Social Education or History: is “historical thinking” too much to expect in primary?

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Context

• Humanities and Social Sciences:
  • History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship, Economic and Business
• **History: Foundation to Year 10** –
  • Primary teachers - teach history as a discipline
  • “historical understanding”; “historical inquiry”
  • Promote capacity for “historical thinking”
  • Assumes young children can engage with historical concepts
Aim of this study

- How do pre-service primary teachers conceptualise and plan for historical thinking?

1) Current policy framework in Qld to implement AC: History
2) Explore the role of inquiry based learning as the overarching framework for humanities
3) Can young children engage with historical thinking?
History or social education in the primary years?

• Qld is committed to *AC: History*.
• Introduced in 2012, full implementation began in 2013. Geography: 2014
• Lots of guidance:
  • Advice about time: 18 – 20 hours (F – Year 2); 37 – 40 hrs (Year 3 – Year 6)
  • QSA exemplars, C2C materials
  • Resistance; lack of subject knowledge; attachment to existing SOSE units
  • Also opportunity for renewal (Moments in Time, 2015)
How to deal with an overcrowded primary curriculum?

• 2014: QSA outlined four planning options for HaSS
  • Includes teaching the humanities subjects separately, or, as integrated schools subjects
  
• Recognised that the Processes and Skills components “should be considered as part of the Investigative or Inquiry approach to learning that is central to this learning area.” (Planning options, 2014 – 2015, p.3)

• Identified that that approach to inquiry learning was different in Science, History, Geography, Civics and Citizenship and Economics and business.
How to deal with an overcrowded primary curriculum?

- “Using a common construct for inquiry would help reinforce the skill through different content” (QSA, 2014, p. 2).
- Misleading statement
- History and geography emerge from different bodies of knowledge
- No reason why inquiry skills in history should be consistent with inquiry in geography or economics.
- “Purposefully connected curriculum” (Nayler, 2014)
Curricular entities

• “[T]he purposefully connected curriculum then is informed by both a student focused and subject focused approach… A common element of both perspectives is an inquiry approach to learning” (Nayler, 2014, p. 12). Links are made between two or three learning areas to plan for good teaching through an inquiry approach to learning; yet, unlike traditional approaches to curriculum integration, “the curricular areas remain entities in themselves” (Nayler, 2014, p. 9).
A ‘Queensland approach’ to enacting the intended history curriculum is an effort to maintain the disciplinary features of history as a school subject, even though there may be some erosion of historical inquiry.

Can discipline-based ways of knowing and thinking still be maintained if a common inquiry approach is adopted?

Historical inquiry is different from other types of inquiry.
Historical understanding

• *Shape of Australian Curriculum: History* (Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, p. 5) maintains that “Introducing students to historical understanding involves teaching methods of historical inquiry. **Students need to learn about history and practise it.**”

• Learning about: substantive concepts, eg., daily life, revolution, colonisation, migration

• Practise history: eg., procedural concepts, eg., evidence, continuity and change, perspectives, contestability
Historical understanding

• Seixas (2006) - history skills are critically important to developing historical thinking and deep understanding.

• Although there may be some commonality between social science skills, the role of historical evidence in developing an informed, even an imagined understanding of what happened in the past, is distinctive to history (Seixas, 1997; Seixas & Peck, 2004).
Can children engage with historical thinking?

- Hilary Cooper’s research into children’s understanding of history has noted that the capacity to enter into imaginative understandings of the past through stories and play requires knowledge and skills.

- “This, in an embryonic way, is how all accounts of the past are constructed: by imagining, from what is known, how people in the past may have thought and felt and why they acted as they did” (Cooper, 2004, p. 7).

