, a number of key informants were purposely selected for interview. Key-informant interviews consisted of semi-structured open-ended questions designed to elicit insider information about the formal syllabus development processes. Key informant interview protocol is included in appendix 4.3.

(d) **Field notes**

The collection of data for this study also included the keeping of field notes. These notes, typically recorded immediately after visiting the research sites (for participant observation, interviews and/or focus groups), aided my interpretation of audio-taped data. My field notes were unstructured and often recorded in point form participants’ expressions and physical reactions to interview or focus group issues and questions.
Perhaps of most importance are those field notes that pertain to emergent concepts and categories I could later use to interpret data.

(e) Focus groups

Focus groups allow for the observation of a large amount of data on a specified topic in a limited period of time (Morgan, 1988, p. 15). A focus group is more than a group interview: “the focus group sets up a situation where the synergy of the group, the interaction of its members, can add depth or insight of an interview” (Wellington, 2000, p. 125). In the present study, focus groups were unstructured, with no specific questions guiding the process. Rather, participating teachers were invited to talk freely about the new syllabus, as well as their experiences as a study participant. The aim of the focus group was to further uncover teachers’ individual and collective attitudes, beliefs and values concerning the new syllabus. The participation of the three history/HSIE departments (totalling nine teachers) and the four key informants was dependent on strict ethical guidelines, which are described below.

**Ethical considerations**

This study meets with the strict ethical guidelines set out by the Human Ethics Committee of the University of Sydney (see appendix 4.4 for ethics approval letter). In accordance with university guidelines and DET regulations, informed consent was sought from School Principals, the history/HSIE departments and the individual teachers and key informants involved in the study. Participation was voluntary and, through written and/or verbal consent, study participants were made aware that they could withdraw from the research at any time. Another way that I attempted to establish trust with research participants was through assurances of informed consent and confidentiality. Confidentiality agreements guaranteed teacher and school anonymity. As such, all participants and school names are pseudonyms. It must be noted, however, that no attempt has been made to alter the gender of participants.

**Member-checking**

A number of ethical considerations accompany the planning and implementation of this study. Much like the research design, these considerations are founded on the perception of reality as socially constructed; the researcher interacts with participants in order to understand their social constructions (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). The ethics of research
depend on “the researcher’s continual communication and interaction with research participants” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p125). Interpreting participants’ utterances with fidelity and authenticity is an important part of negotiating the ethical dilemmas inherent in research. One way in which I strove to ensure fidelity and establish trustworthiness was through member-checks. Transcribed interviews, focus-group responses and field notes were made available to participating teachers for member-checking. This allowed participants to provide interpretive feedback, which I could then act upon. An important part of ensuring trustworthiness was the establishment of trust between research participants and myself as researcher.

The research design pivoted on the honest and open involvement of people in their work situations, and the use of their own words, phrases and conceptualisations. A high ‘trust capital’ was therefore required. However, as Kincheloe and McLaren state, trust and trustworthiness are not measurable, there is no “TQ (trustworthiness quotient)” (1998, p. 288). In addition to confidentiality and assurances of anonymity, I believe that the development and maintenance of trust capital in this study centres on the following:

- Joint agreement NOT to make unfavourable comparisons between school contexts (for example, independent versus government schools);
- Joint agreement to provide teachers with full transcripts, a copy of the finished thesis 27 and access to any published material emanating from this study;
- Joint agreement to signal the commencement and completion of data collection periods. I would often stay at research sites for afternoon tea following interviews. Participating teachers requested that data NOT be collected at this time.

Research participants therefore played an important role in delineating the parameters of data collection. An important part of establishing trust capital was shared decision-making, as it ensured that the realities presented in this study are not merely my interpretation of the texts participants made available during data collection. Rather, interpretation of these texts is cyclic, in that teachers were encouraged to member-check interview transcripts and initial research findings. The realities presented in subsequent thesis chapters are therefore joint constructions between and amongst myself and research participants.

---

27 Thesis copies given to teachers will be edited to protect the anonymity of certain teachers within departments.
Limitations of the study

There are unavoidable factors associated with this study that I believe could potentially limit the findings of this study. These are the nature of the subject department as a research site and the process of member-checking. For reader clarity and methodological transparency I examine these potential limitations below and discuss how these limitations are addressed.

Generally, subject departments are known to be the domain of teachers, and teachers alone. It will be recalled that in previous chapters the politics of subject departments, and indeed the subject divisions upon which they are based, was discussed. Subject departments can act to help or hinder the work of its members. It goes without saying that some subject departments are open and inclusive environments whilst, at the other end of the spectrum, others are fractured and exclusive environments, entry to which is fiercely protected. Earlier I explained that I experienced difficulty in gaining initial access to three subject departments who fitted the study criteria. Three departments – the history department at Illangara High School, the history departments at Northbridge Ladies’ College and the HSIE department at St Bernadette’s College – eventually agreed to participate in the study. Table 4.1, on the following page, presents basic demographic information about the teachers participating in this study.

Table 4.1: Demography of the nine teachers participating in the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of teaching</th>
<th>Current position</th>
<th>Years at current school</th>
<th>Main teaching subject</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illangara</td>
<td>Darryl</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>H-HT</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illangara</td>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>C/R T</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illangara</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>C/R T</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northbridge</td>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>Late 60s</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>H-HT</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northbridge</td>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>C/R T</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>HSIE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northbridge</td>
<td>Jacqui</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>C/R T</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>HSIE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Bernadette’s</td>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>HSIE-HT</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>HSIE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Bernadette’s</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>C/R T</td>
<td>1.5</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Bernadette’s</td>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>C/R T</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>History</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key
C/R T = Classroom teacher
H-HT = History Head Teacher
HSIE-HT = HSIE Head Teacher
Once initial access was negotiated, however, I found that the parameters of data collection, as defined by study participants and their availability, continued to change. Table 4.2 below, provides a summary of data collected across the three research sites.

**Table 4.2 Summary of data collected across the three research sites**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Department</th>
<th>Teacher</th>
<th>Interviews (3)</th>
<th>Participant observation of department meetings</th>
<th>Focus groups (3)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Illangara</td>
<td>Darryl</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes – 8 meetings</td>
<td>Yes – 2 focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illangara</td>
<td>Nadine</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes – 8 meetings</td>
<td>Yes – 2 focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illangara</td>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes – 8 meetings</td>
<td>Yes – 2 focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northbridge</td>
<td>Gillian</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes – 1 meeting</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northbridge</td>
<td>Heather</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes – 1 meeting</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northbridge</td>
<td>Jacqui</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Yes – 1 meeting</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Bernadette’s</td>
<td>Matthew</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No meetings held</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Bernadette’s</td>
<td>Paul</td>
<td>1 (left school)</td>
<td>No meetings held</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>St Bernadette’s</td>
<td>Abby</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>No meetings held</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4.2 clearly displays there were varying levels of data collected within and across the three research sites, over the course of data collection. The quantity of data collected is not necessarily a predictor of the depth and quality of data. However, when one has more opportunity to witness certain behaviours or interactions, one also has more opportunity to relate data to theory and vice versa. For example, not all participating departments allowed me to observe their formal departmental meetings. The history department at Northbridge did not permit me to attend formal department meetings. This was due in part to the highly politicised nature of history within the school and its factionalised subject departments. The HSIE department at St Bernadette’s did not hold any formal departmental meetings, so again I was unable to collect participant observation data from this source. This led to an imbalance within the data as the history department at Illangara allowed full access to all formal and informal departmental meetings and more in-depth observational data was collected at this site. This imbalance is one of limitations of the study.
A result of this was that data collection at Illangara yielded a larger amount of data which was generally of greater depth in comparison to that collected at Northbridge and St Bernadette’s. Due to a shortage of casual teachers and an interest in this study, the Illangara history Head Teacher also invited me to teach on a casual basis within the history department. I subsequently spent three months teaching within the department whilst simultaneously collecting data. As a result, data collected at this site is rich and detailed. As I taught at the school and enjoyed this experience I am also wary of an overt bias towards this research site.

At Northbridge, access to participants became more restricted as data collection proceeded. For example, following my first participant observation of a formal history department meeting at Northbridge, the history teachers decided that they would rather I did not attend departmental meetings, as they didn’t see it as ‘relevant’ to the study. Perhaps the issue was not merely one of ‘relevance’ but rather one associated with cultural norms of privacy. Similarly, Heather and Jacqui were willing to participate in a focus group interview whilst Gillian and Ruth declined. Additionally, the history teachers at Northbridge were dispersed across three different staffrooms which were physically distanced. This hampered the collection of relational data.

I experienced similar obstacles to data collection at St Bernadette’s. For example, one of the teachers (Paul) left teaching to pursue a business venture during data collection. Further, the HSIE department operated at an informal level and no formal departmental meetings occurred during data collection. Again, the collection of relational or group level data was limited by the structural and organisational norms of this department.

Whilst this data imbalance may lead to a more in-depth analysis and understanding of the history department at Illangara, the imbalance is data in itself. This is because issues of access reveal much about the history/HSIE departments participating in the study, their structure, organisation and cultural norms. These issues are further addressed in subsequent chapters.

An added factor that could potentially limit study findings was that of member-checking. Interview and focus group transcripts were made available to the nine teachers and four key informants participating in this study. Participants only received transcripts of interviews and focus groups they were involved in. Of the 13 participants
and 35 transcripts distributed over the course of data collection, only two key informants returned transcripts with interpretive remarks and editorial suggestions. There are a number of possible reasons for this. Perhaps the majority of participants were satisfied with their constructions of reality as portrayed in transcripts. A more palpable explanation may be that, due to time constraints, few participants read transcripts. Awareness of potential study limitations guided the phases and processes through which data was analysed.

**Data analysis**

Merriam suggests that analysis is:

> the process of making sense out of the data. And making sense out of the data involves consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read – it’s the process of making meaning (1998, p. 178).

To make sense of the data, data collection and analysis were undertaken simultaneously (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). This enabled the study to be focused and shaped as it proceeded. Miles and Huberman (1994) argue that the activity of data collection and the analysis of data form a cyclic process. Merriam (1998) identifies three phases in the analysis of data. These are first level, second level and third level analysis. These phases are neither fixed nor are they linear. Rather, each phase informs the next and the researcher may cycle through the phases of analysis, particularly the later phases, many times before drawing and verifying conclusions.

**The role of theory in data analysis**

The role of theory in data analysis has been broadly debated (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998a; Strauss & Corbin, 1990; Wolcott, 1992). Whilst this debate is by no means dichotomous, it is interesting to note that polarised views exist. For example, the scientific research paradigm typically involves the application of theory to data to test hypotheses (‘top-down’ analysis) (Cohen & Manion, 1989). Alternatively, much has been said about the use of grounded theory methods for theory-building and the generation of new theories (Glaser, 1995; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Conventionally, grounded theory:

> is one that is inductively derived from the study of phenomenon it represents. That is, it is discovered, developed, and provisionally verified through systematic data collection and analysis of data pertaining to the phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 23).

In this sense, ‘true’ grounded theory is theory that emerges from the data alone.
(‘bottom-up’ analysis). However, as researchers, we bring with us our assumptions and theoretical understandings to our analysis of data. For example, as chapters 1-3 have established, the current study is based on the metaphor of middle ground curriculum. In examining history teachers’ interpretations and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation, this study operationalises and further conceptualises what I refer to as ‘middle ground curriculum theory’. An integral part of reconceptualising middle ground curriculum theory, however, relies on theory-building. Consequently, my approach to theorising is simultaneously ‘top-down’ and ‘bottom-up’.

**Software programs as analytic tools**

Data analysis is a complex and time-consuming process that involves moving between concrete data and abstracts concepts (Merriam, 1998). There are many tools to assist the researcher in the analysis of data. Increasingly, computer software programs have become popular analytic tools as they allow for the storage and retrieval of large amounts of audio-visual and textual data (for example, *QSR NUD*IST, *QSR NVivo* and *WinMax*). To assist in the management and analysis of data, I utilised *ATLAS.ti* Visual Qualitative Data Analysis, Management and Theory Building, version 4.2 for Windows (Scientific Software Development 1997-2000) (hereafter *ATLAS.ti*). *ATLAS.ti* is a qualitative data analysis software program that offers tools to manage, extract, compare, explore and reassemble meaningful pieces from often extensive amounts of data in a creative, flexible, yet systematic way (Scientific Software Development, 1997-2002).

*ATLAS.ti* is unique in that it allows for the development of relationships between codes (families of codes) and the establishment of networks which link codes to form semantic networks. I found *ATLAS.ti* to be an invaluable tool in the analysis of study data. I must stress, however, that software programs are only tools to assist in the analysis of data. They do not replace the intellectual and interpretive role of the researcher. To highlight the usefulness of *ATLAS.ti* to the aims of the current study, I will integrate discussion of *ATLAS.ti* with discussion of the various levels of data analysis undertaken throughout this study.
First level analysis

The following data were collected in the first phase of data analysis:

- The 1998 syllabus document,
- Participant observations,
- Interviews, and
- Focus groups.

Data collection and analysis commenced simultaneously. Upon release of the 1998 syllabus in November 1998, the syllabus document was analysed for content. This analysis was undertaken so that, prior to interviews, I would have an understanding of the content, structure and potential impact of the 1998 syllabus on the teaching, learning and assessment of history in NSW secondary schools. Document analysis of the 1998 syllabus also guided the development of interview and focus group protocols. To provide context for early discussion of the study, the results of this document analysis were presented in table 2.3 in chapter 2. Here, I explain the process through which document analysis was conducted.

Rather than relying on preconstructed codes and categories, Lupton suggests that document analysis be driven by a set of researcher questions which might include the following:

Why are certain words, phrases and images used to describe and portray the events, individuals, issues of social groups involved? What is the deeper or ‘hidden’ sociocultural meaning and assumptions conveyed by these words, phrases and images? Whose interests are served by these representations? (1999, p. 455).

It was with this in mind and a rather informed understanding of the syllabus development processes that I undertook to analyse the 1998 syllabus. Hilferty’s (1997) analysis of the 1992 syllabus provided a template for analysis of the 1998 syllabus (see appendix 2.3). This template was adapted to fit the aims of the current study, and the following sections/features of the 1998 syllabus were examined: structure, rationale, mandatory sections, content, values and attitudes, outcomes, and assessment and course descriptors. These sections/features were thematically coded according to two primary criteria:

1. Conceptualisation of history, and
2. Pedagogical implications.

These two categories emerged from a preliminary reading of the syllabus document and
were considered appropriate to the aims of this study, as debate surrounding the development of the 1998 syllabus also hinged on these two issues in late 1998 (HTA, 1998a, 1998b; Logan, 1998; Jamal, 1998a, 1998b).

After document analysis of the 1998 syllabus, all participants (nine teachers and four key informants) were interviewed (Interview 1) and audio-tapes were transcribed verbatim. Following distribution of Interview 1 transcripts for member-checking, I read each transcript to familiarise myself with content and emergent categories (sample transcript provided in appendix 4.5). Each interview transcript (primary document) was then electronically imported into the ATLAS.ti software program and primary documents were assigned to hermeneutic units. A hermeneutic unit is the most prominent data structure in the ATLAS.ti program. Hermeneutic units bundle particular primary documents (and associated quotes, codes, families and networks) together and allow for each case study to be treated as a separate entity.

Three hermeneutic units were consequently constructed – one each for the Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s history/HISE departments. A further hermeneutic unit was constructed to manage and analyse key informant data. It was important to separate these case studies across different hermeneutic units, as this allowed for data and coding to be bounded within a particular case. If I had entered all data into a single hermeneutic unit, differentiating those quotes, codes, families and networks associated with a particular history/HSIE department and/or key informants, would have been difficult.

**Second level analysis**

Some researchers use pre-established analytic categories or codes to reduce and conceptualise data (Chen & Ennis, 1995). Wary of pre-empting study findings, I chose not to use pre-established analytic categories and instead relied on emergent categories and codes as an analytic frame. Three superordinate categories emerged from this initial reading. These were:

1. Professional identity (PI),
2. Syllabus (SYLL), and
3. Teachers’ responses to the 1998 syllabus (TR).

Assuming these three categories might constitute or contain potential families of codes, all interviews were open coded. Open coding involves the generation and application of
a series of codes. Codes are used as classification devices of different levels of abstraction to create sets of related information pieces (Scientific Software, 1997-2000).

All interviews were hand coded and then coded electronically within the ATLAS.ti program (sample coded transcript provided in appendix 4.6). As codes emerged I was simultaneously delineating the properties and dimensions of each code. This was a time-intensive process that took several months to complete and resulted in the generation of 76 codes (see appendix 4.7). Not all of these codes fitted the three superordinate categories so a fourth emergent category was constructed – cultures of change (CC). All 76 codes fitted these four categories. This process was instrumental in the development of a practical and theoretically sensitive analytic frame.

Following the coding of Interview 1 transcripts, I became aware my analytic frame of 76 codes was impractical and far too descriptive. Merriam explains that the fewer the codes “the greater the level of abstraction, and the greater the ease with which you can communicate your findings to others” (1998, p. 185). I subsequently undertook a secondary analysis of Interview 1 transcripts. This process was largely inferential and as such I was simultaneously moving back and forth between Merriam’s second and third levels of analysis. Recoding involved making inferences from the original codes to the data and developing fewer codes that were better able to reflect the purpose of the research and encapsulate the meaning of data. My aim was to develop a more manageable number of codes that were exhaustive, mutually exclusive and sensitising (Merriam, 1998). Sensitising refers to the accurate naming of codes to reflect the conceptual orientation of a group of data segments. For example, my initial superordinate categories were reoriented to more accurately reflect the meanings emerging from data. Professional identity (PI) was adapted to teacher self-identity (TSI) and cultures of change (CC) became change environments (CE). As a result, an analytic frame containing 38 codes arranged across four categories emerged. An example of one category and its associated codes is displayed in table 4.3 on the following page (see appendix 4.8 for entire analytic frame).

---

28 Theoretical sensitivity involves “the ability to gave meaning to data, the capacity to understand, and ability to separate the pertinent from that which isn’t” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 42). I argue that both the researcher and the analytic frame must be theoretically sensitised.
Table 4.3 Example of category and associated codes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Code properties</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1998 syllabus</td>
<td>SYLL-92</td>
<td>Comments about 92 syllabus</td>
<td>Positive--negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(SYLL)</td>
<td>SYLL-98</td>
<td>Comments about 98 syllabus</td>
<td>Positive--negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYLL-CRN</td>
<td>Concerns about 98 syllabus</td>
<td>None--many</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYLL-98-DEV</td>
<td>Comments on syll dev process</td>
<td>Positive--negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYLL-PREV-CHG</td>
<td>Prev experience of syllabus change</td>
<td>Positive--negative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYLL-IMPT-DEPT</td>
<td>Perceived impact on department</td>
<td>High--low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYLL-IMPT-SUBJ</td>
<td>Perceived impact on subject</td>
<td>High--low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYLL-IMPT-TCH</td>
<td>Perceived impact on teaching</td>
<td>High--low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYLL-IMPT-LRNR</td>
<td>Perceived impact on learner</td>
<td>High--low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>SYLL-IMPT-RES</td>
<td>Perceived impact on resources</td>
<td>High--low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This analytic frame was subsequently used to code all remaining interview and focus group transcripts, as well as participant observation notes. This phase of analysis was a useful means of reducing raw data to categories and codes, making it more manageable. As transcripts were electronically coded, memos were simultaneously constructed. A memo is quite similar to a code but usually contains longer passages of text attached to a particular segment of text or quotations. Memos capture the textual ‘flesh’ of the study findings and were an important device for theorising data.

**Third level analysis**

The next phase of data analysis centred on the development of families of codes. At this point each category contained numerous codes. Whilst these codes revealed much about the data, how these codes and their associated text segments related to each other and the broader study aims was unknown. To explore the ways in which codes in particular categories and codes across all four categories were related, and how these in turn addressed the aims of the study, subsets of codes were developed. These subsets are called code families. To aid the development of code families *ATLAS.ti* has a specific networking capability. With the aid of networks I was able to express meaningful ‘semantic’ relationships between codes, families of codes and categories. To explain this function a visual sample is provided as figure 4.1 on the following page.
Figure 4.1: Network view of Matthew, Paul and Abby’s (St Bernadette’s HSIE department) initial collective view of the factors constraining their responses to the 1998 syllabus (TR-CNST)

Figure 4.1 is a network view of factors constraining history teachers’ responses to the 1998 syllabus at St Bernadette’s. Figure 4.1 identifies teachers’ perceptions of the BoS, the syllabus change environment at a system level and teacher apathy as factors constraining teachers’ enactment of this new syllabus document. Networks are easily established and handled and the user can link different codes to highlight varying relationships between codes. For example, the relationship between the syllabus change environment at a system level and teacher apathy was defined as “is a cause of” (=>), while the rest of the relationships are simply “is associated with” (= =). Several networks can be related to form a larger matrix demonstrating how various families of codes interact. For example in figure 4.1, the families of codes are flagged with a tree symbol. The network view presented in figure 4.1 centres on TR-CNST (factors constraining teachers’ responses to the 1998 syllabus). A code family for TR-PRAG (teachers’ pragmatic responses to the 1998 syllabus) is also flagged in figure 4.1. To connect these two families you simply click on the TR-PRAG node and the network view for TR-PRAG appears.
Having established code families and network views across all four hermeneutic units I used these network views to construct an individual matrix for all four hermeneutic units. Miles and Huberman (1994) refer to these as meta-matrices. These matrices were so large that I returned to a paper and pen style of analysis to map how codes and families of codes within each hermeneutic unit interacted. This process revealed different points of code convergence within each hermeneutic unit. This allowed me to start to draw conclusions about how history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. These conclusions, however, were specific to particular cases. In order to synthesise understanding across these three case studies I employed a process I refer to as metasynthesis. Elsewhere, Sandelowski (1997) has used this term to explain analysis across separate yet similar interpretive studies. I use the term metasynthesis to describe the synthesis of research findings across collective case studies. This is similar to Glass, McGraw and Smith’s (1981) advocacy for meta-analysis and Noblit and Hare’s (1988) meta-ethnography. Metasynthesis allows for a systematic comparison of the three case studies within this study. It also allows the drawing of cross-case conclusions. Metasynthesis is the final stage of data analysis. Below, I define metasynthesis and outline its practical application within this study.

**Metasynthesis**

I draw on Noblit and Hare’s (1988) notion of meta-ethnography to define metasynthesis. Noblit and Hare (1988) view meta-ethnography as a methodology that is intended for multiple uses. Its first application is, as Sandelowski (1997) has also stated, the synthesis of findings across varying interpretive studies. The second application, which is relevant to this study, centres on interpreting multiple case studies within a single interpretive study. I avoid using the term meta-ethnography, as this study is not a traditional ethnography. Instead I use the term metasynthesis, as it emphasises the process of synthesising the findings of collective case studies to create new understandings and new knowledge. Strike and Posner offer the following definition of synthesis:

> Synthesis is usually held to be an activity or the product of activity where some set of parts is combined or integrated into a whole … (Synthesis) involves some degree of conceptual innovation, or employment of concepts not found in the characterization of the parts as means of creating the whole (as quoted in Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 16).

The aim of metasynthesis within this study was to synthesise the findings of the three
case studies as they relate to the middle ground conceptual framework. At a practical level this involved using the meta-matrices of all three case studies as a starting point for ‘readings’ of the studies. Reading the meta-matrices involved the construction of a narrative account for each of the three case studies. These narrative accounts describe how the history teachers within each case study interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus. The middle ground conceptual framework provides a comparable structure for the construction of these narratives. These narrative accounts constitute the research findings, and case study accounts are presented in chapters 5, 6 and 7.

In chapter 8, I present the next phase of metasynthesis by determining how these studies are related. This involves ‘translating’ the studies into one another. Noblit and Hare (1988) contend that, in its simplest form, translation involves treating the narratives as analogies. They also affirm the complexity of translating studies into one another by asserting that:

Translations are especially unique syntheses, because they protect the particular, respect holism, and enable comparison. An adequate translation maintains the central metaphors and/or concepts of each account in relation to other key metaphors or concepts in that account. It also compares both the metaphors or concepts and their interactions in one account with … (those) in the other accounts (Noblit & Hare, 1988, p. 28).

The translation of narrative accounts into one another is once again facilitated by the use of the middle ground conceptual framework. This framework allows me to identify, compare and contrast the sites, contexts and processes through which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus across the three history/HSIE departments. It also allows me to theorise the similarities and differences between narrative accounts and to make idiographic generalisations about study findings.

**Summary**

This chapter has presented the research methodology. The research methodology falls within the interpretive paradigm and is constructivist in nature. I have discussed the strengths and weaknesses of this methodological framework and justified its use in the current study. The research design was subsequently described and the methods of data collection were overviewed. A number of potential limitations are inherent in any research study. In this chapter I have identified these limitations and discussed ways in
which these limitations have been methodologically addressed. To ensure the trustworthiness of the study and to provide background to research findings, data analysis techniques have also been extensively described and examined. The three case studies – the history department at Illangara High School, the history department at Northbridge Ladies’ College and the HSIE department at St Bernadette’s College – are presented in the following chapters. Each chapter discusses:

- The sites, contexts and processes shaping the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus, and
- How history teachers interpreted and enacted the 1998 syllabus before they implemented it in the classroom, at an individual and departmental level.
CHAPTER 5

THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT,
ILLANGARA HIGH SCHOOL:
RESISTANCE AND PRAGMATISM

Introduction

In this chapter I present a case account of the history department at Illangara High School. The history department is a discrete department containing three full-time history teachers – Darryl, Nadine and Tom. This case analysis seeks to illuminate how Darryl, Nadine and Tom individually and collectively perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus in the middle ground of curriculum. The discussion first introduces the school context and examines how Darryl, Nadine and Tom function as a history department. To do so, a biographical account of each of the three teachers is presented. These accounts examine Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s teacher self-identity and establish how they perceive history as a school subject and how they consequently perceive their role and function within the history department.

I subsequently analyse the nature and importance of the sites, contexts and processes permeating the history department and shaping Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s individual and collective interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus before they implement it in the classroom.

The school context

Illangara is a coeducational government secondary school (years 7-12) situated in outer suburban Sydney. Built in the 1960s to cope with a population boom, the school now caters to an ever-shrinking student population (approximately 400 in 1999/2000). Students are drawn from a low socio-economic community where unemployment is high.

29 History is the only subject taught in this department.
and literacy levels, as measured by standardised basic skills tests, are low. Many students come from single-parent families, a significant number of whom are welfare dependent and experience generational poverty. There is diversity among student ethnic backgrounds including students of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent. However, the majority of students are from an Anglo-Celtic background. Student absenteeism and truancy are frequently as high as 30-40% on any given day. To curb student absenteeism the school day is structured around four 80-minute periods per day. A ten-metre high barbed-wire fence surrounds the school and a number of strikingly new classrooms sit amongst older classrooms as evidence of arson attacks and vandalism in the school and local community. Illangara was classed as a disadvantaged school in the now defunct Disadvantaged Schools Program (DSP). To cater for the special needs of students, the school incorporates a support unit for behavioural disorders and learning difficulties and self-funds a full-time literacy support teacher.

The school suffers from a number of stereotypes, which stem not only from the area in which the school is located but also from community and media perceptions that students from Illangara are ‘failing’ their HSC. There is a perception that many teachers come to Illangara, stay the required three years and then leave for a ‘better’ school. This staff instability is difficult for students and teachers to deal with and in the past few years Illangara has been assigned a number of first-year-out teachers, which certainly added to the vibrancy and enthusiasm of the schools’ culture but also placed certain demands and constraints on the school and other teachers. Despite a history of rapid staff turnover, Illangara had maintained a fairly stable staff in the years immediately preceding data collection.

A number of significant changes occurred at Illangara whilst this study was being conducted. In 2000 Illangara became part of a five-school college. The introduction of a collegiate structure resulted in Illangara becoming a junior high school (years 7-10). History teachers expressed many reservations about this restructuring, including the potential impact on: career prospects, career rewards such as the teaching of senior students, staffing, student clientele, morale, school and departmental culture, resource allocation, and timetabling.
One of the immediate impacts of this structural change has been to increase an already high staff turnover and at the end of 1999, 14 of approximately 40 teachers left Illangara, with a further 13 departing at the end of the 2000 school year. Perhaps surprisingly, the remaining teachers talked of a strong sense of community and support amongst staff at a general level. They also, almost uniformly, held strong unionist beliefs and many teachers were active members of regional professional teaching associations such as the HTA. The formation of the college brought with it a new leadership structure, and at the end of Term 1 2000 a new School Principal was appointed.

The history teachers

To build a picture of the history department and how it operates, biographical accounts of Darryl, Nadine and Tom are provided below. These accounts describe the teacher self-identity of Darryl, Nadine and Tom as contingent on their formal education and training, learner and teacher experience, career stage, conception of self as teacher, conception of subject and the perceived constraints and enablers of their individual and collective teacher practice.

Darryl

Darryl, the history Head Teacher, was 35 years old and had taught in a number of capacities (primary and secondary schools, full-time and casually) for the last 15 years. He originally trained as a primary teacher and retrained as a secondary school history teacher in the early 1990s. Illangara was his first full-time appointment as a secondary school history teacher. Darryl started teaching at Illangara in 1993, and at seven years’ service he was one of the medium to longer stay teachers within the school.

When asked to talk about how he viewed himself as a teacher, Darryl explained that he struggles with the dualisms or tensions he sees in teaching – the nurturing of student learning versus behaviour management, teaching and interaction with learners versus administration, effective learning versus time constraints and changing societal expectations of teachers – the teacher as everything to everybody – “butcher, baker,
candle-stick maker and pseudo parent” (i2, 851-853).

Whilst many teachers would find the socio-economic and educational disposition of students at Illangara demanding, if not overwhelming, Darryl is very pragmatic in his attitude towards his students. He was quick to admit that:

Students shy away from doing homework; they view school as an 8:30 to 2:55pm occupation, shall we say. From a kids point of view, a lot of kids have part-time work which takes them on into the 1am, 2am type time slot (i2, 1127-1133).

He viewed student characteristics as ones that must be taken into account and his teaching strove to accommodate for the particular student clientele at Illangara. Whilst Darryl has defined himself as a ‘humanitarian’ teacher he regularly dealt with student misbehaviour: “I am definitely not that dictatorial, although I like to think now that if push comes to shove the kids eventually know enough is enough” (i2, 373-376).

These comments reflect Darryl’s strong belief that students should be taught a broad range of responsibilities and skills whilst at school. Darryl therefore saw himself primarily as a teacher of student skills and not a teacher of historical content and skills alone. He viewed the development of students’ everyday skills as central to his teaching – “one of the things I have been saying in the last couple of years to the year 7 kids is ‘now I am going to teach you how to think’ and they look at me quizzically” (i2, 452-455).

Darryl did acknowledge, however, that student ability and lack of motivation dictates teaching methods, content, skills and the speed with which learning progresses. Whilst Darryl is understanding of students’ needs and is keen to cater for them, he did find some aspects of students’ backgrounds frustrating, namely the lack of parental involvement and the socio-economic effects on student learning:

So, whereas in other schools, in other places, they might automatically do homework, whereas some of our kids, if they are asked to read, say, more than two pages of text, they dig in their heels – ‘I’m not reading all of that, that’s too much!’ So there’s the lack of experience and determination to do a little

30 Refers to interview 2, line 851-853, within ATLAS.ti. Each interview is numbered within ATLAS.ti. Each hermeneutic unit (case study) contains all interviews related to a particular case.

