

## Owning History: Building Historical Understanding through Creative Engagement

This paper is concerned with the purpose and the pedagogy of teaching History in schools, primary and secondary. It asserts that History is a unique subject in the curriculum. History, more than any other area of study, requires an intuitive understanding of relationships and human complexity, as well as the academic processes of inquiry, analysis, and evaluation. It requires students to empathise with cultures and experiences very different from their own in space and time, and also to recognise and understand difference in value systems and rhetoric. As such, history is 'a form of consciousness'.<sup>1</sup> But above all, the study of History at school asks students to make sense of, and find relevance in, the learning of History itself.<sup>2</sup> The reality is that many of our students are disinterested in, or disengaged from, the experience of History.<sup>3</sup> Yet, as teachers, we are acutely aware that the Historical worlds, the social worlds and the creative worlds of students interact and co exist in the formation of identity.<sup>4</sup>

Our design of curriculum, our explanation of it, and our strategies to teach it, say much about the place we see it having in students' lives, and the value of the content to the wider society.<sup>5</sup> At this time of designing a national curriculum it is critical that we consider what we need, not to make historians, but to make historically interested and aware citizens.<sup>6</sup> If we want students to 'own' History, to see themselves as part of an historical world, we need to engage all aspects of the student in learning.<sup>7</sup> History is a holistic subject which is

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<sup>1</sup> Greg Dening, *Performances*, Melbourne University Press, 2006, p. XIV.

<sup>2</sup> Richard Teese and John Polisel, *Undemocratic Schooling. Equity and Quality in Mass Secondary Education in Australia*, Melbourne University Press, 2003, p.23-4.

<sup>3</sup> Anna Clark, *History's Children. History Wars in the Classroom*, New South Books, University of New South Wales Press, 2008, pp. 113-117.

<sup>4</sup> Chris Husbands, Alison Kitson and Anna Pendry, *Understanding History Teaching*, Open University Press, 2003, p. 141; and Dening, p. 34. Note that Husbands *et al* consider History important to personal identity expressed through political and moral development, but not national identity (p. 121).

<sup>5</sup> Rosie Turner-Bisset, *Creative Teaching. History in the Primary classroom*, David Fulton Publishers, 2005, p. 19.

<sup>6</sup> This is a stated aim of the Australian National Curriculum at points 3.1 and 3.2.

<sup>7</sup> Dening asserts that History is all around us and expressed in our every day lives, involving every aspect of our being: 'We sing it, dance it, carve it, paint it, tell it, write it' (p. XIV).

predicated on the interactions between people, between cultures, between people and their environments, and the ways in which the actions of some people oppress, liberate, inspire and constrain others. It has to do with what people have thought and think today, and with what they feel and have felt. History comes to us most often through the written word, through document study, and students must hear the nuances and cadences of such documents in order to understand the ideologies, prejudices and values that underpin them. History then, is not a purely academic subject; it can also be a sensory subject, and a subject that engages feelings and imagination. History is a subject which asks the students to simultaneously identify with the past and present, one which negotiates between thinking and feeling, just as it negotiates between then and now, and us and them. Consequently, history moves beyond organising and analysing sources to responding to the relationship that exists between us and the sources. As historians we recognise that who we are is identified in how we read the sources. This reflexivity is presented as a central maxim in the new national curriculum (ANC 3.1).

The first part of this paper identifies assumptions and beliefs about the teaching of History that are embedded in the Australian National Curriculum.<sup>8</sup> It contends that the National Curriculum implies a style of classroom history that is teacher led.<sup>9</sup> The second part of the paper challenges the reader to consider more empowering and experiential ways we can teach History so that students engage richly with, and develop, their historical, social and creative worlds in the course of meeting the National Curriculum outcomes. It explores ways of engaging students creatively in the study of History, of allowing them to embody their learning through Drama and other creative and artistic experiences.<sup>10</sup> It suggests that by embodying historical learning students are better placed to develop an historical awareness that has significance in their own lives and the lives of their communities.

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<sup>8</sup> Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History, National Curriculum Board, 2009, found at [http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/Australian\\_Curriculum\\_-\\_History.pdf](http://www.acara.edu.au/verve/resources/Australian_Curriculum_-_History.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> It also implies a particular type of learner, but that is not the focus of this paper.

