

A curriculum of frame-of-reference historical knowledge: The idea and the practical problems

Arie Wilschut

Amsterdam University of Applied Sciences

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1 Introduction

The development of history teaching in the Netherlands offers an interesting example of how governmental and political influence, research about teaching methods, and the (lack of) expertise of teachers coincide to produce effects that were not intended by any stakeholder in particular. It shows how educational reforms meet with tough challenges which are hard to overcome, and sometimes result in frustrating the intended changes altogether.

In principle, the Dutch education system should provide ample opportunities for experimentation and innovation, because freedom of education is a fundamental right laid down in the constitution. This was the result of a compromise reached in 1917 at the end of the so called 'school struggle' in the second half of the nineteenth century, at that time a conflict between catholic and orthodox protestant advocates of a strongly confessionally inspired education and those who championed a more liberally minded, state sponsored general education for everyone. The compromise implied that the state would thenceforth sponsor all types of education without interfering with the curriculum. Up to today, the Dutch government's influence on school curricula is limited. The major tool the government can employ are the final examinations of secondary education, because the law guarantees the validity of secondary education diploma's by means of standards and requirements. Another semi-official tool is a test at the end of primary education which serves to find out at which level students will continue their school career in secondary education. A test produced by CITO (the National Dutch Institute for Assessments, see www.cito.com) has acquired a semi-official status, though primary schools are not obliged to use it. History plays a minimal role in the assessments at the end of primary schools, whose main focus is Dutch language and mathematics.

A national curriculum does not exist in the Netherlands. Levels that should be targeted are laid down in generally formulated 'attainment targets' for primary education and junior secondary education, and in detailed requirements for final examinations at the end of secondary education. The attainment targets for primary educations are only examined semi-officially by the previously mentioned assessment, and for junior secondary education they are not assessed at all. This is the reason why the requirements for the final examinations of secondary education play a major role, not only for someone from outside who would like to know what the Dutch curriculum looks like, but also as an orientational focus for Dutch teachers. This is the reason why these requirements play a major role in the text of this paper.

2 Criticism and debate in the nineteen nineties

During the nineteen nineties, the situation of history teaching in the Netherlands became the target of national discussion which reached the headlines of national newspapers (similar debates had been conducted around that time in some other countries, like the United Kingdom and the United

States (Wilschut, 2010)). As a matter of course the discussion concentrated on the requirements for the final examinations of secondary education. The programme for history at that time contained two parts. Part I described historical skills, historical thinking and reasoning in ways which have become commonplace internationally in standards for history education (see for example: Seixas & Morton, 2013). This implies that concepts like historical evidence, causation, continuity and change, interpretation and accounts were tools that students should be able to utilize when conceptualizing their images of the past. Part II described the historical content that should be dealt with by means of indicating eleven domains of historical knowledge in rather generic terms:

- Livelihood and social networks
- Households and upbringing
- Political system and political culture in the Netherlands
- Totalitarian systems and states
- State and nation building
- International relations and warfare
- 'Non-Western' societies
- Contacts between 'non-Western' and Western societies
- Ancient cultures and Western society
- Folk culture: the design of daily life
- Religion and philosophies of life

These domains were defined with an intention to indicate the kinds of contents that students should be made familiar with by means of more detailed historical topics. The intentions of the composers of this programme were to show that history is a multifaceted discipline today: not only political, socio-economic and cultural history of the more well-known types, but also history of families, of cultural encounters, of informal folk culture and of philosophies of life (Grever, *et al.*, 1995).

The examination practice resulting from this programme was rather different from what one would expect. The skills and concepts mentioned in Part I of the programme barely played a role in the actual examination questions, and if they did, it was only on a superficial level. For example, in the context of 'evidence', students would have to answer a question like 'do you think this source is reliable?' - using only the most superficial criteria, like whether an author was an eye-witness of a reported event or not. Mentioning causes of an event that were learnt by heart would be considered 'using the concept of causation'.

As to Part II, this was examined by annually selecting two of the eleven domains and formulating a topic within them that specified the subject matter to be studied on a detailed level. This resulted into examination topics that were not so easily recognizable for outsiders who were used to studying topics like 'the Industrial Revolution', 'Modern Imperialism', 'the Second World War' or 'the Cold War'. Table 1 shows some of the examination topics that were used during the early 2000s as a result of the examination programme introduced in the nineteen nineties, which would continue to be used until 2015.