31 Darryl explains this thus: “now by that (humanitarian) I mean … my belief that every student is treated equally and fairly until they behave contrary to my, to my beliefs and my standards and even then they still have a chance … to redeem themselves. So, I suppose in a way, that is almost heading towards the belief that every human being is basically good inside” (i2, 354-363).
Students’ low literacy levels, as measured by standardised public tests such as ELLA (English Language and Literacy Assessment), impact upon the resources history teachers were able to use. Rather than relying on textbooks, history teachers had to modify resources to fit the school literacy program. Whilst the literacy support teacher was available to aid teachers with the integration of literacy initiatives into programs and specific resources, the literacy needs of students undeniably created a larger workload for teachers. In many ways, therefore, students and their specific needs constrain teacher practice. One way in which Darryl and his department tried to address student needs was through the development and evaluation of tailor-made resources to fit both student needs and syllabus requirements.

Darryl’s interest in areas of leadership was evident prior to his promotion, as he was an active and readily accepted member of many of the school’s committees, including the Curriculum, Aboriginal Education and Technology Committees. As Head Teacher, Darryl represented his department at a school level, making the appropriate application and justification for funding. Whilst obtaining funding was not a competitive undertaking, Darryl admitted that ‘selling your subject’ and maintaining, if not increasing, student numbers was vital to the maintenance of the department. Maintaining department status within the school and a stable history teaching staff were also crucial to the survival of the history department.

Dwindling student numbers at a school level had meant that in the space of ten years the history department had gone from a staff of five full-time teachers to a staff of three full-time teachers. During this time there had also been three different history Head Teachers. High staff turnover and a shrinking department created tensions for Darryl’s leadership and the functioning of the department, as he explained:

Each year I have to think: are we able to bring in another pure historian? Or do we, like we’ve done for the last two or three years, have not quite enough for a full-time, permanent historian but farm out some periods to some English teachers, and that’s what we’ve had to do for the last two years (i2, 206-213).

‘Farming in’ outside (non-history) teachers to teach within the history department was
also problematic, as it could cause departmental fragmentation:

Well, just looking at that fragmentation of a professional body – I have to supervise in a loose sort of sense a language teacher who also teaches history, a couple of English teachers who teach history, and they do a fair job considering they are not everyday history teachers … and that’s just an added thing that I think that I don’t need, and it’s difficult to give them the support that I know I can give my history faculty members because they are way at the other end of the school (i10, 399-406).

Specialised history teachers were, according to Darryl, those who had tertiary training in history:

If you’re not trained in it you don’t know the ebb and the flow and the nuances and the intricacies of your subject … Anyone can teach but whether you can teach and get hold of the content and then relax with the content so that you can do it your own way effectively is a different thing, otherwise it becomes just chalk and talk (i10, 430-436).

Having specialist teachers within the history department was important, as it promoted a departmental culture based on shared pedagogical understandings. Darryl was however sceptical of what he viewed as ‘super’ subject-specialism as it could be divisive:

On the one hand I am opposed to super-specialisation because it locks out other members of a faculty … getting experience in teaching other areas but then as the department [DET] and the society becomes more success oriented or league table oriented … I suppose I could see the potential merit in having the ancient history teacher, the modern history teacher (i10, 483-490).

Even though his department had to compete against other departments within the school for student numbers, teaching hours, resources and professional development funding, Darryl felt that history was no more or less important than other subjects. His origins as a primary teacher shaped this belief: “coming from a primary school background I have a less high brick wall around my subject than say what others may have; I believe that each curriculum area builds the whole person” (i10, 454-457). Having said this, Darryl was aware of competing within-subject debates, namely about the role and purpose of school history. In response to these debates he was firmly in favour of inquiry-based history as opposed to grand-narrative history. He explained that inquiry-based history “makes history meaningful to the students we have here” (i3, 367-368). For Darryl, it was not about competing visions of history; rather, it was the value placed on history as a vehicle for school learning.

Darryl was an active member of both the Teachers’ Federation32 and the HTA. His

---

32 The Teachers’ Federation is the NSW government school teachers’ union, membership of which is
awareness of current teaching issues and those related to the 1998 syllabus were shaped by this contact. Darryl made sure he was informed of decisions and developments that affected his teaching life and that of his staff. As Head Teacher, his concerns were both administrative (that history teachers are implementing the curriculum) and pedagogic (that the needs of learners are being met):

   My concern as a Head Teacher is that the [syllabus] programs we have work, that the teachers produce the things they need to produce and are comfortable with it, that they can make something work for the client group that they have, but with the bottom line being that we can afford to do the best we can resource-wise for the kids (i3, 841-847).

His concerns also centred on meeting the professional needs of his staff. With a limited budget he tried to provide Nadine and Tom with professional development opportunities. His view of what constitutes good professional development shaped the professional development opportunities he encouraged staff to participate in. He believed that generic professional development opportunities were not as valuable as the subject-specific professional development opportunities offered by the HTA. In fact he felt that DET offered little in the way of assistance for syllabus change, of which he was critical:

   The departmental inservices in my opinion are both a) boring and b) don’t meet the needs of actual curriculum faculties … the focus areas that the Department sets up are generic, as opposed to, like, teaching ideas for the new history syllabus, which are the more interesting ones because they’re the things that impact upon actual teaching and learning in the classroom (i2, 603-617).

Whilst he acknowledged the expertise and instructive leadership the previous Head Teacher had leant the department, he had given the role a personal touch and felt that perhaps he allowed teachers within his department more flexibility and opportunities for leadership:

   So, that training and development, the conscious need for that, that’s one of things that I thought wasn’t met by the past two Head Teachers, and that is one of the conscious things that I wanted to put in and since then the staff have gone to university training … I have actually got a couple of the teachers to actually present some of our work at the days where that didn’t happen before, so I suppose it has probably, well it’s increased one hundred percent (i2, 630-642).

Whilst acknowledging the strengths of the history department, Darryl voiced concern voluntary.
about the impact of structural and curricular change on the role and function of the
history department and its members:

Increasingly over the last decade and a half, teachers have had to deal with
things other than the teaching of their subject, so I suppose if all we had to do
was turn up, teach a fantastic history lesson and every five or ten years change
the history syllabus and all we had to do was teach rather than be counselors and
parents, then the change wouldn’t seem so insurmountable. It is all the other
things that teachers are now expected to do at the end of this decade, as opposed
to a decade or two ago, that makes syllabus changes so daunting, because it is
just another thing that we have to do (i2, 846-858).

As Head Teacher Darryl acknowledged that it was his role to navigate the history
department through what he saw as ‘troubled waters’. Throughout the period of data
collection (1999-2000), Darryl and his department were facing change on multiple
fronts. The 1998 syllabus was being released for implementation in 1999, the same year
that new HSC history syllabuses and a new HSC assessment structure were being
introduced. In 2000 Illangara was restructured under a collegiate plan and became a
junior high school with a new leadership structure. At the same time, NSW public
school teachers were embroiled in a protracted pay dispute with the DET, which
resulted in a series of rolling strikes. It was therefore against a backdrop of industrial
action and structural and curricular change that Darryl and his department had to enact
the 1998 syllabus. This placed significant professional and personal demands on the
Illangara history teachers. When asked about the personal cost of educational change
Darryl spoke frankly:

Over the last couple of months I’ve equated teaching with almost the
characteristics of a monk, where increasingly the amount of time you are
required to spend is larger so therefore you almost become married to the church
meaning your teaching. You try to fit other things around it where you can. I feel
a little bit guilty if by Sunday afternoon I haven’t completed the tasks that I have
written out on my little job sheet and really I should think – well, hey, if I don’t
get it done, I don’t get it done, I am only human (i3, 1185-1196).33

Despite what he saw as ‘change overload’, budgetary and time constraints, Darryl
attempted to enable the implementation of the 1998 syllabus by organising a series of
staggered planning days to discuss and construct programs to meet the requirements of
this new syllabus document. The first, the year 7 planning day, was on July 1st 1999

33 At the beginning of 2000 Darryl’s marriage broke down. Whilst he attributed this breakdown to
number of things, one was that he didn’t spend enough time with his wife because of work
whilst the year 8 planning day was on April 14th 2000. The processes and outcomes of the planning days are discussed in greater detail in later sections of this chapter.

**Nadine**

Nadine, the only female member of the immediate history department (other female teachers are ‘farmed in’ from the English and language departments), had been teaching for nine years, five of which have been at Illangara. Nadine originally trained as a history/geography teacher, which was unusual in the late 1980s when she did her education degree. The introduction of KLAs and the positioning of history within the HSIE KLA in the early 1990s have increasingly resulted in the formal tertiary preparation of history/geography teachers as opposed to the traditional history/English tertiary training.

Having taught in a number of short-term positions in what Nadine described as ‘difficult’ schools, she came to Illangara in 1995 and has held an unpaid position as year advisor since 1997. She recalled that even though she was desperate for a full-time teaching position she cried when she received notification of her appointment to Illangara – yet more evidence of the strong stereotypes that surround the school – “Oh yeah, I rang up and I said – OK Illangara, desperate for a job, don’t want to go there” (i4, 238-239). The deciding factor was, for Nadine, the opportunity to teach history, as she strongly viewed herself as a history specialist: “when I called I asked – but what is it, a history or geography position? And if he had answered geography I wouldn’t have taken it” (i4, 240-247).

Like most teachers at Illangara, Nadine fiercely defended the school from what she viewed as an unjustified reputation, a reputation that she believed was related more to socio-economic stereotypes and prejudice. Her defensive responses were founded on the many occasions in which she has been ignored by other teachers and even socially derided when she told people that she taught at Illangara. Nadine was conscious of the fact that others may have dismissed her teaching expertise and experience because they perceived it as ‘crowd control’ or ‘behaviour management’ as opposed to academic learning. She resented other teachers, the media and the public knocking teachers in commitments.

---

34 The school population is lower than the DET threshold for payment of year advisors.
‘tougher’ schools:

I always defend the place and, you know, I am quite happy to swap with someone who thinks it’s not a good place and do one of those jobs where you just sort of work from 8:30 till 3pm and you just open a textbook and it’s all done (i4, 612-617).

When asked to describe the teachers at Illangara Nadine responded:

Young, enthusiastic, innovative, willing to try anything and give it a go, dynamic … I think everyone gives things a go here. It’s not just history, you see wonderful things happen in every subject and I know that doesn’t happen everywhere and I know that doesn’t happen in the best schools (i4, 630-636).

Nadine also believed that the younger teaching staff and staff turnover were positive aspects of the school culture:

I value the new people in the school because they have just been to uni and they have so much knowledge … their knowledge of the syllabuses is often very good and detailed because they have had that information (i4, 864-870).

In fact she was highly critical of teachers who remain in what she sees as ‘easy schools’ for much of their career.

Nadine believed that a ‘good’ school was often perceived to be related to student clientele and academic results as measured by School Certificate and HSC examinations. This belief immediately positioned a school like Illangara (whose HSC and School Certificate results are in the lower end of the spectrum) as a ‘bad’ school whose teachers are, by association, ‘bad’ teachers:

There is a perception [about this school] and I also think there is a perception about teachers who are in these schools, that they are somehow not as good as teachers in other schools, and that’s not just a general public opinion. Even my husband said to when we were first going out – what did you do wrong to get out there? Now he sees it differently but I think there is a perception in the general public that we have done something wrong to get out here or that we’re not very good teachers and that’s why we are out here (i4, 588-599).

It was, therefore, not surprising that teachers at Illangara had found ways in which to raise morale and their profile through association with teacher subject associations, universities, networks and a series of research projects that were being conducted within the school at the time of data collection. The culture, morale and identity of the school, and by association its teachers and learners, could however be easily undermined, according to Nadine. She was concerned that the introduction of the college and the establishment of Illangara ‘campus’ as a junior high school could change the way in which she viewed herself as a teacher and the ways in which others (including
prospective employers) would view her:

There are so many implications for teachers. I mean we trained to teach years 7-12 – most people like to have that range of students, they certainly want the professional and personal knowledge and growth and learning that comes with senior classes, there’s no thought about that (i4, 943-948).

Nadine’s comments reveal that teaching senior classes is related to teacher status and seniority – it is a reward, perhaps for some teachers one of the few professional rewards of teaching. Nadine felt that having this opportunity taken away would significantly affect her work life and her future career prospects including her ability to be able to do HSC marking.35 Perhaps this just succeeds in further lowering the status of teachers at Illangara: they would have to teach the more behaviourally difficult junior students without the respite of senior classes. Underlying her comments, I could sense anger – anger that DET had not only done little to improve the status and morale of Illangara teachers but had in fact worsened teacher status and morale.

Nadine was willing to critique her own teaching and keen to explore her vision of herself as a teacher. She saw herself as a learner, although her vision of learning and teaching relies heavily on subject matter or content:

There is always something you can learn, every time [that you teach a topic]. Doing civil rights with year 10, there’s always extra stuff you could learn (i4, 309-312).

She also believed that, because of the enormous amount of content history teachers must master, history teachers are hard working in comparison to teachers of what she perceives to be more static subjects:

I think that history teachers have a love of learning that some other subjects don’t continue in some cases. It’s [history] a lot of work and everything changes, I mean you are not just teaching biology only or chemistry, you’ve got different things and there are always different things to explore in history (i4, 290-297).

Nadine at times felt that she lacked content knowledge, again reinforcing the importance she attributes to it:

Yeah, but it’s stressful when I can’t remember things. But that’s the problem with history, too, there’s so much. You can’t know everything and then the kids ask you these really obscure questions (i4, 887-891).

Nadine acknowledged that few of her students come to school with much historical or

35 Teachers can only apply for HSC marking if they have taught an HSC course in the last two years.
even current affairs knowledge, and she accepted that this meant she had to move slowly through content material and attempt to make it relevant and interesting to the needs of her students. Nadine explained that the rewards of working with less academically able students are different to the rewards of teaching a ‘good senior class’. With her students, Nadine tried to celebrate the small successes:

We [the students and Nadine] wrote an essay introduction together and they [students] were able to go off and write each paragraph and after each paragraph I’d check and give them the OK to go on and I was nearly bursting, I was so proud of them thinking that they were doing so well (i4, 359-365).

Her consideration of student abilities meant that

We do a lot of oral work so I know they’ll cope with that because in the exam they can always ask me to read them things or some of them will be entitled to readers when the history examination commences” (i4, 385-390).³⁶

She was also confident that she had managed to build a good rapport with her students both in the classroom and as a year advisor, although at times she became frustrated with students’ attitudes towards school and their lack of respect for teachers. She also felt that it was important to make learning interesting for her students and concedes that this was perhaps not hard in history because of the nature of the subject.

Nadine was aware of the impact of school-related stereotypes on students at Illangara. She was also aware that some students believed that their career prospects were lowered because of people’s perceptions or misperceptions about the school, and she was pragmatic in her advice to students:

So I keep stressing to them that it doesn’t matter where you go, the teacher will be more or less the same, the resources can be better or worse but usually they are the same, you think things are crap here but they’re not … it’s the attitude of all the other kids that might make that school a better school in terms of people’s perceptions and that’s all it is – it’s the attitudes of kids, so improve your attitude of the school (i4, 689-698).

Nadine was therefore student oriented in her perception of herself as a teacher, and she saw history as a versatile school subject or vehicle through which students could learn. History has a sense of general purpose and can be taught to a broad range of student abilities:

History is one of those subjects that you can sell on the point that it helps you in everything and it’s very interesting … history is a nice subject that fits into

³⁶ She is referring to the introduction of the HGCC School Certificate examination mandated in the 1998 syllabus. All NSW year 10 students will sit for this exam as of 2002.
different levels, the kids don’t turn around and say – I hate history, well very rarely. They hate maths, they hate science ... but they always like history because it’s either a story that they enjoy or they can abstract it, they can make those connections between things today and they can learn a lot more about things and get something out of it (i4, 484-492).

Nadine enjoyed working within the history department because she viewed it as a collegial place – one where she was heard and her ideas were encouraged and appreciated. Her comments on the department, however, centred almost solely on Darryl. She spoke of Darryl with admiration and compared his leadership style with that of the previous Head Teacher:

I think I feel comfortable enough [in the department] because Darryl creates that, whereas XX [previous head teacher] was really brilliant, she’s incredibly inspirational and you got lots of ideas out of her but in some respects it was very much her work that we were doing, whereas Darryl isn’t like that, he’s again, very brilliant and inspirational in very different ways. I aspire to have his knowledge, his memory of things because I forget things, I teach it and I forget it and I’ll learn it again the next year. He [Darryl] just remembers things, he has that knowledge that he can bring and he’s wonderful, you can sit down and say - OK, modern history what have I got to do and he can say this, this, this and this because he has taught it and he is involved in the History Association for XX [the metropolitan area] and he also has that incredible understanding I think, but he also allows us a lot of free reign in what we do and I think that allows you to develop (i4, 34-53).

She felt lucky to be in a supportive department, as Darryl allowed her a leadership role within the department. Nadine’s ideas for the new year 7 program were very much supported and encouraged by Darryl:

CH: Did you enjoy leading the Year 7 programming day?

Nadine: That’s what’s so good, we just work so well together, Darryl is our leader in some respects and in some issues but at other times it’s, you can come up with a suggestion and he would never, ever, ever turn around and say no, I don’t think so, because it’s not him and also because he allows us to be creative like that and put our input into the work we do in history … and that program is my baby (i4, 1545-1159).

Nadine had therefore assumed a position of authority in terms of programming for the 1998 syllabus and this raised her confidence in terms of her leadership ability. She found the experience professionally rewarding, with several colleagues suggesting that she may be ready to seek promotion. Her enthusiasm and motivation to fill this role were however dampened by the end of 1999 as she felt that she was receiving little help from Darryl, who was about to travel overseas for the first time. On several occasions Nadine also revealed some angst towards Tom, who she felt was at times arrogant and
lazy. All was perhaps not as collegial and friendly as it had at first appeared.

**Tom**

Tom arrived at Illangara in 1997 as a targeted graduate teacher. His comments on teaching were markedly narrower in their scope, perhaps because as a new teacher he was preoccupied with two things – mastery of content knowledge and classroom management. Before he could diversify his teaching methods, Tom really felt that familiarity with content material was an overriding concern. Tom’s conceptualisation of self and subject were very much a consequence of his career stage and his attempts to deal with the demands of teaching.

In 1999 Tom was 27 and was in his third year of teaching. By this time he had taught the same course more than once. This had led to feelings of content familiarity and greater self-confidence. This allowed Tom to move beyond a content focus:

> It’s probably only this year where I have found my feet and been able to do that, because the first few years it was really a matter of learning the content whereas now I am getting there with the content it is more a matter of well, OK, how am I going to put this across, this content? (i6, 596-602).

Tom found the many demands placed on teachers initially difficult to balance and for him many of his professional rewards came from teaching senior students. For a new teacher, senior classes are part of the development of teacher status and an important part of building a career. For Tom, who wasn’t sure that he would be a ‘career teacher’, senior classes provided him with a break from the monotony of classroom management issues prevalent at Illangarra.

Like many new teachers, Tom soon found that perfectionism had no real place in teaching as “you can’t be everything to everyone” and whilst he felt it was his responsibility to provide students with ‘good classes’, he also felt that a greater percentage of his preparation time should be spent on senior classes – perhaps this also reflects his belief that real teaching is about historical knowledge or subject matter and not primarily about classroom management. Tom entered teaching almost as an afterthought. Married, young and with small children, he decided to defer his law degree.

---

37 Each year DET interviews all graduating education students and ‘targets’ a certain number of teachers for immediate employment. These positions are known as ‘targeted graduate teachers’.
and instead complete a Diploma of Education. His reason for specialising in history teaching was his exposure to history at university. For him, teaching senior classes, who studied a more ‘academic’ history program, made teaching worthwhile:

I like the time that you spend on the topics, whereas in junior classes it seems to be pretty rushed or fairly surface and superficial. They’re more, you can relate to seniors much more easily, those kinds of reasons (i6, 705-707).

Often Tom felt guilty that he wasn’t able to give more to his students and this was, in part, due to his family commitments. Tom has two very young children and found it impossible to take work home with him. This is not to suggest that Tom was lax in his preparation – I would often see him working on the computer at lunchtime, recess and after school. Still, unable to do everything he would like to, Tom suffered feelings of guilt.

When asked about the specific pressures that he felt as a teacher he spoke not only of the pressures of being a new teacher but also of the pressures and opportunities of working in a school like Illangarra. Tom felt that the school was full of teachers who were “pretty talented I think, generally pretty enthusiastic” (i6, 254-255).

He felt, however, that being amidst such a talented group of teachers, all of whom were dealing with difficult students with specific needs, also created pressure to perform:

It makes it difficult for teachers but also challenging in lots of ways. I suppose also there may be a little bit of pressure on teachers in terms of literacy, in terms of trying to live up to some of the standards set by some of the leading teachers like XX [English Head Teacher] … and I think strewth, how can my students ever get that out of a class? You think gee, obviously the students can do it, it’s a matter of setting up the learning environment so that they can do it regularly (i6, 222-238).

On a positive note Tom felt that, as he had had to constantly learn new content material, he was more easily able to adapt to curriculum change:

So like I was saying, because I have only just started, every year so far I have been teaching at least … well my first year I taught six new subjects. I had never taught any of them before and never studied any of them before, so it was all new. Last year I had four new subjects I had never studies before and this year I’ve only got two new subjects but they’re year 12 subjects I’ve never taught

38 The Diploma of Education is a one-year postgraduate qualification that enables one to teach in NSW schools.
39 In comparison, neither Darryl nor Nadine had children.
before so I’ve always had that change in learning, so to me it’s [a new syllabus] not a big deal (i6, 744-752).

This does however indicate that his conception of a new syllabus is primarily one based on content.

At the time of data collection Tom was feeling fed-up with student behaviour and was making the decision to leave Illangara, so his comments on students were shaped by these feelings. He felt that student behaviour affected his work life too greatly and he was tired of the daily battles with students: “no matter what you do, they don’t seem to be improving and they don’t have any … it’s more than manners, it’s respect” (i6, 258-260). At the end of 1999 Tom left Illangara and commenced work in an independent school.

The emphasis early career teachers place on the acquisition of content and classroom management is well documented (Huberman, 1995). Tom’s teacher self-identity was significantly different to those of Darryl and Nadine, who to varying degrees viewed themselves as teachers, learners and leaders. Specifically, Tom’s teacher self-identity was related to the acquisition and transmission of historical content knowledge. Tom had, however, participated in the development of a year 9-10 history program called ‘Great Mysteries’. This program was inquiry based and encouraged students to take on the role of historical detectives. Tom thoroughly enjoyed teaching this course and he was the primary contributor to the maintenance and further development of this course.

When asked how he viewed himself in terms of subject specialism, Tom identified himself as an ancient history teacher. He sees history primarily in terms of historical knowledge and referred to history in a quasi-academic sense as a ‘discipline’. He did however view history as relevant to the development of students’ skills, particularly communication, critical literacy and critical analysis (i6, 128-131). Interestingly, he also saw history as conduit for the development of employment-related skills (i7, 962-968). The emphasis on employment-related skills is not surprising given the majority of Illangara students will leave school in year 10 and few will gain tertiary qualifications. Stressing the importance of history as a school subject that has vocational applications is important, as it commercialises the subject and ensures the maintenance of student numbers.
Tom’s comments on his departmental colleagues focused almost solely on social relationships. It was interesting to note that he rarely mentioned Nadine and instead focused on his male relationships within the department. He spoke of James, a former member of the history staff who provided a solid mentoring role for Tom in his first year of teaching. James encouraged Tom to work in partnership with him and they even presented some of their ancient history unit plans at an HTA professional development day at Darryl’s encouragement. Tom was encouraged to develop his own interests and Darryl laughingly admitted that “Tom’s our resident Egyptologist and I am his apprentice at HSC level [laughs]” (i1, 97-99). When asked to elaborate on his opinion of Darryl’s role as Head Teacher, Tom replied:

Oh yeah, Darryl is great, very genuine, very gentle guy, but very firm at the same time when he has got his ideas about things, when he presents things, which is really good. We’re quite different in lots of ways but we certainly respect each other and enjoy each other’s company and working together too (i6, 434-440).

The history department

The Illangara history department is both a physical and conceptual space shaping the work of Darryl, Nadine and Tom. Its physical and conceptual boundaries shape how they perceive and construct their teacher self-identity. Its boundaries are defined through subject-specific membership and the development and maintenance of particular cultural norms.

To understand the cultural norms of the history department, one must first have an in-depth understanding of the physical and conceptual sites and contexts in which it is immersed. Below, I examine the sites, contexts and processes through which Darryl, Nadine and Tom individually and collectively perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus at the level of the history department.

The sites: department, school and community

Teachers’ experiences of subject departments and the staffrooms in which they are physically located are spatially oriented. Siskin’s (1994) study of subject departments and whole school change found that “the physical layout of buildings, the grouping of classrooms around subject lines and the provision of departmental ‘lounges’” [staff-
rooms” (p. 77) shapes inter- and intra-departmental social relationships. Building on this, McGregor (2000) explains that the use of space has ramifications for the ways in which power is constituted and articulated through social relationships, and she refers to this as ‘spatiality’. The ways in which the Illangara history department is spatially oriented reveals much about their collective subject sub-culture and teacher culture.

Illangara was a highly departmentalised school and, for the most part, the history teachers worked independent of other teachers, although Darryl, Nadine and Tom were administratively active at a school level. The history staffroom and adjoining resource room were located on the second floor of Block A. The history teachers had gone to great lengths to make the staffroom a friendly and inviting place, although the upkeep of the staffroom had largely fallen to Nadine, the only female member of the history department. Photos from past and present students and teachers lined the walls, and amongst the history staff there existed a tradition of each teacher contributing a framed historical picture upon their departure so that a sense of departmental history and character was evident. Student projects sit atop filing-drawers and a large bust of Nefertiti presides over the staffroom door. Darryl, Nadine and Tom shared two computers, although internet access was not available in the staffroom. A common table and sitting area provided space for staff meetings and discussions. Students were often invited into the staff-room to discuss issues with teachers, and teachers from other departments frequently visited. Unlike other departments within the school, the door to the history staffroom was always left open.

Darryl, Nadine and Tom had their own classroom, all of which were clustered around the staffroom. Each teacher had painted collages and historical reliefs on the walls with the assistance of students. Students’ work was routinely displayed and the history classrooms, more so than any others in the school, reflected a student-friendly work environment as tables were clustered in small groups. These details are significant because Siskin’s (1994) study of subject departments and whole school change found that “the physical layout of buildings, the grouping of classrooms around subject lines and the provision of departmental ‘lounges’ [staff-rooms]” (p. 77) shapes inter- and

40 Darryl is a member of several school executive committees, Nadine is Year 10 Advisor and Tom facilitates the Student Representative Council.

41 I use the term ‘staffroom’ in order to signify focus on the physical site in which a history/HSIE department is located.
intra-departmental social relationships and it is these relationships which in turn, shape teachers enactment of curriculum change in the middle ground of curriculum. Most importantly, I argue

The history department was held in high regard at a school level:

Outside the faculty the Principal often prides herself on saying that whenever there has been dissension within other faculties she can always count on the history faculty being smiley and warm and not bitching about one another (Darryl, i2, 548-553).

Whilst the history staffroom and classrooms were the most important physical sites for the teaching and learning of history, the school and community sites in which they were embedded impacted upon the professional environment they provided. The socio-economic positioning of students and the area in which the school is located place significant constraints on the teaching and learning of history due to student misbehaviour, student literacy needs and low student morale.

In an era in which many history departments are being collapsed into HSIE departments, history had retained its status as a distinct department at Illangara because of the value that Darryl, Nadine and to a lesser extent Tom have placed on history as a vehicle for the inculcation of student skills and the ways in which they have been able to forge a collective identity based on shared pedagogical understandings.

**The role of context in shaping history teachers' interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus – subject sub-culture and teacher culture**

A number of contexts emerge as integral to the operation of the Illangara history department. The first of these – teacher self-identity – has been explored in earlier sections of this chapter. The other identified contexts are subject sub-culture and teacher culture. These contexts shaped the ways in which history teachers interpreted the 1998 syllabus. In effect, these contexts acted as filters: Darryl, Nadine and Tom interpreted the new syllabus in terms of the impact it might have on the way they perceived themselves, their subject, their operation as a subject department and the perceived impact on students. These contexts are examined below.

---

42 An HSIE department combines many subjects under a single Head Teacher. DET are therefore able
Subject sub-culture

Subject sub-cultures are founded on conceptions of subject, subject matter knowledge and pedagogical orientation. The history department at Illangara appeared to have a shared subject sub-culture based on shared understandings of history and its value to student learning. The subject sub-culture of the department was a product of Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s teacher self-identity. It was also a product of the historically constituted cultural norms permeating the department.

Prior to the introduction of the 1998 syllabus the Illangara history teachers had been implementing the 1992 syllabus and had reached a stage of comfortability with the programs they had developed, the resources they had designed and the psychic rewards (Lortie, 1977) of teaching the 1992 syllabus, namely student engagement:

We really started to feel that we had the programs and the literacy content or components in the 1992 syllabus down pat and the kids were enjoying it, they were liking coming to history, they were getting a lot out of it, it was at their level and it extended them and we had the resources down pat. Every teacher knew exactly where they were supposed to be at a particular time – it was working fine and we were achieving the goals of the 1992 syllabus (Darryl, i3, 409-419).

This, in combination with a relatively stable history staff, had allowed them time to reflect on their practice, time to evaluate and modify programs and time for out-of-class interaction with students.

The introduction of the 1998 syllabus had the potential to significantly alter the ways in which history was taught, learnt and assessed at Illangara. It also posed a considerable threat to the value they were able to attribute to history in their daily teaching practice. Darryl, Nadine and Tom identified a number of concerns about this new syllabus document. These concerns all centred on the lack of fit between their collective subject sub-culture and the subject sub-culture they believed was advocated in the 1998 syllabus. They identified a number of features of their subject sub-culture, which didn’t fit with this new syllabus document. These included the following.

(a) Subject structure

A comparison of the structure of junior history under the previous 1992 syllabus and the
structure of junior history as mandated in 1998 syllabus is outlined in table 5.1 below.

Table 5.1: Structure of Stage 4-5 history under the 1992 syllabus and the 1998 syllabus at Illangara

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1992 syllabus</th>
<th>1998 syllabus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 4</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(years 7-8)</td>
<td><strong>Mandatory:</strong> Australian history</td>
<td><strong>Mandatory:</strong> Ancient and medieval history (civics and citizenship content embedded within)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>100 hours (2 semesters)</td>
<td>100 hours (2 semesters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semesterised</td>
<td>Semesterised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 5</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(years 9-10)</td>
<td><strong>Elective:</strong> Ancient and world history options included:</td>
<td><strong>Mandatory:</strong> Australian history (civics and citizenship content embedded within)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Great Mysteries</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Legal Studies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>200 hours (4 semesters)</td>
<td>100 hours (2 semesters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year long</td>
<td>Semesterised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td>School based</td>
<td>Public examination for Stage 5 course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An examination of table 5.1 reveals that the 1998 syllabus had the potential to significantly change the way in which the Illangara history department functioned.

The 1998 syllabus mandates a study of 200 hours of history across years 7-10. This structural change required the development of new history programs as specific content had been mandated in each of Stages 4 and 5. Accompanying the release of the 1998 history syllabus was the 1998 geography syllabus, which similarly mandated a study of geography across years 7-10. At the end of these courses students would then be required to site for the School Certificate HGCC Examination. Darryl viewed this move as an attempt by the BoS to artificially fuse history and geography. He saw it as a formal move towards drawing history into HSIE departments at a school level.

