*History … as learned through performance*  
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Conference presentation notes.  
  
The writing of John Dewey on history education reads as fresh today as it must have when the ink was still wet in the 1890s. His insightful commentary provides a progressive counter-point to a content-based approach to teaching about bygone people and past events. Dewey describes as regrettable the 'the wooden' practice of treating history as a collection of fixed facts; through which children are delivered culturally saturated truths. His proposition is that history education should begin with 'now' and work back to find corollaries of past experience. He argues that historical facts be treated as evidence in the plastic pursuit of contemporary understanding. In Dewey's paradigm history is an evidence-based investigation. A forensic process that unravels the past to better explain the present.  
  
Following 2010, the Australian Curriculum was rolled-out in phases; History was an early release. As rationalised, history education in Australia reflects a progressive (Dewey-like) and contemporary view through past windows and present perspectives. As a subject area, the history curriculum is further elaborated through its connection to life-skills; described as General Capabilities in the Australian Curriculum. Each of the seven life-skills inform historical processes with 'Critical and Creative Thinking' resonating well with History's intent. As both critical and creative thinkers students can make good use of history to inform social engagement and practise active citizenship.  
  
That "history starts now" is a useful truism; almost an educational framework in itself. True to Dewey's principles 'now' establishes the motivation to adapt to our living environment having evolved out of past events and activities. To access history through a 'now' perspective is a life-skill requiring some organisation of thought. As a contemporary investigative framework, the Australian Curriculum helps in this matter by expanding on what it takes to be a critical and creative time detective. Consistent with Bloom's Taxonomy history is described as two complimentary process: (1) the development of historical knowledge and understanding, and (2) a set of skills; progressively enabling higher order thinking. As described by the Australian Curriculum these include:  inquiring, generalising, reflecting and analysing.  
  
Tapping into students' own proclivities and interests is basic to school engagement. Through history, Dewey pointed out, we uncover realms of understanding. History's narrative is built upon, for instance, stories of industrial and technological progress; economic and political systems; the rise and fall of civilisations; communities and their heroic personalities. It's through history education that students patch-together a tapestry of people and events in time and place; a critical, creative, flexible, and with growing skill a non-linear interpretation of history as 'continuity'. Australian-ness as a construct is a relative notion particular to one's own backgrounds and experiences. As much as it is an individual interpretation, it's also informed by the remains of those who left a legacy. Through history students find their own likenesses and better understand how they themselves might one day be woven into an ever changing national fabric.  
  
As both critical and creative 'historians' students are to be encouraged to find their own ways of exploring the past and expressing their 'constructed' findings. No longer bound by the determinism of the enlightenment era we (like Dewey an early ground-breaker) are of a post-modern ilk. To be post-modern is itself a complex construct fraught with uncertainty. Survival in this ever changing environment requires the agency of self-actualisation. Through schooling, we come to our own interpretation of history as a tool that helps us best use our individual capacities to make sense of our collective now; to become citizens (participative and productive). Through history education students learn to gather evidence, derive propositions, generate hypotheses and defend opinions as they make sense of the world in which they live, work and play.  
  
And so to now. As educators, we can't expect students to be excited about the past without them being enlivened by their own experience of now. The fact that in 1913 Lady and Lord Denman officiated at the founding of Canberra's launch as Australia's national capital has little impact on a child unexcited by the context of their own Australian city. The child's notion of 'city' has to be real and meaningful; relevant and significant if he or she is going to engage in a historic treasure hunt. The disinterested time-traveller is a passive passenger at best. If backwards in time is the answer to "where to now" we need to make now a very well-anchored stand-point and a highly valued base-camp from where all things gain their meaning. Now is the time to ACT.  
  
The careful and relevant collection of historical evidence is vital to a lively investigation; how it's treated makes all the difference. The same collection (of photos, relics, and/or artefacts) can constitute the exhibits in a dusty static museum; or, become the interactive elements of a dynamic enquiry. Both Dewey and the National Curriculum raise the alarm to the former outcome. In Dewey's mind there's a vast difference between piling-up evidence and penetrating its meaning. Likewise, the Australian Curriculum is very explicit in its caveat of beware the non-interpretative use of historical remains. Mere description of the past isolates its meaning and renders it an object; given continuity the subject is realised.  
  
Rarely can it be claimed that events and places have no precedent; in Dewey's thinking the strings of time are expressed as continuities. Through attachment to continuities we enable the gathering of evidence to purposefully amass. Accepting the interpretative nature of history, nonetheless it does require the collection of facts (cross-referenced and well sourced). In complimentary fashion the Australian Curriculum also acknowledges the need to collect information in order to appreciate the significance of change over time and its impact on our daily lives.  
  
The creation of a lively 'now' doesn't happen by accident. A school environment by nature is a contrived community; one that needs attention if it's to be an authentic starting point for life-long learning. Being in the now is about capturing the moment to serve the school's educative purpose. In a school environment where 'now' is not seized as an opportunity, history has little chance of being appreciated or thriving into a valued host of important life-skills such as critical and creative thinking. It's behoven on a school to reach-out, to be proactive, in its grasp of dynamic and exciting events and activities that might enliven the interest of children in their city's present (and its past). In Dewey's writing he makes it clear that schooling is not about preparation for the future; attention to now (derived from the past) will ensure that the future takes care of itself; we are not preparing children for tomorrow, we are helping them live, love and learn today.  
  