<sup>10</sup> Rachael Kessler discusses definitions of creativity in *The Soul of Education. Helping Students find Connection, Compassion, and Character at School*, association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, 2000, pp. 95 – 110. A discussion of creativity and creative teaching also appears in Rosie Turner-Bisset, pp. 11-14.

## The National Curriculum for History

The Australian National Curriculum is very clear about what history is. It uses words such as: retrieval (ANC 2.6), comprehension (ANC 2.6), interpretation (ANC 2.6), critical (ANC 3.2) inquiry (ANC 4.2), evidence (ANC 2.6, 3.2), and evaluating (ANC 7.1). It speaks of historical knowledge (ANC 5.2) and skills (ANC 5.3). At one point it specifically states that History is not an intuitive understanding of the past (ANC 4.1). In contrast, the document asserts that:

Factual knowledge is essential to historical understanding. Without knowledge of chronology, geography, institutional arrangements, material circumstances and belief systems, no student inquiry on a past period — however well intended — will lead to understanding (3.3).

Such a description of history is limited and places too much emphasis on detail and too little on conceptualization. Unfortunately, at times, the National Curriculum sounds a little like Thomas Gradgrind from Charles Dickens' *Hard Times*:

'NOW, what I want is, Facts. Teach these boys and girls nothing but Facts'.<sup>11</sup>

Factual knowledge, as we know, is very slippery, particularly in History where opinions and interpretations compete for precedence. I am reminded that E.H. Carr's work, *What is History?*,<sup>12</sup> and his idiosyncratic definition of an 'historical fact' continue to have a profound effect on the ways we describe and explain historical studies. Yet, as both a teacher and an historian, I am uncomfortable with this way of 'doing history'. The discomfort arises from an acute awareness that there are few 'facts' in History. There are many 'facts' in the past; indisputably things happened. Captain Cook, for example, landed on the east coast of what is now called Australia in January 1770. But knowing that this even took place is not knowing 'history'. History is hypothesising about why Cook landed, what it meant to Indigenous Australian and European peoples, and creating meaning from the events that followed. The extensive debate that has occurred over this landing and its meaning is clear evidence that History is not based on the 'fact' of the event, but on the interpretation of event.<sup>13</sup> In order

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<sup>11</sup> <http://www.literaturecollection.com/a/dickens/hard-times/1/>

<sup>12</sup> E.H.Carr, *What is History?* Penguin books, 1964, rep. 1980.

<sup>13</sup> Stuart Macintyre and Anna Clark, *The History Wars*, Melbourne University Press, 2003, chapter 6.

to engage in History a student needs to have access to some knowledge about things that happened, but to state that ‘facts’ are essential to historical understanding is overstating the case. Precise knowledge of when things happened (‘facts’ and ‘dates’) is no more essential than empathy, interpretation, the skill of listening and the ability to imagine. History curriculum has, for a long time, been hijacked by ‘facts’.<sup>14</sup>

The authors of the Australian Curriculum present History as concerned with organisation (ANC 5.2), analysis (ANC 5.2), argument (ANC 7.1), evaluation (ANC 7.1), comprehension (ANC 2.6), judgement (ANC 5.2), interpretation (ANC 2.6), and contestability (ANC 4.1.). While I basically agree with these descriptors of the elements of historical practice, two critical concepts are missing. There seems to be no space in the Australian National Curriculum for creativity and very little space for imagination.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, despite a reference to ‘empathy’ (ANC 5.2) and ‘seeing the world through others’ eyes’ (ANC 2.7) there is no correspondence between these more humanistic values and the logical and rigorous ‘historical analysis and critical appraisal of evidence’ (ANC 3.2). It is unclear how the comprehension, analysis, interpretation and evaluation of historical sources and the use of evidence provided in the sources to make informed decisions (ANC 4.2), will of itself, enable students to see the world through others’ eyes (ANC 2.7).

