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CONTENTS

Section 1: Refereed Section

Assessment for Early Intervention and Evaluation of Child Development and Learning: A challenge to African Psychologists

Munhuweyi Peresuh 1

Science Teachers' Cultural Beliefs and Conceptions of the Nature of Science and Instruction

Overson Shumba 22

The Crisis of 'O' Level History in Zimbabwe: A Silent but Dominant Theory of Knowledge. A Didactic theory of knowledge. A Didactic Practice.

Charles Ray Taruvinga 35

Modern Trends in Distance Education Design and Technology: A Look At Zimbabwe and Canada.

Fred Zindi and Robert Aucoin 48

Section 2: Point of View

The Role of the Students Teachers' Observation in the Development of their Teaching Skills During Teaching Practice

Alois S Chiromo 62

THE CRISIS OF O'LEVEL HISTORY IN ZIMBABWE : A SILENT BUT DOMINANT THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE, A DIDACTIC PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

The crisis in history is part of a larger crisis in education in Zimbabwe. History in the Zimbabwean school curriculum is under seige, especially with the promotion of new subjects and the consequent falling numbers of pupils studying it. The "unpopularity of history" is evidently a post-independence phenomenon. The pass rate in History at O'Level has dropped dramatically in most schools since 1980. No simplistic explanations can be given for this state of affairs. It is or should, however, be a source of concern to various education authorities, historians and teachers of history.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a synopsis of the problem and to try to anchor it within the competing theoretical frameworks. A position is taken which it is suggested would best inform the teaching of history in Zimbabwe. A brief historical expose of the O'level history syllabi is given in order to contextualise this paper.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF THE PROBLEM

The system of education Zimbabwe inherited at independence in 1980 reflected the ideological interests of a colonial capitalist order. The curriculum was designed, planned, and developed by external examination boards and endorsed by the local colonial education authorities. History curricula for distinct racial groups characterised our educational system.

It, therefore, became imperative that, as in other subjects, the history syllabus had to be revisited and reformed immediately after independence in order to reflect the aims and objectives of a new socialist oriented order. In addition, there was need to rationalise the existence of the numerous O'Level syllabi designed by Cambridge, London, and AEB examination boards. The 2160 History Syllabus was largely for the African pupils and the 2158 History syllabus was taken largely by the white pupils. The 2160 syllabus had two papers: one on African History and the other on Modern World History. The teaching and interpretation of both syllabi generally favoured the colonial status quo with topics being treated in a fragmented manner.

Obviously, there was an urgent need for a new history syllabus which encouraged a critical and radical interpretation of history in a manner which made Africans players and not mere observers in the historical process. In most African countries after their independence, Africanist or nationalist histories were implemented (Falola:1993). On the other hand, the new Zimbabwean syllabus (2166) was "intended to provide Zimbabwean pupils with the means by which they will develop a scientific or objective view of the world" (2166 Syllabus, Preamble, 1989:2). This was a "progressive" world view. In addition, it was meant to help them to "acquire an informed and critical understanding of social, economic and political issues facing them..." (ibid). The new syllabus (2166) took ten years to conceive, plan, design and develop. It was first implemented only in 1990.

This syllabus met with the familiar problems characteristic of curriculum change and inno-

vation. Teaching/learning resources were not immediately available when this new syllabus was introduced. Teachers were not familiar with the ideological and pedagogical orientation demanded by the new history syllabus. The new syllabus had the effect of deskilling the teachers. Teachers felt threatened and uncomfortable and this led to some resistance to change. Some teachers, especially in former Group A schools or private schools opted to continue with syllabus 2158. A number of mission schools continued with 2160. The majority of former Group B schools and many rural day secondary schools implemented Syllabus 2166 in 1990.

It has been argued that the teaching of Syllabus 2166 without adequate resources and its socialist bias explains the increasing unpopularity of history. This argument is not convincing as the alternative 2160 and 2158 syllabi have not grown in popularity either since independence. The socialist bias could be circumvented, as indeed happened in most schools, when teachers exercised the right to interpret and teach the content in a manner they were comfortable with. Such teachers taught the new history in the most traditional ways. After all, the majority of the topics remained the same. What was radically different was the approach to teaching them.