A result of this was that the whole school timetable needed to be shuffled to address the issue of Stage 5 history/geography. The 1998 syllabuses (history and geography) required that each Stage 5 student study 100 hours of mandatory Australian history and 100 hours of mandatory Australian geography across years 9-10. The easiest way to

---

43 History/geography has assumed an elective ‘line’ in the school timetable.
address this was to semesterise Stage 5 history.\textsuperscript{44} Semesterisation of both history and geography, however, will mean that when students sit for the School Certificate HGCC Examination, commencing in late 2002, they will not have studied one of either history or geography in the semester immediately preceding the examination.

\textit{(b) Subject value and status}

Whilst the mandating of history across years 9-10 and the introduction of a public examination was in part an attempt by the BoS to increase the status of history, it had the reverse effect at Illangara. For example, history has not been attributed compulsory subject status as measured by timetabled hours of study. Compulsory Stage 5 subjects such as English, maths, science and PE are allocated 400 hours across years 9-10, whereas history has been allocated only 200 hours (combined with geography’s 200 hours; HSIE assumes compulsory subject status, not history alone). Under the previous syllabus, Stage 4 students studied 100 hours of mandatory Australian history and had the option of electing to study a further 200 hours of ancient and world history in Stage 5. Over 70\% of Illangara’s Stage 5 students studied elective history in 1999. The 1998 syllabus would therefore result in fewer students taking fewer hours of history.

According to Darryl, the mandating of Australian history in Stage 5 would also destroy the marketability of history, as Australian history was perceived by students to be boring and irrelevant to their contemporary lifestyles. This in turn could affect the status of history as a subject at Illangara.

Their primary concern, however, was that history would somehow lose those attributes which made it such a valuable school subject – for example, history’s skills base and its ability to engage students of low ability and literacy levels through empathy and interpretation. In short, they feared that history would return to the ‘knowledge as fact’ subject they had studied as students at school. These fears were encouraged by the HTA. This case study revealed that the role of teacher subject associations such as the HTA in shaping teachers’ perceptions of curriculum change should not be overlooked.

Following the marginalisation of the HTA in the formal development of the 1998

\textsuperscript{44} The other option was to have only two periods of contact with history students per fortnight over the entire year. Darryl felt this option was untenable, as it would hinder the continuity of students’ learning.
syllabus it sought to generate teacher support to veto draft syllabi as they believed the process to be untenable and draft versions of the 1998 syllabus to be narrow and traditionalist: “this draft syllabus looks like a syllabus from the 1970s” (Key informant B, i28, 373).

Darryl and Nadine both strongly identified with the HTA, which tends to be their main source of information in terms of curriculum change and professional development. They unquestionably support the HTA and even share similar values in terms of opinions of, and perhaps cynical attitudes towards, the BoS. Their alignment with the HTA is very much a product of the contexts within which they work – students’ low literacy levels, the need for practical and inexpensive professional development opportunities, strong teacher unionist ties and a strong commitment to history as a separate and individual subject and department within the school.

HTA membership undoubtedly coloured their opinions and views of the 1998 syllabus and the processes through which it was formally developed. On several occasions they spoke vindictively of the BoS HSIE Inspector and relayed stories about this person. When interviewed, the HTA key informant retold similar stories that were later revealed to be blatantly manufactured. It was in this highly political and personalised environment that Darryl and Nadine were interpreting the 1998 syllabus. Interestingly, Tom, who was not a member of the HTA, was far less concerned about the 1998 syllabus.

(c) Teachers’ subject matter knowledge

Darryl, Nadine and Tom were concerned that they collectively lacked Australian history subject-matter knowledge:

Looking at the Stage 5 content areas, there are some things that teachers have been teaching at a junior level from the time they started teaching – the World Wars, Vietnam, topics like that – and then there are also topics that teachers are also apprehensive about teaching for whatever reason, and that is, say, Indigenous history, especially with the current information, the current concepts, it wasn't a settlement, it was invasion and that’s just at its very simplistic level … What were the roots and the origins of Aboriginal protest? Given that the current statistical median age of a teacher is 45, most of those teachers, unless they have done some subsequent professional development or reading or courses on contemporary views on Aboriginal Australian historiography, they wouldn't know a lot (Darryl, i3, 704-
They all acknowledged the importance of this content and the issues it raised but were worried about the practical implications of new content – it would require time, money and precious emotional energy for Darryl, Nadine and Tom to acquire and then apply this content knowledge to their teaching. The development of new programs for Stage 5 Australian history would be a particularly exhaustive task. The 1998 syllabus also challenged their previous notions of subject specialism. Neither Darryl, Nadine nor Tom had tertiary exposure to Australian history. In deference to Darryl’s earlier definition of subject specialism, did the new syllabus mean they were no longer ‘history specialists’?

(d) Pedagogical orientation

The 1998 syllabus had numerous pedagogical implications, the most significant of which revolved around the School Certificate HGCC Examination and the teaching of ‘content as opposed to students’:

I think both the teachers and the students will be very frustrated with it [the 1998 syllabus] because … there’s not a lot of room to do the creative stuff as much as we do do the creative stuff [under the old syllabus], and the teachers I think will be frustrated in that they will have a lot of things to do and less time to do it in and they will feel, I believe, professionally dissatisfied because the members of staff in my department are quality teachers and they like to do a lot more than just textbook teaching, whereas the new syllabus … we just won’t have time to teach the way we naturally teach (Darryl, i10, 34-45).

It [the exam] will have an impact on students – ranking them and in a sense even further distinguishing between the haves and the have-nots in lots of ways, and I don’t think that that’s socially responsible (Tom, i6, 889-893).

The 1998 syllabus therefore presented a significant threat to the established practices of the Illangara history department. In view of this threat, Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s initial responses to the perceived threats posed by this new syllabus document were emotional.

The emotional side of syllabus change

In the face of ‘change overload’ Darryl, Nadine and Tom were, at first, angry. Angry at their exclusion from formal decision-making processes: “they’re (the BoS) putting the con back in consultation (laughs). I mean it’s sad” (Darryl, i3, 1560-1561). Angry at the BoS and their lack of understanding: “you wonder what they think goes on in schools, it shows their lack of understanding about what is going on in schools” (Nadine, i5, 1339-1341). Angry at the cost of syllabus change to themselves and their
students: “you are basically going to put your school, your student and your personal reputation on the line in 2002 (when the examination commences)” (Darryl, i2, 1248-1250). And angry at the lack of support offered by the BoS and the DET:

CH: So what professional development opportunities have you as a staff been offered for this new syllabus?

Darryl: Nothing. Oh well, we have a copy of the syllabus [laughs] (i2, 1156-1162).

This anger was initially manifested as resistance to the 1998 syllabus. Teachers are often accused of being resistant to change and of rigorously defending the status quo (Giacquinta, 1998). Resistance to change however is sometimes justified, or, as Gitlin and Margonis (1995) argue resistance sometimes ‘makes good sense’. Whilst the Illangara history department had cause to feel angry about the introduction of the 1998 syllabus, the data also revealed teachers’ natural tendency towards resistance. When asked to describe his department’s response to the new syllabus, Darryl explained that his department was “sailing along with nice blue skies and a calm sea”,45 when, with the arrival of the new syllabus, “the swell started to get up a bit and then we just battened down the hatches and hung on and just got on through it”. This analogy highlights that change is, for some teachers, unsettling and unpredictable and that teachers may feel threatened by what is out of their immediate control. It also highlights that the history department may have collectively held resistant attitudes to syllabus change before the arrival of the new syllabus. The contexts within which change is immersed are not always conducive to that change. This is further revealed when Darryl spoke of staff turnover: “I keep losing people overboard and fishing new people out of the ocean”. Perhaps the most telling part of Darryl’s analogy is uncovered in the following excerpt:

CH: And is the storm starting to die down now?

Darryl: Ahh, I think it is starting to die down a little bit but I suppose we won’t get into calm waters for another couple of years yet.

The implication here is that ‘calm waters’ are those in which external elements such as a new syllabus are not introduced. Calm waters are also experienced when mandated change has become familiar and is no longer ‘new’. This highlights what could be perceived as a ‘no change is good change’ mentality or a resistance to change that acts as both a powerful internal barrier to change and a significant effect of change.

45 All sea analogy quotes are from i27, 168-203.
Resistance is a natural part of responding to change, and within schools there exists a powerful ‘culture of resistance’ (Evans, 1996). Such resistance is amplified when teachers implement centralised curriculum change, as teacher receptivity to change, and conversely their resistance to it, is a direct outcome of what people think the probable benefits and/or losses to them will be in their most direct teaching tasks (Giacquinta, 1998). As already outlined, the Illangara history department stood to potentially incur a number of ideological and material losses in their implementation of the 1998 syllabus.

Teachers’ initial responses to change are therefore often emotional, as Darryl explains:

That’s a classic example of responding emotionally to a change first but then taking half a dozen deep breaths and saying – OK, now that I’ve blown my top let’s have a look at it and see exactly what are the changes and how will these so-called changes affect the smooth running of the department and the teaching (i3, 370-377).

In this case, Darryl’s initial response to the new syllabus was reactive – he was reacting against the 1998 syllabus rather than responding to it. That resistance fades or manifests itself in different forms is an inevitable consequence of teachers’ work lives. The intensification of teachers’ work, multiple curricular and structural changes, and the commitment many teachers have towards their students means that resistance is only one component of teachers’ responses to a new syllabus in the broader cycle of change. Luckily, the history department was founded on strong cultural norms of sharing ideas and concerns, and resource pooling. This allowed them to collectively navigate their initial resistance to the 1998 syllabus.

**Teacher culture**

An investigation of the teacher culture of the Illangara history department reveals much about issues of conflict and power, and the beliefs, values and propositions of Darryl, Nadine and Tom, at both an individual and collective level. It is important to understand the teacher culture pervading the history department, as teachers’ capacity to cope with and adapt to syllabus change requires that new experiences, roles, relationships and perceptions be fitted into the cultural patterns with which teachers have become familiar (Evans, 1995, p. 27).
As Head Teacher, Darryl worked hard at maintaining what he saw as a tradition of teamwork within the history department. He frequently referred to “the ways we do things in this department” and began several interview responses with “since its inception in 1969 the History department has …”. In a school in which many departments struggle for survival, the history department has done more than this – the history teachers have collectively managed to successfully meet many of the challenges of working at Illangara. They have also striven to establish and maintain a collaborative and engaging professional environment. Previous sections of this chapter have elaborated Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s visions of the history department, how it functions, and their role in its functioning.

In initial interviews Darryl, Nadine and Tom all reported positive intra-departmental interaction. Whilst Nadine initially commented that “I don’t think we’ve ever had moments where we have disagreed, no-one has ever stormed out or sat up in their room [laughs]” (i4, 800-802); it was later revealed that in the latter part of developing programs for the new Stage 4 history courses she felt isolated and would have liked more assistance and guidance from Darryl, who was under extreme personal stress at the time.46 Nadine put Darryl’s lack of interest in the latter and more formal stages of program construction down to personality as well: “Darryl isn’t interested in you know, I know he’s interested in the literacy things but he’s not interested in it to that extent” (i10, 10-12).

In doing so Nadine was revealing the varying strengths and weaknesses of departmental members. Whilst continually acknowledging the strengths of Darryl as Head Teacher she was now also revealing that she was consciously aware of and annoyed by his failings. Nadine was also aware of underlying tensions existing between Tom and her, as she revealed in later interviews:

Nadine: Well I had that with Tom (professional jealousy) – I am going to put you down because I have got to establish myself.

CH: Was he trying to ‘flash his feathers at you’?

Nadine: Yeah and I am a male peacock and you are only a pea hen and you've got no colours; and I are really regret the day we were sitting here on the last day of term (1999) and Tom went – oh, yeah my first year here was the best

---

46 Darryl’s marriage had broken down.
when we used to give you heaps and I felt like saying – yeah you bastard that’s when I used to go home in tears every night and I should have said it – I should have said yes, I used to go home and cry my eyes out when you and Jason just had, well I knew that was my relationship with Jason but you putting me down and making me feel like a bad teacher and then I’d find all my bloody work in your folders (i8, 380-396).

If Nadine was increasingly aware of Tom’s seemingly competitive identification as a teacher, Tom was oblivious to the potential effects of his behaviour on Nadine. In fact, he attributed good inter-departmental relationships to the varying yet complementary personalities of the three history teachers. Similarly, Darryl claims to be unaware of any discord within the department:

Now I don’t know, I haven’t actually heard anyone within my faculty bitching about anyone else to other faculties, so I am assuming, therefore, that within the faculty it is quite cohesive (Darryl, i2, 553-557).

Relationships with teachers ‘farmed in’ to work within the history department were a little more problematic, particularly for Nadine, who felt that one person in particular, a language teacher, ignored the history programs and implemented out-of-date content using ‘old’ resources. Nadine felt that this was detrimental to students.

These sometimes divergent feelings about departmental cohesion and professional community reveal the intricate mix of personalities and professional identities that make up the bricolage of the Illangara history department. They also reveal that building a multi-perspective of the department must be founded on the various realities as experienced and defined by individual teachers. It is the points of convergence and divergence amongst these worldviews that allows for a more holistic picture of the history department to emerge, revealing the micro-politics of personal and collective agendas, the personal, professional and political dimensions of the lives of individual history teachers, and the collective departmental culture.

**Processes: being pragmatic and making syllabus change work**

Part of overcoming their initial resistance towards the 1998 syllabus was to make it as workable as possible within their department and classrooms. When asked what effective implementation meant, Darryl articulated two primary departmental

---

47 This section has been adapted from an earlier paper I wrote about the Illangara history department.
responsibilities or goals, both of which reveal what Gustavson calls the ‘practicality ethic’ which is teachers’ belief that change has to be relevant to ‘me in my classroom’ (as cited in Stoll & Fink, 1998, p. 298). Interestingly, these goals were not defined in response to the perceived goals of syllabus developers or policy-makers; rather, the history department defined effective implementation on their own terms. The first goal was that the Illangara history department believed that, even though they were not committed to the vision of the new syllabus as projected by the syllabus developers, they did have a responsibility to write new programs and restructure their courses to fit the syllabus requirements, especially in view of the external exam attached to it. Second, and related to the first, was the department’s commitment to continuing to make the teaching and learning of history meaningful to their personal and professional lives and those of their students in the face of what they saw as enormously difficult circumstances. Underlying this is, as Nadine revealed, the belief that “perhaps it’s better to be pragmatic, as change is inevitable” (i25, 473).

For the history department at Illangara being pragmatic in the face of mandated syllabus change revolved around the development of curricular programs and resources which fitted the syllabus requirements, their needs, and the needs of their students and their department. In fact, the gradual dissolution of the history department’s resistance to the new syllabus came about through their experiences of programming. NSW teachers, usually at the department level, are required to develop curricular programs for their students based on the syllabus document. Given that Darryl took over as Head Teacher three years ago, the new syllabus therefore presented the history department with their first real need to work collaboratively. The previous Head Teacher had developed programs for previous syllabuses and distributed them to department members for implementation. As current Head Teacher, Darryl insisted on providing his department with opportunities for collaborative communication, as is evidenced in departmental programming days. The history department self-funded two professional development days that were held away from the school. On the first programming day, Darryl, Nadine and Tom developed a year 7 program, as this was the first program to be implemented. On the second programming day, they worked on the year 9 Australian history program, as they had all expressed concern about this program and their lack of Australian history subject matter knowledge

See Harris (2001).
Darryl, Nadine, and Tom all found the programming days to be immensely rewarding – everyone got a say in change and, instead of individual efforts to write new programs, a genuine effort at collaboration was aimed for. Even though whole group participation was invited, it seemed that Darryl and Nadine were central to the process in that, when the group split up to work on tasks, Darryl and Nadine worked together and they did most of the follow-up programming. Departmental collaboration was therefore focused on the specific planning days, and the responsibility for formalising ideas put forth on the day fell to Nadine. At first Nadine was happy to accept this leadership role but later, as I have previously discussed, she felt that Tom and Darryl were not providing the support they ought to.

The programming days were something that Darryl was immensely proud of, as he explains:

> We’ve really had to get together and share a lot of ideas quickly and we’ve been able to have whole days where we’ve programmed, and a positive aspect has been that we’ve been able to get to know each other professionally a lot more and also to come up with some really good ideas, so in that sense the negatives have also had positives as well, that we’ve been able to share a lot of ideas, which has bonded the faculty in times of adversity (i10, 25-31).

Study data indicate that the pragmatic processes through which Darryl, Nadine and Tom interpreted and enacted the 1998 syllabus in the middle ground of curriculum give rise to the following features of change.

(a) *The prioritisation of change:* the year 9 and 10 programs were the most feared and were consequently the programs that accorded the most effort. This is due in part to the teachers’ unfamiliarity with Australian history content and related to the examinable nature of these courses.

(b) *The immediacy of change:* Due to the pressures of multiple changes, the teachers viewed the new syllabus in its most immediate form. For example, when asked how they felt about the new syllabus, they would only talk about that section of the syllabus they were currently implementing. Further, programming was often completed either immediately prior to or during the implementation of a new stage of the syllabus.

(c) *The colonisation of change:* teachers used their existing programs and resources as a starting point for change. These old programs were adapted through a process
referred to as ‘programming up or programming down’. Colonising change allowed the teachers to navigate time constraints and to minimise the possible negative effects of change, such as work overload.

(d) The relevance of change: During programming days those teachers who were to immediately implement the program being developed were the most vocal and active. For example, during the year 7 programming day, Tom, who has never taught year 7, was far less involved than he had been on other days. Therefore it may be that teachers are pragmatic in that they put in an effort when they stand to reap the immediate rewards of that effort.

(e) Change as a cumulative process: The programming days were seen as the first step in a multi-layered process of program development. Discussion of and planning for programs continued beyond these days and continues throughout the first years of implementation.

Pragmatic curriculum development as experienced by the Illangara history department allowed the teachers to make sense of the new syllabus in the context of multiple barriers to change. Pragmatic syllabus implementation may in itself be a barrier to effective change, as defined by syllabus developers and policy-makers, given that pragmatism can result in the isolation of, and response to, components of the new syllabus, and hence encourage piecemeal change. Similarly, pragmatism may be evidenced in the colonisation of change, which may mean, “the philosophic changes included in the new syllabus document have not yet been internalised” (Hannay & Denby, 1994, p. 9). Outside perceptions of the history department’s pragmatic curriculum development and whether it constitutes successful implementation of the new syllabus are irrelevant in view of Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s belief that being pragmatic was one way in which the history department, as context for change, was able to help them to respond to the new syllabus.

Summary

Darryl, Nadine and Tom shared similar visions of history as a school subject and similar understandings of how history is best taught, learnt and assessed. Hence, departmental
norms of collaboration and a strong sense of commitment to meeting the needs of their students allowed the history department to collectively negotiate their initial resistance to the 1998 syllabus.

Had the department culture been of a divisive nature, Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s lack of commitment to, and resistance to, the new syllabus may have been manifested in apathy or a refusal to implement the syllabus. However, the existence of a unified vision of history, one that focused on the development of student skills, allowed the department to navigate these barriers in ways that ensure that the teaching and learning of history will continue to be relevant to the needs and abilities of their students. In this way, commitment to their students supplanted commitment towards a new syllabus, and their resistance gave way to pragmatism in order to maintain this student focus. As they continue to phase in the new syllabus, one has to wonder how issues of commitment, resistance and pragmatism will manifest themselves in the institutionalisation of the 1998 syllabus.
CHAPTER 6

THE HISTORY DEPARTMENT,
NORTHBRIDGE LADIES’ COLLEGE:

FRAGMENTATION AND INDIVIDUALISM

The school context

Northbridge Ladies’ College, a church-affiliated high school north of Sydney, was established in the late 19th century and has, for over 100 years, catered to a select student clientele. Northbridge was established by a religious order whose mission was to improve girls’ religious and academic education, and Northbridge has numerous overseas ‘sister-schools’. It is a school known for both its strong academic achievements as well as its affluence. Most of its 1,100 students come from high socio-economic backgrounds and, whilst students of Southern European and Asian descent attend the school, Northbridge is, according to one history teacher:

A snapshot of the 1950s, its very white Anglo-Saxon. Fifty percent of the girls here are called Sarah or Jane or Mary and I worry … it’s not very representative of the community as a whole (Heather, i3, 608-614).

Student literacy standards, as measured by ELLA, are high. The school offers an extensive academic program as well as an extra-curricular program that incorporates debating, music academy, house plays, community service and the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme. Provision is made for students with special needs and an accelerated program is available for gifted and talented students. Academic achievements, student awards, and photographs of school excursions and extra-curricular activities are prominently displayed throughout the school as evidence of the school’s combined academic and pastoral focus. Northbridge has a history of consistently high HSC results and the majority of Northbridge girls will undertake tertiary studies.

Like many prestigious independent schools, Northbridge has a very strong and active
old girl\textsuperscript{48} community and many members of staff and the school executive attended the school as students. In 2000, the first lay Head Mistress was appointed, who is herself an old girl.

The school incorporates numerous heritage-listed buildings and is surrounded by landscaped gardens. The school site is a difficult one to navigate as it incorporates numerous tiers connected by stairs. The school is well equipped materially and in 1999 a student learning centre was opened, the focus of which is the cross-curricular integration of information technology.

Northbridge has a teaching staff of approximately 100. Typically, staff turnover is low and there are examples of teachers spending their entire teaching careers at Northbridge, although in recent years the school has made a concerted effort to employ younger and less-experienced teachers in a bid to re-culture the school. The introduction of KLAs in the early 1990s has also seen the breakdown of traditional subject boundaries and has resulted in school-wide attempts to employ teachers who are qualified to teach entire KLAs, as opposed to individual subjects.

Whilst the school is structured along departmental lines, teachers have been randomly allocated to a number of staffrooms across the school. There are over ten staffrooms, many of which require a brisk five minute walk to classrooms and other staffrooms. This causes great access problems for teachers and is fracturing in terms of fostering subject-specific cultures. Subject specialism and subject status is of great importance at a traditionalist school like Northbridge Ladies’ College. Its academic orientation and history have, for 100 years, placed great emphasis on the core academic subjects (maths, science and English) and the humanities (languages and history). As greater subject diffusion occurs and once clear subject boundaries begin to blur, history teachers at Northbridge have found themselves polarised into ‘the history staff’ and ‘the HSIE staff’. As a result, some history teachers have increasingly felt that attempts were being made to subsume them into the HSIE department.

**The history teachers**

There were four history teachers in the history department at Northbridge, two of whom

\textsuperscript{48} An ‘old girl’ is a former student of the school.
also taught in the HSIE department. These were: Gillian (junior and senior ancient history), Elaine (senior modern history), Heather (history/HSIE) and Jacqui (history/HSIE). As Elaine did not teach junior history, she decided her participation in this study would at best be peripheral and declined to be involved.

Gillian and Heather were located in the same staffroom, whilst Jacqui worked in a separate staffroom located in the same building. Biographical accounts of all three teachers are provided below. These accounts reveal that the teacher self-identities of these three teachers are fragmented along subject specialist/non-specialist lines. Further, Gillian, Heather and Jacqui have disparate conceptions of history. These distinctions can be attributed to tertiary training, career stage and generational differences.

**Gillian**

Gillian, the history Head Teacher, originally worked as a primary school teacher and has been teaching for 41 years. She completed an arts degree majoring in ancient history in the late 1950s and later undertook an education degree when it became necessary for teachers seeking promotion to have formal teaching qualifications in the mid-1980s.49 She has been teaching at Northbridge for 31 years and in that time has taught as both a primary and secondary teacher.50 For the last ten years Gillian has been history Head Teacher.

Data collection occurred immediately prior to Gillian’s retirement at the end of the 2000 school year. In her mid to late 60s and suffering from degenerative hips, Gillian was finding it increasingly difficult to physically navigate the school and to personally negotiate the ‘school hierarchy’: “I am really looking forward to it [retirement] to tell you the truth, I am getting a little bit tired now, not tired in the room with my subject but just tired with everything that goes with teaching” (i1, 463-467).

Gillian identified herself as an ‘ancient historian’. Her initial tertiary training focused solely on a study of ancient history, and when asked why she became a teacher she responded:

---

49 DET now requires all NSW teachers to have either an education degree or an undergraduate degree and a Diploma of Education or a Master of Teaching.
50 Northbridge was previously a school that catered for girls kindergarten to year 12.
Well in those days, and that’s way back in the stone ages [laughs], you could either become a nurse or a teacher and I was told I was too small to be a nurse … but I’ve always wanted to be a teacher. I mean I am a little disillusioned now because I am at my retirement age but I always wanted to be a teacher (i1, 101-115).

Her desire to teach emanated from her passion for and interest in ancient history. As a student, she recalled being enthralled by “tales of far off places and other cultures” (i1, 168-169) and it was her experiences as a learner of ancient history that compelled her into a career of teaching.

Her identification as an ancient historian is interesting for several reasons. Firstly, it reflects her desire to be a part of the academy. Having completed her arts degree, Gillian returned to live with her parents in a remote rural area and began her teaching career with the ‘School of the Air’ in the early 1960s. Reflecting on this, Gillian reminisced about her desire to enter academic life and the unavailability of this option to her. She remains an active member of several university-based ancient history societies, the emphasis of which is scholarship as opposed to pedagogy.

Secondly, she defines an historian as someone who has subject matter expertise and someone who continues to cultivate this expertise through tertiary study. This traditionalist definition informs the ways in which she viewed herself and other teachers. The acquisition of subject matter knowledge was the focus of Gillian’s own learning and she in turn places emphasis on subject matter knowledge as the measure of teacher expertise: “a knowledgeable teacher has the content” (i2, 388-389). She uses this as the benchmark against which she judges the teaching of others.

When asked about the school and the learning environment it offers teachers and students, Gillian talked almost exclusively about the physical environment of the school:

CH: What is it like to work at Northbridge?

Gillian: Well I love the architecture of the buildings and I think we are lucky. I don’t know, I have been here so long but people who have come from other schools, been in other environments, find it nice.

CH: Is it a good learning environment?
Gillian: For the girls?

CH: Yes, and yourself.

Gillian: On the whole the rooms are … I mean sometimes the rooms are a pigsty and the girls could be tidier and cleaner. Some of the rooms are old but on the whole I would say they are lucky, the new learning centre is lovely and it’s the old attic up here, the old art room, and the library is quite beautiful if you go into the library (1, 396-416).

Gillian’s emphasis on the buildings and artefacts that comprise the physical grounds of the school is perhaps a consequence of her teacher self-identity, which centres on the construction of herself as an ancient historian. Conventionally, it is the ancient historian’s role to become knowledgeable about the past through rigorous examination and analysis of artefacts. It is surprising, however, that she rarely mentions her students. When directly questioned about her students she commented that:

You get certain children who arrive in your class in year 11 who’ll say – I really love the Celts, I’ve read about the Celts all of my life, are we going to do the Celts? So you do get this little pocket of, and if you only get one child who takes it further I think you’ve done something – succeeded – and I always push the line that eventually you are going to go out and see these sites … at my desk, there’s a card from an ex-head-girl – “here I am in Roman Britain and Mum thinks I am terribly clever because of what I know”, and that sort of thing … well they [students] mightn’t be an ancient historian, it mightn’t have anything to do with their lives really, but that’s an important aspect I think, it’s leisure (1, 294-314).

This reveals much about how Gillian perceives her students, her role as teacher and the value of history as a school subject. Firstly, she referred to her students as ‘children’. This may be a product of her experience as a primary teacher and/or her age; comparative to her age, she may view 16-year-old students as ‘children’. Standing alone, this may appear inconsequential. That she referred to those younger and less favoured teachers in the history department as ‘girls’, however, suggests that she may be patronising in her characterisation of students and other teachers. Secondly, she measures her success as a teacher through students’ subject matter knowledge. The fact that a past student was knowledgeable about Roman Britain and viewed as ‘clever’ by her mother was evidence that Gillian was a good teacher. A whole-school emphasis on academic achievement and HSC results reinforces this emphasis. In this sense, good
teaching centres on the transmission and take up of subject matter knowledge.

Given her conception of ancient history as a scholarly enterprise aimed at the acquisition of subject matter knowledge, Gillian views the value of ancient history narrowly. She encourages students to assume the role of ancient historians:

We're doing a site dig in year 7 at the moment – I bought in a Mycenaean pot of mine and they are quite intrigued … and we put our gloves on and we handled the pots and we thought about the pots as if we are underwater archaeologists, that’s sort of romantic I suppose, although I was trying to approach it not so much from a romantic view. We looked at an article from Professor Kanawati whose the Egyptologist at Macquarie [University], saying it’s a lot of hard work and they read that article and they had to list down what an archaeologist does, so recording, cataloguing, researching (i1, 232-242).

This experiential approach to learning encourages students to engage deeply with ancient history and it must be acknowledged that Gillian’s passion for ancient history is evident in her teaching. Whilst she acknowledged that few of her students would actually become ancient historians (undertake tertiary studies in ancient history), she concedes that a study of ancient history aids travel and leisure.

Traditionally, historical knowledge holds a certain status amongst particular socio-economic groups. For example, Gillian explained that historical knowledge was a valuable social commodity in her youth as it signified both intelligence and affluence. This is largely due to history’s quasi-classical categorisation: “history was one of the original subjects when the school was founded, you know in the days when ancient history and the classics and Greek and Latin were very important” (i1, 183-190), and it is this status that Gillian identifies with.

Subject status was, for Gillian, measured by the number of timetabled hours allocated to history, the number of students electing to study history and the number of history specialists she was able to retain within the history department. Further, her teacher self-identity was dependent on the status of the history department. For her, status was closely linked to autonomy. In fact she vigorously defended what she perceived to be her autonomy as a teacher and that of the subject specialists in her department. The BoS requires that all NSW teachers develop programs from current syllabuses for implementation in the classroom. Despite this, Gillian has never taught from programs, largely because she views programming as unnecessary as “it’s all in my head” (i1,
She believes the ‘jargon’\(^{51}\) that accompanies syllabuses and programs is obsolete, and was defensive of any queries concerning her practice. The other history specialists did not question her practice because “it’s not their area” and Gillian did not question their practice “because modern history or Australian history is not my area” (i1, 884-886). Gillian admits that she and her subject specialist colleagues are:

> Sometimes negligent, I mean we found out last term that the 3 unit modern [history] hadn’t been [formally written in a program]. I had been asking Irene for ten years for that to be done and she of course had to do it because of the accreditation – but it’s not as if she doesn’t know her work and doesn’t know exactly what she’s doing she has just never written it down (i1, 955-963).

Whilst she implicitly trusts the subject specialists in her department, she also implicitly distrusts those teachers she views as non-specialists – the HSIE teachers.

Throughout the 1990s the proliferation of subjects at Northbridge has led to fierce interdepartmental rivalry. The emergence and growth of the HSIE department at Northbridge was of particular concern to Gillian. The HSIE department offers many subjects that are deemed to be vocationally oriented, such as business studies, economics and legal studies. Student numbers in these courses have steadily risen whilst student numbers in history have correspondingly declined. In order for history to survive as a separate department within the school, history must be marketable, and typically the marketability of a subject is related to its vocational orientation. Gillian’s conception of history and the value she attributes to it do not centre on its vocational orientation, and she feels that marketing it in such a way would ‘dumb it down’ and take away the value she attributes to a study of ancient history.

The introduction and expansion of the HSIE department has had an enormous impact on Gillian’s teacher self-identity and on the ways in which she perceives and enacts her role as history Head Teacher. The most immediate impact of the introduction of the HSIE department has been the departure of several history specialists and the decision by the school hierarchy to employ HSIE teachers\(^{52}\) to teach within the history department:

> CH: Have you had a large staff turn over during your time here?

> Gillian: Yes, just recently in the last few years we have. We lost two very good

\(^{51}\) She identifies terms such as ‘outcomes’ and ‘key competencies’ as jargon.

\(^{52}\) HSIE teachers are trained to teach history as well as a number of other subjects, most notably, geography, economics, business studies and legal studies.
modern historian [names them – both women] and then we had an excellent ancient/modern historian [names her], so those three I think have weakened the subject in as much as they were very, very good and strong teachers (i1, 506-512).