This examination practice suggested that students did not acquire survey knowledge of any general significance, that a haphazard choice of alternating topics dominated the examination programme and that history education therefore did not serve the needs of society. In the debate in

the newspapers, participants wondered what had happened to ‘good old history’, and whether students leaving secondary schools would have any knowledge at all that ‘an educated person in society should have’, like notions about Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Enlightenment, Colonialism, the Industrial Revolution, Revolutionary and Napoleonic Europe, the Second World War, etcetera.

The criticism was not completely misplaced. Because of the major influence of the final examinations on the curriculum, teachers tended to pay a lot of attention to the annually selected topics. As is evident from Table 1, a topic was used for any two subsequent years alternating with the other one, which implied that every year a new topic was introduced. The description of the topic was announced two years before the actual examination year, including a detailed specification of subject matter (names, dates, etc.) that should be remembered. Teachers followed in-service training by academic specialists about the topics, because their general knowledge of history would not be sufficient to cover the subject matter. These in-service trainings were even popular among considerable numbers of teachers, who felt they had a chance to go back to their university years and follow some sound old-fashioned lectures by professors they admired. Whether the general interest of the students was served by this, was apparently not their first concern. Another consideration is whether a national examination should focus on knowledge that is beyond the scope of the experts, the teachers. If even teachers cannot cope with a final examination using their usual professional knowledge, is it the right kind of examination?

Table 1 *Examination topics in the Netherlands, early 2000s*

Year	Domain	Topic
2002 2003	Totalitarian systems and states	A system under tension: The Soviet Union of Stalin and of Brezhnev 1928-1941; 1964-1982
2003 2004	Political system and political culture in the Netherlands	The Dutch and their authorities 1950-1990: pillarization, polarization and regained consensus.
2004 2005	Livelihood and social networks	The magnifying glass on Lancashire: cotton and society 1750-1850.
2005 2006	International relations and warfare	Decolonization and Cold War in Vietnam.
2006 2007	Households and upbringing	From child to citizen: Popular education by means of the schooling system in the Netherlands, 1780-1920.

3 Political interventions in the 1990s: two committees

The debate about the state of history education in due time also reached Parliament. Almost unanimously, regardless of their party affiliations, politicians took the view that history teaching should return to a more generally usable kind of 'survey knowledge'. A commonly heard phrase in this context was that *'students should know that Napoleon came earlier than Hitler'*.

The political answer to this debate was the appointment of a committee which should research what society in general expected from history education. The committee was composed of professors of history and some other stakeholders (like museum managers) as well as some history teachers, but no specialists in history education from universities, who were suspected to 'defend their own position', i.e. the existing situation in history education. The committee consulted stakeholders in society, like publishers, people working in the arts, museum directors, journalists and people employed in the scientific institutes of political parties. All of these 'outsiders' were asked what they thought history education in schools should target at. In the report, published in 1998, the committee observed:

'Virtually all interviewees turned out to attach most value to the transfer of historical facts and insights into a chronological framework; learning skills, while useful, was considered secondary. On this point, the Committee has found a certain estrangement between what is considered to be desirable in a broad social circle, and the current practice in history teaching' (Het Verleden in de Toekomst, p. 35, my translation).

To solve the problem of this 'estrangement', the committee gave the following points of advice:

- *Create a 'new balance between knowledge, insight and skills'.*
- *Offer an identical minimum package of historical overview knowledge and skills ('canon') for all students in primary education and junior secondary education.*
- *Limit the subject matter for senior secondary education to the period from the pre-industrial Europe to the present.*
- *Delineate the substance within that period to a limited number of diachronic thematic domains* (p. 36, my translation).

Earlier in the report, the committee had specified what it saw as the 'canon' mentioned in the second point of advice. The summing up of desirable standard contents was not very surprising:

'Prehistory, Mediterranean Cultures, Middle Ages (aspects of state building, economy and culture), Reformation, European Overseas Expansion, Absolutism and Democratic Revolution, Industrial Revolution, Colonialism, Imperialism, Socialism and Communism, Fascism, International Relations in the Twentieth Century (World War I, World War II), Cold War, Decolonization, European Unification' (p. 29, my translation).