The vocationalisation of the curriculum in keeping with the polytechnic orientation of socialist education meant that history was no longer part of the core-curriculum. History was now one of the options. History in Zimbabwe like in the U.S.A. was being dislodged from the centre stage of the school curriculum. Gagnon graphically illustrates this issue in respect of the U.S.A. He says:

Just as History and other newer subjects like modern languages in the late 19th Century displaced and dislodged classics schools, in the late 20th Century History is being dislodged by the newer and sometimes trendy subjects, at school and college level by psychology, political science, health education, population education and computer education (Gagnon 1989:71).

This quotation shows that the crisis history is facing is international. This crisis is not due to the financial cost of sustaining History in the school curriculum. In fact, other subjects are more costly in terms of capital outlay and recurrent expenditure. In spite of the cost factor, one would have imagined that the place and importance of history in the curriculum and in nation building is self evident. Mandizha (1995:5) has recently shown that subjects deemed to be of less or no utilitarian value have lost the pride of place to the latecomers. The essential point to make is that history goes beyond the mere utilitarian value; it has an intrinsic value in terms of developing critical thinking capacities and giving citizens a sense of identity and pride, if nothing else.

My submission is that the crisis in history cannot be seen in terms of its dislodgement from the curriculum or the dwindling numbers of pupils studying it alone. The crisis in history in my view has arisen as a result of a failure on the part of practitioners to articulate the nature of viewpoints which inform practice. Seixas (1993:236) says questions arising from the

view points about history would be "what happens to history as scientific inquiry, what happens to historical objectivity in an intellectual environment which encourages the proliferation of equally legitimate alternatives"? These are questions which reveal competing conceptual frameworks. These competing paradigms are discussed below in order to show clearly the theoretical framework which informs Syllabus 2166 as well as our current practice.

PARADIGMS WHICH PROVIDE THEORETICAL FRAMES IN THE TEACHING OF HISTORY

The Dominant Theory of Knowledge

The teaching of history has been largely influenced by scholastically dominant theory of knowledge, learning and literacy which makes the following assumptions: that students should be taught factual knowledge and that this knowledge is independent of the thinking that generates, organises and applies it; that an educated person is a repository of content analogous to and encyclopedia; that knowledge, truth and understanding can be transmitted through verbal statements in the form of didactic teaching which is teacher dominated. There is also an assumption that learners can gain knowledge without seeking or valuing it, and therefore learning can take place without significant transformation of values; that it is more important to cover a great deal of knowledge superficially than a small amount in depth; that the personal experience of the student has no essential role to play in education; and that a student who can correctly answer questions, provide definitions, apply formulae while taking tests has knowledge (Paul, 1991). Although these assumptions have not been explicitly stated in the teaching of history, the practice suggests that they are in operation and prevalent.

It is now generally agreed that the teaching of history in schools should not have recall of "factual knowledge" of the past as the primary aim. Content knowledge should be taught through skills so that learners go beyond regurgitation of facts. Mumford (1991:307) quotes Descartes as saying "I think therefore I am," not "I can memorise correct answers therefore I am". Recall of information does not produce recognition of individual actuality or authenticity. Mumford (1991:307) argues that

human beings are at their best and in full realization of that which distinguishes them from other living beings, thinking creatures. They are no data collectors nor storehouses for collections of an endless and incoherently myriad of facts, but living beings who can act upon data, manipulate it rearrange it, evaluate it and use it for sensible and beneficial purposes.

CONVENTIONAL/MODERNIST VIEW

The conventional/modernist view appears to be a reaction to the dominant theory of knowledge. It states that history pupils should be taught how to think "historically" as historians do in historiography. They should view history as a scientific discipline. The modernist view focuses on the following basic skills according to van Veuren (1995:72):

- the ability to evaluate and generate historical hypotheses and causal explanations;
- the ability to identify and evaluate historical evidence;
- the ability to recognize bias, propaganda and semantic slanting in historical writing and
- the ability to identify and evaluate arguments by conflicting historical interpretations.

Consequently there has been a reaction to the a priori orientation to knowledge. The modernist view is said to be based on the enlightenment, faith in rationality and the belief that human reason when properly developed has a possibility of discovering how things really are. "Universal Reason" and scientific knowledge are viewed to be the exclusive valid standards of what constitute civilization, modernity and progress (Bridge 1991 and Hatcher 1991).

