

2019

Historical Thinking for History Teachers: Review Essay

Bruce Haynes

Life Member History Teachers Association of Western Australia, b.haynes@highway1.com.au

Follow this and additional works at: <https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte>



Part of the [Teacher Education and Professional Development Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Haynes, B. (2019). Historical Thinking for History Teachers: Review Essay. *Australian Journal of Teacher Education*, 44(5).

<http://dx.doi.org/10.14221/ajte.2018v44n5.6>

This Book Review is posted at Research Online.
<https://ro.ecu.edu.au/ajte/vol44/iss5/6>

Historical Thinking for History Teachers: Review Essay

Bruce Haynes

Life Member History Teachers Association of Western Australia

Allender, T., Clark, A., Parkes, R. (Eds). (2019). *Historical Thinking for History Teachers: A new approach to engaging students and developing historical consciousness*, Sydney, Allen and Unwin 352 pp., \$44.48

This is an important addition to the resources available for teacher educators and students concerned with teaching history at primary and secondary school levels.

This book is designed to offer pre-service and early career history teachers a gateway into becoming proficient in their chosen profession in Australia by drawing on the experience and research of many (23) expert academics and teacher professionals ...from a range of Australian academic institutions. (pp. xx/xxix)

This Sydney-based book has contributions from a range of authors but includes only one contribution from an institution in the 90% of the country west of the Great Divide.

The Editors endorse a

... shift to critical engagement with narratives that help a citizenry orient itself in time (that) underscores the need for the history teacher to recognise the positionality of all historical accounts... (pp. xxiii/xxiv)

To indicate the positionality of this review, I advise that it is 50 years since I taught history in a secondary school and almost as long ago that I sought to make a contribution to change the teaching of history in Australia (Haynes 1975). Thus I am probably more appreciative of the changes (contested as they have been and will continue to be) in history teaching in Australia, than the intended audience of this book who have only experienced some of the kind of teaching espoused in this book.

The first two chapters by Tony Taylor and Stuart Macintyre and the chapter on citizenship education by Yeow-Tong Chia and Kieren Beard indicate the changes that have occurred over the past 50 years in curriculum and history teaching in Australia. This is important because pre-service teachers can expect to experience at least two significant changes to curriculum, and possibly a change to history teaching, during the course of their career. Teachers should anticipate that change will be proposed (this is particularly so for history teachers for whom change is a central aspect of their pedagogical being) and be well disposed to contributing to that change process.

100 years ago the Western Australian primary history curriculum justified the teaching of British history as the way to have children appreciate their place as a citizen in an Empire that brought British justice to the native peoples of the world. Rising Australian nationalism brought with it an increasing emphasis on Australian history. British history was later placed in a context of European history. In the 1950s south and east Asian history was included as a post war recognition of our geographical location. In all this there was an expectation that most students would own a text book and that some would read it, either to write an assignment or study for an exam. For the most part, history teaching was lectures with students taking notes.

The changes surveyed in these chapters include the integrated approach (US inspired) of study of society and the environment and the disciplinary approach (British inspired).

These changes need to be understood in the context of a rapid expansion of a range of high quality resources available to teachers and students, access to which enables new and more productive approaches to teaching history. The 1990s History Wars and the push for a national curriculum in the 1990s set the scene for the current disciplinary approach to teaching history as indicated by Tony Taylor.

After this long succession of twists and turns, an inquiry-based world history curriculum was published by ACARA in 2010, featuring seven by now very familiar historical understandings: Evidence; Continuity and Change; Cause and Effect; Perspectives; Empathy; Significance; and Contestability. It represented a considerable change from SOSE's Time, Continuity and Change (ACARA 2017). At the early stage of the design ... literacies became Understandings and Skills. As of 2017, they are 'key concepts' in 'learning areas'. (p. 15)

It is not clear that David Boon's chapter on the primary history perspective on the Australian Curriculum has adequately considered a fundamental difference between teaching history at primary and secondary levels. Primary teachers are often generalist teachers without a specific background in history whereas Secondary teachers are often specialist teachers with varying levels of history background. The contribution explores the potential of teaching history in primary schools and calls for more research to capture the degree and extent of the impact of the changes made under the Australian Curriculum. Research to identify how Primary teachers may maximise the effectiveness of their teaching within the limitations of their circumstances might perhaps be thought to be of greater importance.