Today's continuities with the past find expression in stories; the carriers of customs and cultures. It's for this reason that history needs an audience if it's to be truly transforming in the minds of children. A performance-base for history is endless in variety; from page to stage it is a creative journey and the opening to critical reviews. Performance has its artistic connotation but that interpretation would limit its scope and value. Whatever the medium, whatever the performance, the point is to expose historical findings; to test the strength of their presence on our understanding and interpretation of their relevance to now. The journalistic style of reporting is ideally suited to a simple and useful performance piece. The journalistic framing of a story is short and punctuated with penetrative intent; the very home of when, why, where, who and how.  
  
At the year 3 level of the Australian Curriculum is a focus on community and remembrance. Highlighting local memories is an ideal doorway into history as a two-way-passage that orchestrates continuity and change. At each year level, the Australian Curriculum provides an elaboration of the topical studies to help unpack what a typical study might look like as students undertake the related learning tasks and activities. In a study of local identity it's likely that students will be investigating developments and exploring artefacts of the time. In addition, the teacher of a history unit is provided with advice on useful terminologies and the life-skills most associated with that historical enquiry. It is clear from the Australian Curriculum's that its teaching advice is indicative rather than prescriptive; a teacher would be expected to bring to a unit of study their own understanding of local context and student capacities.  
  
As the conceptual elements and elaborations of a history unit come together, a teaching team's attention is drawn to the practical and technical components of delivery. Considerations include the macro aspects of space and time and for this unit often hinged on technological expectations that could help or hinder students' online research. Schools, over time, have created a technological dependency. The 'type and style' of digital learning places high demand on a school's supply of networked equipment. It was often the case that the digital demand was unmet and required a paper-based work-around. Until the day of ubiquitous ICT access arrives there will be a need for judicious use of resources and coordination of online and offline group-work to distribute the demand equitably across available resources.  
  
The digital library (or online archive) has partially transformed the way students approach encyclopaedic enquiries. Gradually the information skills of children are improving in parallel with more accessible and intuitive technologies. A good example is the Australian National Library's online presence known as TROVE. As a gesture to Canberra's Centenary the ANL has digitised all of the city's newspapers dating back to its early origins. TROVE models good research practices and prompts the reader to conduct advanced searches and reference accordingly. Likewise, the ACT created an online photo gallery to house the thousands of photos taken by Canberra's first official photographer: 'Jack' Mildenhall. At Mildenhall's Gallery students are able to sort photos, update references and upload 'Then and Now' rephotographs.  
  
In the context of a local enquiry, it seems appropriate that some form of excursion beyond the school boundary is undertaken. Without some external experience a study of the city's origins could rightly be considered contrived and vicarious. History's abstractions are counterbalanced when children come into contact with a city's extant resources; including it local personalities. The power of embedding into a social enquiry some local expertise is well worth the effort of coordination. Local experts are normally very generous with their knowledge and present as highly motivated devotees of history. As models of good practice local enthusiasts are invaluable; they are more than likely avid proponents of living history. In a contemporary sense they exemplify history's organisation along the lines of knowledge, understandings and skills.  
  
The assessment of children's historical understandings obviously has to track their growing capacity to express knowledge and understandings; alongside the demonstration investigative skills. There also needs to be some consideration given to how the children have applied some general capabilities (i.e. critical and creative thinking). The one-off quizzes, the pre- and post-tests, are quite valid but hardly constitute a full profiling of a student's depth of awareness. Other incidental, more qualitative, factors can also inform assessment. If curiosity is a feature of historical interest then a child's independent enquiries constitute a valid indicator of success. Provision of feedback to students needs to recognise achievement (of standards) and celebrate effort (as engagement).  
  
The Australian Curriculum provides ample support to teachers carrying out history assessments. To gauge year-level performance indicators, achievement standards have been established. In very simple terms the 'end-of-year' achievement standards outline what students can be expected to (1) know and understand, and (2) how skilfully they approach their enquiries. In a very practical sense the Australian Curriculum also provides teachers with year-level student portfolio work-samples. The portfolios include clear examples of students' work representing three levels of performance (below, at and above satisfactory).The work samples are assistive in establishing a basis for year level moderation and constructing quality criteria in negotiation with students.  
  
As discussed, this unit ran the risk of amassing content; somewhat for its own sake; somewhat for enjoyment. As teachers conducted assessments it wasn't clear that children were engaging in any higher order thinking; they were able to indicate knowledge and skills, but whether this had translated into understanding was unclear. A more penetrative assessment strategy was required. In post-war Japan, using Deming's Total Quality tools, Toyoda implemented the 5-whys problem solving strategy to drill down into structural processes impeding progress of the Toyota car manufacturing company. Dewey's notion that historical legacies are indicative of how our predecessors solved problems suggested children maybe able to link past practices with the present through a 5-whys approach.  
  
Given a child friendly framework the 5-whys enable students to show they have identified key historical issues as related to 'problems or issues' of the past. The 5-whys is assistive in assessing children's use of higher order thinking skills; those of inquiry, generalisation, reflection and analysis. In a historical sense, identification of problems is only part of the investigative enquiry. To demonstrate understanding of 'continuity and change' a simple transformation of the 5-whys into 5-hows is effective. The pairing of 5-whys with 5-hows intuitively links past with present; problem with solution.  The reverse engineering of 5-whys and 5-hows is quite satisfying; children take quite easily to the concept and its similarity to an uncovering of the past.