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Teaching Australian History: A temporally inclusive approach

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Abstract

The teaching of Australian history is of particular importance given the Primary Principal Associations endorsement of Australian history as a core curriculum area and current moves towards national curriculum. Australian History is, however, often perceived to be both boring and repetitive by some students and teachers. The challenge is therefore to provide teachers and students with an Australian history curriculum that is both engaging and relevant. In this paper we explore Australian history curriculum (P-12) possibilities across the P-12 spectrum, from a temporally inclusive perspective. Specifically, we discuss how Australian history curricula can engage students in a study of the connectedness between the past, present and future/s; and the responsibilities students have to preserve the legacies of the past and to have a sense of stewardship for future generations. In doing so, we propose relevant content knowledge and a range of possible pedagogies.

Introduction

The teaching of Australian history is a contentious and highly politicised issue. The contention surrounding the teaching of Australian history is manifold. Australian history has often been lauded as boring:

Australian history is crap. No-one wants to learn Australian history cause nothing happened (NSW Year 10 student as cited in Melleuish, 2006, p4).

Despite this Australian history is now being positioned as the saviour of school history:

The phenomenon that appears to be breathing life into the corpse of history is, ironically, Australian history: ironic because research ... revealed that many teachers believed that any emphasis on Australian history would destroy the subject altogether (Allen, 2008).

Whether Australian history should be taught as a mandatory subject is one area of debate. Contestation also surrounds when Australian history should be taught (and for how long), what should be taught and why, how it should be taught and by whom. Such contention is not new and is nested within broader societal debates about globalisation, nationhood and civics and citizenship. Debate surrounding the future of Australian history teaching has in recent years however, come to the fore; partly in response to a perceived historical knowledge deficit and its impact on national identity, but also in response to international and national moves towards more rigorous educational accountability and national curriculum.

Since 2000 there has been a ‘National Inquiry into the Teaching of History’, the report of which is interestingly titled The Future of the Past (Taylor, 2000), a National History Summit to discuss two specific reports An Overview of the Teaching and Learning of Australian History in Schools (Taylor & Clark, 2006) and The Teaching of Australian History in Australian Schools: A Normative View (Melleuish, 2006), and most recently DEST endorsed a Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9-10' (Australian History Curriculum Reference Group, 2007) which will “will inform the development of core curricula standards for Australian history in Year 10 being progressed through the Realising Our Potential – core curricula standards initiative” (DEST, 2007).

Whilst the election of a new federal Labor government may have slowed what seemed like an inevitable ratification of this guide (which many have viewed as a potential syllabus) with the newly appointed Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard, recently stating that “The government will work cooperatively with the states and territories through Labor’s national curriculum board to implement a rigorous, content-based national history curriculum for all Australian students from Kindergarten to Year 12″ (Gillard, as cited in The Age, 10/01/08); a national mandatory study of Australian history across years 9-10 appears imminent.

It is within these contexts that this paper seeks to explore the ‘how’ of teaching Australian history. Elsewhere we have been critical of the temporal bias of Australian curricula arguing that Australian education provides a temporally biased environment which advocates a rich understanding of the past, but limited, uniformed and unrealistic futures dimensions (Bateman & Harris, 2007; Harris & Bateman, 2007). In examining the ‘how’ of teaching Australian history we aim to explore pedagogies that address this temporal bias – that is pedagogies that are temporally inclusive. To do so, this paper is comprised of three sections. In the first section we define the temporal domain and its relation to the teaching of history. In the second section we...
evaluate the temporal perspective/s of the Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9-10 (AHCRG, 2007); and in the final section we explore the notion of temporally inclusive pedagogies and provide some examples of temporally inclusive pedagogies as they relate to the teaching of Australian history across the P-12 spectrum.

The Temporal Domain and its relation to the teaching of history
Throughout and beyond their education, people will develop notions of conventional time, non-conventional or operational time and adaptation. Conventional time systems allow people to adapt to the natural environment and to work within a social system. Children are taught about conventional time in a school's curriculum, traditionally implemented as part of the Mathematics KLA. Conventional time provides a precise reference system for describing the order of any two events, describing or deducing duration, or arranging for some future appointment such as a meeting. It is represented as clock time, incorporating days of the week, the annual calendar and intervals of historical time. Children demonstrate their understanding of conventional time by recognising and using order, recurrence and duration applied to different intervals of time. In comparison, an adult's understanding of conventional time includes knowledge beyond the structure used to describe and organise time. An adult is aware that time continues regardless of any human intervention, agenda or marking device. This highlights the way in which conventional time systems can be coordinated with logical time.