The general impression after the publication of this report was that history education would be heading 'back to knowledge' and away from 'historical skills' and exotic themes and topics. This impression greatly influenced the context in which the next committee, installed in 2000, would

start its work. The task of this committee, the Committee on History and Social Sciences (CHSS), was to specify the details of new attainment targets for primary and junior secondary education as well as the new requirements for the final examination, based on the point of departure of 'more survey knowledge'. The word 'canon' had been used for the first time, though it must be pointed out that there was no mention of a 'national canon'. The outline of history presented by the previous committee was a traditional, general-European, or general-Western kind of history, without even mentioning the special role that the Netherlands had played.

The CHSS was presided over by an Amsterdam professor of history with few ties to teacher education or the practice of history education. Members of this committee, however, were people familiar with history education, teacher trainers and practicing history teachers. The present author served as secretary to the committee, implying that draft texts for the report were largely composed by him. This implies that what follows here on the discussion within the committee is based on his own observations, but is also partial to the extent that it represents not only his views on history teaching, but also his account of what happened.

The general expectation within the committee as well as outside, was that the CHSS would come up with lists of names and dates to specify the survey knowledge that every Dutch citizen should have. For example, a survey was published in *Kleio* (Dutch magazine for history teachers) in 1999 asking readers to list the names and facts that should be included in the canon of chronological knowledge that the committee should produce (Van Boxtel, 1999a; Van Boxtel, 1999b). Within the CHSS, members started attempts to come up with lists of knowledge items, however, as was to be expected, it was difficult to reach an agreement.

This gave rise to a more fundamental question: what purpose should survey knowledge of history serve? The committee concluded that this purpose would be 'the development of historical consciousness'. As a working definition of historical consciousness, a connection was made to German literature, for example Jeismann's (1979) definition:

'More than mere knowledge of or pure interest in history, historical consciousness embraces the connection between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present and future perspectives' (p. 42, my translation).

Connections between past, present and future could only be made successfully, according to the committee, if the historical skills, concepts and ways of thinking as specified in Part I of the existing examination programme, would be maintained. Next to that, students should be able to 'orientate in time'. The general outline knowledge that was necessary for this kind of orientation, would have to be specified. The knowledge specification would therefore be purely instrumental and serve no other purposes than the development of historical consciousness and orientation in time. This raised the question of how orientation in historical time actually takes place (Verleden, heden en toekomst, 2001).

4 Orientation in historical time

Research on how people orientate in time is first and foremost executed by psychologists analyzing how an image of the past originates. This research has led the American psychologist William Friedman (1990; 1993; 2005) to develop some insights that bear relevance also for history

educators. Consciousness of time is not in the first place a linear one, based on chronology expressed in numbered years and specified dates. Rather, people have memories like pictures attached to certain circumstances and places. For example, someone finding an old dress in a wardrobe may be reminded by its conspicuous colours or design of the occasion when she wore it, without being able to mention the numbered year in which it took place. Photographs of holidays may recall vivid images of the circumstances of the time without any historical periodization. People remember time primarily in the shape of unconnected 'islands of time', as a 'patchwork of representations' (Friedman, 2005, p. 155). There is no reason to think that the abstract shape of time represented in numbered years or centuries supports an imaginable past:

'The sense of an absolute chronology in our lives is an illusion, a thin veneer on the more basic substance of coincidence, locations in recurrent patterns, and independent sequences of meaningfully related events' (Friedman, 1993, p. 61-62).

It is a 'chronological illusion' to think that people imagine time naturally like *'an abstract, uniform, measurable dimension that stretches indefinitely into the past and the future'* (Friedman, 1990, p. 103). The timeline, favoured in history textbooks as a tool to support students' imaginations about historical time, may be a less effective tool than concrete images of circumstances during certain historical periods. Images of 'Roman times' are supported by the looks of a Roman city with its temples, its aqueducts, its fora and its amphitheater. Images of the time of absolutism are better supported by the palace of Versailles and its inhabitants than with its indication of 17th century.

