



AEF'S POSITION PAPER 'ASIA LITERACY' IN HISTORY CURRICULUM

SECTION 1: THE CONTEXT

1.1 Asia literacy in the national interest

- Prime Minister Kevin Rudd has said that he “wants Australia to become the most Asia-literate country in the Western world.” He states the core challenge for Australia is how we best prepare ourselves for the Asian Century – to maximize the opportunities, minimize the threats and make our own active contribution to making the Asian Century peaceful, prosperous and sustainable for us all.¹
- Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard told the 2008 AEF National Forum that, “It is impossible to conceive of a future Australian education system that does not take the study of Asia seriously.”²
- Our political leaders describe ‘Asia literacy’ as a national education priority and a learning opportunity to which *all* young Australians should have access.
- A focus on ‘Asia literacy’ in schools is inextricably linked to the changed world Australia finds itself in with India, China and other Asian nations strengthening their impact on the world in unprecedented ways:
 - China and India set to be the world’s top economies by 2040 when five year olds starting school in Australia today will be at the peak of their working lives.
 - Pressing global issues now confronting Australians including climate change, food supply, pandemics and security, require citizens with the skills to work closely with our geographic neighbours to help resolve these issues.
 - The proportion of Australians from Asian backgrounds is 10 percent and rising. The 2006 Census indicated that 800,000 Australians speak an Asian language at home; Buddhism is Australia’s fastest growing religion; India provides our third largest source of migrants and over 20 percent of our university students are Asian.
- We now find ourselves at a crucial moment in the evolution of Australian school curriculum, which has remained firmly Euro-centric with little attention paid to equipping new teachers with skills, knowledge and understandings of Asia. Consequently, half of our schools teach little or nothing about Asia, less than a quarter of students have a chance to learn an Asian language and fewer than 6% study an Asian language at Year 12.
- A unique opportunity now presents to address the long-standing under *emphasis on* ‘Asia literacy’ as a vital and non-negotiable component of an Australian national curriculum.

¹ Speech to Asia Society 11th Annual Dinner, 6 April 2008, New York

² The Hon Julia Gillard MP, Speech, AEF National Forum, Adelaide 19 May 2008

1.2 Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians

Recently, the importance of 'Asia literacy' in Australian education has been reinforced in the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians*, which notes that:

India, China and other Asia-Pacific nations are growing and strengthening their impact on the world, representing a huge shift in geopolitical power and sparking the need for all Australians to become 'Asia literate' (MCEETYA 2008: 3).

The Declaration also proposes as a goal that:

Active and informed citizens...are able to relate and communicate across cultures, especially in relation to cultures and countries of the Asia-Pacific (op. cit.: 6)

The Goals described in the Declaration will underpin Australian education for the next decade.

1.3 The National Curriculum

If the intentions of the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* are to be taken seriously and 'Asia literacy' realized for all Australians, then explicit inclusion of studies of Asia as core learning in the new National Curriculum must be achieved. There are two important aspects underpinning the explicit inclusion of 'Asia literacy' in the national curriculum:

- 'Asia literacy' does not require a new or separate subject such as Asian Studies. Nor does it attempt to load the delivery of this goal into one subject only, namely Asian languages.
- Asia literacy does require the systematic integration of Asia-related content and skills, where appropriate, across the whole [History] curriculum.

The most recent version of the *Shape of the National Curriculum* paper supports the context for 'Asia literacy' in the curriculum by stating that:

Development of a perspective on the world beyond Australia, in the Asia-Pacific region and globally, is also important (National Curriculum Board, February 2009: 9).

The paper also states that the national curriculum should build a set of knowledge, understanding and skills that:

...enables students to respect and appreciate their own and other cultures, and to work and communicate with those from different cultures and backgrounds...including respect for Australia's multicultural composition; appreciation of the special place of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures; communicating and working in harmony with others within and across cultures, especially in relation to cultures and countries of the Asia-Pacific; and appreciation of difference and diversity (National Curriculum Board, February 2009: 8-9).