Assumptions about how History should be taught are throughout the document and are identified towards the end. Amongst these are the following:

- students experience the ‘story’ in the history through the narrative of History
- the use of artefacts, museums, historical sites and hands-on activities will enhance students’ interest
- teachers provide opportunities for students to engage in the analysis, interpretation and evaluation of historical sources

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<sup>14</sup> Clark observes that ‘students acknowledge the importance of knowing facts about Australian history, but they also want historical narratives, discussions and debates, and imagination in the classroom’ (p. 142), and that students value the opportunity to ‘interpret’ (144) and appreciate and enjoy the complexity of history (137-139).

<sup>15</sup> Creativity is mentioned once, but not in the context of the students’ creativity. Rather, the value of History includes that ‘it deepens our understanding of humanity, creativity, purposes and values. History draws on and contributes to other bodies of knowledge’ (Introduction 2.5). ‘Informed imagination and ethical responsibility’ is also mentioned once, though it is unclear what an imagination is ‘informed’ by (5.2).

- higher order tasks, for example, building an historical argument using evidence
- teacher-directed and student-centred learning, enabling students to pose and investigate questions with increasing initiative, self-direction and expertise.

There are two difficulties with dot point one. The first is the idea of History as narrative. Historical narrative can be misleading, having ‘the effect of tidying up the chaos of the past so that we can all feel comfortable with it’.<sup>16</sup> Unfortunately, the ‘narrative of history’ often suggests that certain events inevitably lead to others, and the mess of human activity and the multitudinous alternatives are not considered, simplifying the past.<sup>17</sup> The second difficulty with dot point one is the notion that History is ‘experienced’ through the ‘story’. Reception of a story in western culture is often fairly passive. The story may provide a structure for the students’ experiences, but ‘experiencing’ History can only come from *doing* it. Furthermore, small children listen to stories, are receivers of them, and then often act them out in order to understand them, embed them and ‘experience’ them.<sup>18</sup> Hearing the story, as is implied here, is not enough. They must be participant in ‘making’ it and ‘being’ it. The suggestion that the use of artefacts and excursions may ‘enhance’ students learning (dot point two) keeps History students firmly placed as receivers. They receive historical knowledge in the classroom and then are taken somewhere in order to enhance that knowledge by giving it some physical reality through objects. ‘Hands on’ activities are not described, but there is a sense that these too will be teacher-designed to ‘bring History alive’ by objectifying it. Dot points three and four implicitly present History as literacy-based; both create an image of students sitting, working through text, even though in the case of dot point three, there are many alternative ways to provide such ‘opportunities’. The higher order skills of analysis and synthesis are clearly implied in dot point four, but the higher order thinking of creation is overlooked. Dot point five has space for innovative

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<sup>16</sup> Beverley Southgate, *History: What & Why? Ancient, Modern and Post modern Perspectives*, Routledge, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 2011, p. 116.

<sup>17</sup> Alternative possibilities in history are explored by Major General John Strawson in *If By Chance. Military Turning Points that Changed History*, McMillan, 2003. On hindsight and the ‘inevitability’ of one event leading to another, see James S McLaren, ‘Delving into the Dark Side: Josephus’ foresight as Hindsight’ in *Making History. Josephus and Historical Method*. Journal for the Study of Judaism Supplement Series 110, ed. Z. Rodgers, Brill, 2007, pp. 49-68.

<sup>18</sup> Barbara Poston-Anderson, *Drama. Learning Connections in Primary Schools*, Oxford University Press, 2008, p. 286.

teaching practice, indicating that students should be increasingly directing their own inquiries. However, it is also very open to the use of text books and maintenance of the status quo in the teaching and learning of History.

### An alternative pedagogy: Creative engagement

I stated above that creativity and imagination are missing from the National Curriculum for History. So how can we address this absence in a way that remains consistent with the definition and description of History as it appears in the National Curriculum? Engaging students creatively in the study of history, and particularly, as embodied learners, offers ways of students hearing and responding to History differently. In this context, 'doing' history means experiencing History, not reading about it, but embodying the voices of history through Drama and Dance.<sup>19</sup>