I lost three historians and other people are being asked to come in from other areas now, which worries me because once upon a time it was your expertise, now if you teach religion, you might have to teach a little bit of history, you are asked to take it (i1, 434-439).

Gillian considers HSIE teachers to be non-specialists and loathes accepting them into the history department. It is interesting to note Gillian’s definition of subject specialism; it centres on what Darryl from Illangara calls ‘super-specialism’, that is, it is within-subject specialism. It is through the lens of super-specialism that Gillian defines her role as Head Teacher, the primary focus of which is the protection of the status of history within the school. Her unwillingness to accept HSIE teachers within her department is an attempt to defend the status of the history department. This is patently clear in her comments on Heather, an HSIE teacher who also teaches within the history department:

One relatively young teacher [Heather] who came here this year, and she wasn’t really interviewed for history and lo and behold she ended up with five history classes and she is quite neurotic about having everything in front of her (i2, 620-624).

I think she [Heather] might find it difficult that we don’t work from programs because she doesn’t have any content, she has never taught the area (i1, 921-927).

Gillian acknowledged generational clefts within the history department. The history specialists (Gillian and Elaine) were both over 55 years of age and had both taught at the school for more than 30 years, whilst the HSIE/history teachers (Heather and Jacqui) were both in their early to mid 30s and had taught at Northbridge for a relatively short period of time. She also acknowledged the need for ‘new blood’: “well there is a few of us who have been here a long time so it would be nice to get perhaps, a younger teacher who can start on her way up and learn, but we haven’t got that this year” (i1, 545-549). Interestingly, she did not view either Heather or Jacqui as the ‘new blood’ the department needed.

Gillian acknowledges that the inclusion of Heather in the history department has been particularly problematic:

So this new girl arrived and I think she must think we’re the pits and she said to
me – I have no content, no content whatsoever, and she really wanted it in front of her. Now it wasn’t in front of her … it’s not all written down [in programs] and she asks – what are the outcomes? … And we, on the whole, haven’t coped with that very well I must admit this year. She has a point too and that point is that she has walked into a history department where the people have been doing, well I hope, what they have been doing for a number of years and we don’t take too kindly to the new jargon (i2, 619-653).

Northbridge was going through the process of accreditation whilst data collection was being undertaken. The BoS now requires that all non-government schools be accredited every six years. Part of this process involves the inspection of the syllabus programs of all subject departments. Accreditation required Gillian and her department to develop programs for the courses they were teaching in 1999. At this time the 1998 syllabus was being implemented in year 7 and accreditation forced Gillian to arrange the formal development of written programs. The process of writing these programs was, however, an individualised one in which every teacher in the history department was required to write their own programs. Resource pooling and collaboration did not occur.

As Head Teacher, Gillian therefore offered little in the way of leadership. Each subject specialist was assigned their preferred classes and each worked independently. Gillian had arranged her workload so that she only taught ancient history, and the HISE teachers who work within the history department (Heather and Jacqui) were allocated the least desirable classes – the junior history classes.53

Where once the history department had been the domain of super-specialists, it had become a department that was in the words of Gillian, “dying”:

The lady in charge of professional development [at DET] said a few years ago that she felt that Northbridge had one of the strongest history departments in the state and that was when [names] were still here and [names] who are still here. We feel now that perhaps that mightn’t be the case because three of them [history specialists] have gone (i1, 521-530).

Gillian expressed concern about the 1998 syllabus and its accompanying School Certificate HGCC Examination:

53 The junior history classes are considered less desirable because they lack the status attributed to senior history classes.
I am just frightened that civics and citizenship is going to be so deadly boring and children will be turned off history, but I think that a component of civics and citizenship was needed. I don't know about the Australian in year 10 … it's just going to make the year driven towards this passing of the exam and the marks that they are going to get for it (i3, 736-744).

The 1998 syllabus therefore had the potential to contribute to the declining status of history at Northbridge through the mandating of specific content (civics and citizenship and Australian history) and the introduction of a public examination. Whilst this presented no immediate threat to Gillian, as she only taught ancient history, she was concerned that the 1998 syllabus might have a ‘knock-on’ effect and that, in the future, fewer students might elect to study history in their senior years (years 11-12).

At an individual level, Gillian largely ignored the 1998 syllabus. When asked how it would affect her teaching she replied: “It’s not going to change me in any way. I might have to learn something about India and China, which I have never sort of taught, but it won’t change the way I teach” (i2, 725-729).

The deteriorating status of history and the history department within the school was reflected in Gillian’s professional and personal relationships with the school hierarchy. It was immediately obvious that Gillian felt marginalised and under-valued, as her initial comments revealed: “the hierarchy here aren’t interested in me or history for that matter, they are waiting for me to retire” (i1, 350-351). Further:

I don’t know what my role as Head Teacher is. You’d think I would be on the committee for next year – for arranging the history of Northbridge – because it’s a great celebration next year, it is 100 years [old]. Well I haven’t even been asked to be on it so you wonder. I don’t know that there is an historian in the department on it, I don’t think so, so that might tell you of how I am thought of (i1, 588-595).

Relations between Gillian and members of the school executive had deteriorated to the point where the Head Mistress personally allocated the senior ancient history classes to another teacher. In 1999 Jacqui was instructed to teach senior ancient history despite her lack of experience. When probed about this, Gillian declined to comment but her final interview response was telling:

CH: And are you teaching the senior ancient history this year [2000]?

Gillian: I am this year. Sister Margaret is gone [laughs] – my punishment year is
Heather

Heather, an HSIE-trained teacher, is in her early 30s and has taught for seven years. All of her teaching experience has been in ‘disadvantaged’ government schools and she had yet to secure full-time, permanent employment. At the time of data collection Heather was employed at Northbridge as an HSIE/history teacher for an initial period of one year.

When asked to describe the school and the students who attend it, Heather did so comparatively:

Comparing it [Northbridge] to Hillside [previous school], it is very privileged, you don't have the socio-economic problems that you do at a school like Hillside, where they are fighting other battles than doing their homework and certainly there is not the level of ESL kids, of special learning needs kids, and I am actually not used to that. I have always had classes where I have had to cater for a really big spectrum of need so this school is actually very easy to teach at in that respect … this school doesn’t even have a very wide racial background, let alone kids from other languages, and I think that that's very, very enriching for a school, whereas this school just doesn’t really seem to have it. So, there are definite pros and cons about this side of school education [independent schools] (i3, 594-640).

Whilst Heather acknowledged the advantages of teaching students at Northbridge, she was also aware that her students were in some ways limited by their educational and socio-economic background:

I mean it’s all very well for them [the students] to do reconciliation and things like that but there’s no Aboriginal girls in the whole school. I mean they really, honestly, have got no concept … every now and then the girls will come out with some comment, there was a student in year 9 commerce who said something really odd about how people in the Western Suburbs [a low socio-economic area in Sydney] only spend their money on cigarettes and alcohol and I said – excuse me, have you ever met anyone form the Western Suburbs? And their answer was ‘no’ (i3, 614-626).

Whilst face-to-face classroom teaching presented few challenges for Heather, a number of other obstacles emerged during her first months at Northbridge. Initially Heather was employed to teach HSIE subjects (which at Northbridge excludes history). On her first day at Northbridge, however, she was informed that she had been timetabled to teach four junior history classes. Heather had studied history as part of her undergraduate degree but had never taught history in schools. This meant that whilst she had subject
matter knowledge of disciplinary or academic history, her subject matter knowledge of school history was extremely limited. Despite this, she approached teaching her four history classes with enthusiasm and a willingness to embrace new subject matter knowledge. Heather attributed this willingness to her teacher self-identity. As an HSIE teacher, Heather viewed herself as multi-disciplinary. HSIE teachers are typically trained to teach up to four or five subjects, so the acquisition of new subject matter knowledge is a continual process, as Heather explains:

That’s the nature of being an HSIE teacher and that’s one of the big problems with it, as you know. Every one of the schools that I have taught and every year that I have taught, I have taught something different. The only two subjects that I have ever taught twice is year 9 commerce and year 11 business studies. Every other course in seven years I have never taught more than once and that’s across the whole spectrum of HSIE subjects (i3, 55-66).

Heather acknowledged that teaching four new history courses posed a number of challenges, most importantly accessing resources and finding time to first acquire junior history subject matter knowledge and then develop syllabus programs for implementation in the classroom. Heather felt that the history department offered little in the way of professional support. When asked to talk about her experiences within the history department Heather explained that, on arrival at the school, she was immediately aware that her youth and status as an HSIE teacher placed her in a marginalised position. Her experience as a member of the Northbridge history department was a stark contrast to her previous school:

At Hillside we had an HSIE staffroom, there was seven of us in there, we shared ideas all the time, we shared resources all the time, we shared problems all the time – you know, this kid’s doing this, oh well, I had them last year, I did this with them etc. I just find it so much more productive – it wastes less time, you see (I3, 721-728).

At Northbridge, Heather felt that her marginalisation was patently clear – she was allocated the lower status junior history classes and taught in a number of different classrooms, all a brisk five-minute walk from her staffroom:

CH: Is there a hierarchy within the department?

Heather: Oh yes, most definitely, I didn’t get a lot of say over what I would be teaching [laughs].
CH: So you think this hierarchy is evident in what classes you’ll get, what room allocation?

Heather: Oh absolutely, oh gosh yeah, first year here and I am walking all over the school and Gillian’s got her own classroom [laughs] but she has been here 30 years.

CH: Sure. Is that hierarchy evident anywhere else?

Heather: Oh – well this is probably the least egalitarian school I have taught at.

CH: Is the idea that you win your stripes over the years you put in here?

Heather: By putting in the decades, not only years – decades, so I have got no hope [laughs] … There’s a lot of suspicion of young people, a lot of suspicion of new ideas that you’re not experienced enough you know, but rubbish! Through sheer hard work I could teach any subject that you wanted me to teach or the school wanted me to teach (i3, 979-1011).

Heather believed that she was perceived as a threat:

I think Gillian sees me as a little bit of a threat because she didn’t choose me, XX [HSIE Head Teacher] choose me to be here for business [studies], so Gillian is really terribly concerned that the department remains purely history and that she is getting really top quality, very highly trained history teachers in. Well, whilst I have a degree in history I don’t really have any experience of teaching it, or minimal experience, and I think that she was really, ah, fairly threatened by that but she’s warming to me I think, it has taken half a year (i3, 373-386).

As a young teacher Heather felt that she had a lot to offer the history department, yet her experience and expertise were often overlooked: “there is a lot of new ideas that have come in and because I have been at several different schools and I have seen different ways of doing things and I know that there is better ways to do things” (i3, 367-371).

Interestingly, Heather rarely talked of the ‘history department’, and nearly all of her responses to questions related to the history department centred on Gillian. It may be that, in the eyes of Heather, Gillian was the history department.

Despite sharing a staffroom with Heather, Gillian offered no professional or personal support. Typically, classroom teachers access funding for formal subject-specific professional development through their Head Teacher. Despite requests, Heather received no professional support. In fact, when she asked Gillian for resources, none were forthcoming:
There are no programs and no resources, so to have never taught it [junior history] before, as well as have no resources, as well as have no program to run by or a textbook, umm, that contributed to the workload most definitely (Heather, i3, 111-115).

As previously explained, the Northbridge history department does not develop and implement collective history programs. Rather, it is left to the discretion of individual history teachers to implement syllabuses as they see fit. In the case of Gillian, she believed that her subject expertise negated the need for her to develop any written programs, and she relied on ‘what was in her head’ in her day-to-day teaching. Heather, like most of her contemporaries, however, relies on programs as a way of collaboratively planning for and reflecting on her teaching practice. Heather’s beliefs about formal planning are a product of her recent tertiary training and the current educational climate, which requires classroom teachers to document their teaching programs. Whilst Heather views programming as a teaching aid, Gillian views it as an infringement on her autonomy. These oppositional views are representative of Gillian and Heather’s almost polarised views on history and teaching.

Whilst Gillian advocated ‘super-specialism’, Heather’s conceptions of history were filtered through her multi-disciplinary teacher self-identity:

My philosophy of the importance of history is tied up with my philosophy of HSIE and as a whole subject, but having said that, obviously in the senior year the skills that the kids have got to learn if they are going on to tertiary education is, you know, the research skills and the analytical skills. I don't think they can get them in other subjects, it [HSIE] can give them a terrific understanding of who they are and where they are in life (i3, 479-493).

Similar differences were found in Gillian and Heather’s perceptions of the 1998 syllabus. Gillian perceived it to be a threat to the status of history, whilst Heather was supportive of the syllabus and it’s ‘big picture’ conception of history:

HSIE and history are quite dynamic in the way that they need to be taught, and a lot of the focus that was appropriate in the 70s and 80s is just not appropriate now, and I agree with the new civics course, I agree that we need more emphasis on learning about Australia and Aboriginal heritage and getting away from the model or the emphasis that there used to be – the you will do Roman and Greek history and that sort of thing – that there are other things that have more relevance these days so I don’t think … I don’t see these changes as a bad thing (i4, 106-117)
Heather acknowledged the rigours of syllabus change:

All of a sudden they have to, you know, coordinate with the commerce and with the geography and have their hours cut back and rearrange the whole course so Australian history is now taught in years 9 and 10 and now the ancient is in the junior years. They have to change the resources around and you know that’s quite a lot of change for people who are not used to change (i3, 426-434).

Her career history has made Heather receptive to change: “it [the 1998 syllabus] won’t affect me as it affects other people because I’ve always had change, every single year I’ve taught I’ve dealt with change so it is not something that’s new” (i3, 950-955). She did concede that the school’s high expectations of teachers might present a significant barrier to change, as it left little time to plan and prepare for a new syllabus:

It’s the two playground duties instead of one a week, the before and after school roll-call instead of just the one, and the afternoon one goes for 15 minutes by the time they [students] all leave, the two faculty meetings instead of one for me because I am over two faculties [history and HSIE]. It’s things like a separate parent teacher night for every year so that’s six evenings right there, plus afternoon hockey training once a week plus my Saturdays [for sport] and pastoral period, that’s another spare period gone, plus just the geography of the building there seems to be a lot less time to do things … I really worry about having enough time to be able to do it effectively. I mean I will do it effectively because I am a perfectionist, I’ll get it done even if it kills me (i3, 797-821).

Heather’s receptivity to change relied on a narrow perception of change. As data collection progressed it became apparent that Heather’s knowledge of the 1998 syllabus was very limited. Whilst she saw herself as adaptive to change, for Heather, a new syllabus primarily represented the acquisition of new subject matter knowledge. This focus is certainly related to career history and career stage, as Heather’s sentiments reflect those of Tom at Illangara. When queried about this she explained “you can link the ability to adapt to new syllabuses to having broad experiences in your past but I think it’s also to do with the type of person you are as well” (i4, 202-205).

To clarify the link between career history, career stage, personality and ability to adapt to syllabus change, Heather talked broadly about the generational clefts pervading the history department and how she felt that Gillian’s resistance to change was related to Gillian’s age and intractability: “they've [Gillian and Elaine] taught the same course for ten, 20 years, so there’s a lot of anxiety over the change and you know a lot of suspicion of the change and they’re really not happy about the change” (i3, 398-402).

Where once super-specialism had been the measure of a good teacher, Heather
associated it with stagnation:

my feeling is that there are a lot of people who are objecting to this syllabus because they are stuck in a rut and don’t want the work of having to rewrite their programs and having to think about things, and they don't want to do. But that’s not what teaching is about and that’s not responding to the needs of students in the 90s I don’t think (i4, 146-153).

Heather was therefore able to rationalise her position within the history department and respond to the 1998 syllabus at an individual level through the development of her own programs, the focus of which was the acquisition and application of new subject matter knowledge.

**Jacqui**

Jacqui has 14 years’ teaching experience, three of which have been in the Northbridge history and HSIE departments. Jacqui is in her mid to late 30s and trained as a history/geography teacher in the late 1980s. She has taught in a number of schools and spent five years teaching geography and history in London. Most recently she taught at Western High, a junior high school located near Illangara.

More so than any other study participant, Jacqui was very keen to explore her teacher self-identity and how it shaped her teaching and learning. Interviews with Jacqui would often span several hours, and her perspective on her perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus, and those of the history department, provided insight into the inner workings and dynamics of the Northbridge history department and the broader school.

Immediately preceding data collection, Jacqui had attended a weekend professional development course and this was the motivation for many of our initial discussions, “on the weekend we looked at three questions and the first question was – how would I like others to see me? The second question was – how do others see me? And the third question was – what is the real truth, how am I in fact as a teacher? (i8, 236-244).

Jacqui felt that a good teacher was a student-centred teacher and she strove to provide students with learning opportunities that promoted the development of skills:
So for me teaching is all about helping students to be independent, to be critical, to be open minded, and that’s probably my history/geography background coming through, but to constantly challenge information and to have the skills to acquire information and they’re life skills and we have to have a particular forum for the students to acquire them. I think that when I can see a student developing those skills, that’s when I feel like I’ve done a good job … I think that in the future those skills are invaluable in hundreds of situations (i7, 269-284).

Jacqui felt that particular subjects encouraged the development of student skills: “history and geography attract me because they, they allow me to help students to acquire those skills” (i7, 309-311).

The issue of subject identification was a focal point for initial discussion. This is not surprising given the changing focus of recruitment at Northbridge:

Well I mean if you have a look at who has been hired here in the three years that I have been here, these are not specialist teachers, these are teachers who can teach a range of subjects and there are two very different camps in the school about this. There’s the camp that says it’s impossible to specialise in more than a single subject and then there’s the others who think – well, get with the program, you can’t possibly teach only one subject and make yourself employable (i8, 458-468).

Jacqui was employed as an HSIE teacher but has been allocated to teach across both the HSIE and history departments:

Jacqui: I may be employed as a geography teacher, then the school will develop a need for a history teacher and I will slot in there and vice versa. I certainly wasn’t employed here to teach ancient history but a vacancy came up so that was what happened.

CH: Was that difficult?

Jacqui: Yeah, yeah, it has actually been a bit of a nightmare really because I wasn’t anticipating teaching it (i7, 115-126).

When Sister Margaret refused to allow Gillian to teach senior ancient history, the task befell Jacqui. In 1999 she taught 2 unit and 3 unit senior ancient history. She had never taught ancient history before and found it a struggle. Gillian did not assist Jacqui in this task and Jacqui was hospitalised mid-year for a stomach ulcer that she attributed to stress. Throughout this ordeal Gillian and Jacqui’s professional relationship remained as
it was before, distanced. Interestingly, Gillian twice mentioned the academic success of history students under Jacqui’s tutelage. This may indicate that Gillian holds a certain respect for Jacqui. Certainly, Gillian made no negative comments about Jacqui and her multi-disciplinary status. This may be because Jacqui had both a preference for teaching history and substantial modern and Australian history subject matter knowledge:

I really, really love history. History is just as much a hobby as something I teach for a living, but I enjoy having a break from it and for me geography is good way to do that because there is a lot of history in geography. If we look at how a particular city evolves, I mean you have to have some historical skills, or if we are looking into the outcomes caused by a particular environmental activity it has an historical base. You know I can understand certain aspects of history a lot more clearly because I am a geographer so they do work hand in glove. If you pinned me down and made me choose what to teach it would be history, but I am glad that I don’t have to work that way (i10, 411-425).

The bifurcation of HSIE subjects at Northbridge is unusual, as Jacqui explains:

I think that Northbridge is quite interesting because there is this whole big chunk of subjects that get called HSIE but history doesn’t fit in there and I can’t quite work that out, like I don’t know why they haven’t done one or the other, put history in with the others or alternately make the other subjects more separate, get their own coordinators. I am sure that the way it is at the moment, it has nothing to do with common sense (i7, 675-684)

And it is this unusual configuration which has led to the categorisation of teachers as either subject specialists or non-specialists (multi-disciplinarians). Much like Heather, Jacqui believed there were benefits to being a multi-disciplinarian. But unlike Heather, Jacqui was acutely aware of the ways in which teachers at Northbridge identified themselves, why and to what effect. To this end, Jacqui assumed an intermediary position as an HSIE teacher who, to a certain extent, also had history subject matter expertise. This unique position resulted in varying levels of acceptance within both the HSIE departments and the history department:

If you see yourself as an HSIE teacher you’ve got a vested interest for making a case for teachers being multi-skilled. If a teacher is saying – how can we be an expert in more than one subject? When you hear that often enough you start to perhaps think - how can you only teach one subject? In the current climate it’s a little bit dangerous for employment purposes. I have always tried really hard to avoid being locked into one subject. That’s interesting because a few years ago I thought I was overspecialising too much in geography whereas at this school it may actually happen that the reverse will happen with history – well, you know, who knows, I am only 14 years into a career that, if I do it until I retire, has got a
Jacqui felt that the exclusion of multi-disciplinary teachers within history teacher communities was widespread:

I think history teachers are shocking when it comes to intellectual snobbery, second only to English teachers, and it means that if I turn up at a place where there's a group of geography teachers as opposed to a group of history teachers, the atmosphere is different and the way that teachers treat each other is quite different. I'm actually on the AIS [Australian Independent Schools] history committee … I love history, it’s my favourite subject so I am really happy to slot myself into this history focus, but the people I was running across were just really blinkered in their focus … I noticed a lot of jargon dropping which was very exclusionary, and the manner of the people wasn’t particularly welcoming, people seemed to be falling over themselves to show off their knowledge of history (i8, 550-577).

This suggests that the superiority Gillian attributes to history specialists is evidenced in a broad history sub-culture that excludes non-specialists.

Having worked across both the HSIE and history departments for a number of years, Jacqui was in a unique position to compare and contrast the structure and operation of these two departments, but did so only vaguely. Perhaps this was a result of her general acceptance within and across both the HSIE and history departments. At the time of data collection the HSIE Head Teacher had been on sick leave for seven months and the HSIE department was, according to Jacqui, in disarray. Both departments therefore had what Siskin (1994) calls non-leaders – one through illness and the other through pervasive norms of individualism.54 It was interesting to note that when pressed about the HSIE and history departments, Jacqui spoke exclusively of the age differences of teachers across these two departments. She explained that the history department, as well as having many older staff members, felt its status was threatened by curriculum change and by the employment of younger teachers who were typically more receptive to such change:

My experience of this school and the history department particularly is that

---

54 Individualism is characterised by isolation, cultural fragmentation and protection from outside interference (Hargreaves, 1992).
younger people are associated with change and therefore younger teachers views aren’t necessarily accepted, and that only makes the younger staff more adamant that change is implemented. They feel like they are being resisted, and there’s nothing like waving a red flag at a bull to get it to run at you, to get it to move. I think that’s part of it, the fear of change is not just associated with having to work hard, because I think that teachers are generally happy to work hard, but I think that there is fear that they are going to be made obsolete or that their views and experiences are being disregarded (i8, 434-452).

The tension between older subject specialists and younger multi-disciplinarian teachers did not affect Jacqui to the extent to which it had Heather. Again, this may be because Jacqui was generally accepted within both departments. It is interesting to note that acceptance within the history department means that you are left to your own devices. Jacqui also saw that these tensions would dissipate following the retirement of Gillian at the end of 2000:

Gillian and Elaine are the only two people who just teach history so when Gillian is replaced on staff I can’t envisage them hiring just simply a history teacher, particularly since the trend has been to hire people who have recently graduated. A lot of those specialist graduates don’t exist anymore, they have taken a double major with a view to making themselves employable (i10, 368-371).

Jacqui’s perceptions of the 1998 syllabus were filtered through her self-identity as a multi-disciplinarian who also had significant history subject matter expertise. Whilst she welcomed the mandating of both history and geography she was sceptical of the politicisation of history and its effects on the development of the 1998 syllabus: “we are still hearing Bob Carr’s [NSW Premier] version of history I think, which is … interesting and disappointing” (i8, 124-126).

Jacqui felt that the syllabus development process was ‘disappointing’ because teacher consultation had been, in her opinion, inadequate. She did however understand the difficulty in consulting teachers about curriculum change: “it’s a bit of a catch-22, in that consultation would have resulted in teachers rejecting mooted changes to the syllabus at any rate” (i8, 676-678). Jacqui felt that choice rather than participation in formal development processes was the key to securing teacher commitment. To explain, she drew on her experiences of teaching in London:

There’s far greater choice in the British system, where you get to choose the syllabus that you teach from. I can't remember the exact number but it’s at least ten, so you say – right, I don’t like that syllabus but this is what we’ll go with here and you can shop around (i8, 511-517).
Rather than increasing teacher participation in formal syllabus development processes, Jacqui argued for broader community participation in syllabus change processes:

There’s a community perspective. Teachers forget, I think, that the community equals the parents and the children that we teach, so we have to be aware of what parents want. We can't say ‘no, no, no, we know what’s best’; it should be a more collaborative process, that’s all, where I believe teacher views should be paramount but not exclusively so. Certainly parents, and I don’t understand why kids couldn’t get involved (i8, 685-694).

This echoes Fielding’s (1999) argument for radical collegiality.55 Certainly, Jacqui was concerned about the potential impact of the 1998 syllabus on her students. Her concerns were broad and she perceived the 1998 syllabus as an attempt by politicians to determine what counts as historical knowledge:

It just comes across to me as really politicians’ definitions of what Australian kids need to know and that worries me as there appears to be an agenda happening … What’s been decided as important about Australian history has a heavily, heavily political focus (i7, 787-792).

I think the new geography and history courses are very parochial, you know. It's like American-style education where the kids can rattle off the name of every state but have no idea who participated in World War 1 (i7, 813-817).

Her main concerns were that she felt the content of the new history and geography syllabuses were old school: “this is what I learnt at school. I feel like I am going full circle again, I don’t like it” (i8, 62-64). Beyond having to implement syllabuses that she felt were traditionalist and uninspiring, disliking the new history and geography courses was problematic for Jacqui for another reason – her students:

My job isn’t about the nuts and bolts of the syllabus, it’s about the kids in the classroom, so perhaps it’s wrong of me to assume on their behalf that this is boring, and I have to be really careful there because if I walk into the classroom with that attitude of course it will become boring, the kids will easily pick up on that, so I have to be careful that I don’t betray my greater interest in the past syllabus (i8, 172-181).

Jacqui felt that the very nature of NSW syllabus change constrained teachers’ responses to new syllabuses: “the way we go with change around here [NSW], you don’t take it on with you, you have to actually reject the past and then you've got this new approach” (i8, 502-505). She further explains that; “we do need syllabus change but I would say

55 Radical collegiality centres on the development and maintenance of a critical community that encompasses all those affected by education – the community, parents, students, teachers and bureaucracies. It is through radical collegiality that schools become dialogic and democratic (Fielding, 1999).
we need to adapt, I would like to see more shading in periods where there’s more transition and less revolution” (i8, 624-627).

The 1998 syllabus had the potential to impact on her students in a number of other ways. For example, Jacqui was critical of the new syllabus document because it:

Doesn’t seem to give opportunities to kids to build up the sort of skills that I think are important for them to learn. I suspect this will really make it easier for bright kids to excel without extending themselves one little bit; they’ll just have to remember things, they don’t actually get to challenge themselves, which is a worry (i7, 1065-1072).

Whilst she saw that the newly introduced School Certificate HGCC Examination was unproblematic in view of the academic orientation of Northbridge students, having recently worked at Western High, Jacqui was concerned that the examination may lead to the generation of league tables as measures of teacher and student success.

Jacqui was also concerned about the broader effects of the 1998 syllabus on curriculum choice for students. The mandating of history and geography across years 7-10 meant that students had one less elective subject in years 9-10. The 1998 syllabus therefore had the potential to impact upon other subject areas, as Jacqui explained: “these changes to geography and history are really happening at the expense of languages” (i7, 821-824).

Like the Illangara history teachers, Jacqui’s initial response was pragmatic and revolved around the development of new programs. Unlike the teachers at Illangara, however, Jacqui’s programs were indirectly being evaluated through concurrent school accreditation. This meant that her programming was quite mechanical, as the following comment reveals: “it’s all very formal, you are following the syllabus to the letter because the school is going to be accredited so you have to make sure the document you produce is a good reproduction of what the syllabus dictates” (i8, 23-28).

Following the construction of formal written programs, the process of programming was for Jacqui far more dynamic:

I am still really, really busy. There’s program stuff to do but it’s almost part of teaching really; you’re either writing a new one or your revising it, you’re tinkering with it somehow or a new teacher comes in and they’ve got a different speciality or you’ll get a good idea from a conference, it doesn't really ever end,
although some people like to pretend it does (i8, 854-861).

As mentioned earlier, programming within the history department is individualised and, much like Heather, Jacqui spent 1999 and 2000 largely working alone on her history programs. It is interesting to note that Heather and Jacqui didn’t collaborate on any of their programs. It may be that the culture of individualism is far more pervasive than either of them believed it to be. When asked whether she thought programming for the 1998 history and geography syllabuses would continue to be individualised after Gillian’s retirement, she responded:

There’s something about teachers that brings out autocrats. People are really used to running their own show and they often find it difficult to collaborate when they are back in the staffroom, so it really depends on the personalities of the people involved and the leadership as well (i10, 461-465).

Returning to her experiences on the weekend professional development course, Jacqui pondered her immediate future and resolved to negotiate syllabus change in ways that allowed her to retain her focus on teaching:

My greatest fear as a teacher is that I will become resistant to change no matter what form that change takes, so I try not to be negative about change per se and also try to be philosophical about change. It’s going to happen whether I like it or not, so deal with it because that would happen with whatever workplace I found myself in, it happens in life in general. My ambition in the short term is to deal with the new School Certificate and the new HSC. In the long term it is to not forget why I am a teacher and not be hung up about the bureaucracy as opposed to the pastoral [side of teaching] (i7, 1074-1057).

The history department

The Northbridge history department did not occupy a specific physical site within the school and the four history teachers (including Elaine) were spread across three separate staffrooms. This meant that a sense of there being a ‘history department’ wasn’t advocated through physical space. Rather, very strict and almost tangible boundaries governed membership within the history department. These boundaries were based on subject specialism, and membership within the history department was closely monitored by Gillian. The recruitment of HSIE teachers to teach within the history department had widespread ramifications for the history department and for Gillian in particular. First, it challenged the collective identity of the history department. Historically, the history department had been the bastion of subject specialists such as
Gillian. The arrival of HSIE teachers therefore threatened the status of the history department and, by association, history teachers. Second, it had promoted the splintering of the department along subject specialist lines, thus resulting in the consolidation of previously existing norms of individualism. Finally, the employment of HSIE teachers to teach within the history department was viewed by many as an indicator of the school’s desire to subsume the history department within the HSIE department upon Gillian’s retirement. This led to the deterioration of relations between Gillian and the school hierarchy and the subsequent marginalisation of the history department and the history subject specialists, at a school level.

It was within these contexts that Gillian, Heather and Jacqui interpreted and enacted the 1998 syllabus. To understand how and why they perceived and enacted this new syllabus document one must first have a deeper understanding of the sites, contexts and processes pervading the history department. These are outlined below.