Research in history education has confirmed that these insights in human temporal orientation derived from psychology also apply to orientation in historical time. The present author has conducted an experiment in which a group of students was taught some new historical content supported means of numbered years and centuries, while a comparable group was taught exactly the same subject matter supported by a series of named eras with imaginative, associative names (like 'time of the pirates', or 'time of the gold diggers'). It was shown that the last group was significantly better able to position events in time and to allocate new information to the correct studied context (Wilschut, 2012). Results from research by Van Boxtel and Van Drie (2012) identified three pillars of historical orientation in time used by students:

'Outcomes support the idea that a rich associative network of historical knowledge organized around key historical concepts and knowledge of landmarks helps students anchor and calibrate timelines for effective contextualization' (p. 113).

Apart from the pillars 'key historical concepts' and 'knowledge of landmarks' (to which we will return below), a 'rich associative network' was identified as an important tool, which supports the idea of associative orientation in time by means of patchworks of representations. Another idea pointing in the same direction is Dawson's (2009) concept of 'sense of period', using key questions to evoke the 'picture of an age', like: 'What did they wear?' 'What kinds of houses or buildings would you have seen?' 'How did they travel or communicate?' 'What kinds of machinery would they use?'

5 *The proposals of the CHSS*

Inspired by this kind of thinking on orientation in historical time the CHSS proposed an outline curriculum based on ten associatively named eras. Bearing in mind that people in general more readily refer to 'the time of Louis XIV and Versailles' than to 'the 17th century', and rather to 'the time of Monks and Knights' rather than to 'the Middle Ages', the committee supported the idea presented by its secretary to conceive of such names for usable eras, which could then shape the outline of history to be studied in schools. The idea was that the same framework should be used throughout history education, implying that in its simplest form it would have to be applicable in primary education. In junior and senior secondary education, the framework of eras would become increasingly nuanced by adding a growing number of 'characteristic features' that typified each of the eras. This implied a concentric curriculum, in which the whole framework would be discussed at least three times, preferably more. The maximum number of characteristic features of eras would be reached in senior secondary education and serve as the backbone of the final examination. Table 2 specifies all of the ten eras with their maximum number of characteristic features.

Apart from the characteristic features of eras, no names, dates or other details to be remembered were specified. This stressed the idea that the eras should serve as a frame of reference to work with, not as a body of knowledge to be memorized and remembered. Three of the 49 characteristics, like the sixteenth century Dutch Revolt, the seventeenth century Dutch Golden Age, and the German occupation during the Second World War, specifically addressed Dutch history, while all the others were conceptualized as generic features of Western or World History. *The committee specifically renounced mentioning further factual details to be studied.* This did not imply that such details should not be studied at all, but that the choice of specific details would be up to the schools, teachers, or even students.

Returning to the research results mentioned earlier, the framework of eras served to operationalize three pillars of orientation in time: 1 the associative network was formed by the names of the eras themselves, which were intended to evoke a general image of the time; this function was enhanced by providing icons for every era (which are now widely used throughout Dutch history education); 2 key historical concepts were provided by the characteristic features of the eras, containing terms like 'feudalism', 'manorial system', 'crusades', 'renaissance', 'enlightenment', 'industrial revolution', 'colonialism' or 'democratic revolution'; 3 landmarks which could support remembering developments in time were left to the discretion of teachers to select. For example: the characteristic feature 'Christianization of Europe' in the early Middle Ages (era of Monks and Knights) could be supported by the Baptism of Clovis as a turning point, or the characteristic feature 'Industrial Revolution' could be supported by the introduction of James Watt's steam engine as a landmark event.

Table 2 *Eras and their characteristic features in the Dutch history curriculum*

Eras	Characteristic features
 Hunters and Farmers	1 Hunter-gatherers 2 Emergence of agriculture 3 Origin of cities and ancient civilizations
 Greeks and Romans	4 The Greek city-state 5 The classic style 6 The Roman Empire 7 Romans and Germans 8 Judaism and Christianity
 Monks and Knights	9 Christianization of Europe 10 Islam 11 Manorial system and serfdom 12 Feudalism
 Cities and States	13 Re-emergence of trade and crafts 14 Cities with freedoms 15 Struggle between church and state 16 The Crusades 17 Origins of national states
 Discoverers and Reformers	18 Discoveries overseas 19 World view of the Renaissance 20 Revival of Antiquity 21 The Reformation 22 The Dutch Revolt
 Regents and Princes	23 Absolutism 24 The Dutch Golden Age 25 Worldwide trade and early capitalism 26 The scientific revolution
 Wigs and Revolutions	27 The Enlightenment 28 Enlightened absolutism 29 Plantations and slavery 30 Democratic revolutions
 Citizens and Steam Engines	31 Ideologies 32 Democratization 33 Industrial Revolution 34 The social issue 35 Emancipation movements 36 Modern Imperialism
 World Wars and Crisis	37 Mass organization 38 Totalitarian systems 39 The world economic crisis 40 World Wars 41 The genocide 42 German occupation of the Netherlands 43 Total war 44 Rise of nationalism in colonies
 Television and Computer	45 Decolonization 46 Cold war 47 European unification 48 The 'sixties' 49 Pluriform societies

