



Libraries and Learning Services

University of Auckland Research Repository, ResearchSpace

Suggested Reference

Ormond, B. (2018). Subject knowledge for secondary teachers: The critical place of knowledge in education. PPTA Subject Associations Forum 2018, Wellington, New Zealand

Copyright

Items in ResearchSpace are protected by copyright, with all rights reserved, unless otherwise indicated. Previously published items are made available in accordance with the copyright policy of the publisher.

For more information, see [General copyright](#), [Publisher copyright](#).

Subject Knowledge for Secondary Teachers

The critical place of knowledge in education

April 2018

PPTA Subject Forum

Barbara Ormond
Faculty of Education and Social Work
The University of Auckland

b.ormond@auckland.ac.nz

Key argument

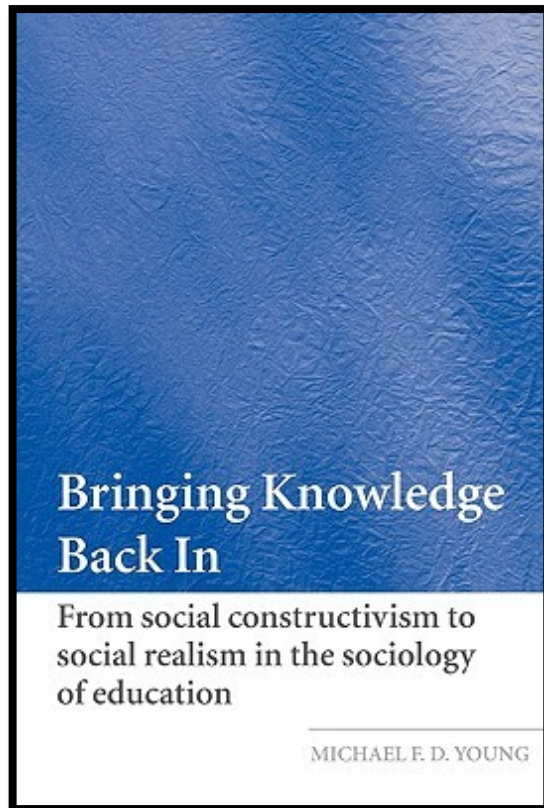
- **Knowledge has reduced, narrowed and become fragmented as a result of assessment practices**

Well google it!

'The world's not about learning facts, well what are those? Well Google it on your phone which is in your pocket, you know, you can find it out' .

(Stephen)

Knowledge and the curriculum



- **‘powerful knowledge’**
 - enables students to see connections and generalise

(Young and Muller)

- **‘decluttering and reducing content’**
 - an aim of contemporary curricula

(Sinnema and Aitken)

Choosing knowledge for History

'First are the students. So what are they interested in? So what do they like? ... So actually understanding what kids want to know.

I can do as much content or as little content depending on where they are at, **depending on what skills I need to teach**, depending upon how their interest goes.

So it is really **skills come first** and then you have an interest and you **find some content to fit that and *it doesn't really matter***. Like it doesn't matter where I finish. I think our kids do better because it allows them to follow their interest.'

Stephen

Selection for the NCEA

‘The second is the achievement standards. **So what do they have to produce to get credits?** So having very clear events and **making sure that the content that you teach relates** to the achievement standards’.

Stephen

Narrowing the focus

‘We don’t go into any depth anymore - it’s the Rainbow Warrior and the Springbok Tour, just to get them ready for the assessment’.

‘We only look at James I and the gun powder plot because that’s our “perspectives” standard. We don’t look at anything else’.

Suzanne

‘So we just take the Montgomery Bus Boycott out of black civil rights and ... we don’t want our textbook on black civil rights anymore - we just want one chapter’.

Linda

Implications of narrowed knowledge

Instead of them getting a wider perspective of understanding about change over time or continuity, it gets lost in this tunnel visioned focus.