Non-conventional, or operational time, is described as the way in which people use time concepts to interact within the world. Children develop these skills concurrently as they conceptualise conventional time. Friedman (1982, p. 3) describes a hierarchy of temporal problem-solving, listing abilities which must be learned in order for a child to master understanding and operability of time concepts. The skills, acquired throughout the development of thinking about non-conventional time that he describes are:

- Judging length of time, using cues and tools, such as clocks, calendars, etc
- Judging length of time in the absence of time tools
- Ordering events
- Sequencing series of events, using inferential information
- Distinguishing Past, Present, and Future
- Representing Natural and Conventional Periods and Orders
- Other types of Problem Solving (such as the ability to wait).

Temporal perspectives are the overall span of a person's thinking across past, present and future life domains. A person's temporal orientation is his/her predominant thinking about one of these time frames. For example, it is recognised that the future dominates human adult consciousness. This is distinctly different to a child's past temporal orientation. Many theorists argue that there are benefits of integrating past and present experience with future expectations in order to strengthen personal morale, enrich one's sense of self, and cope effectively with adversity. This is what Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) refer to as having a balanced time orientation, or a mental framework that allows flexibility in the temporal orientation a person operates within, depending upon contexts, resources and personal and social assessments. They warn of temporal bias, which involves a person's overuse or underuse of any of the orientations of past, present and future.

Elsewhere we have argued for a reconceptualisation of school history which we have referred to as 'history as the extended present' (Bateman & Harris, 2007; Harris and Bateman, 2007). This occurs where a study of history is a study of time, not in the functional sense of time as days, months and years but time in a conceptual sense where students can view the past, present and future/s through intersecting and often conflicting narratives. In this sense, history is not just about the past and about the acquisition of historical knowledge or truths. Rather, it is about experiencing the past, present and future/s as complex, connected and personally and socially relevant. The term 'extended present' highlights our focus on how the past has informed and continues to inform the present and how the present seamlessly blends into the future. Rather than seeing this conception as a linear progression from past – through the present – to an inevitable future; we argue that a study of history should be multi-dimensional and focus on multiple visions of the past and present and examine how these varied visions inform possible, probable and preferable futures.

For the learner, there are three main concepts and capacities which underpin the development of the extended present: connectedness, responsibilities, and comparisons. In the first instance, through lenses of time, we want students to acknowledge the connectedness which occurs between the different time frames. We, as living in the present, are connected to those who came before us, in many ways, and we learn this through histories, both personal and collective. We are similarly connected to those, with whom we live in the world, and we can learn this, through histories,
as well as in scanning our social and cultural worlds. More abstractedly, we are connected to those who will come after us, and we can develop these understandings through the interweaving of futures and histories.

Directly emerging from this thinking, then, are ideas related to the notion of responsibilities. We have responsibilities to keep the legacies and lessons of those who came before us alive. Similarly, we have a responsibility to both present and future generations to equip ourselves with as much information as we can to make decisions both personally and globally. Within history, there are many precedents, which can contribute to our thinking and planning of various events. Further, the unprecedented events we act upon in the present become historical precedents for future generations. Consciousness of the legacies we leave for future generations, and thus, our responsibilities, is integral to the decision making processes we are involved in, within the immediate present.