1.4 Defining Asia literacy

In brief:

- 'Asia literacy' assists young Australians to make sense of the part of the world in which they live – the Asian region
- 'Asia literacy' is foundational and deep knowledge, skills and understandings about the histories, geographies, societies, cultures, literature and languages of the diverse countries that make up our region. This is a core part of a twenty-first century *Australian* curriculum.
- 'Asia literacy' is integral to the achievement of educational goals including personal futures, interpersonal development, social responsibility, cultural sensitivity, building communities, local and global futures, intercultural understanding, moral and ethical integrity, spiritual and aesthetic development and the skills of communicating, creating, thinking and innovating.

SECTION 2: AN 'ASIA LITERATE' HISTORY CURRICULUM

2.1 'Asia literacy' in History

'Asia literacy' in history refers to two kinds of outcomes:

- Developing knowledge of historical development, people, events and themes in some Asian nations, in the region generally, and in relation to the historical development of Australia.
- Development of the kinds of skills and understanding involved in studying the history of places, people and events in Asia associated with diverse cultural values, life experiences and political and social systems from one's own.

'Asia literacy' in History will involve young people gaining knowledge, skills and understandings including:

- a reasonably detailed knowledge of the history of more than one Asian nation, to enable students to understand the diversity of Asia;
- an understanding of some key Asian contributions to economic, political, social, cultural and spiritual matters;
- an understanding of the history of Asian contact with, influence on, immigration to and importance to Australia and in particular of the role of Australians of Asian heritage;
- skills in interpreting historical evidence across cultures; and
- skills in articulating an historical account of events, people and themes encompassing different cultures and places.

If these outcomes are to be achieved, the national history curriculum should address as a minimum:

- the economic, political, social, cultural and religious history of some Asian nations and those historical developments that have led to contemporary political and social arrangements;
- European voyages of discovery in the Asia-Pacific and subsequent colonization and resistance;
- major events and themes involving Asia and Australia, including World War 2 and the development of Asian regional associations involving Australia;
- key factors and events affecting Asian contacts with and migration to Australia and the influence on this nation of Asians and Australians of Asian background.

SECTION 3: STRUCTURING THE HISTORY NATIONAL CURRICULUM TO SUPPORT ‘ASIA LITERACY’

3.1 How can the History National Curriculum be best structured to support Asian content and focus as core curriculum?

The national curriculum should make the study of Asia and the incorporation of references to Asian people, cultures, places, events, sources and artefacts a mandatory part of the study of History. It is not enough to enable teachers and students to choose to study Asia: the data indicate that where this occurs, only a minority take-up the option – *both students and their teachers*.

Accordingly, there are key criteria that apply at each stage of schooling, and for each year in the history curriculum:

- Each year of schooling should include some mandatory study of Asian history and/or of the experience of Australians of Asian background.
- Primary and secondary sources at all year levels should include those from Australia, Asia and Europe.
- On balance across the years of schooling, there should be a rough equivalence in the history curriculum in the time spent on studies related to Asia and those related to Europe.
- Consistently throughout schooling the Overview section of courses should include elements related to Asia.
- Whenever Studies in depth occur, a proportion approximating a quarter of those required to be taken should focus on Asia and matters related to Asia (including studies related to Asian-Australians and influences on Australia).

SECTION 4: 'ASIA LITERACY' IN HISTORY ACROSS THE STAGES OF SCHOOLING

4.1 What specific elements should be included at each stage of the History National Curriculum?

Across Australia, states/territories currently describe curriculum in different stages of schooling. While a year-by-year approach is intended to describe the content to be taught in the History curriculum, the National History Curriculum Framing Paper³ described stages of schooling to outline the broader needs and interests of students as they progress through school.

The four stages are:

- Stage 1: students typically from 5 to 8 years of age
- Stage 2: students typically from 8 to 12 years of age
- Stage 3: students typically from 12 to 15 years of age
- Stage 4: students typically from 15 to 18 years of age

At each stage, there are specific elements that ought to be included.