A POST MODERNIST CRITIQUE

Post modernists have questioned this "conventional" view arguing that:

- (a) history is non-referential; i.e there is no correspondence between history and an "objective" past;
- (b) history is interpretation and "evidence" is therefore one of form of interpretation of the past, but does not in itself constitute objectivity in history;
- (c) history cannot be objective. It is relative, subjective and therefore there is no one history, but a plurality of histories.
- (d) theory has no privileged status. "History," explains van Veuren (1995:74), "does not have a rational explanation of the past." "Theory" is displaced by "description", "small narratives", "insight" and "local conversation". While theory might have a role in historiography, post-modernists question its claims to universality and inter-subjectivity. "The scientific reason' of the enlightenment project is said to be itself relative.. the rhetoric of power of a specific culture" (van Veuren, 1995:74).

There are no underlying structures, background trends, causal explanations as these ignore the inter textual character of the world.

The post modernist view, therefore, rejects the thinking skills of the conventional/modernist view. Skills of identifying, evaluating evidence, detecting "bias" or "slant" become meaningless concepts because "history" is a series of positioned "readings" and there are no unpositioned criteria by which one can judge the degree of bias or slant explains van Veuren (1995:74). However, he rightly observes that the post-modernist views appear to be on the verge of abandoning the whole history project.

Van Veuren (1995) views some of the theses as untenable, e.g. that the truth cannot be known; that there are no generally applicable criteria; that terms like "bias" should be dropped entirely as well as causal attribution and the claim that skills are not central.

The skills approach of the modernist school is relegated to a lower status in favour of a shift towards "deconstruction". The post-modernist criticism of modernist scientific rationality with its emphasis in the technology of research procedures in the technology of research procedures is justified because of its lack of meaning-making in historical interpretation. On the other hand post-modernism relies heavily on interpretation and deconstruction at the expense of rational evaluation and argumentation. Post-modernism has a flaw of one sidedness. Hatcher (1991:6) observes "... while the arguments for the post-modern perspective begin with the true observations, they do not entail the conclusion that all knowledge is relative to one's frame of reference or context". Critical thinking offers a viable alternative to the weaknesses of the dominant theory, modernist and post-modernist orientations.

AN EMERGING CRITICAL THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

It is important that a compromise has to be struck between the modernist and post-modernist views. This would provide us with an emerging critical theory of knowledge, learning and literacy which assumes the significance of teaching how and not what to think, the relationship between content and thinking, and places an emphasis on strategies, principles, concepts and insights and on the process of thought, not as atomised facts. The role of the teacher is that of facilitator under autonomous learning conditions and not verbatim transmitter. The emphasis on learning should generally be active, creative, critical and caring inquiry. Most importantly, according to this conception, learning is essentially a public, communal, dialogical and dialectical process in which learners can only proceed indirectly to truth (Paul, 1988). Weinstein (1991:14) argues the case for critical thinking thus:

critical thinking, seen as the self-correcting application of skillful (sic), responsible thinking based on explicit criteria and sensitive to the particulars of context in which it is applied, leaves room for a wide range of perspectives available in the post-modern era and to those perspectives yet to come. By... insisting on the requirement of a justifiatory framework for inquiry of all sorts, critical thinking welcomes all to the table of reasonable discourse.

It is this theory of learning which to a large extent informs Syllabus 2166. So why this lengthy expose on the theory debate? The point is that the practice of history teaching in Zimbabwe or even the attempted scholarship on historical issues does not appear to be informed by theory. As a result, the crisis faced by history today has not been adequately addressed. The rest of this paper is an articulation of the history problem in Zimbabwe as advanced in the limited literature reviewed. It mainly has to do with (a) drop out rate; (b) declining pass rate; (c) lower ranking of history in the school curriculum; (d) lack of career prospects for history products; (e) teaching approaches/ styles/strategies; (f) teaching/learning resources; (g) teacher qualification, experience and attitude. These factors influence and reflect pupils' attitudes towards history. Each of these is explained in turn in some detail.

THE PROBLEM

Since 1980, History at O'Level has been experiencing a declining status in the school cur-

riculum. History is increasingly becoming unpopular with the pupils in our school system. A number of pupils do not read History at all throughout their secondary education because of their schools' policies on the subject. Some school heads allow pupils to study History up to the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (ZJC) level only. At such schools, History is compulsory in the first two years of secondary education. Beyond ZJC History is optional to the pupils.