The idea that associations would be stimulated by the names of the eras was confirmed by an initial research of the proposals, which implied the presentation of the names of the ten eras and their icons to ca 700 grade 10 students of eight different secondary schools in the country. These students had never seen the names of the eras or the icons,, because they had not yet been introduced into the curriculum. The students were asked to answer three questions:

- What does this era make you think of?
- Can you name any persons from this era?
- Can you name any events from this era?

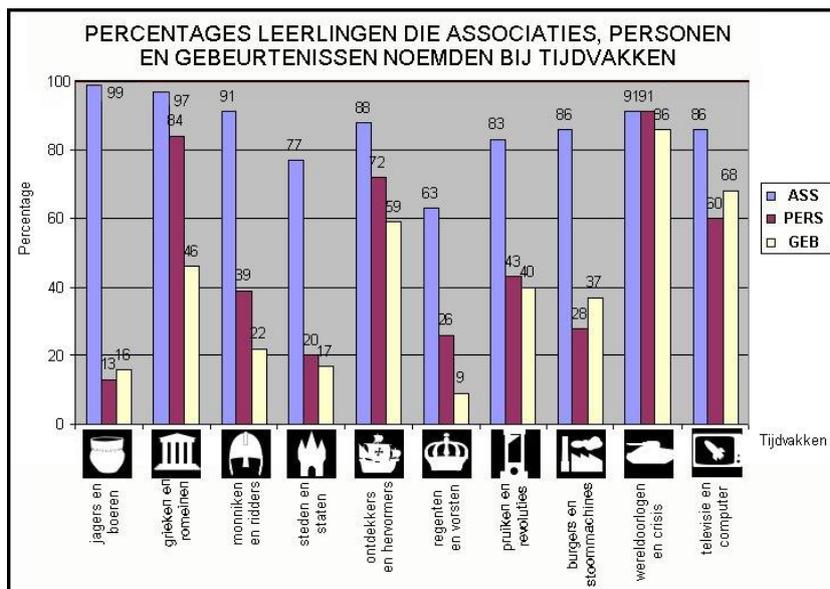


Fig. 1 Percentages of students mentioning correct associations, persons or events when confronted with names and icons of eras.

Results showed that correct associations were mentioned by 86% of the students (varying between 99 for the best known eras and 63 for the least known era). Considerably fewer students could mention correct events or persons (Van Straaten, 2006 – see Fig. 1).

In its advice on the renewal of final examinations, the CHSS proposed to abolish the prescribed annually changing topics with detailed knowledge to be memorized. Instead students should be tested on their competence *in doing history*. This implied that they would have to be competent in two respects:

1 using the skills and modes of thought in historical reasoning, as already specified in the previous examination programme, but thus far not really assessed in the actual examinations; the CHSS thought that the chance of actually testing this competence would increase in a context in which no detailed factual knowledge would have to be memorized, because this would necessitate a focus on historical problems instead of historical knowledge.

2 using an orientational framework of outline knowledge, as specified in the ten eras and their characteristic features as a background to historical issues and problems.

In the CHSS proposals the final examination should take the shape of one or two ‘issues in history’, not previously specified or studied by the students, presented to students on the examination session. Each issue would be accompanied with background texts and source material which should be utilized by students, more or less in the shape of a ‘document based question’

existing in United States assessments of history. The students would then be assigned to write an essay in which they took a position based on historically sound ways of thinking and reasoning, using their framework knowledge and knowledge of historical skills and reasoning as tools. The CHSS added some example issues to illustrate its proposal:

1 Should the 'Elgin Marbles' in the British Museum be sent to Athens to be near their place of origin? This issue would require students to consider the origins of the sculptures in Greek Antiquity, their fate in Greece under Ottoman rule, the role of the Enlightenment in developing an inquisitive attitude among Western European people like the British Lord Elgin, the role of nationalism in founding a Greek national state, and the role of nationalism nowadays as a background of the Greek claim to the Elgin Marbles. All of this would lead them to an historically sound judgement on the question whether modern Greeks are the rightful inheritors of works of arts created some two and a half thousand years ago on the territory they now inhabit.