**The sites: staffrooms as private places**

Gillian, Heather and Jacqui were spread across two staffrooms that were located on different floors of the school administration building. Gillian and Heather shared a staffroom with two other teachers from different departments. Their staffroom was located on the third floor of the administration building, a building that was out of bounds for students. All interviews with Gillian and Heather were conducted in the formal school conference room and I was never invited into their staffroom. Jacqui shared a staffroom with three other HSIE teachers. The staffroom was located on the second floor of the administration building. Jacqui often invited me into her staffroom but, for reasons of confidentiality and privacy, all of our interviews were conducted in the school library. The school had undergone a student population boom since its inception, and despite the school’s best efforts to accommodate increased numbers of students and teachers, space is limited. Consequently, Jacqui’s staffroom was small and crowded. Each teacher had their own desk but there was no space for computers and teachers had to travel to the library for computer and internet access. Similarly, few teachers had their own classrooms, and materials and resources had to be carried to and from each class.
There is, therefore, no designated area in which history teachers can congregate and discuss issues of importance. All history department meetings were conducted in the formal conference room. This required teachers to be seated around a 12-seat, rectangular formal dining table. The conference room is in high demand so this arrangement also places limitations on the time available for history department meetings. It is unclear whether these site restrictions and the lack of a defined space for history teachers has promoted departmental norms of privacy and individualism. Alternatively these norms may be the result of the stringent subject boundaries on which the history department is founded. To delineate the impact of space restriction on the functioning of subject departments, one would need to compare the history department with others in the school, and interviews did not yield this type of data. With this in mind, I assume that the subject department’s cultural norms are both a product of the school environment and the historically constituted subject boundaries, which Gillian strives to maintain.

I attended one history department meeting. This meeting was brief, largely administrative and focused on issues of immediate concern such as up-coming excursions. Gillian sat at the head of the table and directed most of the conversation. The tone of the meeting was formal and it was at this meeting that Gillian, Heather and Jacqui agreed to participate in this study. As Head Teacher, Gillian agreed to allow the study to be conducted on the proviso that I not attend any more history department meetings. I believe this decision was made because Gillian found my presence intrusive and was wary of my observation of departmental interaction.

**The role of context in shaping history teachers' interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus – subject sub-culture and teacher culture**

Three interrelated contexts informed the ways in which Gillian, Heather and Jacqui perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. Previous sections of this chapter examined Gillian, Heather and Jacqui’s teacher self-identity. Specifically, the data revealed that their respective teacher self-identities were influenced by their formal teacher training, career histories and career stage. The most prominent context shaping the ways in which Gillian, Heather and Jacqui perceived themselves, the history department and ultimately their enactment of the 1998 syllabus...
was that of subject sub-culture.

**Subject sub-culture**

In chapter 3, I argued that distinct differences have been found between the cultures of departments of varying subjects within schools (Ball, 1981; Grossman & Stodolosky, 1995; Siskin, 1994b). These cultural differences can also exist across and within same-subject departments. These sub-cultures can, for example, differ according to competing conceptions of subject. Different teachers conceive of history in different ways and this is certainly the case within the Northbridge history department. Gillian, Heather and Jacqui’s conceptions of history were dissimilar. Gillian conceived of history as an academic discipline whilst Heather’s conception of history was based on the acquisition of subject matter knowledge and its fit with her conceptions of other HSIE subjects, namely geography. On the other hand, Jacqui’s conception of history centred on its use as a vehicle for the acquisition of student skills.

Numerous competing subject sub-cultures were therefore evident in the Northbridge history department. Conflict over subject sub-cultural differences was exacerbated by the release of the 1998 syllabus, as Jacqui explained:

Jacqui: the fact that geography and history be compulsory, well the left hand is going to have to know what the right hand [the HSIE and history department are going to have to work together] for the first time ever … there will have to be a lot of dialogue between Head Teachers …

CH: So in a sense it will be a marrying of history and HSIE?

Jacqui: Yeah it is (i7, 725-744).

Gillian, Heather and Jacqui had varying concerns about the 1998 syllabus. These concerns were related to their teacher self-identities and the subject sub-culture with which they identified. Whilst their concerns were often divergent, a number of themes ran across their individual perceptions of the 1998 syllabus. These are examined below.

**(a) Subject structure**

Like Illangara, the introduction of the 1998 syllabus signalled radical restructuring of Stages 4-5 history courses at Northbridge. Table 6.1, below, gives an overview of the
structure of Stages 4-5 history under the 1992 syllabus and the 1998 syllabus.

Table 6.1: Structure of Stage 4-5 history under the 1992 syllabus and the 1998 syllabus at Northbridge

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1992 syllabus</th>
<th>1998 syllabus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 4</strong></td>
<td><em>Mandatory</em> Australian history</td>
<td><em>Mandatory</em> Ancient and medieval history (civics and citizenship content embedded within)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(years 7-8)</em></td>
<td>100 hours (2 semesters) Semesterised</td>
<td>100 hours (2 semesters) Semesterised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Stage 5</strong></td>
<td><em>Elective</em> Ancient and world history</td>
<td><em>Mandatory</em> Australian history (civics and citizenship content embedded within)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>(Years 9-10)</em></td>
<td>200 hours (4 semesters) Year long</td>
<td>100 hours (2 semesters) Semesterised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Assessment</strong></td>
<td>School based</td>
<td>Public examination for Stage 5 course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The restructuring of the Stages 4-5 history courses to fit the requirements of the 1998 syllabus meant different things to Gillian, Heather and Jacqui. Gillian only taught ancient history and took no administrative responsibility for syllabus change other than that directly affecting ancient history. Consequently, the 1998 syllabus required that Gillian teach ancient history for a semester in Year 7 as opposed to the year-long ancient history course taught in Year 9 under the 1992 syllabus. On a practical level, this presented little challenge to Gillian. This was because the 1982 syllabus had required teachers to teach ancient history in year 7. Gillian was therefore able to merely revert to subject matter knowledge with which she was already knowledgeable.

Gillian’s refusal to formally construct written programs meant that the 1998 syllabus presented little practical work for her. It did however present a significant threat to both the status of ancient history and to Gillian’s teacher self-identity. Gillian’s main concern about the restructuring of Stages 4-5 history was that there was less time given to ancient history, thus making it harder to entice students to elect to study it in the senior school:

As I said to them [year 10 students] the other day when I was trying to enthuse
them in ancient history – out of 16 terms [eight semesters], two [one semester] have been ancient so eight [four semesters] have been Australian, and about three [one and a half semesters] have been Australia in the modern world (Gillian, i1, 660-665).

Having not taught Stages 4-5 history before and having recently arrived in a history department that offers little or no support, Heather found the restructuring of Stages 4-5 history had surprisingly little impact on her. With or without a new syllabus, Heather still had to construct new programs for all of her year 7-10 classes. Her concerns about teaching within the history department therefore revolved around accessing resources and acquiring new subject matter knowledge.

Of all the Northbridge history teachers, Jacqui was most concerned about the restructuring heralded by the 1998 syllabus. She felt that restructuring involved an enormous amount of work, including the construction of new programs. It also involved, for example, teaching Australian history in years 9-10 as opposed to years 7-8. This required that Jacqui strengthen her Australian history subject matter knowledge.

The 1998 syllabus also resulted in the semesterisation of history and the loss of elective history in years 9-10,56 which was, as Jacqui explained, problematic:

So that’s going to be a nightmare for us. The only other way you can do it is to say, have two lessons of history a week and two lessons of geography a week and run them concurrently, but that runs the risk of really trivialising the subject itself and the kids begin to think, well, this is just a play time and they don’t see it as having the same status as, say, English which is taught four lessons a week and so on, and that is a real concern to me as well, that history hours have been lost for students who want to do history. We are pushing at Northbridge to have geography and history available as electives, which a few schools will be able to do, but I am not very hopefully that it will happen (i10, 68-80).

(b) Subject status

Biographical accounts of Gillian, Heather and Jacqui revealed the issue of subject and departmental status to be the focus of debate at Northbridge. The 1998 syllabus cannot be viewed acontextually. Its release, in combination with the recruitment of HSIE teachers to teach within the history department and the impending retirement of Gillian,

56 Under the 1998 syllabus change, schools are still allowed to offer elective history in Stage 5 (years 9-10). Most schools chose not to because the mandating of history across Stages 4-5 had already resulted in a crowded timetable.
had the potential to significantly alter the status of history at Northbridge. It is through this lens that Gillian perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus. Heather, on the other hand, was pleased that HSIE and history were attributed joint status through the mandating of both history and geography:

I am really in support of this syllabus because I think that commerce, geography and history are all vitally important and that in year 9 and 10 up until now you have had choose one of the three and I think that’s a crime you know, against society – well not that strong [laughs] but you know … (i3, 470-477).

Certainly many of the concerns the Illangara teachers expressed about the 1998 syllabus are not issues of consequence at Northbridge. This is because of the student clientele the school attracts: students are academically able and will, in all probability, do well in the examination accompanying the 1998 syllabus. The schools affluence also enables teachers’ enactment of a new syllabus document, as Jacqui commented:

I am not anxious [about the new syllabus] as a teacher at Northbridge, I think that Northbridge has the money, for example, to hire staff to supervise our trial exams to give us free time. We actually have been given time now to do things … we are having two pupil-free days, towards October sometime (i7,1006-1015).

Having taught at Western High, Jacqui is acutely aware that the 1998 syllabus has the potential to ‘hit harder’ on other schools:

I worry about schools that are not independent, where the boss can’t just say – yes, let’s take some time off to have a look at this and make sure that we get it right, or perhaps where the students at the school have special needs that the teachers won’t have time to a) get the programs happening, and b) work out how to modify that program [to meet the needs of their students] (i7, 1016-1023).

Teacher culture

The Northbridge history department has a long history of subject specialism and individualism. Traditionally, history teachers have been female, have remained at Northbridge for long periods of time and have been super-specialists in that they have either been modern or ancient historians. Gillian’s lengthy career at Northbridge is perhaps typical of an older generation of Northbridge history teachers. As a classroom teacher she was responsible for the development of her own courses and their implementation and evaluation in the classroom. She has carried this vision of teaching through to her role as history Head Teacher. To allow history teachers autonomy was an acknowledgement of their subject expertise. Gillian’s reflections on the past glories of the history department focused on whole department subject specialism and student academic results as measured by the HSC. Whilst Northbridge students continue to
achieve consistently high results in the senior years of history, the introduction of KLAs and the recruitment of HSIE teachers to teach within the history department has seen the emergence of competing cultures within the history department.

These competing teacher cultures are age-related and point to the existence of generational clefts within the department. Traditionally, norms of individualism have characterised the operation of the history department. The influx of HSIE teachers into the history department has bought with it younger teachers who have different ways of doing things. These competing cultures are evidenced in the processes through which Gillian, Heather and Jacqui perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation.

**Processes: competing cultures**

Gillian’s advocacy of isolation and norms of individualism are the result of a career in which she and her colleagues, nearly all of whom have been subject specialists, have worked autonomously. She does not question the work of her subject specialist colleagues, nor do they question her work. The arrival of Jacqui and Heather in the history department was problematic for Gillian, who perhaps unintentionally used previously established departmental norms of individualism to marginalise HSIE teachers. She did so not because she disliked either Heather or Jacqui but because she disliked what they represented – the declining status of history at Northbridge. Gillian has therefore assumed the role of ‘gatekeeper’, and the pervasive norms of individualism, which were once symbolic of teacher autonomy and trust, are now representative of exclusion and distrust. In fact, Hargreaves argues that individualism can represent “a withdrawal from threatening … or unpleasant working relationships” (1992, p.182).

This, in combination with Gillian’s identification as an ancient historian, has resulted in a lack of collective or departmental responses to the 1998 syllabus. Her agreement to participate in this study and her willingness to allow Jacqui and Heather to be involved is testament to her passion for and defense of history. It also suggests that she is not as rigidly private and individualistic as she might at first seem. When asked why she agreed to participate in this study she replied, “we need more academic work in the field
of history teaching if we [history teachers] are to survive in the current educational climate” (9, 114-116).

Whilst Heather and Jacqui’s experiences of previous subject departments have been characterised by problem and resource sharing, their experience of both the history and the HSIE departments have been, to varying degrees, characterised by isolation and individualism. Gillian, Heather and Jacqui all responded to the 1998 syllabus in an individualised manner. This is surprising given Heather and Jacqui’s claims of past collaboration. It must be acknowledged that Jacqui’s illness, time constraints and their placement in different staffrooms presented significant obstacles to collaboration with one another. When asked to describe metaphorically how the history department operates, Jacqui’s response was telling:

“We’re not all on the same ship and I can’t really put my finger on a reason for that because the staff turnover is quite low. It’s not a problem with having to deal with new people all the time. If anything it’s probably the opposite, it’s probably the fact that the staff hasn’t changed over so it’s probably the fact that there hasn’t been the input of new ideas, and new ideas tend to be unwelcome, which may explain why people do their own things rather than collaborate as much … I think that, yeah, the age is a factor, the stage that they are in, in their careers, is a factor. Many people have no intention of either promoting themselves or seeking promotion and they may well be looking for a quiet life. From my perspective I actually think that that generates more stress and more work by resisting what you have to do. To put that into context, what I said about the history staff working alongside each other rather than with each other, I think that’s typical of the entire staff, I don’t think that’s necessarily just a history department problem, it’s the school culture or a way of doing things. People tend to stick with who they know and what they know rather than seeking out new ways of doing things.

Whilst all three teachers have responded to this new syllabus document at a very pragmatic level – through the construction of new programs – the impetus for doing so is different for each teacher. Gillian constructed a written program for the new year 7 ancient history course because she was required to do so for school accreditation. Heather’s programming guided her acquisition of subject matter knowledge and Jacqui’s programs were aimed at facilitating the development of students’ skills. Where Gillian, Heather and Jacqui most differed was in their attitudes towards and perceptions of syllabus change.
Resistance: a generational issue?

All three history teachers repeatedly mentioned age or generational differences as key factors defining the history department and its members. Huberman (1995) and, Rusch and Perry (1999) have described age, career stage and past experience as factors influencing teachers’ attitude and commitment towards change. Misperceptions about the relationship between age and resistance are common. Certainly, Heather and Jacqui associate older teachers with resistance:

Jacqui: The history department is generally speaking battling change … because they don’t like change.

CH: Is that a generational thing do you think? The fact that many teachers have been here a very long time?

Jacqui: Yes, I definitely think so two of the teachers [Gillian and Elaine] that I have in mind have been here in some cases for decades and quite simply I think they want an easy life. Their students do well, so they argue – why should I change this when it’s working, you know my students are bright, they’re productive, they’re able to demonstrate superior skills in history so why is this necessary, which is probably not a bad question but nevertheless the change is there (i10, 542-554).

Much like Gillian has stereotyped younger teachers as, for example, ‘neurotic about writing things down’, Heather and Jacqui have oversimplified the reasons for Gillian’s resistance to the 1998 syllabus. Gillian’s resistance to this new syllabus document has both personal and professional dimensions. She believes that the 1998 syllabus threatens the status of history and its existence as a distinct subject in NSW secondary schools. NSW remains the only state in Australia in which history remains a discrete subject. Gillian’s concerns are therefore well founded, and her resistance to the 1998 syllabus could be referred to as ‘principled resistance’.

In summary, study data indicate that the processes through which Gillian, Heather and Jacqui interpreted and enacted the 1998 syllabus in the middle ground of curriculum give rise to the following features of change:

(a) The relevance of change: Gillian only responded to that part of the 1998 syllabus pertaining to ancient history. Similarly, Heather and Jacqui only responded to the medieval and Australian components of the new syllabus, as these are the components immediately relevant to their teaching.
(b) Change as an isolating and individualised experience: Gillian, Heather and Jacqui’s enactment of the 1998 syllabus was highly individualised. Despite claims of previous collaboration, Heather and Jacqui implemented this new syllabus alone. Change was, for all three history teachers, an isolating experience.

(c) Coping with change: Heather’s response to the 1998 syllabus was aimed at survival. Much like most first-year teachers, her first year of teaching history was aimed at the acquisition of subject matter knowledge.

(d) Change highlights generational clefts: Gillian, Heather and Jacqui were all quick to identify age as a factor shaping teachers’ responses to syllabus change. Whilst Gillian argued the deficiencies of young teachers, both Heather and Jacqui stereotyped older teachers as intransigent.

(d) Change exacerbates pre-existing micropolitical tensions: the introduction of the 1998 syllabus highlighted and indeed hastened the fragmentation of the history department.

Summary

The Northbridge history department was in a state of steady decline at the time the 1998 syllabus was released for implementation. The introduction of KLAs in the early 1990s had contributed to the decline of subject specialists and to the employment of HSIE teachers to teach within the history department. Gillian, the history Head Teacher, was increasingly alienated from the school hierarchy and was preparing for retirement. A protracted struggle to maintain leadership within a separate history department had worn her down and she was weary. The school was being accredited and Heather had recently arrived at the school to learn that she was to teach four classes of history, a subject she had never taught before. Jacqui had just finished a year of teaching senior ancient history in which she had suffered poor health. It was through this lens that Gillian, Heather and Jacqui perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus.

These three teachers have diverse understandings of history, its value and its purpose.
Without shared understandings, shared experience and shared concerns, Gillian, Heather and Jacqui were unable to overcome the pervasive norms of individualism which characterise both the school and the history department. Their enactment of the 1998 syllabus reflects the culture of the history department – fragmented and individualised.
CHAPTER 7

THE HSIE DEPARTMENT,
ST BERNADETTE’S COLLEGE:
CYNICISM, APATHY AND COMPLIANCE

The school context

St Bernadette’s College is an independent Catholic school for girls situated in inner-city Sydney. The school has been operating for 130 years and in that time has evolved from a rather exclusive private girls’ boarding school to a broader, more generalist school, as one teacher explained:

Even though the grounds look quite impressive, a lot of people get the wrong idea as to what the school is like. The philosophy of the Sisters of Mercy, the owners of the school, is that education is something that should be available to all, regardless of their socio-economic background and their ethnicity, so we do have quite a broad range of students (Matthew, i1, 620-627).

The 700 students who attend St Bernadette’s are from varied cultural backgrounds. The student population is over 60 percent multicultural with students of different Asian and Southern European backgrounds attending the school. St Bernadette’s also caters for a broad range of socio-economic backgrounds:

There would be a percentage of kids from socio-economically middle-class backgrounds, which is slightly increasing, but there’s a very large percentage of single parents and very disadvantaged kids (Abby, i4, 64-172).

There are also over 70 full-fee-paying overseas students, and the school offers scholarships to 20 Aboriginal students from rural areas per year.

The philosophy of the school’s founders – the Sisters of Mercy – advocates compassion and caring for others. Consequently, since its inception the school has focused on pastoral care as a way of practising these philosophical beliefs. The curricular focus is not, therefore, predominantly academic. Rather, the school encourages whole person
learning:

The culture of this place is very much centred on the kids being educated for life. They are getting skills that are going to equip them. They are maybe not academically becoming more upwardly socially or economically mobile but they have an incredible confidence. They also learn about social values and justice and equity, and those factors are really, really important (Abby, i4, 269-276).

Approximately 70 teachers work at St Bernadette’s. These teachers inhabit a large common staffroom that is grouped according to KLAs. History has been subsumed within the HSIE department for over ten years and there are 13 teachers in the HSIE department. History has a low status within the school, particularly in the junior school, where many students elect to study commerce instead of history.

The history teachers

There were three teachers within the HSIE department who taught junior history. These were Matthew, the HSIE Head Teacher, Abby, the year 11 advisor, and Paul. Both Matthew and Paul also taught a number of HSIE subjects whilst Abby was the only history specialist within the school. Coincidently, Abby worked in the history department at Northbridge immediately prior to her employment at St Bernadette’s.

As one of eight subjects taught within the HSIE department, the status of history as measured by student numbers was relatively low. In 1999 the HSIE department was implementing both the 1998 history and geography syllabuses and the new Stage 6 HSC syllabuses across seven subjects – history, geography, legal studies, business studies, economics, Aboriginal studies and studies of religion. Comparatively, the 1998 junior history syllabus was a low priority. Matthew, Paul and Abby had seen numerous changes to the junior history curriculum over their careers. Their previous experiences of history curriculum change and the low status accorded history at St Bernadette’s were influential factors shaping their enactment of a new syllabus document. Their interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus were characterised by cynicism, apathy and compliance. To fully explain this, biographical accounts of Matthew, Paul and Abby are first provided.

Matthew

Matthew, the HSIE Head Teacher, was 41 years old at the time of data collection and
had been teaching for 17 years. Matthew initially trained as a history/English teacher but was required to teach history and geography in his first teaching position.

In his second teaching position Matthew was employed as a history teacher. He was again forced to diversify when the history department became part of the HSIE department several years later. To survive in an HSIE department teachers need to be multi-disciplinary. His teaching subjects have therefore varied over his career. In the years immediately preceding data collection, Matthew was teaching a number of subjects, including, economics, legal studies, business studies, junior history and senior ancient history, although history, remained one of Matthew’s interests:

I guess over the years I have developed an eclectic interest or range of interests just simply from the point of view that that’s what interests me. I mean I certainly am very interested in history and I tend, just for enjoyment, to read history but I have had and still have an interest in the economy and politics (i1, 239-246).

Matthew believed that subject diversification is important as it allows for professional growth:

I enjoy teaching varied subjects because it allows me to grow in the sense of being exposed to a number of different subject areas. As most teachers who have been teaching for a while will tell you, that diversification allows you to keep interested and motivated obviously to learn, which is important.

Subject diversification was also instrumental in securing promotion to HSIE Head Teacher. It is unusual for a history-trained teacher to be appointed as HSIE Head Teacher. HSIE Head Teachers must have a working knowledge of up to eight different subjects, and NSW history teachers are frequently stereotyped as too insular in their subject orientation:

I do remember when, not so long ago, when someone [at a nearby school] was appointed as the HSIE coordinator who was subject focused, as in my case – a history teacher. A lot of people asked why this person was appointed the HSIE coordinator … Traditionally the HSIE coordinator would be the economics/geography type person (i1, 436-454).

Whilst I was at Franciscan Brothers there was a move to incorporate history into the HSIE [department] and there was a lot of resistance because there was a history coordinator who was brought up in a separate history department now taking on such things as commerce and general studies to make up his [teaching] load (i1, 79-85).

These comments suggest that subject territorialism is not the domain of subject specialists alone. Multi-disciplinary teachers such as HSIE teachers can also be
territorial and exclusive in their maintenance of clustered subject boundaries.

Matthew believed his subject flexibility came from working in the Catholic system. He argued that subject proliferation and increased competition for students, and the income they generate, meant that to survive, Catholic schools such as St Bernadette’s needed to have teachers who could teach multiple subjects and respond to the changing subject demands of students:

I don’t know whether that is something that is peculiar to say private school education or, say, specifically Catholic school education, but the notion that we can afford to have specialist teachers who will only take, say, history is not common (i7, 185-189).

Unlike Gillian at Northbridge, Matthew was able to select individual teachers for employment in the HSIE department and he deliberately chose those teachers who would fit the multi-disciplinary needs of the HSIE department:

There is a lot of resistance amongst certain staff to move away from those subjects which they trained in. We [the HSIE department] haven’t found that because we tend to employ staff that we can use in a flexible way and we tend to emphasise that at the interview level (i1, 196-209).

Matthew hadn’t experienced any difficulties in assuming the role of HSIE Head Teacher. There are a number of reasons for this. First, he taught as an HSIE teacher at St Bernadette’s for two years prior to his promotion and had established collegial relationships with many of his colleagues. Second, the HSIE department is large and has a rapid staff turnover. Matthew has therefore been able to select teachers for inclusion in the HSIE department and his selection of teachers has rested on several criteria. These criteria, described below, provide a broad profile of Matthew’s perceptions of HSIE teachers and the HSIE department. They also provide insight into Matthew’s teacher self-identity.

(a) Staff turnover
Matthew felt that staff turnover was a significant factor in the renewal of teachers’ skills and he encouraged regular staff turnover:

I don’t know whether this is something peculiar or particular to the Catholic school system, but because there’s a lot of movement and people are happy to
stay for more or less three or four years in a place and then move on somewhere else seeking a newer challenge or whatever the case might be, so there’s a continual renewal of ideas even amongst older teachers who, because they’ve come from somewhere else. I mean we always tend to say that this is a different environment, it’s a renewal of your skills because you are teaching in a different school, different socio-economic background, whether it be boys or girls, and that has an impact on your motivation to teach and share your expertise and knowledge, so I think that has been a very positive thing to bring to a job (i1, 572-588).

(b) A mix of inexperienced and experienced teachers

Matthew actively sought a mixture of inexperienced and experienced staff. During his time as HSIE Head Teacher, six younger and relatively inexperienced teachers were employed to teach within the HSIE department:

I am lucky in that I have a younger group of people in the HISE department which brings in new enthusiasm, motivation, and that helps those of us that have been here for, say, a number of years to pick up rather than simply just do things as we have over the years and so on (i7, 317-330).

It must also be remembered that younger and less experienced teachers attract lower salaries and are thus more cost-effective. Matthew had also selected older, more experienced teachers, such as Paul, to work within the HSIE department.

(c) Subject flexibility

Matthew employed teachers who were either trained in, or were willing to teach, a number of HSIE subjects. He does so for practical reasons:

We tend to employ staff that we can use in a flexible way and we tend to emphasise that at the interview level because, although we would like to specialise and have specialist teachers, it’s not always possible and there are such considerations as the timetable, which makes it impossible to say that I only teach history and therefore that’s all I am teaching. That’s unfortunately the practicalities, the constraints of, say, things like the timetable, and I guess the fickleness of certain students to, say, certain cohorts of students who say – well, we’re not interested in history this year, and all of a sudden history classes drop (i1, 206-223).

(d) Teacher autonomy

Matthew encouraged HSIE teachers to work independently of him:

There have been occasions, however, not at the present time thank goodness, where there have been teachers that need a lot of guidance and teachers who
would like to teach senior school but who are not adequately prepared or are unable for a number of reasons. I mean I don’t like that role but when it comes down to having to apply those sorts of measures I do it – I don’t like it but it has to be done (i1, 371-379).

He also encouraged HSIE teachers to work collaboratively, and resource sharing and informal collegial work is common:

Matthew: In most cases there’s a lot of resource sharing amongst the HSIE staff. I mean we do collect a lot of resources that either we have created or we’ve received from somewhere else and they’ve been shared as a tool.

CH: And does that occur as a one-on-one interaction or will there be times that, say, with the 1998 history syllabus, you’ll sit down together in staff meetings and hatch it out as a department, or is it generally little sub-groups in the department who go away and do there thing if they are perhaps all teaching year 7?

Matthew: Mm, I guess it is done on a rather ad hoc way (i1, 510-526).

Formal HSIE department meetings were difficult to organise around the timetables of 13 HSIE teachers. Departmental relationships were therefore built on informal interactions. Certainly, Matthew perceived his role as Head Teacher to be largely administrative. He defined his responsibilities and focus as familiarity with subjects and syllabuses and ensuring that teachers within his department were meeting syllabus requirements. The sheer size of the HSIE department – 13 teachers across eight subjects – placed significant demands on his time and energy.

His focus on the responsibilities of teaching similarly relate to issues of accountability. He rarely mentioned his students and had come to view his role as both teacher and Head Teacher in a rather perfunctory manner. This stems from his increasing cynicism about the nature and purpose of educational change. Matthew admits to recurrent feelings of disillusionment:

Well I guess as a lot of us that go through university and then think that we are going to change the world in a sense and the students are going to love our subjects, the reality in a lot of cases is that the students don’t share the same enthusiasm that we had and so, yeah, after four years I became quite disillusioned with the profession and I left, I left for a year and then I guess necessity [marriage and a family] threw me back to what I could do (i1, 30-39).

Early in his career, Matthew used subject diversification and job relocation to maintain his enthusiasm for teaching, but at 41 Matthew was openly disillusioned about teaching and this was reflected in his focus on the mechanical sides of his role as teacher and Head Teacher – administration and accountability. The following comment revealed a
sense of anger and entrapment:

There are some Principals and deputies who have this notion of career path. Remember when the ST1 classification [CH: The senior teacher one?], yeah, the senior teacher one in the private system came in and the notion was to give you a career path. I mean for goodness sakes, how could they really say to us that for $1,500 [per annum] that’s a career path! It’s a cup of coffee [per week] for God’s sake, and that’s a career path. They must take us for fools and so people laugh and the younger ones leave and that’s all there is to it. We stay on because we have to and the younger ones who have any sense leave (i6, 487-497).

Matthew also feels a sense of sadness about his changing perceptions of teaching and teachers:

It’s [teaching] a job and you become, I guess, immune to a lot of those things that in the past would make you feel guilty if you didn’t do because practically you just can’t do it. A lot of younger teachers would say – gee, look at those older teachers who don’t pull their weight because they don't participate in other activities and you know I'm tired ... but it’s sad because I used to, once upon a time, look at older teachers who seemed burnt out and I used to say to myself – isn’t it time for them to move on? I remember it like it was yesterday really, that I was there and now I am here and I can understand why now (i6, 390-399).

Matthew’s feelings of disillusionment were further compounded by the changes to HSC courses. New senior syllabuses were released at the same time as the 1998 history and geography syllabuses. As well as feeling overwhelmed by the challenges these new syllabuses presented to his daily teaching, he also felt overwhelmed by the administrative challenges these changes posed to his role as Head Teacher. Matthew had little control over the changes he had to implement:

Again, I can only speak for myself and, say, colleagues and friends who are in the profession, and that’s the general feeling, that there is a degree of anger and a sense of hopelessness in that you don’t feel that you are participating in anything but the implementation of somebody else’s ideas, but why fight it? (i6, 237-241).

When asked to talk specifically of his perceptions of the 1998 syllabus, Matthew saw the changes it advocated as ‘recycled’:

They [BoS] have imposed their views and the new syllabus upon us and we have done this before. They are not fresh ideas, they are not new ideas, they are just simply recycled ideas (i7, 374-377).

Well in the past the structure was more or less as it is now in the sense that we have gone back to the notion of teaching Australian history in [years] 9 and 10
and the ancient history and the medieval history were taught in [years] 7 and 8 (i1, 818-823).

Whilst he was openly cynical of changes heralded by the 1998 syllabus, he elected to teach year 7 history in 1999 so that he would be familiar with this new syllabus document. Like many teachers, Matthew felt that the mandating of Australian history in Stage 5 would not be well received by teachers and students alike:

I can’t put my finger on it but, I don’t find they [students] have the same reaction. They don’t have the same interest in Australian history, maybe because there are no wars apart from external wars, but there are no wars and I guess issues of conflict within our past history. I know that we can discuss the Aboriginal issues, etc, but there aren’t specific events that people in that history can sort of debate and take a stand on (i1, 832-841).

His comments are perhaps more reflective of Matthew’s own feelings about Australian history. Student interest in particular areas of history is arguably related to teacher interest. Certainly, there are many historical and contemporary Aboriginal issues worthy of debate and conjecture. In view of the sizeable population of Aboriginal students at St Bernadette’s, Matthew’s comments are slightly disconcerting.

Apart from these comments, Matthew is largely apathetic about the 1998 syllabus. Apathy is a coping mechanism. In the face of disillusionment, low morale and curriculum change overload, apathy is a mechanism that allows Matthew cope with his feelings of anger, frustration and disappointment:

The notion of teacher-beating by the government and by outside bodies, and you read it in the paper and letters to the editor in our major daily papers and you absolutely, you know, grow completely disheartened. So why would this, why would a syllabus be of any consequence to us? We just simply say – don’t make waves, don’t rock the boat and just go ahead with it (i6, 254-260).

I don't mean to rubbish on your research [CH: No, I’d like to know what is and isn’t important to you] but frankly I don't give a damn about the history syllabus, the economics syllabus whatever (i6, 379-400).

Apathy does not, however, protect him from the effects of curriculum change: “it impacts on every aspect of your career, on the way you see your job, and obviously it has an impact on the way we see teaching here” (i6, 383-385). To minimise the effects of the 1998 syllabus on himself and his department, Matthew relied on textbooks containing ‘sample programs’ as a way of avoiding having to develop new programs:

We’ve bought textbooks for all our students and the textbook that we are using does have a sample program so we have been able to use it in some
cases by modifying it, but in most cases I don’t think … well certainly the feedback from the teachers who are taking junior history, it hasn't been a question of finding it difficult (i7, 63-78).