The remainder of the book is divided into 3 parts; Teaching historical skills and effective assessment; Teaching approaches; Key Issues.

Anna Clark's opening chapter of Part 2

... challenges those calling for a stronger national narrative in schools and suggests that an approach of 'historical thinking' ... not only better reflects the discipline, but is also more likely to promote historical engagement in the classroom. (p. 47)

Unfortunately, no matter how much 'historical thinking' better reflects the discipline or engages children in the classroom, this does not actually challenge those wanting schools to provide a stronger national narrative as they have a different set of values as part of a different agenda for schools. In a later chapter, Jacqueline Wilson and Keir Reeves state

... history remembers facts of the past and as a discipline has a commitment to an analytical establishment of what transpired, whereas heritage is the depiction of the past in the present day and not necessarily, or always, interested in factual remembrance. (p. 181)

Those of a more conservative, authoritarian political stance are likely to want schools to help construct a heritage that serves their identified social purposes rather than to teach history. This is part of a much broader contest about the nature of schooling and its function in a desirable society. Pre-service teachers should work through the issues involved in this contest and develop a coherent educational position that informs their practice of history teaching. There is more to becoming an effective history teacher than mastering curriculum content and teaching methods, important as those are.

John Whitehouse's chapter highlights an important difference intended by the introduction of inquiry-based history teaching.

Questions drive inquiry. For students to pursue questions about the past in a rigorous and meaningful way, they need to draw on procedural concepts such as those identified by the Historical Thinking Project.... a source must be evaluated before it can be used in support of an argument.... It is one thing to tell students

the significance of a historical event; it is quite another to ask students to evaluate its historical significance. (p. 69)

Robert Parkes chapter provides a 'navigational guide' for a newly qualified history teacher to work through this and related issues to determine how they may seek to justify, to themselves and others, their teaching practices.

Empathy is one of the identified historical understandings and Tyson Retz laments *There have been few cases of scholars applying philosophical argument in the history of ideas to problems in historical teaching and learning. (p. 91)*

He then proceeds to indicate

... how it is only by allowing ourselves to be conducted by the past and its meanings that we are able to genuinely learn from the past while using it as a mirror for self-knowledge and present day understanding. (p. 93)

Deborah Henderson presents her argument

That when teachers' practice focuses on developing their students' progression in historical thinking, students will acquire a vocabulary to analytically engage with those values embedded in conflicting accounts of the past.... Young people also need to acknowledge the value perspectives of others, develop personal values, make judgements and reflect on their decisions. (p. 103)

Paul Kiem endorses the mastery of skills and concepts informing the goals of the current inquiry-based approach to history teaching but cautions that

Especially in a classroom where students do experience a variety of approaches throughout the year, there is no good reason why entire units or significant parts of them should not be delivered predominantly via direct instruction. (p. 126)

He claims that 'lower-attaining' students needs may be better met if a greater proportion of the history teaching conveys historical knowledge by direct transmission. This to provide a sounder base upon which to engage in inquiry-based activity.

The important issue of assessment in inquiry-based history teaching is considered by Heather Sharp in the light of the agreed view that summative assessment of skills and recall of content is an inadequate approach to judge progress in student's historical thinking while doing historical research.