We believe that history is an integral part of the curriculum, in schools. Currently, however, as a domain of learning, we are concerned that in some schools history may have lost its connectedness with students living in the world today. We need to make the relevance of historical events and constructions explicit, and clear to our learners. Thus, the third dimension of history as the extended present draws upon the rich comparisons which can be made between the different time frames of past, present and futures. Developing the notions of connectedness, and responsibilities, we can track a variety of developments in our world, through time. We can compare the ways in which people have lived, or physical worlds which have existed, and draw upon the perceptions students have of their life worlds. Further, we can come to understandings about why our world has evolved in the ways that it has, as well as drawing upon these analyses and syntheses to develop possible scenarios for the future. Using critical lenses, we can think about some of the assumptions which underpin our foresight capacities, through the examination of our historical capacities. For teachers and students to be able to engage with ‘history as the extended present’ they need to be able to develop an historical and futures consciousness as it is through the development of this consciousness that certain events and stories do or do not enter the collective memory and it is through this process that we are able to develop a futures foresight. This relies of the development of historical and futures literacies as teachers and students need to develop tools, concepts and understandings about the past, present and the multiple futures so that they can become empowered in terms of shaping their personal and shared futures, rather than passively being transmitted a grand narrative future. It is with this in mind that we now evaluate the temporal orientation of the Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9-10 (AHCRG, 2007).

The following diagrammatic on the next page overviews the content (topics), perspectives and skills, this Guide aims to foster:

The Guide states that:

*Learning Australian history provides a context for students to understand their identity. It helps them to understand the story of the people who have created the community of which they are a part. In coming to know that story they will learn something more about themselves and reflect on the society Australia should become. Understanding the past helps make sense of the present and explain continuity and change (Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9-10, AHCRG, 2007, p6).*

Examining the temporal orientation of a proposed Australian history Curriculum

This Guide provides a rationale and objectives for the study of Australian history in Years 9 and 10 as a separate subject in schools across Australia. It outlines:

- the skills students should acquire through this study;
- a programme of study built around a series of Topics and key Milestones which inform a chronological approach; and
- a range of historical perspectives to provide a context for these Topics and to help students pursue in-depth studies.

(Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9-10, AHCRG, 2007, p3)

The Guide to the Teaching of Australian History Years 9-10 will, for reader ease, subsequently be referred to as the 'Guide'.

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In terms of the temporal perspectives advocated in the *Guide*, we have a number of concerns. Firstly, it positions Australian history almost entirely as a study of the past. For example:

- If you examine the ‘study of topics’ you will notice that a study of Australian history ends in the year 2000;
- A word search reveals the only mention of future/s is in John Howard’s endorsement of the *Guide* “we need to ensure that today’s (and future) young Australians have an opportunity to learn about their national story”; and
- The graphic representation of Australian history presented on the first page of the *Guide* shows images of the First Fleet, Ned Kelly, Indigenous images and wartime photos, all of which are temporally biased towards the past (AHCRG, 2007, p1).

Secondly, we believe the *Guide* advocates a linear, chronological conception of Australian history.

We acknowledge that the development of students’ temporal capacities relies on the development of sequencing skills and that creating lineage out of any sequence of events (placing events in chronological order) is very important. If teachers’ and students’ temporal capacities remain focused on a linear and chronological understanding of history however, there is a danger that their understandings of history will remain rooted in the past. History teachers (and the students they teach) need to be able to go beyond a chronological understanding of history, they need to be able to abstract and move between different temporal dimensions (past-present-future/s) and be able to conceptualise and reconceptualise their knowledge, skills, values and attitudes in view of different temporal dimensions. This allows teachers and students to contextualise events which happened in the past to understand the present and forecast for the future/s. Temporal mobility allows us to be able to consider multiple futures, with multiple outcomes and consequences and to connect with...
Australian history in a manner that is meaningful, relevant and purposeful to our future/s.

Thirdly, the Guide focuses on the development of students' national identity from what we see as a traditionalist and prescriptive stand. The development of conceptions of identity—individual/personal, community/local, national and global are integral to our conceptualisation of history as the extended present. Having said this, the Guide largely focuses on the nation state as the unit of analysis. We believe that a study of Australian history needs to be multi-perspectival (which the Guide attempts), temporally inclusive and needs to engage students in issues of identity through a broader range of lenses. As it stands the Guide can be interpreted in ways that force a continuance of and/or return to temporally biased teaching based on traditionalist and teacher-centred pedagogies. Below we make a case for teaching Australian history in temporally inclusive ways.