The National Curriculum places a heavy emphasis on source study. In a creative History classroom sources really 'speak' to the students and teacher. We read them aloud and we hear their voice, their ideas, their concerns. Different students read the same source differently – students become aware of the nuance of History, just as they hear that intonation and tone can change meaning.<sup>20</sup> This is the very beginning of embodiment, where the student hears their own voice, and their peers' voices read aloud the words of others. The value of analysis lies in amplifying or clarifying the voice. Similarly, chronological study is valuable because it contextualises that voice; and archaeological study or the study of the physical environment has value in that it provides examples of the voice in things – artefacts of the voice. The purpose of the skills of retrieval, organisation, analysis and evaluation, on which the National Curriculum is focussed, is to give us a bridge into listening to other people from other times.<sup>21</sup> These skills have value and purpose in an historical context when they assist us to listen. What I hear and what you hear, listening to the same source, whether that is a document, a piece of Art or Music or a coin, will be different

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<sup>19</sup> See Turner-Bisset, 'Through being in role in approaches such as story telling, drama, simulations and songs, they experience aspects of past historical situations as 'players in the game' (p. VII).

<sup>20</sup> Denning notes: 'The forms and structures of histories differ with different expressions' (p.49).

<sup>21</sup> Rachael Kessler identifies 'bridging difference', and 'integrating ways of knowing' as definitions of creativity. pp. 101 and 103.

nuances, different ideas, and these are determined by how well we listen, and what parts of ourselves we bring to the task of listening.

Recently I have been working on letters written from my grandfather to my father during World War 2. My grandfather was a member of the 2/2<sup>nd</sup> field ambulance and served in Northern Africa, Greece, Crete, Syria, Ceylon and New Guinea. My father was a boy when my grandfather enlisted – 10 years old – and was 16 when he returned. His mother was dead and he was an only child, shuffled between grandparents for the duration of the war. This story can be studied simply through the letters – a document study. When references to relatives and friends are taken into account, almost every major theatre of war appears in these letters. Emerging from them we see the relationship between father and son, the values of the day, and the daily existence of a boy in the 1940s.

However, there is so much more that can be done. These letters are not the sum of the history they represent – rather, their existence is a key, a clue, to a previous way of life. They offer wonderful opportunities for creative engagement with the past, where students experience the feelings of individuals rather than reading about them. This is the difference between having an intellectual understanding of the letters and an emotional understanding; it is the difference between studying history and experiencing history. In order for the experience of historical sources to be transformative in students' historical awareness, I believe they need to be engaged with creatively and imaginatively, in ways that allow students to embody their learning.<sup>22</sup>

My own task was to write a play based on these letters. I became very aware of my dual roles of dramatist and historian: this was a story belonging to real people. I had a responsibility to present it as honestly and truthfully as possible. I also became increasingly aware of my own historical engagement in the task. As I listened and read, interrogated my written and oral sources, and sought corroborating or expanding evidence, I also reflected on the processes of building historical knowledge. I developed a richer understanding of History in school as a constructivist activity that can be student led and teacher facilitated,

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<sup>22</sup> Denning observes: 'I think that we never know the truth by being told it. We have to experience it in some way' (p. 101).

rather than a content transfer activity which is teacher led and student received, even with hands on activities. I became increasingly interested in the idea of embodiment, something I have used for many years as a drama teacher. What happens if students do not write essays, but scripts? What happens if they become the characters involved in the shaping of History and improvise significant events? What happens if students are encouraged to live a week from the time and place they are studying? I do not envisage these as one -period tasks, activities to add some interest and from which students can then progress to writing an essay, but as a complete experience of learning in itself.

There are several ways that embodiment can be used in the classroom. Below I consider two of these: performance and Process Drama.<sup>23</sup> Both of these differ from role play. Whereas role play involves students 'acting out' a scene or event, performance involves work that is considered, planned, crafted and rehearsed. Process Drama involves immersion over an extended period. Both Process Drama and Performance require the student to 'be' the person they represent, rather than 'acting as' the person.