Reliance on sample programs allowed Matthew to comply with the demands of the 1998 syllabus. This compliance placed few demands on him and allowed focus on issues of greater consequence, namely the implementation of seven new HSC syllabuses.

**Paul**

Paul was in his early 50s and was months away from leaving the teaching profession when interviewed. Far from being dissatisfied with teaching, he had enjoyed his 18 months at St Bernadette’s: “there is no context of, sort of, draining away to an end or hanging by my fingernails or anything. I am actually quite excited to be in the classroom every day” (i3, 343-348).

His decision to leave the teaching profession was a reflection of his desire to try a new but related career path. Following his departure and a brief overseas vacation Paul was intent on setting up a private business offering courses aimed at the development of change management skills for children. Rather than viewing this as a departure from teaching, Paul saw it as part of ‘the continuum’.

Paul’s teaching career had been diverse. He originally trained as an English/history teacher in New Zealand in the 1960s and migrated to Australia in 1980. On arrival, Paul explained:

> There was a surplus of history teachers and I went into geography, which was my other area, and then I went from there into commerce and English, and commerce became my main teaching area over most of my career, commerce and business studies (i3, 322-327).

Paul had no strong ties to any particular subject. His love of teaching stemmed from his experiences in the classroom:

> I would just describe myself as a teacher, not a history teacher or a commerce teacher but a teacher, so that I don’t particularly have a problem with any area that I’ve been chucked into other than, obviously, I wouldn’t like to teach science [because of safety issues], but I’ve taught across quite a range of subjects, including visual arts and all sorts of things so I don’t necessarily have a preference subject. If they want to put me into an area, that’s fine, so a teacher first (i3, 43-51).
In 1998 and 1999 Paul taught history for the first time in 20 years. He felt that history held particular value to the students he was teaching because:

You can anchor it from where the students are coming from … with so many of them [students from overseas], well in any class we have possibly at least half a dozen new arrivals and getting some sort of handle on where they are is pretty important. History is also about a sense of time, which is vital I think (i3, 150-156).

Paul has never felt constrained by junior syllabuses, as until recently history and other junior HSIE subjects were not publicly examined. Paul’s experience of junior syllabuses has been to use the syllabus as a guide – “it’s something you can explore with” (i3, 676) – and it is within this frame of reference that he perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus. He relayed a recent class experience as an example of this:

When we were looking at Federation for a few periods we were moving in and out of the republican debate as well, because it ties. The late 1890s people were having to focus on change politically and we’re having to focus on it again now. So, you know when elections are on I sort of believe that that’s very much part of history and you should focus on an election campaign, or last week I concentrated in years 7 and 8 history on Hiroshima because it was Hiroshima Day last week and it’s a bit senseless to remember Hiroshima Day in February or waiting until you do Japan when you remember it. You’ve got to do it when it’s happening (i3, 127-141).

When asked to comment on his experiences of the HSIE department, Paul talked of the freedom and flexibility that Matthew had allowed him:

Paul: I think Matthew leads the department in a way that we're not … we don’t have many meetings, and we have help when we need it.

CH: What sort of help?

Paul: Help with resources mainly and there’s no sort of over-regimentation, we’re not sort of, you know being forced to do anything. We have a lot of freedom in our ability to program and register our work and so forth, which is really good, it’s just a nice mix (i3, 377-384).

Paul was unbothered by the introduction of the 1998 syllabus. In 1999 he was teaching the year 7 course of the 1998 syllabus and was doing so in an informal manner. He hadn’t constructed programs for this new year 7 course. Rather, he relied on his prior knowledge of ancient societies and taught those topics that he thought would be interesting to students.
Certainly, leaving the teaching profession made this new syllabus document of little direct relevance, but Paul’s cheery demeanour and broad career history suggest that his teaching rewards have been found in the classroom and he infrequently allows syllabuses to alter the ways in which he teaches junior subjects. Some people might see this as a dereliction of his teaching duties but Paul sees it as responding to the interests and learning needs of students. He also has a motto of not taking anything too seriously: “I am pretty blasé about change, even more so because I’m leaving. A new syllabus usually doesn’t amount to much” (i3, 358-369). If he were staying at St Bernadette’s and implementing the 1998 syllabus through to year 10 and the School Certificate HGCC Examination, Paul might have perceived the 1998 syllabus differently. He may have viewed the syllabus as more of a threat to the way in which teaches.

**Abby**

Abby went to Teachers’ College in the late 1960s and trained as a history teacher. She had started an arts degree but the arrival of her first child and the subsequent need for job security convinced her to enter the teaching force:

> I had no intention of ever being a teacher, not at all, but equally I think I am a very good teacher. I am a natural in the classroom. I think that teachers are born and not made in lots of respects, and I also think that people have to have an enthusiasm and a love of young people or they shouldn’t stay in it (i4, 68-75).

Abby’s teaching focus was her students and she relished her role as year 11 advisor. She occupied her own office in the school library and there was a constant stream of students dropping by for assistance or advice. Abby was a self-confessed ‘mother’ to her students and had a preference for teaching girls. She had taught at four different schools, all of which been either independent or Catholic schools.

Abby believed in whole-person learning and advocated a broad academic and extra-curricular program. Her educational philosophy fitted with that advocated by the school Principal:

> Oh I love it, I love it here. I think my philosophy about education is very much endorsed and encouraged by the Principal here. She has that same kind of mentality about the kids, student centred, very caring, compassionate, but also providing students with the opportunity to take responsibility for themselves (i4, 142-144).

Part of taking responsibility for oneself revolves around issues of social justice, and
Abby stressed this at both a whole-school and classroom level. At a whole-school level, she gave the following example:

Now those kids have said that they have learnt about Aborigines being here and they have gone back [home] and taught about reconciliation issues with their families, with their peers back in their country towns and they have said that what they have learnt from here is the reality of life and about social justice (i4, 279-285).

Abby’s focus on history teaching was not by choice; rather it had emerged by chance:

I teach history because that’s the first job I got [laughs]. No, I started doing social work and I have got a major in politics and history so I got a job at Pennington [prestigious independent girls school] teaching history and that’s all I have ever taught. I have had a very, very privileged teaching career (i4, 86-95).

Her experiences of teaching have been diverse. She uses the example of teaching within the history department at Northbridge comparatively:

Having taught at my previous schools, particularly when I taught at Northbridge and Pennington, it was very territorial and departments stayed within departments and there was this supposed academic rigour. Well there was academic rigour I suppose, and your worth as a teacher was measured by your results, but I think there is a real flaw in doing that because if you accept the best results then equally you have to be responsible for the poorest [results] (i4, 30-41).

Abby has taught students of varied ability and social background and has found that student demography significantly influences the way in which she views her role as teacher. It is the intrinsic rewards of teaching as opposed to the extrinsic rewards (as measured by students’ results) that were important to Abby: “my sense of worth comes from them [students] being people, being thinkers, being responsible, you know, having the skills that will equip them for the rest of their lives” (i4, 54-58).

Abby believed history to be a valuable subject:

I value history because I think that any real student of history becomes very socially aware of a society, looking at basically discrimination and injustices. No-one could study 19th-century Britain without looking at how workers were exploited and the value of unionism, basically looking at the ideal of socialism and the reality of Russia and stuff like that, so I see it [history and social awareness] as part and parcel, it can’t be separated (i4, 298-308).

Abby viewed history not only as a valuable subject but also an academic subject. This perception may emanate from her experience teaching in schools like Northbridge, where history has traditionally held academic or quasi-academic status. History is not a popular subject at St Bernadette’s, however, as Abby explained:
I think the students here at this school come from a perception that you do subjects like commerce and business studies because they are more practical and they will get you a job. It’s a misperception but there is a real preference for less academic subjects (i5, 81-87).

Abby is not overly concerned about history’s lack of popularity and status, as her personal and professional needs are met through her role as year 11 advisor: “it’s a lot of work but you really get to know the girls” (i5, 389-390).

Abby finds St Bernadette’s a collaborative school to work within and explained why:

Because there’s a movement of staff. They are younger – see this would probably be the youngest staff I have ever taught with … so there’s a movement and I don’t mean there’s an instability but there is a renewal. You help the new people coming in because it benefits everyone – the kids are happy and we are all teaching the right thing and got the resources, it’s a much happier place, an easier place to work in. I just found that was a real, it was something that impressed me and it was such a contrast to Northbridge where everyone just jealously guards their little territory, their little empire (i4, 355-403).

Whilst Abby is a member of the HSIE department, she only teaches history and is the only history specialist at St Bernadette’s. This didn’t signify status to Abby as it did Gillian at Northbridge; rather it allowed Abby independence and autonomy:

I think he [Matthew] respects the fact that I know what I am teaching, so he lets you do it. He has got specialists under him [mentions a geography specialist] and he basically delegates that kind of stuff. He is more administrative, he keeps the marks and all that kind of stuff, he doesn’t say – what’s going on in the classroom? He’s not really interested, like when all the programming has to be done he just lets you go, and people get shitty with that and might say that he is doing bugger all but basically he was allowing the people who were teaching those kinds of things, who knew what they were doing, to do it (i4, 492-506).

The comment above suggests that Abby’s career history and career stage allowed her to function in a department whose leadership is administratively defined. Other teachers might not have found Matthew’s role as Head Teacher as amenable to their needs.

Abby had mixed feelings about the 1998 syllabus. She was concerned about the content this new syllabus mandated and the potential effects of it on the teaching of issues of social justice. Like many history teachers her concerns centre on the School Certificate HGCC Examination and its effect on the way in which the Stage 5 Australian history content will be taught and assessed:

There’s a real possibility that ... history can tend to be a whole series of wars and so I
think that that can become the students’ notion of history, and there is a tendency to
do that [teach the wars] because there’s the juicy bits and the kids are interested in the
fighting and all that kind of stuff whereas a lot of the other history - the political and
social and the economic history – is lost and the students don’t get a proper
perspective of what history is about and they go in thinking that they just learn about
wars (i4, 865-879).

It [the impending School Certificate Examination] is not even a valid test
because the logistics of marking it in a very short time. It's a very American way
– the tick and flick, the multiple choice (i4, 643-648).

Abby endorsed the move to mandate Australian history in Stage 5 but felt that the
proposed examination structure could constrain the ways in which history was taught
and learnt. She felt confident, however, that a teacher of her experience and subject
matter knowledge could easily adapt their practice to fit students’ needs and syllabus
requirements. Her concern was that teachers who didn’t possess experience and broad
content knowledge would have difficulty preserving the inquiry base of history, which
she felt was a strong feature of the 1992 history syllabus.

Abby believed that syllabus change is necessary as it forced teachers to evaluate their
teaching:

I don’t think that that’s a bad thing for teachers to start rethinking the way they
present something in the classroom and that can be a renewal, invigorating instead
of standing there being bored witless at the beginning of the year thinking here we
go again. If you are an educationalist you are meant to believe in change. We
expect the kids to keep changing and moving and learning new things and I think
equally teachers need to do that (i4, 791-805).

When syllabus change is enforced, however, Abby conceded that it was hard to feel
invigorated or even accepting of a new syllabus document. Rather, Abby was dismissive
of the “continual syllabus changes in NSW”. Rather than being angry about the
marginalisation of teachers in formal syllabus development processes, Abby was
nonchalant: “I think it's inevitable, I don't give a nickel and a dime about it at all, that's
just the way it is” (i5, 119-121). She is similarly dismissive of the 1998 syllabus
document: “you know, we just sit back and wait and then when another political party
gets into power in NSW, I think there will be more changes so no, I don’t get worked up
about it, I just go with the flow” (i5, 126-130).

When asked what ‘going with the flow’ involved, Abby explained that her career history
and her broad subject matter knowledge enabled her “to change things to fit whatever
little structure they are coming out with, you know, you can now just make sure you
whack the outcomes on the front of an assessment” (i5, 141-145). Like the Illangara history teachers, she merely adapted her existing practice to fit the demands of the 1998 syllabus:

You just pick the eyes out of it and you just take what you need, what you’ve already got and you just adapt it. Well, you’re not going to reinvent the wheel, you just add some new spokes, that’s the reality of it (i5, 310-314).

Colonising change was an informal process that allowed Abby to comply with the requirements of the 1998 syllabus in a way that presents little threat to her teacher self-identity:

The reality is that whilst you should sit down and plan it out [a new syllabus document] before you teach it, you actually program as you go and you know what works, you chuck what doesn’t work and, OK, with one year it might work and with the next it mightn’t so you program after you’ve taught it (i4, 949-957).

Asked whether planning and programming for a new syllabus was a collegial activity, Abby explained that as she has her own office she typically works on her own programs. This is interesting in view of Abby’s earlier assertion that the HSIE department was collegial. When asked to clarify what she meant by collegial she replied “everyone is friendly, they don’t bitch about each other and they share resources” (i5, 447-450). Admittedly, collegial relationships centred on curriculum change and/or subject-specific pedagogy are hampered by the diverse subject identities of teachers within the HSIE department. It may be that finding a common point or understanding from which to build collegial relationships is more difficult in multi-disciplinary departments than in single-subject departments.

The HSIE department

The sheer size of the HSIE department at St Bernadette’s presented a number of challenges for the teachers working within it. First, whole-department formal meetings were impossible to arrange around the timetables of 13 teachers. Second, staff turnover was fairly rapid due to both the size of the department and Matthew’s preference for employing younger and more mobile teachers. The diverse subjects incorporated within the HSIE KLA also presented their own challenges. The identity of the department was not based on subject affiliation. Rather, Matthew claimed it was based on teacher age,
flexibility and frequent staff turnover.

Whilst the biographical accounts of Matthew, Paul and Abby provide insight into their individual perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus, how their collective perceptions and enactment of this new syllabus document were manifested, if at all, remains unclear. To address this issue the sites, contexts and processes through which Matthew, Paul and Abby individually and collectively perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation are examined below.

The sites: a common staffroom

The HSIE teachers were, excepting Abby, located in the common staffroom. The staffroom is a large ground floor office. It is open plan and teachers were clustered according to KLAs. The HSIE teachers were clustered around Matthew. The staffroom was off limits to students, although students regularly called at the door to request particular teachers. Matthew and Paul always invited me to enter the staffroom and as a visitor I found I was the object of many questions and greetings. The staffroom appeared to be both an industrious and congenial environment in which to work. Photographs, posters and student work lined the walls and there was certainly a sense of ‘being at St Bernadette’s’.

Abby had her own office located in the school library. She was allocated an office as her role as year 11 advisor required regular confidential consultations with students. Abby’s office was cluttered but homely. History texts were piled in corners and the walls were lined with photos of students and Abby’s three children. The door to her office was always open and students requiring urgent advice or assistance regularly interrupted interviews.

These varying sites had their advantages and disadvantages. Whilst the common staffroom was designed to encourage the development and maintenance of a whole-school teacher culture, it also made close subject or KLA-based relationships difficult as smaller groups of teachers found it hard to meet and discuss issues uninterrupted. Similarly, Abby’s personal office enabled her role as year 11 advisor yet placed restrictions on her ability to be able to interact with other members of the HSIE
The clustering of departments according to KLA reflects a school-wide trend towards non-specialism. Matthew explained this trend:

I think that one of the biggest problems in teaching is this notion of you know - my department is more important that yours – that petty, insular belief that, you know, the English department is the foundation of everything. I mean I can understand obviously people being proud of their subject area but I rather look at things in a broader sense … I think that the staffroom environment, or the common staffroom environment, would tend to minimise that insularity because you are exposed to everybody within the staff (i1, 393-414).

Detailing the physical sites in which Matthew, Paul and Abby worked is important in understanding their perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation. The HSIE department is, however, more than the physical sites it occupies. The HSIE department is also a conceptual space in which numerous contexts intersect. Chapters 5 and 6 have discussed the salience of subject sub-culture and teacher culture in shaping teacher practice and their responses to syllabus change. As with both the Illangara and Northbridge history departments, understanding how these contexts are manifested within a specific subject department, such as the St Bernadette’s HSIE department, is critical to understanding how Matthew, Paul and Abby enacted the 1998 syllabus before they implemented it in the classroom, and why and to what effect.

**The role of context in shaping history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus – subject sub-culture and teacher culture**

Of the three case studies, the subject sub-culture and teacher culture of the St Bernadette’s HSIE department are the most difficult to portray. This is because they are marked by both diffusion and confluence. A distinct or dominant subject sub-culture is not discernable, as the HSIE department is both structurally and culturally amorphous. Areas of confluence are evident in the profile of HSIE teachers provided by Matthew. Typically, HSIE staff are young, multi-disciplinary and adaptive. This profile provides a broad but once again diffuse portrait of the teacher culture of the HSIE department.
Further, the participation of only those teachers who teach junior history allowed only a glimpse inside the HSIE department, as they perceived it. Certainly, the identification and examination of subject sub-cultures and teacher cultures that pervade history/HSIE departments is related to the broader aims of this study; it is not, however, the sole focus of this study. The findings presented in this study are inferential, and making inferences from data is constrained by the parameters of each case study. To explain this fully, these issues are elaborated below.

**Subject sub-culture**

It is difficult to discern a specific subject sub-culture within the HSIE department, as there is no identifiable dominant subject sub-culture, nor are there recognisable multiple competing or coalescing subject sub-cultures. This is perhaps a reflection of the size and diversity of the HSIE department. The broad multi-disciplinary focus of the HSIE department has encouraged subject flexibility amongst staff. This, in combination with the school’s and Matthew’s preference for employing teachers who are not subject specialists to work within the HSIE department, has resulted in an amorphous subject sub-culture. This is evidenced in Matthew, Paul and Abby’s conceptions of history. Of the three teachers, Abby was the only teacher to regard herself as a history specialist. She was also the only teacher to acknowledge the unique value of history to students. Matthew and Paul were somewhat dismissive of the importance of history; whilst they enjoyed teaching it, they equally enjoyed a range of subject such as business studies and commerce.

There was therefore no collectively held history subject sub-culture. Subject sub-cultures are important as they can act to develop and sustain school subjects. The low status of history at St Bernadette’s is a reflection of both student preference and the lack of history specialists. Typically, subject specialists act to both promote and protect their subject. Whilst Abby is a history specialist, her career history and her experiences at Northbridge have convinced her that her focus on her subject is secondary to her focus on her students. This is not to suggest that these are mutually exclusive focuses. Her role at St Bernadette’s is defined through her relationships with students and what she perceived to be collegial relations with other teachers. She therefore neither promoted nor protected history beyond her own classroom teaching.

Matthew, Paul and Abby were not, for varying reasons, overly concerned about the
1998 syllabus. This is because they perceived the impact of this new syllabus document on their work as teachers and the functioning of the HSIE department to be minimal. However, the 1998 syllabus did require the restructuring of junior history courses. This is briefly explained below.

Subject structure

A comparison of the structure of junior history under the previous 1992 syllabus and the structure of junior history as mandated in 1998 syllabus is outlined in figure 7.1 below.

Table 7.1: Structure of Stage 4-5 history under the 1992 syllabus and the 1998 syllabus at St Bernadette’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>1992 syllabus</th>
<th>1998 syllabus</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stage 4</td>
<td>Mandate Australian history</td>
<td>Mandatory Ancient and medieval history (Civics and citizenship content embedded within)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(years 7-8)</td>
<td>100 hours (2 semesters)</td>
<td>100 hours (2 semesters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Semesterised</td>
<td>Semesterised</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stage 5</td>
<td>Elective Ancient and world history</td>
<td>Mandatory Australian history (civics and citizenship content embedded within)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(years 9-10)</td>
<td>200 hours (4 semesters)</td>
<td>100 hours (4 semesters)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Year long</td>
<td>Year long</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>School based</td>
<td>Public examination for Stage 5 course</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The structure of junior history under the 1992 syllabus was identical to that at both Illangara and Northbridge. Students undertook two semesters of mandatory Australian history in Stage 4 and could then elect to study ancient and world history in Stage 5. Unlike Illangara, Stage 5 history was not a popular student choice at St Bernadette’s. The introduction of the 1998 syllabus now requires students to undertake a study of history across both Stages 4 and 5.

Interestingly, where Illangara and Northbridge stood to lose history student numbers through the introduction of the 1998 syllabus, St Bernadette’s stood to gain history
student numbers. Matthew rationalised that those students who had previously elected commerce would now be forced to study mandatory Stage 5 history, so the HSIE department would inevitably maintain pre-1998 syllabus student numbers. Asked whether the increase in numbers of students studying Stage 5 history would raise the status of history within the school and the HSIE department, Matthew replied: “No, I don’t think so, these students are non-voluntary and the Stage 5 content is pretty bland” (i6, 90-91).

Where St Bernadette’s differed from both Illangara and Northbridge was in their decision to teach both history and geography concurrently. Rather than semesterising history and geography, the HSIE department decided to teach both subjects at the same time, using the same teacher. Both Matthew and Paul had experience teaching geography, whilst Abby had none. To ease potential concerns for Abby, Matthew suggested that he could either arrange for another teacher to take the geography component or Abby could specialise in the teaching of senior history. In this way Abby’s teacher self-identity was protected and the 1998 syllabus presented little threat to her. The restructuring of Stages 4-5 history was supported by the flexibility of HSIE teachers and Matthew’s willingness to accommodate Abby, the only history specialist within the HSIE department. The ease with which Matthew and Abby have enacted the 1998 syllabus is a reflection of their individual teacher self-identities and the teacher culture of both the school and the HSIE department.

**Teacher culture**

The criteria governing the employment of HSIE teachers is a useful indicator of the teacher culture pervading the school and the HSIE department. The school is structured according to KLAs. Whilst several KLAs are single subject (maths and English), many are multi-disciplinary. This, in combination with increasing competition for students and fiscal constraints has, according to Matthew, led to the development of a whole-school culture based on subject flexibility, staff turnover and adaptability. This is evident within the HSIE department. HSIE teachers are typically young, have taught at a number of schools and are adaptive to change. Interestingly, the three HSIE teachers who teach junior history are all older. Whilst Matthew assured me that this was a coincidence, it may be a reflection of the changing tertiary preparation of history teachers. Increasingly, teachers are now trained as HSIE (including history) while only
ten years ago it was far more common for teachers to train as history/English. It follows that those teachers who trained as history/English teachers could potentially have greater subject matter knowledge of history than HSIE trained teachers, and hence be asked to teach history classes.

Matthew, Paul and Abby’s perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation were, to varying degrees, characterised by cynicism and apathy. These findings shed light on the teacher culture pervading the HSIE department but not conclusively so. Matthew, Paul and Abby are only three teachers out of a department of 13, and in light of Matthew’s employment criteria it is fair to suggest that these three teachers are not representative of the HSIE teachers in terms of their age alone. Any conclusions drawn about the teacher culture of the HSIE department can only be justifiably related to these three teachers, as the remaining ten HSIE teachers did not participate in this study.

Data indicates a teacher culture based on cynicism and apathy. Cynicism can be a product of past experience of educational change. Matthew, Paul and Abby have seen numerous curriculum changes throughout their careers and have increasingly come to distrust DET, the BoS and the political parties and leaders who “meddle in education”, as Matthew explained:

I think political involvement [in syllabus change] is a huge concern amongst staff and again I can only speak personally and from other people's opinions that I've talked with. There is an idea that there is some political mileage to be gained by saying – well, schools are not doing it right and we should emphasis this (i1, 737-744).

Cynicism is also a coping mechanism; it is an expression of distrust and a way of dealing with disillusionment. Abby provides an example of this when she talks of the lack of support provided by DET for teachers in NSW:

I think the Education Department [DET] and the Catholic Education office [CEO] are really short sighted … If they want the product they are providing [education] to be the best then teachers need to the best, so as an employer of teachers they need to look after us, educate us, make sure we have access to everything. So it’s not just paying us, it’s making sure we have time, that we’re not stressed, that we’re really, really well informed, that we’re are up to date and all that kind of stuff, then they can provide a better quality product, but they don’t and that is a joke. You know I don’t even expect any support anymore (Abby, 424-438).

Abby is disappointed by the lack of formal support provided to teachers in their implementation of curriculum change. By expecting the worse (no support from DET or
the CEO) she is able to avoid feeling continually disappointed.

Cynicism is also a way of preparing yourself for the public criticism that frequently follows these often failed curriculum reforms. Cynicism about curriculum change can also lead to apathy as was evident in Matthew’s attitudes about the new syllabus. Whilst cynicism and apathy are effective coping mechanisms, simply ignoring or rejecting a new syllabus document is increasingly difficult, as external student examinations and other accountability mechanisms force teacher compliance. The processes of complying with a new syllabus document are discussed below.

**Processes: strategic compliance**

In direct and indirect ways, teachers are often forced to comply with the demands of policy-makers. This is because career continuance depends on teachers complying with the demands of their employers. Teachers in government, independent and Catholic schools are either directly or indirectly accountable to DET. DET directly employs all NSW government school teachers, and teachers in independent and Catholic schools must go through school accreditation processes that ensure DET requirements are met. One of these requirements is that schools and teachers implement NSW syllabus documents. This, in combination with rigorous accountability mechanisms such as the School Certificate HGCC Examination, forces teacher compliance.

Goldman and Conley (1996) argue that teachers tend to be more socially compliant than the general population. They explain that:

> The education profession tends to drive out non-conformists, and the basic purpose of education is the transmission of established, endorsed cultural values, hardly an institution that can tolerate for long individuals who disown the legitimate authority of the state (1996, p. 12).

There are a number of forms of compliance. Often people comply with change when they can identify with it, when it fits their already established belief and value systems. Alternatively, as was the case with Matthew and Abby, compliance is characterised by apathy, minimal effort and little to no change in teachers’ attitudes and beliefs. Yukl (1991), contrasts compliance with resistance arguing that resistance is an active attempt at subterfuge whilst compliance is characterised by indifference. Whilst Matthew and Abby claimed indifference towards the 1998 syllabus, they also expressed anger,
disappointment and cynicism about the politicisation of curriculum change, and in particular the development of the 1998 syllabus. This suggests that compliance may be a form of passive resistance, and I characterise Matthew and Abby’s compliance as ‘strategic compliance’. Elsewhere, Shain and Gleeson (1999) have used this term in the context of professionalism and further education. The term ‘strategic compliance’ here refers to the ways in which Matthew and Abby strategically ‘bent’ the rules and enacted the syllabus in ways that presented little or no challenge or effort. Matthew and Abby’s compliance is evident in their acknowledgement that they must enact the 1998 syllabus. Rather than being a direct response to the 1998 syllabus, their strategic compliance was a product of their lack of trust for policy-makers:

A lot of us have become used to the fact that a lot of the changes that are occurring in teaching, especially the longer you are in it, you just simply have to adapt to those changes, and I guess I am speaking for myself but also from general conversation from others, the idea is that although the notion is that we are you know, an active participant in curriculum change, the reality is that we are really not. That’s certainly my perception of it and the perception of a few other people that I have spoken to, and not just in this school, about curriculum change and you more or less, and this is very complacent, but you basically acquiesce to the process and say – well, what’s the point of standing on principle and saying – this is my viewpoint, blah, blah, blah (Matthew, i6, 21-33)

In summary, study data indicate that Matthew, Paul and Abby’s perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus were shaped by their collectively held, yet individually defined, cynicism and apathy. For Matthew, disillusionment and a general distrust of policy-makers was manifested in a general apathy towards change. Whilst he longed to leave the teaching profession, he felt unable to do so and was reliant on the school for employment. A condition of his employment and certainly his role as HSIE Head Teacher was responsibility for the implementation and administration of HSIE syllabuses. He rationalised this duty and his feelings of cynicism and apathy by relying on textbook syllabus programs and effectively avoiding engaging with the 1998 syllabus at an individual or collective level. This is a form of colonising change: instead of adapting existing programs to meet syllabus requirements, Matthew colonised textbook programs for use in his classroom.

Paul’s cynicism was a product of his experience of previous curriculum change. It had manifested itself in his decision to leave the teaching profession. He loved teaching in the classroom but felt that continual change had become overwhelming. In view of his imminent departure, he was apathetic about the 1998 syllabus and in his final year of
teaching his passive resistance to syllabus change was evidenced in his failure to implement the new syllabus. As there was no recourse for this – he was leaving teaching and the year 7 1998 syllabus course is non-examinable – he felt justified in teaching those topics identified by students as interesting.

Despite general feelings of cynicism, Abby felt that teaching still offered her a number of intrinsic rewards. Her cynicism was therefore limited to pessimism about the worth of curriculum change and a general distrust for policymakers. Abby did not feel the same sense of hopelessness Matthew experienced and her tone was significantly more up-beat than that of Matthew. Abby’s feelings of apathy related to her experiences of curriculum change. These experiences gave Abby the belief that syllabus change was shortsighted, shortlived and something with which she could comply with minimum effort. She did so by colonising new syllabus documents.

A number of features of change are evidenced in the ways in which Matthew, Paul and Abby perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus before they implemented it in the classroom. These include:

(a) The prioritisation of change: Like most teachers, Matthew and Abby were more concerned with planning for and implementing the new Stage 6 HSC syllabuses. Whilst Abby’s focus was on the implementation of Stage 6 history syllabuses, as HSIE Head Teacher Matthew was responsible for organising the implementation of seven new Stage 6 HSIE syllabuses. This meant that the 1998 syllabus was a lower priority for Matthew than it was for Abby.

(b) Subject-specific curriculum change is difficult to collectively negotiate in a multi-disciplinary department: Matthew, Paul and Abby had disparate conceptions of history and its value to students. With no specific history subject sub-culture, collectively planning for and enacting the 1998 syllabus did not occur.

(c) Cynicism and apathy: As this chapter has shown, Matthew, Paul and Abby all expressed cynicism about curriculum change and, having experienced numerous curriculum changes, they were rather indifferent about the 1998 syllabus.

(d) Compliance: Mandated, system-wide curriculum change forces teacher compliance. Complying with the requirements of a new syllabus document is manifested in a number
of ways, including strategic compliance, as this case study demonstrated.

(e) *Colonising change:* To comply with syllabus requirements Matthew and Abby both colonised change, but in different ways. Abby planned to adapt existing programs to meet syllabus requirements whilst Matthew relied on textbook sample programs for implementation in the classroom.

**Summary**

The HSIE department at St Bernadette’s incorporated eight subjects and a staff of 13 teachers. Of these, only three teachers – Matthew, Paul and Abby – taught junior history. This is a testament to the low status afforded history at St Bernadette’s and students’ preferences for more vocationally oriented subjects. The concurrent release of the 1998 history and geography syllabuses and new Stage 6 syllabuses across seven HSIE subjects resulted in change overload. This in combination with a general cynicism towards curriculum change, made Matthew, Paul and Abby apathetic about syllabus change. In order to comply with syllabus requirements both Matthew and Abby opted to colonise change, thus meeting their employer’s needs with minimum effort.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 have presented within-case findings and have addressed the following research questions:

- What are the sites, contexts and processes that comprise the middle ground of curriculum?
- How do history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus in the middle ground of curriculum?

Each of the three case studies has revealed teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation to be the result of a series of complex and interrelated contexts and processes. Specifically, chapters 5, 6 and 7 have produced a number of issues and themes for consideration:

- The sites history/HSIE departments occupy are spatially oriented and reveal much about issues of power and prestige. Further, the physical layout of the history departments at Illangara and Northbridge and the HSIE department at St
Bernadette’s significantly influenced formal and informal intra-departmental and inter-departmental relationships.

- Three important contexts intersect within the history/HSIE department – teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture. Whilst these three contexts were evident across the three case study sites, they assumed different forms within and across these sites. This suggests these contexts are highly individualised and that teachers within the same history/HSIE department can experience these contexts in different ways and with very different effects. Teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture were therefore found to have numerous features, the dimensions of which were individual, collective, professional, personal and political.