Temporally inclusive pedagogies
As with any effective pedagogical model, in studies of time, and change and continuities, we want to appeal to students' curiosities about the world, and its people (peak students' interest). Further, we want to make clear connections between what students are learning in school (knowledge, skills, values and attitudes), and what students are doing and want to do in their own lives (make learning relevant and significant to students lives). To do this we need to develop students' historical and futures consciousness which in large part relies on students developing historical and futures literacies. But how do you facilitate the development of historical and futures literacies? We suggest that employing temporally inclusive pedagogies is an important factor in this. You will notice that we do not refer to a temporally sensitive pedagogy—rather we use the plural 'pedagogies'. We use the plural form because we are not advocating a particular pedagogy; rather we are advocating the use of a range of existent pedagogies in temporally inclusive ways. We are not therefore, advocating WHAT pedagogies you should use, we are instead focusing on HOW you should use them in temporally inclusive ways.

Temporally inclusive pedagogies have two main features. In the first instance, teaching and learning increases connectedness between different time frames. Figure 1 on the following page provides a classroom example of what this might look like. Please note that as this is a draft paper we have not attempted to use content advocated by the Guide, rather we have drawn on current history teaching practice as advocated by the Victorian Essential Learning Standards [VELS]. This example is designed for a year 7 or 8 class.

![Figure 1.1: Increasing connectedness between different time frames](image)

**Time and water shortages**

Often in a classroom, we begin with an agenda which reflects learning about a particular period of time (eg. Medieval times, Ancient civilisations, etc). In our temporally inclusive pedagogy, we will begin with the issue, which relates to students' lifeworlds.

In the first session, the teacher might present some data from multiple sources about the water shortage, and crisis Australia is currently facing. Sources are readily available on the internet. Regardless of the age we are teaching, we can stimulate thinking, and questions about this issue, in the present. We can extend this thinking and questioning temporally, by asking what events have lead to this. There are many websites, and texts, which track the history of water issues (eg. [http://www.yvw.com.au/waterschool/seniors/waterfacts/water_facts_3.html](http://www.yvw.com.au/waterschool/seniors/waterfacts/water_facts_3.html)). We can also track what other instances there have been in global history, as water has been a significant issue across times and cultures. Comparisons can be made between the people and environments, of each time, as well as the strategies, or lack thereof, to address their water crisis.

Secondly, temporally inclusive pedagogies make explicit connections between the time perspectives of the learner, along with connection of learner lifeworlds. A temporally inclusive pedagogy embraces a student's lifeworld knowledge, and extends their understanding of continuities and changes in their world at many levels, through temporal scanning tools. They also highlight the importance of making explicit connections between what is learnt in the classroom and student's lifeworlds. History teachers are in an enviable position in that some of the core skills we teach and the ways in which teach them are founded on making learning personally relevant. There are many ways in which teachers can connect learning to students lifeworlds; these include the explicit teaching of empathy and the incorporation of cultural institutions in the teaching of history and futures. Empathy is an interpersonal skill that allows people to imagine (with some degree of accuracy) what it's like to be in the predicament of another person. Figure 1.2 on the following page provides a relevant classroom example.

Additionally, empathy "entails the ability to communicate that awareness so the other person feels understood" (Blatner, 2002). Empathy is therefore a key communicative tool that allows people to effectively participate in society. It is important that we are able to empathise with people and events across a range of time periods. This allows us to understand the motives, actions and feelings of people over time and how they have influenced, and may continue to influence, society. A focus on changes and continuities over time is
Figure 1.2: Using empathy to promote connectedness to student's lifeworlds

Scenario: Year 7 history/SOSE lesson; one week into a unit Australian Immigration; an article about child refugees appears in the paper and the next day you walk into your classroom. You show a series of PowerPoint images of children from various time periods and various places whilst reading the following statement:

We are the world’s children.
We are the victims of exploitation and abuse.
We are street children.
We are the children of war.
We are the victims and orphans of HIV/AIDS.
We are denied good-quality education and health care.
We are victims of political, economic, cultural, religious and environmental discrimination.
We are children whose voices are not being heard: it is time we are taken into account.

We want a world fit for children, because a world fit for us is a world fit for everyone. Statement made by the child delegates representing the Children’s Forum at the opening of the United Nations General Assembly’s Special Session on Children in May, 2002. (Rendon, 2004).

The teacher displays images showing children performing ‘typical cultural tasks’ – some children are playing, some are performing unpaid menial tasks and yet others are drawing pictures of their war-torn neighbourhood (see below for example http://www.slate.com/id/2122730; news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/europe/02/unicef_gallery/html/img1.stm –; Hine, L. (1908). http://www.kentlaw.edu/ilhs/hine.htm).