### *Creative Engagement through Performance*

A substantial term-long collaborative embodiment exercise may revolve around the students creating a performance piece. For many students this might be a writing exercise but for others it will be an improvisational process. The two processes can work alongside each other. Students do initial reading, watching and interviewing (if appropriate) in order to decide which scenes to include (historical significance ANC 5.2). They build this piece over several weeks; student will identify their strengths and build on them as writers, researchers, developers of character, those with theatrical flair, music or visual arts strengths, those good at finding people and places of relevance, those skilled at internet searching, downloading and editing. Students compile lists of inquiry questions and design strategies for examining those questions – these strategies include debate, role playing,

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<sup>23</sup> For Process Drama, see Betty Jane Wagner, *Dorothy Heathcote. Drama as a Learning Medium*, National Education Association of the United States, 1976, and Gavin Bolton, *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education*, Longman, 1979. Other forms of embodiment include Dance, and Mantle of the Expert (<http://www.mantleoftheexpert.com/>), based on the work of Dorothy Heathcote. Both these overlap with the processes described above, but are expressed differently.

monologue writing, exploration of the Arts and science, and understanding technology (selection of evidence, ANC 5.2). This embodiment exercise includes:

- Choosing how the experience will be developed – through a family, through a theatre of war, through an individual, through government, through an indigenous population, through a social, community or employment group, through transport. This supports students developing reflexivity as they need to weigh their personal interests against historical significance and debate the most appropriate lens through which to explore specific events, circumstances or people (establishing historical significance [ANC 5.2])
- Planning events and relationships to be explored (selecting and interpreting historical evidence [ANC 5.2]; retrieving, comprehending and interpreting sources [ANC 2.6])
- Investigating the relevant events and relationships (continuity and change; cause and consequence [ANC 5.2])
- Understanding the ‘back stories’ of characters and circumstances and creating sub text (historical inquiry [2.6]; comparative historical analysis and critical appraisal of evidence [ANC 3.2])
- Shaping the presentation of the historical ideas through performance (contestation and contestability; problem solving [ANC 5.2])
- Applying performance elements – adopting character, selecting costume and props, use of stagecraft to convey ideas (historical perspectives; historical empathy and moral judgement [ANC 5.2])
- Debriefing: what did it feel like to be your character? What insights did this experience give you as to why people make the decisions they do? What did you learn about your own character and other characters by ‘being them’? How do decisions shape events? (historical empathy and moral judgement; contestation and contestability [5.2]; making informed decisions about an inquiry question [ANC 5.3]; knowledge based on evidence [ANC 2.6]; variety of human experience and appreciation of the nature of change [ANC 2.7]; experience of collective memory [ANC 2.8]).

This engagement with historical process by doing History in the act of 'being' history is theorised by Denning in his book, *Performances*. He explores the idea of 'presenting the past' and the implications of this term in time and space.<sup>24</sup> It is this idea of simultaneously and self consciously 'presenting' and 'representing' the past that students experience in creative engagement through devised performance.

### *Creative Engagement through Process Drama*

While Process Drama has some similarities to the performance experience outlined above, it is 'lived' rather than 'performed'. Everyone is a participant and there is no audience, other than 'spectators'.<sup>25</sup> Students and the teacher move into and out of role in order to explore events, ideas and relationships. Process Drama is a highly reflexive form because it requires participants to simultaneously engage in a role while also viewing that role, and the role of others, from outside the situation. This reflexivity mirrors the student's experience in engaging with history – that they are simultaneously assessing events and decisions in the past, while also assessing their present values and how they influence their judgements and understandings. This is the 'paradox of acting', and also the 'paradox of history', where the participant is simultaneously involved in two worlds – the drama and reality; the past and the present.<sup>26</sup>

In Process Drama there is no script. Students do initial reading, interviewing (if appropriate) and research, and develop a series of questions. These questions form the basis of their historical inquiry, and as in performance, students design strategies for examining the questions. They are encouraged to explore those areas of specific interest to them within the wider topic, knowing that they will then engage in an extended role play to examine the complexity of the period, people and circumstances being studied. Ideally Process Drama takes place over an extended period – a morning or whole day, or even longer. However, the restrictions of school timetabling often make this impossible. Process Drama can also

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<sup>24</sup> Denning, *Performances*, throughout.

<sup>25</sup> This term comes from August Boal's *Theatre of the Oppressed*, Pluto Books, 1979, and describes someone who watches a drama unfolding, and becomes involved at points of relevance to them or the character they are playing.