2 Should the statue of Dutch colonizer Jan Pieterszoon Coen, founder of the city of Jakarta, be removed from its central position in the city of Hoorn (North-Holland)? The discussion on statues like these has been going on in the Netherlands for some time and is still continuing. Students would have to consider the circumstances of the Dutch presence in Indonesia during the 17th century and the merits or contemptible acts of someone like Coen, the circumstances around the erection of the statue in the nineteenth century and the views of colonialism and imperialism at that time, as well as more modern points of view on this issue (*Verleden, heden en toekomst*, 2001).

6 Political developments after 2000

More or less simultaneously with the presentation of the report by the CHSS in 2001, there were some remarkable developments in Dutch politics which have later been called the Fortuyn-revolution after its initiator Pim Fortuyn (1948-2002). Afterwards it has become clear that his movement represented the first stirrings of populism in Dutch politics.

The rise of populism not only manifested itself in an islam-critical attitude and an anti-immigration movement, but also gave rise to questions about the national identity and national culture. Relatively soon, this was also reflected in education. The influential Education Council – an advisory body to the government in matters concerning education – published an advice in 2005, urging the government to introduce a national canon of Dutch history:

'Respect for others may be enhanced if we know who we are and what history we have. Knowledge about one's own identity strengthens the understanding for others. In addition to imparting knowledge about their own past ('the story of the Netherlands'), education can help young people to come up with a modern interpretation of the concept of 'citizenship'. A canon for education makes an important contribution to this' (Onderwijsraad, 2005, page 13 – my translation).

The government swiftly responded to this plea by appointing a Committee for the National Canon of the Netherlands, which reported in 2006. Only few historians were members of this committee, which was presided by a renowned professor of Dutch medieval literature. No specialists in history education and none of the members of the previous CHSS took part in this committee. The national canon was produced with a surprising speed; apparently, this committee was not impeded by

difficult discussions about the function of historical knowledge. The canon consisted of fifty items, not because the discussion in the committee had revealed that fifty is an appropriate number of most important things in the Dutch past, but because fifty was a fair sounding round number of not 'too many' or not 'too few' items. There were names of persons, dates, events, and phenomena which were considered things 'that every Dutch person should know' – of course exclusively from Dutch national history.

The selection of items corresponded in no way with the previously proposed ten eras of the CHSS. There were, for example, no concrete specimens of the characteristic features of the ten eras which could have been used as an illustration of them from the perspective of the Dutch past – which, incidentally, would have resulted into 49 items instead of 50, because the CHSS specified 49 characteristic features of eras. It would have been perfectly possible to look for these 49 illustrations, but the Canon Committee denounced this option on purpose, because their aim was not to stimulate historical consciousness of the orientation in time, but the enhancement of Dutch national character and culture. Thus, they selected ten out of fifty items for the glories of the Golden Age (17th century), and eleven out of fifty for the period after the Second World War (probably because they deemed recent history most relevant). In this way, 21 of the fifty items (almost half) were devoted to only two eras. The other eras were not given this much attention (Van Oostrom, 2007).

The canon was generally applauded in politics and society. This was an idea that everyone could understand, especially those who lacked any form of expertise in history education. Though the proposals of the CHSS had been adopted in national legislation only recently (in 2005 for primary education and in 2006 for junior secondary education), most politicians had probably forgotten that principles for the curriculum based on ten eras had been adopted that did not correspond to the idea of a national canon, neither principally nor practically. There was quite a lot of political pressure to promote the national canon, which was supported by a widely reaching public campaign throughout the country (see for example the website <https://www.entoen.nu/en/>, which is available in Dutch, English, French, German, Arabic, Turkish, Indonesian, Polish, Serbian and Turkish languages). Nothing like that had ever been provided for the ten era curriculum, which had to be implemented without any substantial government support.