... the external exit exam for Year 12 students in New South Wales – the HSC – emphasises ... the inclusion of primary sources in its history exams. It is important that teachers equip students with the skills to be able to describe, comprehend and analyse sources so that, during this high-stakes external assessment, students can apply those skills to answering questions. (p. 137)

In the last chapter in part 2 Claire Gollege considers the inclusion of social history in the classroom as a way both to provide deeper historical understanding and to engage students in the process. As one whose experience of historiography was a few lectures at the end of an undergraduate history major, I am impressed with the claim that inclusion of social history will help

... students expand their understanding of history in a disciplinary sense, but they will also develop a more sophisticated and multidisciplinary understanding of the past as they consider history from this new point of view. Let the 'ordinary people' of the past come to life in your classroom! (p. 155)

Part 3 Teaching Approaches, begins with Tim Allender's chapter that reports research that

... seeks to recover the voice of experienced (Year 11/12) history teachers in school whose practice has sometimes been neglected as university-driven historical thinking models have been developed around the world.... The

research quickly identified the agency of teacher voice as central to the craft of history teaching, particularly in the way it orchestrated the disciplinary intersections between epistemology and pedagogy, teacher procedure and student cognition. This voice was also built using a repertoire of intuitive adaptations to classroom realities in terms of student interest and knowledge deficits, although these adaptations remained largely unscripted – even to the teachers themselves. (pp. 160/2)

Jacqueline Wilson and Kier Reeves report their project for pre-service history teachers at an Australian regional university that used original personal narratives as part of the sources for individual research on the significance of the Great War. They found the use of personal narratives helped students understand the way individuals experienced the War as well as understand the underlying broader themes. The project helped give the pre-service teachers the experience and confidence to use such an approach in their secondary classrooms. This mirrors my experience of a similar archival research project for pre-service primary teachers in a 1970s Teachers College before it was turned into a university where staff did research and students were to acquire graduate attributes.

Grant Rodwell uses his experience as a ‘time-slip novel’ author to consider *... developing student’s higher order historical understanding, student motivation to study classroom history, students’ appreciation of historiography and how history might be linked with English literature – particularly through the time-slip novel and power of the narrative it represents. (p. 194)*

Kelly Freebody and Alison O’Grady consider *... the use of drama pedagogy to teach history. (Their chapter) aims to provide interested students and teachers with an introductory perspective on what drama pedagogy is, why it might be useful for students of history and how it can be implemented in classrooms, schools and communities.... Drama used for good can therefore provide students with a particular agency that promotes and generates new knowledge about the world they inhabit and the world that has gone before them – an empowering and humanising experience. (pp. 208/218-9)*

Debra Donnelly uses examples of teacher practice to focus *... on film as a teaching resource in the history classroom, and suggests ways in which film representations can be integrated into the teaching and learning cycle. (p. 221)*

Given the ready accessibility of a wide range of film now available, both in the class and outside, compared to days of yore with the need to order the 16mm film a term in advance, book the film room and make sure the Bell and Howell projector did not chew up the film, the possibilities and benefits of film use have increased exponentially.

James Goulding chapter considers what is now taken for granted by pre-service history teachers but is a new resource, namely the internet.

The chapter aims to provide a broad and principled approach to thinking about the use of digital resources in the history classroom that can be applied flexibly to any resources you might happen to find online, and to help you and your colleagues use them to their greatest potential. I first draw upon recent research to shed light on why students appear to be reluctant to critically engage with certain types of website. (p. 231)

Catherine Smyth takes the issue of the use of digital resources further by providing

Insights into the kinds of online digital technologies teachers can use to enable primary students to connect with, and make sense of, the discipline of history in engaging and meaningful ways. (p. 245)

Craig Barker, on the other hand, takes a view of a more traditional resource for teaching history, the museum. In 2013-4 there were 51 million visits to Australian museums and now there are even more visits to museum websites. Barker's experience as a museum educator providing object-centred teaching experiences means he sees

... firsthand the value of the access to direct historical and archaeological materials for history students in terms of broadening their understanding of historical context... The museum experience should enhance and expand upon a student's classroom experience, integrating different knowledges so that students have a more holistic understanding of historical inquiry. (p. 261)

Part 4 Key Issues in Australian History Teaching, commences with two chapters regarding Aboriginal history at school and university level. Nina Burrige surveys contact history, aboriginal activism, aboriginal education, reconciliation and the Uluru Statement before considering culturally responsive pedagogies.