Evidence for the decline in the popularity of History is in the number of pupils who have dropped it in their studies. Guzha's study (1993) of this problem in five schools in Zvimba district of Zimbabwe shows that Kutama College had 70% drop out rate between 1986 and 1993. Similarly, Mabvure school had 52% drop out; Mandevhani had 46% drop out rate; Matoranhembe school had 61% drop out rate in the same period respectively.

Mandizha's study (1995) of four secondary schools in Rudhaka district, Marondera, shows similar trends in the drop out rate in History from 1990 to 1994. Mandizha noted that in these schools History was only compulsory in the first two years of secondary education. At O'level, history was no longer compulsory in these schools: As a result in 1995, 57% of the total number of students studied History at Waddilove High School, 20% at Mahusekwa, 29% at Manyaira, and 31% at Mukumba. Nyamusakura's research (1995) on four schools in Harare and Moyo's study (1993) of seven schools in Bulawayo reveal a similar trend of the decline in the number of pupils doing History at O'Level.

THE HIGH FAILURE RATE IN HISTORY

The declining pupil population studying history at O'level has been accompanied by the fall in its pass rate since 1980. The view that the high failure rate has been associated with the introduction of the 2166 history syllabus is not borne by any evidence.

This trend of the high failure rate is not peculiar only to this new syllabus. It is equally true of the 2160 and 2158 History Syllabi. Table I, II, III, and IV clearly highlight this unacceptable low pass rate.

TABLE 1 : HISTORY RESULTS AT SEVEN SELECTED SCHOOLS IN BULAWAYO SINCE 1990

SCHOOL	YEAR % PASS RATE			Average
	1990	1991	1992	
A	40%	34%	33%	36%
B	50%	28%	30%	36%
C	38%	34%	43%	38%
D	43%	36%	38%	39%
E	28%	25%	26%	26%
F	34%	27%	29%	30%
G	36%	29%	31%	32%

C.R. Taruvinga

SOURCE : N. MOYO (1993:43)

	1986	1987	1988	1989	1990	1991	1992	AVE
A	73%	94%	83%	72%	82%	96%	100%	76%
B	19%	20%	17%	16%	42%	18%	38%	24%
C	6%	1%	27%	23%	42%	25%	20%	21%
D	7%	3%	15%	27%	15%	33%	42%	20%
E	30%	26%	41%	38%	27%	50%	30%	36%

SOURCE : M. GUZHA 1993

TABLE III : HISTORY AT FOUR SCHOOLS AT RUDHUKA DISTRICT, MARONDERA FROM 1990 TO 1994

SCHOOL	YEAR % PASS RATE					
	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	AVE
A	68%	71%	60%	69%	73%	68%
B	27%	10%	12%	14%	17%	16%
C	19%	9%	12%	12%	14%	13%
D	24%	11%	13%	11%	15%	15%

TABLE IV NATIONAL PASS RATE 1991 - 1994

SYLLABUS NO	TOTAL	A	B	C	C	
1991	2158	619	9.7%	15.0%	20.9%	45.6%
	2160	4,489	3.6%	12.8%	18.6%	34.9%
	2166	15,106	2.7%	11.1%	17.5%	31.3%
	2158	832	11.8%	16.3%	18.5%	46.6%
1992	2160	4,49	0%	16.7%	16.7%	33
	2166	14,114	2%	12.1%	18.1%	32.9%
	2158	2 760	14.9%	16.9%	17.8%	49.6%
1993	2160	117	6.8%	17.9%	21.4%	45.1%
	2166	14,114	2.8%	11.6%	17.3%	31.7%
	2158	676	14.4%	15.9%	18.8%	49.1%
1994	2160	260	4.8%	15.1%	20.0%	30.9%
	2166	14,049	3.9%	12.3%	17.9%	34.1%

SOURCE: The Zimbabwe School Examination Concil 1995

PUPIL RANKING HISTORY IN ORDER OF PREFERENCE

Researchers use rank ordering a subject by pupils as a way of determining its popularity among them. Nyamusakura's study (1995) of four randomly selected schools in Harare showed that 40% of the pupils surveyed ranked History fifth out of eight subjects. In a similar study by Mandizha only one pupil (1.7%) out of 60 pupils ranked History as her most favorite subject out of eight subjects. Those who ranked History between first and fourth preference were only about 32% of the sample. It can be assumed that these were the only pupils with a reasonably high level of interest in the subject. In the same study, eighteen pupils out of sixty ranked History eighth in order of preference. This was the lowest preference given to it. This statistical evidence confirms the view that History is experiencing a very low status among Zimbabwean secondary school pupils. This trend may not be unique to Zimbabwe only.