The simultaneous implementation of two diverging approaches to the curriculum proved to be a hard job. The systems simply did not match. Finally, the result was a typically Dutch compromise laid down in the law of April 29th, 2009:

'The items of the canon of the Netherlands serve as a source of inspiration for dealing with the ten eras' (Law of April 29th, 2009).

Because this rather vague regulation (what is a 'source of inspiration'?) was only introduced into primary education and junior secondary education, there were no consequences for the final examinations, the most determining factor in the curriculum. In primary education, however, the canon acquired a relatively strong position, not only because primary education traditionally deals with national history, but also because teachers in primary education are no subject specialists. Their mastery of history is usually rather limited, implying that it is easy for them to refer to fifty concrete items to be remembered, especially if an attractive website provides support material for each of

them, like educational film clips. This implies that the first orientation on the ten eras, which was meant to take place at a simple level in primary education, has been crossed and impeded by an adverse development.

The political debate was subsequently devoted to the question whether or not a 'museum of the national past' should be founded. The Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam opposed this idea, because it contended to be this museum already. The debate gradually faded out after 2010, and finally resulted in another Dutch compromise: the addition of one 'Canon Room' in the existing Open Air Museum (for folk culture of the Netherlands) in Arnhem, opened September 2017. The display in the room was surprisingly enough based on the ten eras, probably because the fifty loose items of the canon proved to be too difficult to use as a foundation for an coherent image of the past (see: <https://www.openluchtmuseum.nl/en/uitgelicht/canon-van-nederland>).

7 Testing the CHSS examination programme

Although the framework of eras had been introduced into the attainment targets for primary and secondary education (which are not assessed), its introduction into the programme for senior secondary education was postponed until after a series of experiments. After all, serious national testing was at stake here. During the period 2006-2010 experiments were conducted with new style examinations on a group of nine secondary schools. The experiments were conducted by three experts, one from CITO (National Dutch Institute for Assessments, see www.cito.com), one from SLO (Netherlands Institute for Curriculum Development, see international.slo.nl), and the present author as the third person and president of the trio.

From the side of CITO, it was immediately made clear that essay assessment as proposed by the CHSS would be out of the question. They thought it would be impossible to develop a valid and reliable national assessment for history based on the writing of long essays. The new style examinations would in appearance have to look like the existing examinations, the only difference being that there would be no detailed prescribed factual content about two historical topics, but only the framework knowledge as defined by the CHSS. For CITO, this already implied a major change, because questions could not longer focus on the reproduction of detailed factual knowledge, but would have to concentrate on the application of outline knowledge to specific cases presented on the examination itself. This is an example of a 'new style' question CITO came up with:

Source 7

In 1792 the Marquis De Condorcet wrote:

'We must assume that the progress of reason will keep pace with the progress of arts and sciences. That, for instance, the progress of medicine will eventually result into the annihilation of all contagious and transferable diseases and also of diseases which are the consequence of

climate, nutrition and the burdens of daily labour. Is it therefore strange to suppose that the improvability of the fate of man knows no limits?'

The views of the Marquis De Condorcet are an example of a new way of thinking in the eighteenth century.

Use source 7

Name a characteristic of this new way of thinking and explain how this is manifest in the views of the Marquis.

The novelty of this question is that students would not have heard about the Marquis De Condorcet or his ideas, but only be familiar with outline knowledge about the Enlightenment which they had to apply to this example.

The experiments were accompanied by quantitative and qualitative evaluations, the quantitative data being acquired by means of an extensive questionnaire presented to students immediately after they had finished their examination session. The experiment groups consisted of students talking part in the experimental examination, the control group were students taking part in the existing traditional examination, which was devoted in 2010 to the topics 'Dynamics and stagnation in the 17th century Dutch Republic' and 'Decolonization and Cold war in Vietnam'. Table 3 shows the average answers given by both groups on some of the items of the questionnaire (the complete questionnaire consisted of 25 questions, most of which were answered without statistically significant differences between both groups).