- Play, story-telling, re-telling, dress ups, roleplays – imaginative recreations of the past
Research Questions

• How do pre-service primary teachers conceptualise “history” in a unit of work and in a history lesson?
• How is “historical inquiry” facilitated in these plans?
• What teaching strategies do pre-service teachers plan to use to teach history?
• What are the implications for primary teacher education programs in the Humanities?
Method and participants

• Qualitative; case study
• Two cohorts of second-year students enrolled in an undergraduate social education curriculum studies subject in 2013 and 2014 and from the Primary Graduate Diploma in Education in 2014.
• Five examples
  • 2 group history lessons
  • 3 units of work: Year 1 (2); Year 3; Year 6 (2)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Undergrad/Graduate</th>
<th>Curriculum application</th>
<th>History topic and Year level</th>
<th>Key Question</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ann, Jo, Karen</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>Group lesson</td>
<td>Daily Lives Over Time – Year 1</td>
<td>How is my life different from that of my parents or grandparents?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rebecca</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>History unit</td>
<td>Moments in Time – Year 1</td>
<td>How can we describe our moments in time?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cassie, Rochelle, Harris</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>Group lesson</td>
<td>Celebrations and Commemorations – Year 3</td>
<td>How and why do people choose to remember significant events of the past?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ann</td>
<td>Undergrad</td>
<td>History Unit</td>
<td>Australia as a nation: A migrant’s journey – Year 6</td>
<td>What does a migrant’s journey to Australia involve before leaving, during their travels and once arrived?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Katie</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>History Unit</td>
<td>Stories of those who have come – Year 6</td>
<td>What are the stories of people who migrated to Australia since World War II?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Data Analysis

• Initially coded for 3 key themes: a) Content b) Skills c) Inquiry Learning

• Reoccurring themes identified:
  1) Teaching for “historical understanding” through the procedural concepts and skills,
  2) Using a variety of student-centred teaching strategies,
  3) Links with other learning areas,
  4) Use of inquiry learning frameworks.
Findings – concepts and skills

- Required to have an overarching key question
- Subsidiary focus question for each lesson.
- Focuses on inquiry rather than a transmissive approach to learning.
- Two or three historical concepts in each curriculum application.
- Cause and effect was only addressed twice and contestability only once.
- Only three of the five plans referred to evidence or use of sources.
Year 1 – concepts and strategies

• **Daily lives over time - Toys**
• Historical understanding is being developed by referring to photos of old and new toys, old and new bicycles

1. Do these clues help tell us which photo was for a long time ago and which photo is from now?
2. If objects are familiar to us does that mean they are from the present or the past?
3. If we know the red bike is from the present, where is the green bike from?
4. Which generation did each toy belong to?
Year 3 – concepts and strategies

- Commemorations and celebrations – ANZAC Day
- Perspectives and empathy
- Pretending to put on someone else’s shoes
- Visualisation
- Freeze frame
- Diary entry
Year 3

• Lost opportunity to examine authentic evidence as the basis for perspectives and empathy; historical imagination

1) Why did those soldiers go to war?
2) Where did they land on 25\(^{th}\) of April, 1915?
3) What is the song played when laying the wreaths?
4) How might you feel if you were a soldier?
5) How might you feel if you were a family member of a soldier?
Year 6 – concepts and skills

• Role of evidence is variable; needs to be explicitly taught as the basis for emotional enactments of the past to develop perspectives; be alert and sensitive to emotional impact of teaching about refugees / asylum seekers

• Use of TELSTAR and ‘Integrating Socially’ model of inquiry

• Graphic organiser; mind maps; Venn diagrams; KWL charts; discussion; roleplays; uses a range of print, visuals and archival footage
Discussion 1

• Primary pre-service teachers know how to use the principles of inquiry learning; familiar with key and focus questions.
• Focus on student-centred learning; variety of learning activities
• Need for balance of teacher and student – centred learning
• Role for the teacher to instruct, clarify and reinforce
• Primary PSTs are attracted to historical concepts such as perspective and empathy rather than evidence, evaluating primary and secondary sources and teaching about cause and effect.
Discussion 2

• Scope for integration in the HaSS through the general capabilities of critical and creative thinking, intercultural understanding and ethical understanding.

• **Teacher education:**
  • Teach students to “do history”; increase depth of subject knowledge
  • Teach students how to evaluate different forms of evidence as basis for empathy and perspectives
  • Focus on the ACARA historical concepts, skills and General Capabilities
Conclusion

• History has reinvigorated the primary curriculum; develops foundation for thinking and learning skills.

• The findings of this study supports research into the implementation of AC: History in Queensland schools that found Queensland primary teachers favour inquiry-based learning (Dixon et al, 2015).

• The ‘Queensland response’ - maintain disciplinary integrity within a broad inquiry framework.

• Integrate through the General Capabilities; don’t mess with the disciplines!
References