CAREER PROSPECTS

Rowse's assertions (1960) that career prospects for history curriculum products at secondary and tertiary levels in England in the 1950's were abundant is perceived not to apply to the Zimbabwean situation in the 1980's and 1990s. According to Rowse many people who have studied history have become academicians, cultural officers, librarians, archivists, curators of museums, political, foreign and military journalists, public servants at home and abroad.

In Zimbabwe, massive unemployment, due to the harsh economic environment under the Economic Structural Adjustment Programme (ESAP), makes history not to have a visibly functional or utilitarian value to the pupils. Similarly, due to high fees for tuition and exami-

nations, parents are not easily given to encouraging their children to include History in the range of subjects they do at O'Level. The harsh economic conditions have forced parents and their children to prioritize the subjects to be studied and whose examinations to be written at O'Level. In terms of good job prospects, Mathematics, Science, Technical and Technological subjects, Commercial subjects and English enjoy high status among students, parents, and employers. Lewis (1960:15) underlines this vital point when he says "history is not a bread and butter subject; its data are not in common use." Similarly, Booth (1969:XI) says that "our utilitarian society has tended to treat the impractical discipline of History with ... contempt."

TEACHING APPROACHES

The researches cited above show that pupils no longer like History in schools largely because the teaching approaches/methodologies used to teach it. Zimbabwean pupils have developed negative attitudes towards history because of the dull and uninspiring ways it is taught. Similar evidence has been found in Britain and North America (see Gaganon, 1989). Pupils learn a string of dates, battles, and names of kings, queens, ministers, heroes, and nationalists leaders. Teachers teach history in a manner which shows a lack of interest in the subject. In addition, in spite of global, technological innovations in the production of textbooks, history books are produced in a dull and unsatisfactory fashion.

Booth (1969) holds the view that teaching methods in History have a bearing on the high drop out rate in the subject. The survey conducted by Guzha (1993), Moyo (1993), Mandizha (1995) and Nyamusakura (1995) show that the common teaching approach used in History is the chalk and talk and note giving approach. Harris (1969:30) says "History is often... taught by chalk, talk and textbook as thin and useless information. Booth (1969:73) notes that "... it is (pupil) involvement which is lacking in most History lessons".

The 2166 History syllabus is supposed to depart radically from the old history in terms of methodology or teaching approaches. This new syllabus requires a new pedagogy and yet, in fact, it is taught in the ordinary routine, banking approach. Many teachers allege that the length of the 2166 syllabus forces them to use the lecture method in order to quickly cover the syllabus. In the early years of the implementation of the 2166 syllabus nearly all teachers claimed that limited resources made it difficult to use progressive methods of teaching history. The child-centered approaches which should actively engage pupils in discovering, analyzing and discussing historical issues and materials are rarely used. Nyamusakura's study (1995) revealed that the pupils surveyed spent 70% of their time listening to the teacher. The pupils spent the rest of the time writing notes. Ninety percent of the pupils who dropped history in Nyamusakura's study (ibid) said that copious rates which needed to be memorized forced them to drop History. Pressure from other subjects did not allow them to read all these notes. Thus, many notes tended to scare away the pupils from history.

TEACHING/LEARNING RESOURCES

Guzha (1993) observed that teaching/learning resources' provision varied from school to school. He advanced the view that government schools were generally better endowed than the rural/day secondary schools. The mission schools were well provided for in terms of teaching/learning resources. This situation does not necessarily make history teaching in government schools different from the rural/day secondary schools. The differences between the types of schools is a matter of degree. However, the relationship between the availability

of teaching/learning resources and pupil interest in the subject needs further research. Booth (1969:7) noted that History Department "... are not too generously treated in the way of equipment..." In Zimbabwe, History resources centres are non-existent.