You could use an inquiry approach to scaffold students’ engagement with this issue. Your ensuing discussion and activities should be personally relevant and should focus on students developing an understanding of the changes and continuities of children’s rights over time. Parallels between various times and places could be drawn and students could engage in backcasting and forecasting the issue. You could incorporate a range of biographical narratives highlighting the issue of children’s rights and the range of related issues (poverty, abuse, self-determination, voice and participation) and you could involve students in role-play activities that emphasise the emotive elements of this issue. Most importantly, students need to be informed and empowered to act on this information. Setting up a community project, website and/or critical community of action (see below) may be one of the outcomes of your examination of children’s rights and how they are related to Australian immigration.

therefore developed and students are encouraged to see particular issues (such as children’s rights) as connected over time, across places and connected to the choices they make in their lives. Teaching history and futures provides teachers with a vehicle through which students can develop into empathetic learners and empathetic social participants. How can you teach empathy in the SOSE classroom? We suggest that you teach empathy through an issues-based approach and that you ensure that your pedagogy is temporally inclusive. We also suggest that your teaching of issues should have real world consequences for your students and lead towards activism outside of the classroom.

The teaching of history and futures should be contextualised within the lifeworld experiences of students. As such, teachers should utilise a range of community resources such as cultural institutions to demonstrate the connectedness of history and futures education, to students’ lives. Whilst history teachers often take students on excursions (typically to particular exhibitions in museums, galleries and/or archives) or invite students to participate in incursions (when guest speakers or special events are held within school ground); we argue that history teachers should utilise a broader range of cultural institutions in their teaching of history and futures and they should do so more regularly. Here, we define cultural institutions as any place or space that has had, has or may have cultural significance to a particular community. Teachers should also aim to incorporate low-cost or no-cost site visits into their teaching. Cultural institutions can be integrated into almost any history/futures unit of work. Engaging with cultural institutions (as demonstrated above) allows students to understand the real world application of what they are learning in the history classroom and it allows them to engage at a personal and empathic level with contemporary social issues across various timeframes. Figure 1.3 on the opposite page provides an example of this.

Concluding comments

This paper has highlighted the potential for the teaching of Australian history from a temporally inclusive perspective. This is important given that a national mandatory study of Australian history appears imminent. The next phase of our research will focus on further conceptualising the notion of temporally inclusive pedagogies, more thoroughly deconstructing the Guide and exploring further possibilities for the teaching of Australian history (particularly at the years 9-10 level) in temporally inclusive ways.

References


Australian History Core Reference Group. (2007). Guide to the Teaching of Australian History in Years 9-10

Figure 1.3: Utilising cultural institutions to promote connectedness

**Scenario**: Year 5 classroom, two weeks into an integrated unit (SOSE, ICT and Science and Technology) on urban planning. As a class you choose a local site to examine as a case study. There are numerous websites that detail appropriate sites and provide walking tour guidelines (see for example Heritage Council of Victoria - http://www.heritage.vic.gov.au/).

The focus of your examination is how people have utilised this place and the space/s it encompasses over time and the impact humans have had on the natural and urban environment. Students plan a walking tour of this place (Sydney CBD for example) and together you set a series of problem solving tasks that actively involve students working collaboratively to research the changes and continuities of this place over time. Students explore issues of connectedness – how people connect to places, how the urban environment is connected to environmental issues, how decisions about urbanisation are connected to current environmental problems and how these will impact on our possible, probable and preferable futures.

Later in the unit students visit a cultural institution that allows them to creatively address the problems of urbanisation and the need for alternate patterns of urban living due to space shortages and environmental degradation. The National Museum of Australia (Canberra) has a specific gallery devoted to kids contemplating future innovations in transport and accommodation. Students design a vehicle or building for the future and then don 3D glasses for a theatrette presentation of their ideas. Similarly, the Powerhouse Museum (Sydney) has a virtual reality facility named the Wedge which allows students to physically interact in a cyber-future.


Gillard. J. As cited in *Howard history syllabus to be reviewed*. The Age, January 10, 2008.