- The processes through which history teachers individually and collectively perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus were complex, historically constituted and often ambiguous.

The following chapter draws together these three case studies through a process I earlier described as metasynthesis. By drawing attention to the commonalities and differences within and across the Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s case studies, I reconceptualise the middle ground metaphor in light of study findings. I subsequently present a reconceptualised middle ground model that helps to illuminate and explain the complex web of personalities, events, contexts and processes through which history teachers make meaning of a new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom.
CHAPTER 8

METASYNTHESIS: RECONCEPTUALISING THE MIDDLE GROUND OF CURRICULUM

Introduction

In this chapter I use the middle ground metaphor as a foundation for theorising cross-case thesis findings. In doing so, I avoid simply reporting thesis ‘results’ and proposing ‘recommendations’. Rather, the middle ground metaphor provides a framework to compare, contrast and further conceptualise the sites, contexts and processes through which history teachers perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation, both within and across the Illangara and Northbridge history departments and the St Bernadette’s HSIE department.

Earlier, I described this as the final stage of analysis and referred to it as meta-synthesis. Synthesising thesis findings across the three case studies enables me to address the third and final research question: How and why do the sites, contexts and processes that constitute the middle ground curriculum, influence the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact this new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom?

To address this research question, this chapter is comprised of four sections. In the first section, I analyse the sites shaping history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation, as identified in chapters 5, 6 and 7. I argue that the staffroom, school and community are simultaneously places in which teachers’ work, as well as spaces that orient the work of teachers. To demonstrate this I compare and contrast the physical sites within which the Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s history teachers worked and argue that although the history/HSIE staffroom is the site of greatest significance, it is nested within a number of other sites such as the school and community which act in different ways, to either enable or constrain history teachers’ interpretation and enactment of a new syllabus document.
In the second section, I examine teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture as critical contexts shaping teacher practice within the history/HSIE department. Study data indicate that these contexts had numerous features, the dimensions of which were individual, collective, professional, personal and political. I contend that understanding the interplay of these dimensions is necessary to understand how and why teachers perceive and enact a new syllabus document in particular ways.

Third, I examine the processes through which history teachers’ make meaning of a new syllabus document. Drawing on Conley and Goldman’s (1997) notion of the ‘zone of enactment’ I highlight the features and patterns of these processes as evidenced in case study findings. The processes through which a new syllabus document is mediated are shown to be innately political, complex and at times ambiguous.

Finally, in the fourth section of this chapter I return to the middle ground metaphor. Building on Figure 3.1 I reconceptualise the middle ground curriculum in light of study findings. In doing so, I generalise thesis findings to theory and contribute to our knowledge about efforts toward mandated curriculum change as experienced by those who must implement them - teachers.

**Analysing the sites shaping history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation**

Study data identified the history/HSIE staffroom as the primary site within which history teachers perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus. Great structural variance was evidenced across the staffrooms in which the Illangara and Northbridge history departments, and the St Bernadette’s HSIE department were situated\(^{37}\). This variance is important as staffrooms can act to constrain and/or enable history teachers’ enactment of syllabus change. This is because staffrooms are both places and spaces. They are physical sites (places) that are temporally and spatially oriented. An examination of the Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s history/HSIE staffrooms reveals much about the patterns of association, relationships, opportunities and obstacles history teachers

---

\(^{37}\) For consistency I refer to the physical structure of each of the three sites as ‘staffroom structure’ and the conceptual structure of each history/HSIE department as ‘department structure’.
individually and collectively encountered as they engaged with the 1998 syllabus. Fully, to explain this, Figure 8.1 below, visually overviews the staffroom structures of each case study.

Figure 8.1: Staffroom structures at Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Illangara</th>
<th>Northbridge(^{58})</th>
<th>St Bernadette’s(^{59})</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><img src="image" alt="Illangara Staffroom" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="Northbridge Staffroom" /></td>
<td><img src="image" alt="St Bernadette’s Staffroom" /></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Key**
- ☻ History/HSIE teacher
- ☺ Non-history teacher
- ░ walking distance

As Figure 8.1 clearly demonstrates, the three case studies had varying staffroom structures. The Illangara history teachers were positioned in a single subject staffroom, the Northbridge history teachers were situated in separate general (mixed subject) staffrooms whilst the St Bernadette’s history teachers were, excepting Abby, located in a

\(^{58}\) I have included Elaine and her placement in a third common staffroom. Even though Elaine did not participate in this study, her placement in Figure 8.1 allows an accurate depiction of the staffroom structure at Northbridge.

\(^{59}\) Similarly, I have included all HSIE teachers in this diagrammatic so as to provide an accurate portrayal of the staffroom structure at St Bernadette’s.
common (whole-school) staffroom. To elaborate the ramifications of staffroom structure on history teachers’ enactment of a new syllabus document, these three staffroom structures are examined in greater detail below.

**Illangara: A single subject staffroom**

Many authors have commented on subject-based departments and staffrooms as the mainstay of secondary schools in the USA and the UK (Ball, 1981; Ball & Bowe, 1992; Hannay & Denby, 1994; Little and McLaughlin, 1993; McLaughlin & Talbert, 2001; Siskin, 1994a). Similarly, staffroom structures based on subject differentiation have characterised NSW secondary schools for over 100 years (Needham, 1997). During this time, history has emerged as a subject often occupying its own staffroom. The emergence of KLA’s has however, resulted in a radical restructuring of some departments, namely history departments, as history is subsumed within the broader HSIE KLA. This trend towards changing department structures is reflected in a similar trend towards multi-disciplinary staffrooms. The Illangara history staffroom is perhaps then, representative of a rapidly declining single subject staffroom structure.

Darryl, Nadine and Tom all taught junior history, each had their own classroom and they shared an adjoining resource room. The staffroom allowed for both individual and common desk space and filing cabinets containing common resources lined one wall. The staffroom also included a lunch/discussion table that was multi-functional. It was a common area for department meetings, professional dialogue, eating and socialising. Above the table was a white board for common messages and information. Various syllabus drafts, consultation surveys and HTA memos were displayed for teacher information. This meant that Darryl, Nadine and Tom had shared access to formal information regarding the 1998 syllabus. Most importantly, they also had ready access to one another.

Teacher collaboration is often unplanned and informal, and time constraints mean that it is in the corridors, doorways and over coffee that teachers often find snippets of time to

---

60 I acknowledge that history/English staffrooms have been, and still are to a much lesser extent, in evidence across NSW secondary schools. It is not however, within the scope of this thesis to examine this staffroom structure.

61 The move towards multi-disciplinary staffrooms requires fewer Head Teachers and may reflect attempts at economic rationalism.
interact, discuss issues of consequence and plan for a new syllabus (McLaughlin, 1993; Siskin, 1994a). This was certainly the case with Darryl, Nadine and Tom. Unless one teacher was on playground duty, Darryl, Nadine and Tom would lunch together and casually discuss issues of consequence. Often these were personal issues. It is in an atmosphere of comfort and acceptance that people are most willing to share their ideas, their strengths and their weaknesses. I believe that having an understanding of the nexus between the personal and professional needs of one another facilitated collaboration. Aware of Darryl’s marriage breakdown, Nadine was, for example, able to assume greater responsibility for the finalisation of initial year 7 programs. This is not to suggest that the relationships between Darryl, Nadine and Tom were without tension. There were tensions in these relationships but I argue that having a single subject staffroom allowed the Illangara history teachers to work around or through these tensions.

As well as having access to one another, Darryl, Nadine and Tom had access to a number of material resources including an internal and external telephone line and several computers. The photocopier was in an adjoining room and a staff bathroom was at the end of an open corridor. Whilst these details might at first seem trivial or insignificant, it is these fine details that enable history teacher collaboration. Collaboration requires time, and easy and frequent access to human and material resources saves time.

Northbridge: Multiple general staffrooms

In contrast, the Northbridge history teachers did not occupy a single subject staffroom. As Figure 8.1 visually demonstrates, Gillian, Heather, Jacqui and Elaine (who did not participate in this study) were spread across 3 separate general staffrooms. These staffrooms were located on separate floors of the administration building. Having only viewed the staffroom in which Jacqui was located, it is not possible to make substantive generalisations about the physical environments in which the Northbridge history teachers worked. Generalisations can be made however, about the effect of staffroom structure on history teacher interaction and departmental norms.

Jacqui’s staffroom was small and crowded. Whilst each of the 4 teachers within the staffroom had their own desk, these desks each faced a wall and there was no central
area for discussion or resource storage. Space restriction was a result of an expanding school population. The age of the administration building (built in 1876) also presented a number of architectural obstacles. Access to staffrooms was via a number of flights of steep, narrow stairs. To reduce traffic flow and maintain teacher privacy and perhaps status, students were not allowed access to the administration building beyond the reception area.

The staffroom structure at Northbridge provided numerous obstacles to the development of a collective history teacher culture and ultimately to the enactment of the 1998 syllabus. First, there was no central space in which history teachers could meet for informal discussion. Formal department meetings were largely administrative in focus and were held in the school conference room. Access to the conference room was limited due to the large number of departments and/or teachers requiring its use. This meant that history teachers did not meet often in either a formal or informal sense. The casual conversations which characterised history teacher interaction at Illangara did not occur at Northbridge and Gillian, Heather and Jacqui worked independently of one another.

Second, the staffroom structure at Northbridge proved prohibitive in terms of access to material resources. Formal information from the BoS regarding the 1998 syllabus was sent to Gillian in her capacity as Head Teacher. This information was not made available to either Heather or Gillian. Whilst this is reflective of both the divisive nature of the Northbridge history department and of Gillian’s perceptions of her role as history Head Teacher, the Northbridge staffroom structure was problematic as there was no area in which information for history teachers could be displayed or broadcast.

Third, the classrooms in which Heather and Jacqui taught were distanced from the staffroom and at times necessitated a 5-minute walk to and from classes. Gillian had her own classroom in close proximity to her staffroom. When calculated over a week, Heather and Jacqui could literally spend hours walking to and from classes. Access to the computers and the internet was in the adjacent library and once again required teachers to walk a short distance. This placed constraints on the available time teachers had to discuss and plan for a new syllabus.

The staffroom structure at Northbridge undoubtedly contributed to the fragmentation of
the history department. The divisive character of the history department was however, also reflective of Gillian’s leadership, which had resulted in the polarisation of the history department along subject specialist lines. This was clearly evident in Gillian’s relationship with Heather. Despite sharing a staffroom, Gillian offered no professional or personal support to Heather who was teaching history for the first time. This suggests that the Northbridge staffroom structure only acted to reinforce an already fractured department structure.

St Bernadette’s: A common staffroom
Of the 13 HSIE teachers at St Bernadette’s, Matthew, Paul and Abby were the only teachers who taught junior history. Both Matthew and Paul were located in the common staffroom whilst Abby occupied her own office. Approximately 65 teachers inhabited the staffroom, which was a constant hive of activity. Each teacher had their own desk although space for resources was limited and storage space was non-existent. Computers lined the walls and teachers had access to the internet, printing and photocopying facilities within the staffroom. Matthew and Paul therefore had easy access to material resources and resource sharing was, as chapter 7 highlighted, a common occurrence.

Interestingly, the common staffroom structure presented some obstacles to teacher interaction. This was because it was a loud and disruptive place to work in. There was a single entrance/exit through which there was a constant flood of people. Further, the staffroom was the only physical space set aside for teacher preparation. Finding both time and space within which to interact with one another was for Paul and Matthew, a difficult task compounded by the breadth of Matthew’s role as Head Teacher. Matthew’s administrative duties were comprehensive due to the size and scope of the HISE department. To cope with the demands of his role as Head Teacher, Matthew would often retreat to the library to work in a quiet and private environment. Contact between Abby and other teachers was similarly minimised by the location of her office. Interaction between Paul, Matthew and Abby was infrequent and rarely centred on curricular issues. This was largely due to their teacher self-identities, which reinforced an individualised approach to syllabus change.

Whilst common staffrooms can encourage whole staff interaction, they can also constrain the development and maintenance of subject or KLA based communities. This
was the case at St Bernadette’s. An HSIE department is a conglomerate of a number of subjects some of which (history and geography) have traditionally competed for student numbers. The department structure is therefore diffuse. The loose staffroom structure at St Bernadette’s reinforced this diffusion and further consolidated the amorphous identity of the HSIE department. Consequently, Paul, Matthew and Abby had no shared or common ground from which to collectively interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus.

In summary, it can be concluded that in the case of Illangara, a single subject staffroom structure aided collective interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus. In contrast, the Northbridge and St Bernadette’s history teachers were constrained by the physical and conceptual boundaries their staffroom structures promoted. This suggests that single subject staffrooms facilitate the enactment of subject specific curriculum change. In saying so, I am neither advocating subject specific curriculum change nor am I defending the status quo in terms of staffroom and department structures. Rather, I am commenting on levels of fit. The 1998 syllabus advocates history as discrete subject-matter knowledge. Whilst some teachers perceived the mandating of both history and geography across Stages 4-5 as an attempt to ‘marry’ these two traditionally separate subjects, very few of the 9 study participants acknowledged this nexus through practice. The subject structure of the 1998 syllabus therefore fit well with the existing staffroom and department structure at Illangara, whilst it lacked fit with the staffroom and department structures of Northbridge and St Bernadette’s.

Staffroom structures also provide a scaffold for the development and maintenance of teacher culture. Teachers’ thoughts and actions are arguably influenced by the physical environment/s in which they work. Not only are teachers cognitively and behaviourally shaped by the places and spaces within which they work; staffrooms are also constituent of power relationships. Staffrooms reflect micropolitical power relations at both a school and subject department level (McGregor, 2000). For example, subject departments compete for space and timetabled hours and often these are perceived to be reflective of department status (Siskin, 1994a).

The school and the community

Staffrooms as places and spaces do not exist in a vacuum. They are shaped by the broader places and spaces within which they are embedded, and by the people working within them. Study data revealed the community and school to be two important
sites/places shaping history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus. The community and school surroundings within which the Illangara and Northbridge history departments and the St Bernadette’s HSIE department were immersed placed different demands on the individual and collective work of the history teachers within them. They also offered varied opportunities for history teachers.

The day-to-day functioning of the Illangara history teachers was intimately related to the community within which the school was located. The area from which students were drawn was characterised by high unemployment, generational poverty and a general lack of student motivation and parental support. The school was in many ways structured to meet the needs of students and dedicated to raising the morale of students and the local community. The low socio-economic status of students and high student absenteeism presented significant challenges to the school as whole. A full-time literacy support teacher, a full-time Aboriginal education officer and a specialist support unit aided teaching and learning. Stereotypes and prejudice about the area within which the school was located were often referred to in interviews and Darryl, Nadine and Tom all felt that the community and school presented obstacles to implementing syllabus change. Interestingly, these obstacles provided motivation for Darryl, Nadine and Tom to ‘make the 1998 syllabus work’ for their students.

Alternately, at Northbridge, a school-level expectation that Gillian, Heather and Jacqui would contribute to the extra-curricular programs offered to students, resulted in work overload for Heather and Jacqui. Gillian’s age and her ostracism at a school level however, meant that few extra-curricular demands were placed on her. Additionally, the demands of accreditation and a new syllabus promoted stress for both Heather and Jacqui. School level expectations of teachers therefore emerged as a significant constraint to syllabus change.

The community and school within which the St Bernadette’s HISE department was embedded, placed far fewer demands on Matthew, Paul and Abby, than those of Illangara and Northbridge. The school allowed both Matthew and Abby significant autonomy, Matthew in his enculturation of the HSIE department, and Abby in her role as Year 11 Advisor. Whilst a number of ‘disadvantaged’ students attended St Bernadette’s, Matthew, Paul and Abby did not have the same obligatory feelings
towards their students as, for example, did Darryl and Nadine. Whereas one could surmise that the community environment of Illangara and the school environment of Northbridge were influential in shaping history teachers’ enactment of the 1998 syllabus, the St Bernadette’s history teachers were less affected by the community and school environments in which they worked. Rather, the primary factor shaping Matthew, Paul and Abby’s perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation was their teacher self-identities. This suggests that some subject departments are more insulated from community and school influence than others. Figure 8.2 on the following page diagrammatically displays the influence of community and school on each of the three history/HSIE departments.

**Figure 8.2 Community and school influence on history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation at Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s.**

**Figure 8.2** is a reproduction of part of Figure 3.1 (the middle ground conceptual framework). It has however, been adapted in light of study data. Figure 3.1 identified the community and school as sites impacting on the functioning of the history/HSIE department. The perforated lines in both Figure 3.1 and **Figure 8.2** suggest that the community, schools, the history/HSIE department/individuals influence on one another. **Figure 8.2** above, builds on Figure 3.1 by highlighting the differential influence of the community and school across the three case studies. The darker line around the community at Illangara indicates the important role of community and school in shaping
history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus. At Northbridge, the school is shown to exert influence on the work of history teachers whilst at St Bernadette’s neither the community nor school greatly influenced the way in which history teachers engaged with this new syllabus document. What Figure 8.2 does not do however, is reveal the interplay of individual and collective perceptions and enactment of a new syllabus, within the history/HSIE department. Figure 8.2 does not allow examination of what happens in the history/HSIE department to shape teachers enactment of syllabus change. To examine this, we need to analyse the contexts operating within the history/HSIE department, how they interact and how they function to enable and/or constrain the ways in which history teachers make meaning of a new syllabus.

Analysing the contexts shaping history teachers perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation

Three interrelated contexts were identified as critical to the ways in which history teachers’ negotiated and made meaning of the 1998 syllabus at the level of the history/HSIE department. These were: teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture. Whilst chapters 5, 6 and 7 examined the nature of these contexts within each case study, a more in-depth cross-case analysis of the form and function of these contexts is required to highlight the features and dimensions of these contexts, their inter-relationships and how they can act in unison and/or opposition to enable and/or constrain history teachers’ enactment of a new syllabus document.

Teacher self-identity
Study data indicate a number of features of teacher self-identity that influenced teachers’ perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus, across the three case studies. These were teacher training, age and career stage, perceived decision-making space, orientation to students, job satisfaction and conception of history. Whilst these features were evidenced across the three case studies, the dimensions of these contexts differed according to the individual teachers and history/HSIE department. These dimensions were individual, collective, personal, professional, political and social.

Teacher training
Of the 9 teachers participating in this study, varying patterns of formal teacher training
emerged within and across case studies. Elsewhere it has been proven that formal teacher training is central to the formation of teacher self-identity (Rusch & Perry, 1999; Wilson & Wineburg, 1988). The formal preparation of NSW teachers has changed dramatically over the last 50 years. This is clearly evident when we compare Gillian and Heather’s (Northbridge) career histories. Gillian completed an Arts degree in the late 1950s and worked as a teacher for over 25 years before she was required to undertake any formal teacher training. Heather completed a 4-year Bachelor of Education Degree specialising in HSIE. Whilst these differences in themselves are not indicative of the development of oppositional teacher self-identities, when we examine the subject identification of these two teachers, divergent teacher self identities begin to emerge. This divergence led to the deliberate exclusion of Heather from the history department.

Differences in teacher training were not always used as a micropolitical tool for exclusion as they were at Northbridge. Matthew (St Bernadette’s) actively sought youthful, HSIE trained teachers to work within the HSIE department. He felt that it was necessary to employ teachers who had been trained to use the ‘outcomes’ and ‘key competencies’ that have come to characterise NSW syllabuses. Matthew also selected teachers whose enthusiasm could perhaps counter the low morale that he felt had come to characterise the teaching workforce. In this way, differences in teacher preparation could be used as a political tool for enhancing morale and as a social tool for the re-culturing of teachers.

Minimal differences were evident in the formal preparation of the Illangara history teachers and Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s teacher training was largely similar, as all three teachers had trained within the last 10 years as history teachers. This confluence promoted the development of teacher self-identities that could not only co-exist but also collaborate on the enactment of the 1998 syllabus.

Differences in teacher training can set up tacit boundaries between teachers such as

---

62 Since the late 1980’s all NSW teachers are required to have a university degree in the form of a Bachelor of Education or an undergraduate degree and a postgraduate Diploma of Education or Master of Teaching. Previously, teachers with University degrees that contained no teacher training could be employed in the Independent and Catholic education systems. Prior to 1989, school teachers studied at Teachers’ College.
those evident at Northbridge. These differences can also be used as a platform for the
development of positive relationships and for broad, inclusive intra-departmental
relationships as was attempted at St Bernadette’s. Further, similarities in teacher
training are not always conducive to inclusion and collaboration as was the case at
Illangara. Teacher training is only one facet of teacher self-identity. What is most
important is not necessarily the level of fit, certainly there may be stagnating subject
departments whose members have similar teacher training experiences. What is most
important is the level of acceptance and adaptability amongst members of subject
departments. One feature of teacher self-identity that proved crucial to promoting
acceptance and adaptability was teacher age and career stage.

Teacher age and career stage

The 9 teachers participating in this study represented a broad range of ages. The
youngest participant was 27 (Tom) whilst the oldest (Gillian) was in her late 60s. The
average age of study participants was 41.6 years, which closely mirrors the average age
of NSW teachers. Teaching was the first and only occupation of all study participants.
Teacher age was therefore directly proportionate to career stage.

There are varying career cycle models that define the different ‘growth’ and
‘development’ stages of teachers as their career progresses (Fessler, 1995; Huberman,
1995). Broadly, teachers’ careers can be classified into three stages: early career (0-15
years experience), mid-career (15-25 years experience) and late career (25-40 years).
This body of research has shown that teacher age and career stage are related to teachers
feelings about occupational role, autonomy, job satisfaction and educational change
(Fessler, 1995; Huberman, 1995; Rusch & Perry, 1999). Teacher age and career stage
also shape what McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) have referred to as career culture in
that age and career stage can shape teachers expectations for relations with colleagues.
Whilst some studies comment on the vitality of senior teachers (Bland & Bergquist,
2001), a number of studies have suggested that resistance, particularly to change, is
more common amongst older, mid to late career teachers who are often stereotyped as
intransigent (Bailey, 2000; Evans, 1995; Hall, 1007; Huberman, 1995, Huberman &

63 I acknowledge that this classification is simplistic and does not reflect the breadth and depth of
research conducted in this field. This classification does however suit the needs of this study – that is
to highlight the effects of career stage on teacher self-identity and ultimately on the ways in which
teachers enact syllabus change.
It is important to remember that stigmatising older teachers as ‘resisters’ is according to Goffman (1963) a form of social control (as cited, Rusch & Perry, 1999, p. 297). The research of Rusch and Perry (1999) suggests that it is often mid-career teachers who stigmatise late career teachers as resistant in an effort to subordinate older teachers and ensure their own job security. Study data indicate that it was often the early-career researchers who stereotyped both the mid-career and late-career teachers as resistant to change.

This was particularly evident at Northbridge. The age difference between Gillian, and Heather and Jacqui was manifest in what I earlier referred to as a generational cleft. Using Fessler’s (1995) classification of career stage, it can be concluded that Gillian was late career and in the ‘run-down’ to retirement whereas Heather and Jacqui were in the latter stages of their early careers. This career variance was exacerbated by the different educational discourses employed by Gillian and Heather and their competing conceptions of history. This promoted the fragmentation of the history department. Huberman (1995) and Fessler (1995) have shown that as teachers approach retirement they experience a process of disengagement. Teachers’ experiences of this process have been documented on a spectrum that ranges from ‘serene’ to ‘bitter’ (Fessler, 1995). Whilst Gillian approached her retirement with a sense of disillusionment, Paul (St Bernadette’s) was cheerful and positive in the weeks leading up to his early retirement. Different work environments, age differences and personality factors may explain why Gillian and Paul’s process of disengagement was dissimilar.

Career stage was particularly important in shaping teachers’ orientation to the 1998 syllabus. Those teachers who were 40+ years and were mid-career were far more cynical about the teaching profession and educational change in general. This was most evident at St Bernadette’s. Matthew was openly dismissive of the 1998 syllabus and confessed that he felt disillusioned about teaching. Certainly, one cannot claim that his age and career stage alone, were responsible for these feelings but Matthew did admit that his sense of disenchantment had increased as his teaching career progressed.

Another example of the role of career stage in shaping teachers’ responses to syllabus change is evident when we compare the responses of younger, less experienced teachers. The primary concern of both Tom (Illangara) and Heather (Northbridge) was the
acquisition of subject-matter knowledge, a common focus of teachers in the process of what Fessler (1995) refers to as ‘induction and socialisation’. It was through this lens that they perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus.

The political dimensions of teacher age and career stage are also evident in the power relationships that typify varying stages of teachers’ careers. Gillian’s advanced career stage and her role as history Head Teacher immediately positioned her in a dominant position in relation to both Heather and Jacqui. Teachers in the earlier parts of their careers are reliant on Head Teachers for professional review, access to resources and class allocations. In this sense the younger teachers in this study were often placed in subordinate roles when working with older teachers. This may explain the liberal and perhaps reactionary use by younger teachers (particularly at Northbridge) of stereotypes about age and intransigence to describe their superiors. Power relationships such as these significantly influence teachers’ perceptions of control and autonomy and their perceived decision-making space.

**Perceived decision-making space**

Control and autonomy emerged as important features of teacher self-identity. Teachers unanimously felt that they were individually and occupationally marginalised in formal decisions regarding the 1998 syllabus. Study participants therefore perceived the ‘locus of curriculum control’ to be distanced from them. Many teachers (Darryl, Nadine, Tom, and Jacqui) also felt that the 1998 syllabus had the potential to diminish teacher autonomy through the mandating of examinable content. A consequence of this was that many teachers perceived their decision-making space to be limited yet the effects of this perception on teachers’ enactment of the 1998 syllabus were varied.

The Illangara history teachers exercised their decision-making power by constructing syllabus programs relevant to the needs of their students. In doing so, Darryl, Nadine and Tom reported that programming for the new syllabus had been empowering and that they subsequently felt that they had greater decision-making space. This suggests that teachers’ perceptions of control and autonomy are just that – they are the ways in which teachers construe power relationships and their role in them.

These perceptions can result in low morale and feelings of hopelessness, as was the case
with Matthew (St Bernadette’s). He perceived his decision-making space to be very limited and his response to this was to focus on those tasks in which he could exercise his professional judgment and autonomy, namely administrative tasks. A related response was to feign apathy about syllabus change. Whilst claiming apathy, Matthew’s tone and his emotional responses to interview questions suggest that apathy is merely a coping mechanism, which allowed him to rationalise his feelings of hopelessness. This is a clear example of the dual personal and professional facets of teacher self-identity.

Both Abby (St Bernadette’s) and Jacqui (Northbridge) reported ambiguous feelings about control and autonomy. Whilst both felt that teachers had been marginalised in the process of syllabus development neither felt the desire to have greater voice in formal decision making processes. Both were satisfied with their perceived decision-making space and both felt that ‘owning the syllabus’ was not an issue of consequence. Rather, they were angry that the BoS and DET provided no support for them in their decisions regarding the 1998 syllabus. Abby and Jacqui did not feel then, that their decision-making space was limited, they just wanted formal assistance in choosing how to best make the decisions available to them. Jacqui was particularly concerned that the decisions she made regarding how to implement the 1998 syllabus would impact upon her students in potentially negative ways.

**Orientation to students**

Teachers’ orientation to students varied both within and across case studies. Darryl and Nadine (Illangara), Jacqui (Northbridge) and Abby (St Bernadette’s) clearly identified their role as teacher through their perceptions of students needs. Study data extensively documents the centrality of students to their teacher self-identities. Interestingly, these teachers almost always mentioned students in connection with specific subject matter knowledge and pedagogical orientation. The connection between teacher self-identity, students, content and pedagogy is as McLaughlin and Talbert (2001) suggest crucial to the ways in which teachers perceive and enact their teacher role.

It is interesting that Tom (Illangara) and Heather (Northbridge), both teachers in their initial years of teaching, commented on students, content, teaching and learning but at a more simplistic level, suggesting that as teachers progress through their careers they further conceptualise their role in relation to students and subject. This process can be,
as it was for Tom, facilitated through inclusion in a collaborative department. Other teachers, particularly, Gillian (Northbridge) and Matthew (St Bernadette’s) rarely referred to their students and tended to view their role as teacher in a highly mechanised way. Gillian was concerned with the transmission of ancient history subject matter knowledge whilst Matthew was overwhelmed by his administrative duties as Head Teacher. This is not to suggest that Gillian and Matthew did not care about or were not concerned for their students. Rather, it is perhaps indicative of their career stage and lack of job satisfaction.

**Job Satisfaction**

Different teachers experience the rewards of teaching in different ways. For Darryl and Nadine (Ilangara) student success in terms of the development of skills was an important intrinsic or psychic reward. Part of Darryl and Nadine’s job satisfaction was founded on attempts at addressing the inequity their students experienced daily. They were proud to work at a school like Ilangara and they took delight in the small successes of students – literacy improvement, the completion of tasks and encouraging students to regularly attend school. Jacqui (Northbridge) similarly placed emphasis on the intrinsic rewards of teaching. She defined these as having students who were capable of meeting the demands of an increasingly complex society. Abby (St Bernadette’s) found satisfaction in her role as Year 11 advisor as it allowed her to ‘mother the girls’ and she took pride in her personal and professional maternal abilities.

Tom (Ilangara) on the other hand was in the process of establishing himself as a teacher and was more concerned with the extrinsic rewards of teaching – the allocation of senior classes and having academically able students. Ultimately, Ilangara offered Tom too few extrinsic rewards and he left to teach in an independent school. Similarly, Matthew (St Bernadette’s) felt that the intrinsic and extrinsic rewards of teaching were too few. Changes in school had done little to address his feelings of hopelessness and he felt that his age, narrow professional qualifications and familial responsibilities made leaving the teaching profession impossible.

Gillian more so than any other study participant, found her professional rewards in her subject specialism. Protecting and maintaining the status of history at Northbridge had for many decades allowed Gillian to perceive of history as an academic subject. This in
turn allowed her to view herself as an ancient historian. The rewards of teaching were for Gillian, therefore rooted in her own continued learning of ancient history and the transition of subject-matter knowledge to students.

**Conception of history**

Teachers’ orientation to history, their perceptions of the status and value of history and their associated pedagogical orientation were the most decisive factors shaping study participants teacher self-identity. The relationship between teachers’ conceptions of history and their teacher self-identity is a reciprocal one, not only do conceptions of history shape teachers’ self-identity but history as a concept is also defined through teachers’ self identity.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 extensively documented teachers’ individual conceptions of history and the resultant collective subject sub-cultures pervading each of the three history/HSIE departments. A number of tensions were evident both within and across case studies. In the following section I identify and analyse these tensions in an effort to delineate the function and influence of subject sub-cultures in shaping history teachers’ individual and collective enactment of syllabus change prior to classroom implementation.

**Subject sub-culture**

Study data revealed that the subject sub-cultures permeating the Illangara and Northbridge history department and the St Bernadette’s HSIE department were characterised by a number of tensions. Teachers within and across these 3 departments negotiated these tensions in different ways with varied effects, as this section shall examine. These tensions were: antecedent and contemporary subject sub-cultures, disciplinary history and school history, subject status and subject value, and, the individual and collective. These are analysed below.

**Antecedent and contemporary subject subcultures**

Subject sub-cultures are historically constituted. Each history/HSIE department has an antecedent subject sub-culture that is a product of both past members of the department and past conceptions of history. History has been and continues to be a highly contested subject. Antecedent subject sub-cultures therefore hold particular currency for the
teachers participating in this study. This is because antecedent subject sub-cultures establish tacit and sometimes tangible boundaries for the development and maintenance of contemporary subject sub-cultures. In some departments the antecedent and contemporary subject subcultures were characterised by continuity. The Illangara history department for example, had a history of association with the HTA, subject specialism, and valuing history as a vehicle for the inculcation of student skills. These characteristics are also a prominent part of the contemporary subject sub-culture of the Illangara history department.