This means understanding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of seeing the country, and understanding Indigenous cultural knowledge and its place in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander identity.... It also requires knowledge of the contested nature of aspects of the Australian historical narrative and the importance of incorporating the voices of elders, of parents and of the local Aboriginal community. (p. 294)

This is a significant challenge to Australian pre-service history teachers and the schools in which they will be employed.

Heidi Norman provides an account of how that challenge might be met as she *... offers insights into and reflection about approaches to teaching and learning Aboriginal history and politics at Australian universities to improve understandings of Aboriginal lives, inform practiced and contribute to 'truth-telling' of local and national histories. (p. 299)*

Yeow-Tong Chia and Kieren Beard take a particular view of teaching citizenship in the history classroom. My reading of this chapter is informed by views outlined in Haynes (2009).

... the key aim of the chapter, ... is to examine the notion of Asia in the teaching of citizenship in the Australian history classroom.... We argue that while it is important to teach Asian history, it is equally important that Asian Australian history is not inadvertently neglected. (p. 310)

Given the vexed nature of citizenship education in the inquiry-based history classroom, arising from possibly conflicting aims, it is even more problematic to include sectional interests such as Asian background citizens. The extent to which Asian is a viable category with which to identify a sub-set of the population deserving specific consideration is also questionable given the differences between Indian, Indonesian, Vietnamese and Chinese heritages. This problem also exists to an extent where Aboriginal and Torres Islander cultures are seen as unitary when a dominant individual or group is taken to speak for the diversity of the population and their different histories.

In the concluding chapter Nicole Mockler

... examines the factors that mediate and shape teacher professional identity, particularly in the beginning years of teaching. It draws on a life-history study of an early-career history teacher to highlight the interwoven nature of professional, personal and political contexts in the shaping of teacher identity, and it argues that understanding and coming to grips with your own professional identity is a critical 'project' in the first few years of teaching. (p.323)

Teachers with a relatively coherent and clear sense of their professional identity, why they are a teacher, what they stand for, what they wish to achieve, how it is proper for them and others to behave, when it is appropriate to give up on something and change course, when they should exert or resist professional pressure, are better placed to make effective use of the opportunities presented by adopting an inquiry-based approach to teaching historical thinking in primary and secondary classrooms in Australia. Every person constructs a 'moral career' (Harre (1979) over their lifetime and for teachers their professional identity is part of that ongoing enterprise that begins in pre-service teacher education. Reference to life-long learning as a requirement of being a teacher masks the real task. It is what the teacher takes to be of lasting significance in building a coherent and clear, yet changing, sense of themselves as a teacher that is important rather than the accretion of yet more learning. This book should be of considerable use to beginning history teachers in that fundamental task in their professional lives.

I wish I had this book, the resources that now exist, and the opportunities now available when I was a classroom history teacher. I trust beginning teachers take advantage of this book, the resources and opportunities to transform history teaching in Australian schools. I hope these beginning teachers are prepared to engage with the predictable attempts to change both the curriculum and the approach to teaching history so they may contribute to improving the outcomes for the students in their charge.

References:

- Harre, R. (1979). *Social Being: A theory for social psychology*, Oxford, Blackwell
- Haynes, B.T. (1975). On teaching how to make specific historical causal claims, in Pratte, R. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Philosophy of Education Society, Kansas City, March 1975*, Illinois, Philosophy of Education Society.
- Haynes, B.T. (2009). (Ed.) (2009). *Patriotism and Citizenship Education*, Oxford, Wiley-Blackwell <https://doi.org/10.1002/9781444322842>