So it's creating a course of all hateful things, of **rote learning** and preparing and redrafting throughout an entire year one essay. So it's **narrowing focus** and you can talk all you like about teachers, it's in the teachers' hands, ... but it's not actually, **it's the framework that we operate within**. We can manage that to a point but ultimately you know the kids will rework and rework one essay.'

Linda

A student view

‘Once I realised that I gained an Excellence in the mid-years (examination), I knew I could use that essay in the November exams so concentrated on improving that essay. **Whatever topic we studied in class in term 3 was redundant for us**’

(quoted in John Pipe, *The State of History*, 2013, p. 21)

Contradictory messages

We are supposed to be getting away from KNOWLEDGE in 21st century teaching and learning and when we hear of Year 13 students spending a whole term on one essay... the amount of knowledge needed for the students to write, as they do, 12 to 15 pages, is ridiculous.

(NZHTA Survey 2014 Externals 1: The Papers, Comment 16, p. 9)

Depth vs Breadth

I feel what's happened is that **we've reduced our content** in order to give more time for internal assessment in order to get the best outcomes for those students. ... **I teach less content than I did when I started** and I'm very aware of that and it's really tricky. **It means that with less topics we go into greater depth** and that's great for the, you know, gifted or talented or the more able students... It's perhaps not so great for the less able kids for whom it's just a spiral of too much information.

Karen

Credit sufficiency

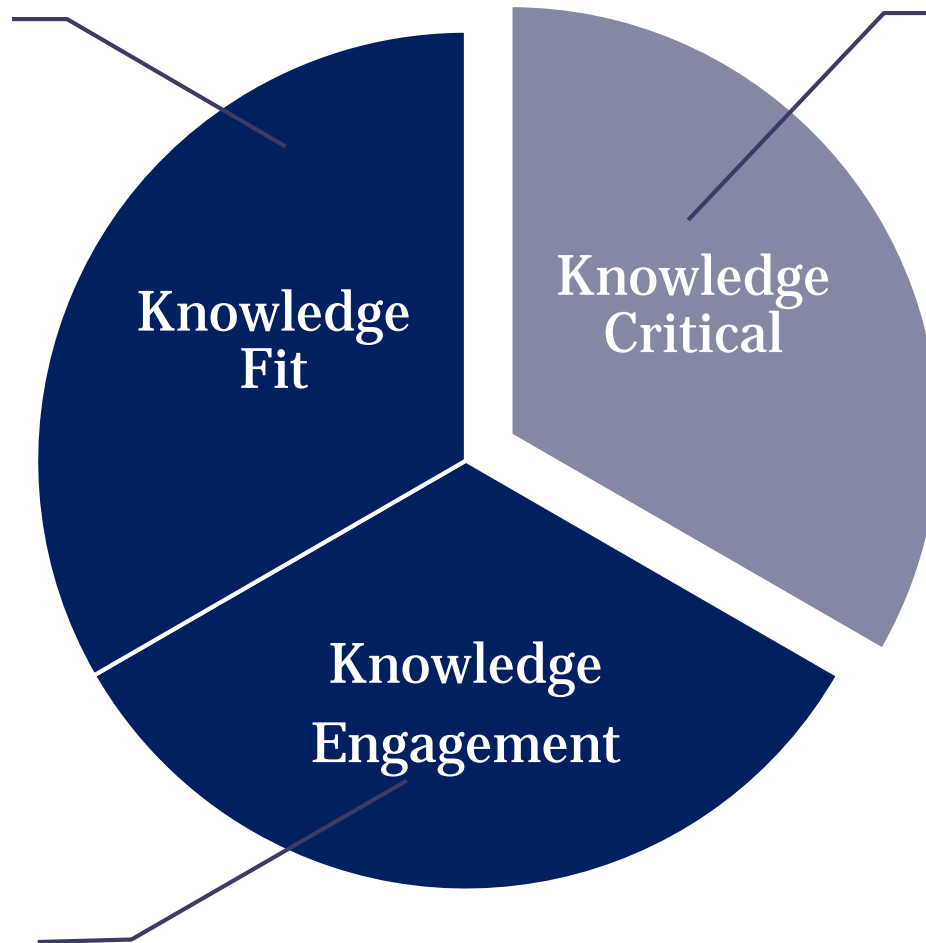
You get your three excellences for the internal standards and one for the external and that is your endorsement. You know, **no one is giving a prize for the kid who gets 120–130 excellence credits. People really stop caring once you get 80 of them.** Students become very focused on only what is required for the exam throughout the year.