Table 3 *Quantative evaluation of the experimental examination, 2010*

Statement	Exp. group	Control group
This examination allowed me to show my historical knowledge	3.2	3.0
This examination allowed me to show my historical understanding	3.6	3.4
This examination allowed me to show my historical skills	3.4	3.3
I will probably forget soon what I have studied for this examination	2.6	2.9
I have acquired a good survey of historical knowledge	4.0	3.2
I can contextualize events and phenomena in the correct historical context	3.9	3.8
I have learnt things that are applicable elsewhere (outside history)	3.6	3.6
I have learnt things that are useful for further study	3.0	3.0
I have learnt things that everybody should know	3.8	3.9

Qualitative data were acquired by means of interviews with participating teachers and students in the experiment. Some of their reactions were:

(Teacher)

'I would deplore a return to the annual themes. Because with this program, one is really dealing with history. Otherwise one only has two topics which are just singled out from history and which have no relationship between them whatsoever.'

(Student)

'With this examination, one really had to think. For instance there was one question about the Enlightenment and those articles from America. The question was to name the Enlightenment ideas and relate them to the texts. One had to think really deeply for that.'

(Student)

'By this method I have acquired a clear image of history, and if for instance you have only studied the Cold War or the Netherlands East Indies, then you are really missing something. Sometimes, when I am watching the news, I think: hey, this is like something that happened in that time too. So you can explain things historically.'

The general result of the evaluations was that the new style examination was doable and evaluated favourably by the participating teachers and students.

Implementation of the new examination programme

The results of the experiments did not give reasons to think that the CHSS examination programme would be impossible to implement. Yet, its introduction was opposed fiercely by CITO as well as the organization of Dutch history teachers. The assessment institute contended that it would be impossible to produce enough valid and reliable examination questions without further specification of factual subject matter to be studied and remembered. The reproductive tradition in examinations was strong, and CITO did not wish to take leave of these practices. Many teachers from outside the experiment project felt insecure of what to teach if no further specification of factual subject matter would be provided. Also these teachers were firmly attached to test memorizable factual knowledge and did not know how to conceive of history in another manner. Therefore, the actual introduction of the new programme was delayed, until an interim committee had formulated so called 'historical contexts of factual knowledge to which the framework of eras and their characteristic features

would have to be applied. Table 4 shows the contexts that have been adopted for the first stage of new examinations, starting from 2015, and the second stage, that will start from 2022.

Table 4 *So-called 'historical contexts' for final examinations since 2015*

Contexts 2015-2021	Contexts from 2022
The Dutch Republic 1515-1648.	Cities and citizens in the Low Countries 1050-1700.
Enlightenment and Revolutions 1650-1848.	The Enlightenment: theory and practice 1650-1900.
Germany 1871-1945.	China from Empire to Capitalism 1842-2001
Cold War 1945-1991.	Germany in Europe 1918-1991.

This implementation of the programme implies that the original idea of working with historical skills and framework knowledge is yet again frustrated by examination practices, partly caused by institutional construction (CITO), partly by the lack of expertise of history teachers. In this way, history continues to be a school subject which is not considered useful or relevant by students and runs the danger of being abolished altogether by curriculum specialist who would rather focus on 'domains of knowledge', such as integrated social studies.

Conclusions

The idea of defining the school subject of history as *a competence*, based on applicable historical skills and an applicable framework of orientational knowledge, shatters again and again on a tough tradition of interpreting history as 'remembering what happened in the past'. History as knowledge to be reproduced has already been discarded by educational research and academic history educators since the 1970s. Although this research is common knowledge in the Netherlands, partly also among teachers, attempts to implement a different kind of history teaching is steadily confronted with the misunderstanding that 'remembering what happened in the past' is the essence of the discipline of history.

Political pressure to introduce *a national canon of knowledge* is popular outside education, but has had only a marginal influence in history teaching in schools. The main sector implementing the fifty items of the Dutch national canon is primary education. This implies an impediment of the idea that a framework of eras should be gradually inculcated throughout the curriculum, building up towards a sophisticated level of historical consciousness in senior secondary education. The existing practices in primary as well as junior secondary education (not teaching the canon, but also not thoroughly teaching the framework, because it is not being tested nationally) result into the need of studying the framework more or less for the first time in senior secondary education, because it is part of the national examination programme.

The continued interpretation of history as knowledge about the past to be remembered is *a danger to its continuation as a school subject* in the future, as it is seen as largely irrelevant by students as well as outsiders. At present, a process of curriculum reform is at hand in the Netherlands which departs from integrated domains of knowledge, one of which is 'social studies'. Whether history will survive as a separate subject, remains to be seen (see <https://curriculum.nu/>).

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