Stage 1: students typically from 5 to 8 years of age

It is not anticipated that the study of history will be allocated substantial time during Stage 1. The history national curriculum should ensure that in the national curriculum for the years covered by this stage, there are clear and explicit references to Asian experience, especially in relation to the lives of children. Where the study involves reference to or use of artefacts, images, primary sources, oral histories, examples of transport, housing and ways of living, attention should be paid to the inclusion of examples of Asian origin and, especially at this stage, to examples illuminating the experience of Australians of Asian background.

Examples:

Students identify similarities and differences between their lives and the lives of children in Asia, using *Asia Counts* (Primary) to learn about Keiko and Chong Ling's daily lives, the *Snapshots of Asia* series to learn about celebrations and the family, or *Inside King Sejong's Gate* to learn about daily life in South Korea.

Students learn about the diverse customs and practices of people from Asia in their own community.

Stage 2: students typically from 8 to 12 years of age

The History Framing Document makes clear that Stage 2 involves the progressive emergence of history as a study in its own right. During this stage, the same approach should be taken as for Stage 1, ensuring that, for example, where the document refers to the need to 'introduce students to the traditions, stories, myths and legends that makes [sic] connections with the values, beliefs and the socio-cultural elements of past societies', that these include a significant proportion drawn from Asia, roughly equivalent to the proportion drawn from Europe.

In the section of the Framing Paper that outlines the four focus questions intended to shape the history curriculum during these years, a similar approach should be taken. For each of these questions, there are substantial Asian themes not reflected in the Framing document.

Question 1: *What is Australia and who are Australians?* could refer, for example, to indigenous contact with Asian traders in Australia's north, to 19th century Asian immigration (eg to the goldfields), to commemorative days in Asian countries. In each area of study, references to Asian examples should be roughly equivalent to references to European examples.

Question 2: *What problems did successive peoples encounter in living in early Australia and were these problems resolved?* could use Asian traders as examples of sea travel and exploration, and should specifically address issues associated with early Asian immigration to Australia.

3 National History Curriculum Framing Paper, National Curriculum Board, November 2008

Question 3: *How did we create a 'new' nation and develop a national identity?* should properly address issues in Australia's governance including the history of Australia's immigration laws and practices. The section referring to how other societies govern themselves could appropriately include a comparative study involving, for example, Imperial China, the changing roles of Japanese Emperors or the growth of democracy in Indonesia and India, as well as examples drawn from other nations and cultures.

Question 4: *How did we live then?* should more explicitly address the experience of migrants from Asia. The long experience of Chinese Australians, for example, should be included, and more recent arrivals from Vietnam after the Vietnam War and those from the sub-continent would also make a valuable study.

Stage 3: students typically from 12 to 15 years of age

Stage 3 is the period during which history is defined as a full independent subject. The Stage 3 discussion as a whole treats Asia as one region among many which should be included when global relationships and references are discussed. There should be a prioritizing of Asia, as there is of Europe, during this stage. In each unit, where there is at present a global focus, the focus should be roughly equally on Asia and Europe, with substantially less attention to other areas.

In Unit 2: *History from the end of the Ancient period to the beginning of the Modern period (c. 500–1750)*, for example, refers to the need to include 'other major civilizations—particularly those located in the Near and Middle East, China, Japan and India, and the Americas'. This section should be more explicit about the focus on the Asian examples, which should not be seen as equivalent to, for example, South America.

Unit 4: *Australia and the Modern World (1901–present)*, should include specific references and a more detailed account of the increasing historical significance of Asia during this period. This is addressed in one passing reference in the Framing document (paragraph 112). This reference should be expanded to include additional detail to ensure that the significance of Asia during this period is acknowledged in the written curriculum.

Throughout these units, Asian themes should be clearly present. Throughout all four units for example, students should gain a body of knowledge and understanding of the relationships between imperial China, Confucianism and the Communist era. As part of Stage 3 curriculum, students should be expected to engage in substantial in-depth study of a period of significant historical change in an Asian country (eg Westernisation in China, or the influence of Middle Eastern and European culture in Malaysia, Indonesia or the Philippines).

Stage 4: students typically from 15 to 18 years of age

The description of Stage 4 in the Framing document is supported in giving appropriate prominence to Asia-Pacific history.