Matthew

Teachers' Explanations for Choices

What knowledge is the most suitable to address a stated outcome?

What knowledge will motivate learners? Topics are selected on the basis that they are perceived to be 'high interest'.



What knowledge of the past is valuable to know?
The best of this knowledge can be considered to be *powerful knowledge*.



Largely absent from teachers' explanations

Segmented Learning

Can the subject of history (or any other knowledge-based discipline) actually be disassembled and reassembled in this way? History is a subject where a student's progress depends on the depth and breadth of their understanding about the past rather than **isolated measurable**, and transferrable skills.

(Gregor Fountain, Curriculum Matters, 2008, p. 136)

Reduction in Knowledge

Data shows number of topics typically studied in a year programme. These serve only as an indication since school programmes differ widely.

History			Art History			Classical Studies		
LEVEL	Pre-NCEA Before 2002	Today 2018	LEVEL	Pre-NCEA Before 2002	Today 2018	LEVEL	Pre-NCEA Before 2002	Today 2018
Level 1	7	3	Level 1	-	3	Level 1	-	3
Level 2	5	3	Level 2	4	2 Or 3	Level 2	5	2 or 3
Level 3	3	3	Level 3	4	2 or 3	Level 3	5	2 or 3

Narrowing Effects in the enacted curriculum

NZCER Survey of the Secondary Sector 2015

51% teachers (overall) felt that changes from 2011 to NCEA had narrowed their curriculum.

63% of Mathematics and Science teachers felt that changes from 2011 to NCEA had narrowed their curriculum.

43% identified the NCEA requirements as a barrier to making changes or maintaining the quality of the curriculum.

Pressure to Improve Grades

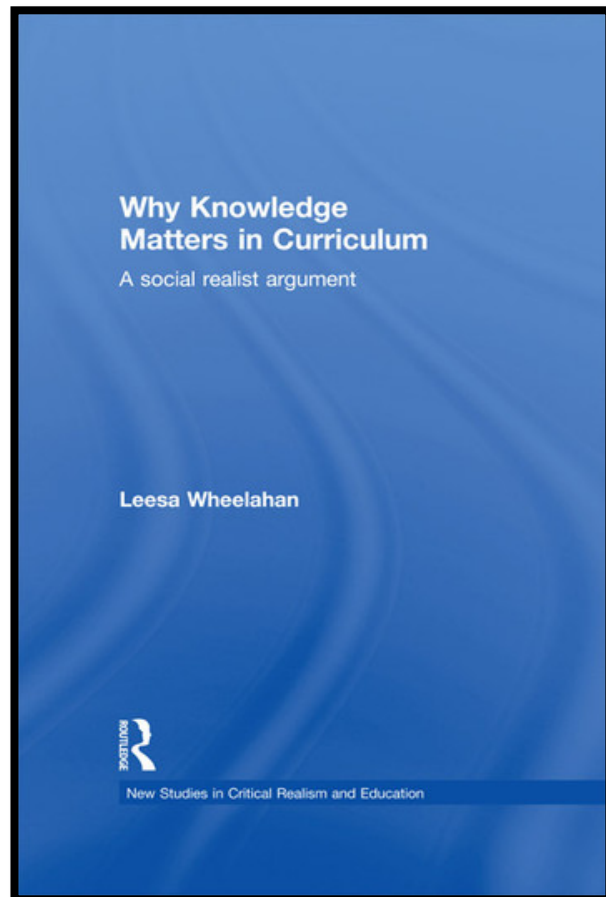
I feel under pressure to improve my students NCEA results. We are quite results driven in terms of government targets around percentage of kids getting Level 2 and that's sort of what we are held accountable for. So it is really about getting results'.

