

TEACH TIMORESE HISTORY

The draft Senior Secondary History curriculum is available for comment until 20 July at <http://consultation.australiancurriculum.edu.au/>

Whilst we applaud the inclusion of two mentions of East Timor in the draft Senior Secondary History Curriculum we believe that an understanding of the history of the relationship between Australia and Timor-Leste is vitally important for students' education. This relationship is not sufficiently represented in the Draft.

If students are to take part in 'contemporary debates', as the Curriculum aims to do, they require an understanding of the elements of those debates. Contemporary discussion about Australia and East Timor is extensive e.g. justice issues in the CAVR Report, (<http://www.cavr-timorleste.org/>), to what extent we have obligations towards Timorese education or the building of their systems and structures, what ongoing military and police roles we may have, how to relate to the increasing presence of China in Timor-Leste and what responsibilities we have regarding the resources of the Timor Sea.

These elements, among others, affect Australians because of the proximity of the two nations and because many Australian persons are involved in the political, social, police, military and oil issues. There are certainly ethical considerations at play here, and students need opportunities to reflect on the *'values and principles that have influenced human affairs and that continue to influence the present'* (Draft Curriculum: 5. Representation of General Capabilities).

History is not adequately learned in a vacuum. Whilst transference of skills is a necessary outcome of education, surely the learning of history skills is most fruitfully undertaken in relation to a history which has *relevance* to present realities.

The relationship between Australia and Timor is a perfect arena for Australian students to study history as a discipline, encompassing those elements which the Draft Curriculum presents as important i.e. *evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, empathy, perspectives and contestability*".

Our students have the right to study the history of near neighbours, not only for good regional understanding, but also because, as in East Timor's case, Australia has sometimes played a less than helpful role, affecting the lives and deaths of many people.

It is not sufficient for students to approach the study of Timor-Leste only from the effects of the colonisation by Portugal and Indonesia, as appears to be the case in the current Draft. Such an approach would neglect the significant role of Australia in East Timor's modern history, easily leading to the false impressions that such omissions can create.

Many of our young people's opinions are shaped by notions championed by various political forces and media, and therefore some actually believe that Australia was unremittingly courageous, generous and exemplary, e.g. they have the mistaken idea that Australian soldiers went into Portuguese Timor in 1941 to protect the Timorese, or that Australia 'saved' East Timor in 1999. A study of history which allows people to have these perceptions challenged by examination of facts leads to a broader education which will affect future community decisions.

We suggest that in Unit 4 (The Modern World since 1945) in the elective topic **Engagement with Asia** (one of 5 to choose from) Timor could be presented as a free

standing element, making a fifth choice:

The significance of Australia's policies concerning East Timor, including the effects of Australian presence in World War II, the Balibó Five, the invasion and occupation by Indonesia, Timorese independence and the resources of the Timor Sea.

Ten good reasons why Australian students should learn about Timor-Leste:

1. At 55 minutes from Darwin it's not only in our region, it's on our doorstep.
2. It is the poorest nation in Asia.
3. We owe the Timorese people because 60,000 of their small population lost their lives in World War II because they befriended Australian soldiers.
4. Australia did nothing to help when Indonesia invaded Timor in 1975.
5. Six Australian-based journalists were murdered in Timor just before the invasion and no one has been brought to account.
6. Up to one third of the Timorese population died during Indonesia's occupation. Australia said little against it and did nothing to stop it.
7. A large human rights report ([CAVR](#)) asserts that Australia has responsibilities towards justice concerning its relationship with East Timor.
8. Many Australians know nothing about Timor.
9. Boundaries between Australia and East Timor are not yet settled.
10. Australia receives substantial benefits from oil and gas fields on Timor's side of a half-way line.

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