<sup>26</sup> Denning, p.121. Boal also has a name for this. He calls it 'metaxis', the state of belonging completely and simultaneously to two worlds.

take place over a number of separate periods across several days, so long as the students understand the process and what is required of them.

Process Drama includes:

- Choosing the event to be experienced and deciding which people and which types of people need to be enacted in order to build an understanding of the event (establishing historical significance [ANC 5.2])
- Researching the people in relation to the event: identifying sources, developing ideas about influences, values and circumstances (critical perspective [ANC 3.2; finding, selecting and interpreting historical evidence [ANC 5.2]). As a result of this further research students might decide to add or delete characters, and to explore further social mores and related events (historical perspectives [ANC 5.2])
- Planning appropriate space and time to enact the Drama, providing necessary props and costumes, food, drink and other elements that might be significant (continuity and change [ANC 5.2]. Removing from the space those things that are anachronistic – e.g. the television, covering the whiteboard, removing indicators of the space as a classroom or gym as much as is possible (historical perspectives [ANC 5.2])
- Students are reminded of the process and enter character; the event is played out. Signals are devised whereby the teacher can move in and out of character in order to contest the presentation of events (constestation and contestability [ANC 5.2]) or to move action along as necessary, for example by providing linking narrative (History as story [ANC 8]), or asking the opinions of students who are in character or of students who are not immediately involved (cause and consequence [ANC 5.2]). Sometimes moments of extraordinary insight will occur spontaneously, from the interactions of students in character.<sup>27</sup> It is appropriate at these times for the teacher to step out of character and invite reflection on this insight before the Drama continues (Teachers describe, explain, model and monitor [ANC 5.3]).
- Boal's 'spectator' can be involved by asking students not immediately in the scene if they can enter in character to offer alternatives to why and how things are

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<sup>27</sup> Kessler observes that being open to the unknown is a critical element in creativity, and quotes Howard Gardner: 'open-mindedness, flexibility, willingness to trust hunches, and curiosity are factors that emerge repeatedly as facilitating and favouring creativity', p. 99.

happening (cause and consequence [ANC 5.2]; historical empathy and moral judgement [ANC 5.2])

- Debrief. At the conclusion of any session of Process Drama students need time to move out of character. In terms of historical study, they also need to examine what they have learnt, what knowledge they have built, and to question why they presented individuals, institutions and circumstances in a particular light. As in performance, students should consider: What did you learn about your own character and other characters by 'being them'? How do decisions shape events? (historical empathy and moral judgement; contestation and contestability [5.2]; making informed decisions about an inquiry question [ANC 5.3]; knowledge based on evidence [ANC 2.6]; variety of human experience and appreciation of the nature of change [ANC 2.7]; experience of collective memory [ANC 2.8]).

Creative engagement through performance and through Process Drama provides a construct by which students can explore events, issues, concerns and the feelings of people in the past. This construct asks students to closely analyse documentary, audio, visual and other sources to build their historical understanding, but their success is collaborative and is not determined by their level of literacy.<sup>28</sup> It leads to different forms of analysis and evaluation, recognising values and making judgements, stimulates inquiry and raises awareness of the nature of historical sources. Creative engagement of this type requires that students work together to create a shared historical experience and to construct an historical context in which to understand themselves and their communities

When creatively engaged in the study of History, students can engage in analysis in a much stronger manner because it ceases to be simply an academic discussion, and becomes part of an adopted identity that they need to explain and understand in order to communicate. The significance of words as identifiers of power and status is noted by Foucault:

*Who is speaking? Who, among the totality of speaking individuals, is accorded the right to use this sort of language? Who is qualified to do so? Who derives from it his*

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<sup>28</sup> In this way it is a democratic process, where knowledge and power are shared in the classroom. See Susan Hyde, 'Sharing Power in the Classroom', in *Negotiating the Curriculum Educating for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, ed. Garth Boomer, Nancy Lester, Cynthia Onre, Jon Cook, Routledge, 1992, pp. 67-77.