Alternately, the relationship between antecedent and contemporary subject sub-cultures can also be characterised by change. Sometimes, this change is part of the natural cultural adaptation of the department. At other times, changing subject sub-cultures are a source of debate and contestation. This was the case at Northbridge. An emergent contemporary subject sub-culture based on competing conceptions of history did not fit well with the antecedent subject sub-culture, which centred on disciplinary history, status, and the transmission of subject matter knowledge.

The issue of fit between antecedent and contemporary subject sub-cultures was not of great importance at St Bernadette’s. There are several reasons for this. Unlike Illangara and Northbridge, the subject sub-culture of the HSIE department was characterised by subject diffusion. The HSIE department was formed through the merging of the former history and social science departments. The antecedent sub-cultures of these departments were all but forgotten due to structural change and rapid staff turnover. This in combination with the diffuse subject sub-culture that has come to characterise the HSIE department means that there is no discernable fit between the antecedent and contemporary subject

**Disciplinary history versus school history**

The differences between disciplinary history and school history have been broadly debated and it is generally accepted that history as an academic discipline and history as a school subject are:

Discrete entities, their differences defined by audience, outlook, subject matter and methodology. The first is concerned primarily with the production of knowledge, the second with the production of learning and its relevance to adolescents (Young, 1998, p. 9).
This debate was evidenced in both the formal development of the 1998 syllabus and in history teachers’ individual and collective conceptions of history.

In the current study, this debate was most obvious at Northbridge. Gillian conceived of history as an academic discipline. Her conception of history was founded on the quasi-classical status history held in her years as a student of history and her early years as a history teacher. Her emphasis on ancient history and subject matter knowledge as a measure of subject specialism proved difficult for her younger colleagues who conceived of history in very different ways. For Gillian defining history as a discipline was closely linked with subject status.

In contrast, Darryl and Nadine (Illangara), Jacqui (Northbridge) and Abby (St Bernadette’s) viewed school history as valuable as it facilitated the development of students’ skills and also because it was a vehicle through which important values, such as social justice could be explored. Consequently, what emerged across teachers’ individual conceptions of history was tension between teachers’ perceptions of the status and value of history.

**Status and value**

Examining the status and value individual teachers attribute to history provides insight into their conceptions of history and how individual conceptions of history interact with antecedent and contemporary subject sub-cultures. The status of history at Northbridge was related to academic rigour and the fact that history was seen as an entrée to undertaking Law at University and/or a social enabler for girls of high socio-economic background. According to Gillian, the value of history lay in its status as a quasi-classical subject. Whilst status and value are not mutually exclusive phenomena, one has to wonder how valuable this perception of subject status is to student learning.

This contrasted sharply with Heather’s (Northbridge) conception of history. Heather perceived a study of history to be complementary to the skills advanced in other HSIE subjects, namely geography. For Heather, the value of history was found in its ability to offer students broad learning experiences in partnership with geography. Whilst Heather saw the related status of history improving in view of its potential multi-disciplinary status, Gillian perceived this to be an open attack on the traditional status of history as
an autonomous subject. Competing conceptions of the status and value of history can promote the development of competing subject sub-cultures, as was the case at Northbridge. Paradoxically, Gillian attempts to protect the status of history as she defined it, contributed to the fragmentation of the history department and its ultimate absorption into the HSIE department.

Darryl, Nadine and Tom (Illangara) offered further insight into the relationship between subject status and value. They defined subject status according to the numbers of students electing to study history. Darryl argued that students would only elect to study history when they perceived it to be of value to them. In this sense subject status and subject value were closely related.

History held low status at St Bernadette’s. This was largely due to students’ preference for more vocationally oriented subjects such as commerce. Whilst Matthew had a personal interest in history, he didn’t perceive history to hold any particular value to students. The low status of history was therefore seen as equivocal to a lack of value. Low status doesn’t necessarily result in a subject being viewed as less valuable. Despite the low status of history at St Bernadette’s, Abby felt that a study of history was valuable and relevant in light of the school’s pastoral focus on issues of social awareness and social justice.

The individual and the collective

The subject sub-cultures evidenced within each of the three history/HSIE departments were a product of the level of fit between the antecedent subject sub-cultures, the contemporary subject sub-culture and teachers individual conceptions of history. Having similar individual conceptions of history aids the development and maintenance of a cohesive subject sub-culture as was evident in the Illangara history department.

Having department members with dissimilar conceptions of history can prove difficult when these conceptions are oppositional, as was the case at Northbridge. The Northbridge history teachers were intolerant of each other’s conceptions of history and these oppositional conceptions lacked fit with the antecedent subject sub-culture. The relationship between individual teachers subject conceptions and the collective subject sub-culture was ill fitting and the department. Had the teacher culture of the
Northbridge history department been adaptive Gillian, Heather and Jacqui may have been able to negotiate their varied conceptions of history.

**Teacher culture**

The concept of teacher culture allows examination of the ways in which individual teachers construct history/HSIE departments and the ways in which history/HSIE departments reciprocally construct teachers as members of a collective or as individuals. Research has shown that teacher culture plays a critical role in the orientation of schools, subject departments and individual teachers to mandated curriculum change initiatives (Bascia & Hargreaves, 2001; Fullan, 1993; Giacquinta, 1998; Goldman & Conley, 1996; Goodson, 1998). Teacher culture shapes individual and collective capacity for change. It similarly, influences the adaptability of individual teachers and groups of teachers to curriculum change (Giacquinta, 1998).

In chapter 3, I overviewed Hargreaves’ (1994) typology of the forms of teacher culture (refer to Appendix 3.2). Using this as a foundation for analysing study data, varying forms of teacher culture were identified across the three case studies. In earlier chapters I have broadly described these as collaborative culture, individualised culture and amorphous culture. These are further theorised below.

**Illangara: Collaboration or contrived collegiality?**

Frequent intra-departmental interaction and teamwork characterised the Illangara history department. The relationships between Darryl, Nadine and Tom were both personal and professional, and collective reflection and problem sharing were common. It is interesting to note that these norms did not extend to those teachers ‘farmed in’ to work in the history department. Whilst Darryl expressed a desire to include these teachers in departmental decision-making processes, physical distance and time constraints prevented this from happening. Further, underlying tension between Nadine and Tom was revealed in interviews with Nadine but neither Tom nor Darryl seemed aware of this tension. Certainly as the only female in the history staffroom, Nadine felt ‘on the outer’ at times. This, in combination with Nadine’s role as staffroom cleaner suggests that relationships within the Illangara history department may have been
Whilst resource sharing was common amongst history teachers, as were conversations about teaching and learning, Darryl, Nadine and Tom did not have a significant internal or external impetus to construct new syllabus programs prior to the release of the 1998 syllabus. This was because the previous Head Teacher developed the 1992 syllabus programs and, having found these programs to be effective, Darryl, Nadine and Tom had no incentive to significantly alter or adapt existing programs. The introduction of the 1998 syllabus provided an external impetus for Darryl, Nadine and Tom to design and develop curriculum materials together.

Hargreaves’ (1992) categorisation of teacher culture suggests that contrived collegiality (as opposed to collaboration) best characterises the teacher culture of the Illangara history department. This categorisation rests on Hargreaves’ (1994) belief that collaborative cultures are those that are spontaneous, voluntary, pervasive across time and space and unpredictable. The nature of the 1998 syllabus (a system-wide mandated curriculum change) therefore necessarily defines the Illangara history teachers’ enactment of the 1998 syllabus as contrived collegiality. I contend that Hargreaves’ (1994) typology of teacher culture is too narrow for the purposes of this study. Further, I argue that the teacher culture of the Illangara history department was collaborative in view of the constraints the syllabus itself imposed. To distinguish between collaborative culture as defined by Hargreaves, and collaborative culture as defined within this study, I shall refer to the culture of the Illangara history department as purposeful collaboration. This adjustment acknowledges the external impetus for change. I base my conceptualisation of purposeful collaboration on the following features:

(a) Volunteerism: Darryl, Nadine and Tom invested their own time, energy and significant enthusiasm in the development of programs for the 1998 syllabus. In this sense their participation in syllabus change whilst mandatory displayed elements of volunteerism.

---

64 Examining the relationship between teacher culture and gender is not within the scope of the current study although I acknowledge that teacher cultures are gendered.

65 This was because the Illangara history teachers felt they had programs that met both syllabus requirements and the needs of their students.
(b) **Altruism:** The primary motive for the development of new programs was Darryl, Nadine and Tom’s desire to protect the value that a study of history held for their students. Whilst this is related to the protection of their established teacher identities (which were student oriented), there was also an element of altruism at play.

(c) **Collaborative leadership**
Collaboration is contingent on effective leadership. This is because unlike collaboration, which Hargreaves (1994) views as spontaneous, purposeful collaboration requires planning. The was evidenced in Darryl’s planning of syllabus programming days and the allocation of time and funds to support these days. Darryl therefore provided a foundation for teacher collaboration. He was a collaborative leader and encouraged shared decision making processes.

(d) **Participatory processes**
Darryl, Nadine and Tom went to great lengths to include a practicum teacher, the literacy support teacher and the Aboriginal Education Officer in phases of program development. The environment in which the new programs were developed was therefore inclusive and focus group transcripts clearly evidence a participatory process.

**Northbridge: Constrained Individualism**
Research has extensively documented norms of individualism amongst teachers (Lortie, 1975; 1998; Huberman, 1992, 1993, 1994). Where once individualism was synonymous with bad or weak practice, variant forms of individualism are now well documented (Greenspan, 2001; Williams, Prestage & Bedward, 2001). These include constrained individualism, strategic individualism and elective individualism (Hargreaves, 1994).66

Once again, using Hargreaves’ typology, as a basis for analysis, the culture of the Northbridge history department is best characterised as constrained individualism. Individualism can be a product of the structural and temporal constraints of teachers’ worklives. For example, the Northbridge staffroom structure was prohibitive to community building. This in combination with a lack of available time promoted

---

66 Elective individualism incorporates the notion of individuality, which Hargreaves defines as “personal independence and self-realization” (1994, p.178). Earlier, Huberman (1993) suggested the concept of the independent artisan to explain the positive attributes of individualism.
individualism within the history department. Gillian and Heather’s relationship is however indicative of an individualism that transcended the everyday administrative, structural and temporal constraints operating within the history department. I argue that Gillian’s role as Head Teacher and a school-level culture of individualism acted to force individualism upon Heather and Jacqui.

In chapter 6 I described Gillian’s role as Head Teacher as that of a non-leader. However, unlike Matthew (St Bernadette’s), Gillian’s role as non-leader was not based on cynicism and apathy. Rather, her non-leadership was a reflection of her active attempts to exclude multi-disciplinary teachers from membership within the history department. Her refusal to provide guidance and/or support to either Heather in her teaching of new junior history courses, or Jacqui when she assumed the role of senior ancient history teacher was indicative of the power relations pervading the history department. Gillian’s angst about the imminent ‘death’ of the history department often translated into a distrust of multi-disciplinary teachers (Jacqui) and occasionally was evidenced as an open dislike of HSIE teachers (Heather). Gillian was not a malicious person, nor did she deem herself to be unprofessional. Rather, I believe the power she wielded over Heather and Jacqui was a direct result of her lack of control over her immediate environment. Mc Neill (1986) suggests that when control is taken away from teachers as it was with Gillian (changing departmental structure and rapidly deteriorating school relations), teachers often react often by exerting control elsewhere. For Gillian this was manifest in her attempts to maintain rigid subject boundaries.

Both Heather and Jacqui had previously worked in departments where resource sharing and collaborative planning were common. The fact that they didn’t work together to prepare programs for the 1998 syllabus seemed at first, to contradict these claims. As data collection progressed however, it became clear that a school-level culture promoting teacher individualism through staffroom structure and work overload contributed to Heather and Jacqui’s individualised enactment of the 1998 syllabus. Further, the academic orientation of the school focused on subject matter knowledge as a measure of academic success. This discouraged teachers like Heather, from asking for assistance as requests for subject-matter knowledge support may have been misconstrued as an admission of intellectual inferiority.
When there are no shared cultural understandings of subject or how teachers should interact, teachers revert to individualised values and belief through which to mediate their perceptions and enactment of a new syllabus document prior to classroom implementation. This suggests that in some departments the role of the individual teacher is more important than the role of the department in curriculum change processes.

**St Bernadette’s: Cultural Amorphism**

Hargreaves (1994) typology suggests a number of categories within which teacher cultures can often be classified. The culture of the St Bernadette’s HSIE department does not however, fit any of Hargreaves suggested categories. This is because teacher culture is multi-dimensional and typologies can only ever capture a certain number of these dimensions. The St Bernadette’s HSIE department displayed a number of features, which together I have referred to as an amorphous culture. A number of these features have already been discussed, namely, subject diffusion, rapid staff turnover and departmental breadth and scope. Three other significant features are however worthy of further exploration. These are:

(a) **HSIE departments as unknown entities**: HSIE departments are a relatively new phenomena in NSW secondary schools. Unlike individual history teachers and history departments, whose identity and membership is based on antecedent and contemporary subject sub-cultures and teacher cultures, there has been no formal articulation or public forum on the role and function of the HISE department beyond its definition as a multi-disciplinary subject department.

(b) **Lack of articulation in formal curriculum**: Whilst the BoS have moved to employ Inspectors who manage the subjects encompassed by specific KLA’s, NSW syllabuses continue to advocate history as discrete subject matter knowledge. This encourages teachers to view HSIE not as a KLA but as a conglomerate of subjects. This lack of fit between the subject structure of syllabuses and the KLA structure of departments encourages teachers to rely on well worn subject specific identities, rather than adapting to KLA’s as organisers of school knowledge.
(c) A non-leader

Matthew’s role as Head Teacher did not involve curriculum leadership. He took no leadership role in planning or programming for the 1998 syllabus beyond distributing copies of the syllabus document to colleagues.

Analysing the features and dimensions of teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture and how these features interact within and across these contexts provided insight into the complex processes that shaped the ways in which study participants perceived, prioritised and enacted the 1998 syllabus before they implemented in the classroom. These processes were identified and discussed in chapters 5, 6 and 7. To make sense of these processes beyond the individual case studies, these processes are examined below, along what Goldman and Conley (1997) refer to as the ‘zone of enactment’.

**Analysing the processes through which history teachers perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation**

The processes through which history teachers’ perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus depended on their individual and collective perceived curriculum decision-making space. Teachers need to have curriculum decision-making space to feel that they have autonomy and can actively make decisions that are relevant to their practice. I argue that teachers perceive this decision making space in terms of the concept of cost. This is because the ramifications of the decisions they make in this space, have levels of personal and professional cost. Further, teachers may perceive this space to be sufficient or insufficient. Similarly, they may perceive it to be a shared space or, for a variety of reasons, they may perceive it to be an individualised space. In this study, history teachers’ perceptions about their curriculum decision-making space were directly related to their perceptions of the high ground of curriculum, their teacher self-identity and their experiences as a member of a specific history/HSIE department.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 identified and examined the following processes within each of the case studies:

- Illangara: resistance and pragmatism
- Northbridge: fragmentation and individualism
St Bernadette’s: Strategic compliance

To make sense of these processes at a broader level, Goldman and Conley (1997) suggest the ‘zone of enactment’. The zone of enactment provides a structure on which to theorise the processes through which teachers enact new curriculum. It incorporates four possible zones, which are visually displayed in Figure 8.3 below.

**Figure 8.3 The zone of enactment** (Goldman & Conley, 1997).

- Zone of rejection
- Zone of indifference
- Zone of discretion
- Zone of acceptance

**Figure 8.3** highlights a range of possible responses to curriculum change. The zone of enactment posits rejection at one end of this continuum acceptance at the other. Between these two extremes are the zone of indifference and the zone of discretion. Far from suggesting that teachers’ responses to curriculum change fit into one of four categories, the zone of enactment is a construct used to explain the innumerable ways in which teachers enact curriculum change. The zone of enactment is multidimensional and teachers’ enactment of change is neither fixed in time nor space.

I have contented that the 1998 syllabus forces teacher compliance through the institution of rigorous accountability mechanism, namely the HGCC School Certification Examination. Were history teachers to reject the 1998 syllabus and refuse to enact it, they would not only be jeopardising their teaching careers, they would also be disadvantaging their students as the DET and the BoS require students to sit for the HGCC School Certificate Examination. For the majority of teachers, the professional and personal costs of rejecting the 1998 syllabus would be far too high to justify this response. Paul (St Bernadette’s) provides an exception to this generalisation. His impending retirement and the fact that Stage 4 (Years 7-8) of the 1998 syllabus is non-examinable, allowed him, in good conscience, to reject the syllabus.

Whilst Paul was in a position to exert personal and professional control and reject the syllabus, both Matthew and Abby were not. Their jobs and their students demanded that they comply with syllabus requirements. They did so in ways that personally and professionally cost them as little as possible. I have referred to this as strategic compliance as both Matthew and Abby complied with the 1998 syllabus only inasmuch
as they could avoid being publicly labelled dissenters. Neither teacher saw the need for the 1998 syllabus and both felt that the syllabus was inconsequential to their teaching of history. Matthew strategically relied on textbook programs whilst Abby deferred to her considerable subject-matter knowledge and implemented the 1998 syllabus ‘off the top of her head’. This places both Matthew and Abby’s enactment of the 1998 syllabus only minimally within the zone of indifference.

Much like Paul, Gillian (Northbridge) would like to have rejected the 1998 syllabus. She was personally and professional opposed to it. Unlike Paul, her retirement commenced two years after the release of the syllabus and occurred in the midst of accreditation. The personal and professional cost of rejecting the syllabus were therefore significant. Another element of difference is evident in their feelings about the 1998 syllabus. Paul was largely indifferent whilst Gillian was angered and disappointed by this new syllabus document. Her enactment of syllabus change was not indifferent. Rather, she used her discretion to construct syllabus programs for accreditation. She did however; exercise her rejection of the syllabus in her year 7 class by electing to teach ancient history topics she saw as relevant and valuable. The responses of both Heather and Jacqui also fall within the zone of discretion. Neither teacher was indifferent to the new syllabus. Jacqui was in fact concerned about the potential impact of the 1998 syllabus on student learning whilst Heather was preoccupied with acquisition of content knowledge. The intention of both teachers was therefore to enact the 1998 syllabus to the best of their ability as defined by the constraints of their work environments.

The Illangara history teachers were able to overcome their initial resistance to the 1998 syllabus. Whilst they unanimously felt that they had limited curriculum decision-making space, they were able to use this space in a pragmatic manner. The collaborative development of syllabus programs allowed Darryl, Nadine and Tom to utilise their perceived curriculum decision-making space in a way that was empowering and gave them a sense of control and autonomy.

The sites, contexts and processes, that shaped the ways in which the Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s history teachers perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation have been shown to be complex, multi-layered and innately political. Table 8.1 on the following page, summarises the features
of these sites, contexts and processes across each of the three case studies.

Table 8.1: Comparing the sites, contexts and process shaping history teachers perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus prior to classroom implementation: Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Illangara</th>
<th>Northbridge</th>
<th>St Bernadette’s</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sites</strong></td>
<td>Community/School</td>
<td>School</td>
<td>Individual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Staffroom structure</strong></td>
<td>Single-subject staffroom</td>
<td>Multiple general staffroom</td>
<td>Common Staffroom (+ personal office)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher Self-identity</strong></td>
<td>Compatible</td>
<td>Oppositional</td>
<td>Co-existing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Subject sub-culture</strong></td>
<td>History as a vehicle for the development of student skills</td>
<td>Subject specialism versus multidisciplinary view of history</td>
<td>Diffuse</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Teacher culture</strong></td>
<td>Purposeful collaboration</td>
<td>Constrained Individualism</td>
<td>Amorphous</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Processes</strong></td>
<td>Pragmatism</td>
<td>Individualism</td>
<td>Strategic compliance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Enactment of 1998 syllabus prior to classroom</strong></td>
<td>Collective planning and programming Participatory</td>
<td>Individual programming</td>
<td>Ranges from non-enactment (Paul) to minimal compliance (Matthew and Abby)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reconceptualising the middle ground of curriculum

A related aim of this thesis was to reconceptualise the middle ground of curriculum in light of study data. In doing so, the findings of this thesis can be generalised to theory and have implications for future research. Figure 8.4 on the following page, draws together previous sections of this chapter and presents a holistic model of the middle ground of curriculum as experienced by the history teachers at Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s.
Three contexts – teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture remain central to teachers’ enactment of syllabus change before they implement it in the classroom. The features of these contexts are summarised in Figure 8.4. The dimensions of these contexts are individual, collective, personal, professional and political. The features and dimensions of these contexts and their interaction are shown to be central to the construction of teachers’ perceived curriculum decision-making space. Teachers perceived curriculum decision-making space shapes the processes through which history teachers interpreted and enacted the 1998 syllabus. These processes are identified along the zone of enactment shown at the bottom of Figure 8.4.

This reconceptualised model of the middle ground curriculum is important as it offers insight into the ways in which teachers make meaning of a new syllabus document at the level of the history/HSIE department.

Summary

Chapter 8 has synthesised study findings across the three case studies – Illangara, Northbridge and St Bernadette’s. Using the middle ground model articulated in chapter 3 (Figure 3.1), the sites, contexts and processes through which study participants perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus, prior to classroom implementation, were analysed and a number of features and dimensions were subsequently identified. Following cross-case analysis, a reconceptualised model of the middle ground of curriculum was constructed (Figure 8.4). Figure 8.4 clearly addresses the third research question: How and why do the sites, contexts and processes that constitute the middle ground curriculum, influence the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact this new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom?

Chapter 9 provides the thesis conclusion. In chapter 9, I return to a broader focus on curriculum change and draw together the high, middle and ground levels of curriculum by articulating the contribution of this thesis to curriculum change literature and to literature focused on the contexts of teacher practice. I also highlight the implication of this study for future research.
CHAPTER 9

THEORETICAL CONTRIBUTION AND IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Introduction

This final chapter highlights the theoretical contribution of the thesis and identifies related areas for future research. To do so, this chapter consists of three sections. In the first section, I revisit the research questions and evaluate the effectiveness of the theoretical orientation and methodology in addressing these questions. This involves a brief overview of the study limitations and how these limitations were methodologically addressed. In the second section, the major research findings are reinstated and the theoretical contribution of the thesis is subsequently emphasised. I argue that this thesis makes a theoretical contribution to two specific fields of inquiry, those of curriculum change and the contexts of teacher practice. In the final section of this chapter I examine the implications of the thesis for future research.

Research questions, theoretical orientation and methodological issues

This study sought to identify and examine how history teachers’ perceived and enacted the 1998 syllabus before they implemented it in the classroom (in the middle ground of curriculum). The study was framed within the contexts of:

- The introduction of a system-wide mandated syllabus (the 1998 syllabus)
- The increasing politicisation of history in relation to issues of national identity within NSW
- Teacher concerns that this new syllabus had the potential to negatively impact upon the teaching, learning and assessment of history in NSW secondary schools
- The changing structure of history within NSW secondary schools as evidenced in the emergence of HSIE departments
Specifically, the development and dissemination of the 1998 syllabus provided a critical incident through which to examine the nature and form of history teachers’ perceptions and enactment of syllabus change in the middle ground of curriculum. Three specific research questions guided the study. These were:

- What are the sites, contexts and processes that comprise the middle ground of curriculum?
- How do history teachers interpret and enact the 1998 syllabus in the middle ground of curriculum?
- How and why do the sites, contexts and processes that constitute the middle ground curriculum, influence the ways in which history teachers interpret and enact this new syllabus document before they implement it in the classroom?

The concept of the middle ground of curriculum provided an effective framework to address the research questions. This is because it allowed a contextualised examination of the sites, contexts and processes pervading the middle ground of curriculum as they related to both the high ground of curriculum and its ground level implementation in the classroom. Further, the middle ground framework provided a lens through which the features and dimensions of syllabus change, as experienced by history teachers, could be explicated. This is important as often curriculum change processes are conceptualised to be overly simplistic as in rational and cause-effect models or rampanty chaotic (Marsh & Stafford, 1984; Print, 1987). The middle ground of curriculum provided a framework that identified and analysed the breadth of teachers’ perceptions and enactment of a new syllabus document whilst simultaneously acknowledging the minutiae of teachers’ experiences of curriculum change.

Whilst the middle ground framework provided structure for the analysis of study data, the framework was itself, an emergent design. Goodson first introduced the concept of the middle ground of curriculum, in 1994. However, little if any research has conceptualised the middle ground of curriculum beyond Goodson’s initial discussion of the middle ground of curriculum as it related to the high ground of curriculum. Broad reading across the areas of curriculum change, teacher culture and the contexts of teacher practice lead to the development of a working model of the middle ground of curriculum (Figure 3.1). This model provided a consistent basis for initial data
Data analysis was a reflexive process and it was during the latter stages of data analysis, which I have referred to as meta-synthesis, that study findings informed the reconceptualisation of the middle ground model (Figure 8.1). This is significant as it lead to the development of an analytic framework, which has application beyond the current study. This addresses one of the study’s key methodological criteria – that of idiographic generalisability.

The other methodological criterion framing the study was that of trustworthiness. Establishing methodological trustworthiness relied on prolonged engagement in the field, the use of multiple methods of data collection and member-checks. In chapter 4 I outlined a number of potential limitations to the study including data imbalance and member checking. To these I must add my role as researcher as a potential limitation to the study. Having spent 18 months with study participants I grew to respect and like the teachers whose experiences make up this thesis. In view of this I found it difficult to make judgements and critical comment on their individual and collective perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus. Part of establishing methodological trustworthiness is directly evidencing the inferences made from data. To this end, chapters 5, 6, 7 and 8 rely on heavy usage of study data to evidence the drawing of conclusions.

**Major findings and theoretical contribution of thesis**

Chapter 9 presented the major findings of the study. This chapter draws these findings together and provides a brief summary below:

- A syllabus document is as Ball and Bowe (1992) contend, a micro-political resource for teachers to interpret, re-interpret and apply to their specific work contexts. Whilst history teachers’ perceptions of the high ground of curriculum did shape their perceptions and enactment of the 1998 syllabus, the ways in which teachers individually and collectively internalised this new syllabus document was of greater importance in shaping their enactment of syllabus change prior to classroom implementation.

- The internalisation of a new syllabus change is a dynamic process that is evidenced at all levels of curriculum change – the high ground, middle ground and ground
level. Study data indicate that the middle ground is a critical arena in which teachers perceive and enact a new syllabus document. The ways in which teachers individually and collectively internalised the 1998 syllabus were dependent on the interaction between three critical contexts – teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture. The features of these contexts whilst similar across the three history/HSIE departments had varying dimensions that made for very different working environments for the 9 teachers participating in the study. Of particular interest was the differential interpretation and enactment of the 1998 syllabus within individual history/HSIE departments. This was most evident at Northbridge and suggests that the role of individual teachers in curriculum change processes is often more important than the role of groups of teachers.

- Study data indicate significant variation within and across the subject sub-cultures of the three history/HSIE departments participating in the study. These variant history sub-cultures suggests that individual history teachers and history teacher communities, construct history as a school subject, in very different ways. The personal, professional and political dimensions of subject sub-culture had implications for the ways in which teachers enacted the 1998 syllabus. These dimensions were clearly played out across the Illangara and Northbridge history departments and the St Bernadette’s history department throughout the period of data collection.

- HSIE departments face significant challenges in establishing and maintaining inclusive subject sub-cultures. The diffuse subject sub-culture of the St Bernadette’s HSIE department meant that there was no common understanding or vision of history from which Matthew, Paul and Abby could collectively perceive and enact the 1998 syllabus. Again, this encouraged individualised responses to this new syllabus document.

- Subject specific syllabuses such as the 1998 syllabus are sometimes incongruent with the changing structure of subject departments. This is because the 1998 syllabus promotes history as discrete subject matter knowledge whilst HISE departments such as St Bernadette’s, are based on a multi-disciplinary organisation of subject-matter knowledge.
The processes through which history teachers interpretation and enacted the 1998 syllabus were primarily shaped by the nature and number of decisions they perceived to be available to them. Teachers’ perceived curriculum decision-making space was primarily linked to teacher self-identity, subject sub-culture and teacher culture, the dimensions of which were shown to be individual, collective, personal, professional and political. More specifically, history teachers enacted the 1998 syllabus through the concept of cost. Teachers individually and collectively considered the number and range of decisions available to them in their enactment of the 1998 syllabus. The process of making these decisions was then negotiated according to the perceived professional and personal ‘cost’ of each decision. More often than not, teachers erred on the side of cultural maintenance rather than adaptation, and aimed to minimise the costs of change to themselves, their students and their subject.

This thesis makes a theoretical contribution to the fields of curriculum change and the contexts of teacher practice. Whilst it is broadly acknowledged that mandated curriculum change often ‘fails’ (Sarason, 1990; Fink & Stoll, 2001), study findings indicate that ‘failure’ and ‘success’ are perhaps not a central focus in studies of curriculum change as these terms measure teachers’ responses to change as defined by policymakers. Rather, I argue that our focus should be on the mechanics of syllabus change not what was intended to happen as a result. An examination of the ways in which teachers negotiate syllabus change prior to classroom implementation is particularly important firstly because little is known about the middle ground of curriculum and secondly because teachers’ initial perceptions and enactment of syllabus change at the level of the subject department, have implications for classroom practice and student learning.

Research focusing on the role and function of the secondary school subject department has emerged as an area of interest over the last decade. This thesis contributes to this body of knowledge by examining the role of subject sub-culture in shaping the structure and operation of departments of the same subject. Previously, I argued that subject department research has often focused on comparing departments of different subject. This study compares and contrasts departments of the same subject – history – and their
differential effects on teachers’ enactment of subject specific curriculum change. This is particularly pertinent in the NSW context as the emergence of KLA’s has broad and far-reaching implications for the structure and function of subject departments in secondary schools. It also has ramifications for the ways in which new syllabus documents are implemented as this study has proven.

Additionally, study findings have application in the arena of policy formation. I suggest that policy makers need a much clearer understanding of the sites, contexts and processes through which a new syllabus document is mediated. Formal history syllabus development processes must for example, be informed by a greater understanding of the complexities of history teachers and the competing and coalescing subject sub-cultures with which they identify. This includes an understanding of the relationship between history and HSIE as organisers of subject-matter knowledge. It is clear that the subject specific syllabuses that have characterised NSW curriculum for the last century do not fit the KLA profile that the DET and BoS now endorse. This incongruence must be addressed and publicly debated if policymakers are to improve syllabus development processes and encourage teacher commitment to syllabus change.

**Implications for future research**

This study has taken the first step towards understanding the middle ground of curriculum. The reconceptualised middle ground of curriculum model provides a framework for future research at the broad level of change and more specifically at the level of curriculum change. Future research needs to:

- Further conceptualise the middle ground of curriculum and consider questions such as: what is the relationship between antecedent and contemporary subject sub-cultures as they relate to teachers enactment of new curriculum? What are implications of changing subject structures for the development and implementation of new curriculum? What is the relationship between the middle and ground levels of curriculum change? How do teachers’ initial perceptions and enactment of new curriculum influence the ways in which they implement new curriculum at a classroom level in the long-term?
• Cut across subject boundaries and examine teachers’ perceptions and enactment of school-wide change initiatives in the middle ground of change.

• Utilise the middle ground framework to inform the formal development of curriculum at a high ground level. Additionally, the middle ground of curriculum may provide insight into the improvement of professional development initiatives to enable teachers’ enactment of curriculum change.

In the current educational climate such research is necessary if we are to improve teacher morale and continue to strive towards meeting the learning needs of the community, teachers and students.