Stephen

The Age of Accountability

- **Close scrutiny of grades and school performance in assessment**
- **Reduction in how much knowledge is covered in order to gain higher grades through undertaking fewer standards**
- **Constraints in what knowledge is taught despite the apparent freedoms in the Curriculum**
- **Pressure for central government to improve results in international tests – PISA and TIMSS**

Why does knowledge matter?



Knowledge matters because it:

Extends horizons



Enables students
to contribute to
society's debates



Enhances
student's
personal growth

More about carrots and less about sticks

Robert Schwartz 2006

Dilemmas and the future:

- curricula freedom and professional judgement is easily undermined where evaluative mechanisms are tightly controlled - *we need to recalibrate the balance between 'the empty' curriculum and the place of knowledge in education.*
- outcomes forms of curricula and assessment can marginalise and fragment knowledge – *we need to reconsider their piecemeal effects and re-look at how best to integrate knowledge, disciplinary concepts and skills.*

Contact details

- Refer handout

History Achievement Objectives - all levels

108 words for History

Level 6	Level 7	Level 8
Understand how the causes and consequences of past events that are of significance to New Zealanders shape the lives of people and society.	Understand how historical forces and movements have influenced the causes and consequences of events of significance to New Zealanders.	Understand that the causes, consequences, and explanations of historical events that are of significance to New Zealanders are complex and how and why they are contested.
Understand how people's perspectives on past events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.	Understand how people's interpretations of events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.	Understand how trends over time reflect social, economic and political forces.

Alignment of the Curriculum and Assessment

The New Zealand Curriculum (Level 6)

- Understand how the causes and consequences of past events that are of significance to New Zealanders shape the lives of people and society.
- Understand how people's perspectives on past events that are of significance to New Zealanders differ.

Achievement Standards (Level 1)

Achievement Standards	Mode of Assessment
1.1 Carry out an investigation of an historical event, or place of significance to New Zealanders	Internal
1.2 Demonstrate understanding of an historical event, or place of significance to New Zealanders	Internal
1.3 Interpret sources of an historical event of significance to New Zealanders	External
1.4 Demonstrate understanding of different perspectives if people in an historical event of significance to New Zealanders	Internal
1.5 Describe the causes and consequences of an historical event.	External
1.6 Describe how a significant event affected New Zealand society.	External

Examination Questions

NCEA Standard - *Describe the causes and consequences of an historical event.*

Examination Question 2015

Identify and describe the main **causes** that led to your chosen historical event.

What were the short-term and long-term **consequences** of the event for people and / or groups?

Examination Question 2014

Identify and describe the most significant **causes** that led to your chosen event.

What were the **consequences** of your chosen event on people and / or groups?

Examination Question 2013

Write an essay on ONE historical event you have studied this year, using the following question.

Identify and describe the **causes** of _____ What were the most significant **consequences** of _____?

Playing the Game

‘Students should aim to include historiography and some memorised quotes to add impact and authority to their essays. Students could use an actual **vivid short soundbite quote**. Doing these things, or demonstrating these skills, helps to lift an essay out of the ordinary in the marker’s eye.

Neither of those requirements (historiography or quotes) are in the standards or assessment specifications.

NCEA History has become an ‘arms race’ of rising expectations.’

(Jim Frood to AHTA Members, 22 August 2016)

Growing expectations

‘There is the emergence of the super-essay to gain Excellence.’

(NZHTA Survey 2015, Comment 26, p.15)