*own special quality, his prestige, and from whom, in return does he receive if not the assurance, at least the presumption that what he says is true?*<sup>29</sup>

These are critical historical questions when applied to document study. For the teacher, the issue is how best to get the students to the point of asking them, and of understanding that such questions exist and shape our interpretations of events and actions. How we structure the discourse so that communication takes place is critical in shifting students' horizons, rather than students being limited by horizons.<sup>30</sup> In other words, the teacher's aim is to open alternative world views, alternative interpretations of the past, and to invite students to engage together and individually in the building of historical knowledge and understanding around such world views.

In this form of History characters and events are investigated and then students explore elements of them – known or hypothetical. For example, what would Curtin and Churchill have said to each other when Japan entered World War 2? We can find out via historical investigation that some sources exist to assist us, primary and secondary sources that discuss the context and the tensions regarding the deployment of the AIF and the movement of the Japanese – but that particular conversation is unrecorded. Students can have that conversation; and they should contest the content as it is presented by their peers. What organisation of ideas and information, beliefs and analyses lead to some students presenting the conversation in one way and other students presenting it differently? What aspects of their knowledge and intuition are they employing in order to create an interpretation of Curtin or Churchill and how does that interpretation stand up to the contestation of their peers? Students are challenged to ask: what do we really know, what are reasonable assumptions, how do we decide?<sup>31</sup> This is an experiential exercise backed up by genuine historical inquiry. The value is in doing the exercise, in 'being' as Curtin or Churchill. To 'be' as these people, or as any other historical people, the students must understand what their world was like, adopt their world view, take on their values, and present people in situations that are real to time and place. This is embodiment – taking

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<sup>29</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, Routledge, 1972, rep 2005, p. 55.

<sup>30</sup> Jurgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: an inquiry into a category of Bourgeois Society*, MIT press, 1999, p. 140.

<sup>31</sup> The use of generative topics is aligned to the thinking. See Andrew Bawden, 'Designing a thinking curriculum for later middle years' adolescents' in *Designing a Thinking Curriculum*, ed. Susan Wilks, ACER, 2005, pp. 97-108.

the learning inside the person, so that history is experienced not 'learnt'. It is no less rigorous – in fact students must justify and understand many more historical decisions they make.<sup>32</sup> Although hindsight encourages us to view some events as inevitably leading to others, and consequently minimises the human dimension of decision making and the element of chance, creative engagement with History through embodiment embraces the complexity of past events. It opens up the opportunity for problem solving and supports the National Curriculum's call for investigation, debate and reasoning about the past (ANC 4.1). Perhaps most importantly, it allows for self conscious engagement in reflexivity and it acknowledges the power of relationships, systems, power, oppression and individual values in the shaping of history, in a way that reading and writing about it do not.

### Reflection

Authentic historical awareness emerges from an understanding that history must be respected and negotiated in our lives. We empower students to 'own' history when we enable them to make it an ever present part of their identity and place in the community. Embodying history through creative engagement encourages students to encounter History as an experience that resonates and reverberates through their being. It provides them with opportunities to recognise and communicate that who they are is built on the memories and experiences of generations, that their identity as perceived by self and others is bound to social and cultural constructs. Creative engagement through embodiment assists students in identifying and exploring the emotional, physical and intellectual landscapes in which people before them have lived and in which they now live. By engaging our students in this experience of History, we give them a 'poetry of History',<sup>33</sup> a sense of layers, alternatives, the different discourses we all connect to and disconnect from during our lives. Students recognise themselves as conversant with the past, participating in a discourse. Through creative engagement with history, students discover and experience and identify themselves at the point where dialogue between the past and the present occurs.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Creative engagement and embodiment are consistent with thinking curriculum as it is described by Clinton Golding, 'Creating a thinking school' in *Designing a Thinking Curriculum*, pp. 29-41.

<sup>33</sup> Denning uses a similar terms when he describes the 'Poetics of History', Denning, p. 36

<sup>34</sup> In theatrical terms this is the moment of Drama in Boal's *Rainbow of Desire* – the moment of change and possibility to fulfil dreams – when people move from parallel monologues to dialogue. Augusto Boal, *The Rainbow of Desire. The Boal Method of Theatre and Therapy*, trans. Adrian Jackson, Routledge, 1995.

History lives within each student in our classrooms. It is part of who they are and who they will become. When we allow students to experience that history, rather than simply learn about it, then they will own that history, rather than being owned by it.