To make things worse, the 2166 History syllabus has been seen as not having adequate resources. New text books are being produced but they all vary in quality. Moyo (1993:6) says "also the syllabus came into operation with an inadequate supply of textbooks and other learning resources." Paper One of the 2166 syllabus contains source-based questions but the sources required to prepare pupils for this paper are inadequate or inaccessible. While it is true that history can be taught with minimal teaching/learning resources, the absence of resources makes history teaching boring and unimaginative. Lack of resources tend to inhibit the use of a variety of teaching methods and often leads to the dictation of notes and memorization of facts for examination purposes. The materials production from the History section of the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) over the years has been a trickle.

TEACHER QUALIFICATION AND EXPERIENCES

While the number of qualified teachers of history has improved since 1980, history has not always been taught by qualified people. Between 1980 and 1990 teacher shortage characterised the education scenario in this country. Teacher shortage meant that history was taught by unqualified/temporary teachers. Mandizha's study (1995) revealed that 50% of the teachers at the four schools in Rudhaka district were untrained. The graduate history teachers were a rare species.

The bulk of the trained teachers are non-graduate. Qualified teachers in other subject disciplines are asked to teach history. This view that history can be taught by anybody is also responsible for its low status in the school curriculum and its unpopularity among teachers and pupils. In Britain, the Incorporated Association of Assistant Masters in Secondary Schools (IAAM, 1975) held the view that "the subject of the complexity of History must be organised and for the most part taught by experts." IAAM (1965:5) went on to say that "the teaching of so valuable and so complex a subject as History needs to be in the hands of these who have specialist History qualifications, obtained by degree through university, polytechnic or college of education." This ideal situation is also recommended for Zimbabwe.

Even the trained teachers who functioned well under the conventional/traditional syllabus have experienced problems in teaching the 2166 History syllabus. Nyamusakura (1995:34) observed that "... History teachers in the study are not well equipped to teach 2166 syllabus. Few teachers readily accepted change, especially when it entailed much reading, research and resourcefulness." The overall consequence of the inappropriate use of trained teachers, the use of underqualified or unqualified teachers and teacher resistance to curricular changes has been the unimaginative way of teaching history and its unpopularity and increased pupil drop out rate and unacceptable failure rate. The in-service programmes for history teachers were short and lacked appropriate structures. They also did not have the desired effects largely because of limited financial resources and lack of the appropriate qualified and experienced personnel. Supervision by the subject specialist has not been concerted and impactful.

THE WAY FORWARD

The foregoing analytic observations are only symptomatic of the crisis in history. To focus on them only is to fall into the trap of an untenable didactic emphasis in which history teach-

C.R. Taruvunga

ing is currently caught up. The underlying task is to unravel the theory which informs our practice. There is need to move away from the pervading, silent, salient, tacit, dominant theory of knowledge to an emerging critical theory of knowledge. In brief, historians should engage in a debate which highlights theoretical insights as provided by the conventional modernist and post modernist paradigms among others.

It is outside the scope of this paper to give details of an alternative framework. I intend to make this subject of a forthcoming paper. Nevertheless, the centrality of history teaching should focus on thinking skills, concept formation, critical questioning, interpretation, working on extended projects and cross referencing form a variety of sources. Mumford (1991:12) says "problems important to study should be open ended, arouse doubt or create an indeterminate situation which acts as intrinsic motivator". Conclusions or judgements arrived at should be seen as as tentative within the context of critical/reflective thinking.

The 2166 syllabus provides a solid base for a critical inquiry approach to the teaching of history at all levels of the education system Shemilt. (1980:10) observes that:

A concept and skills programme could be effectively taught to secondary school children and ... that the problems intrinsic to such a programme derive not so much from pupils' limited intellectual competence as from the greater demands made upon teachers' skills and understanding.

This is precisely the problem 2166 syllabus is face with. Since it provides a "programme" of student inquiry using primary sources and requiring the construction and evaluation of historical interpretation it entails some clear choices. Contrary to the concern often expressed that the 2166 syllabus is very long, it has a number of options and this allows more time for depth of coverage on the selected areas. Consequently "a more complex set of arguments... replaces the single narrative of traditional history" (SEIXAS 1993 :239)

CONCLUSION

The theoretical and practical inadequacies in history teaching is a cause of concern. In ramifications for Zimbabwean not knowing their history are not pleasant. In this global village, our identity and consciousness are threatened by a lack of a historical awareness. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, the crisis in history is part of a large crisis in education in an era when "education" has been reduced to instrumental utilitarianism. Can history also be salvaged?

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