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## Teaching for ‘Historical Understanding’: What Knowledge(s) do Teachers Need to Teach History?

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*Abstract: Recent curriculum reform in history in Australia promotes ‘historical understanding’ through discipline-based teaching practice. However, many middle school teachers are new to the scope of historical knowledge and skills required. This paper reports on a case study of five Queensland teachers in one secondary school who undertook a school-based trial of the Year 8 Australian Curriculum: History in 2012 - 2013. Drawing on notions of historical consciousness and frameworks for curriculum alignment, the case study indicates that the intent of the stated curriculum to develop concepts of ‘historical understanding’ is undermined by two factors – first, teachers’ inadequate knowledge of the scope of the curriculum and second, a patchy understanding of how key substantive and procedural historical concepts contribute to ‘historical understanding’. The research identified significant gaps in the disciplinary knowledge of history teachers and makes recommendations for pre-service and in-service history teacher education.*

### Introduction

The *Australian Curriculum: History [AC: History]* (ACARA, v8.2, 2016) has been a source of controversy with many contesting its purpose, prescriptive and content-driven approach and insufficient curriculum theorisation as a ‘product’ to be delivered (Atweh & Singh, 2011; Ditchburn, 2015; Gilbert, 2011; Reid, 2009). The conceptualisation of history as a school subject is harnessed to contemporary notions of historical awareness and consciousness (Lee, 2011; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Seixas, 2006; 2012) rather than intuitive, memory-based understandings of the past. The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History [Shape Paper]* (NCB, 2009, p.3) asserted that history was a distinctive form of knowledge with its own methods and procedures, and furthermore, that the curriculum was intended to promote ‘historical understanding’ and ‘historical consciousness’ of the past. These terms which are relatively new to secondary history teachers provide the focus for this study.

Although undefined in the Australian curriculum documents, historical consciousness is the individual and collective cognitive and cultural awareness of links between the past and present which help inform the future. The Canadian history educator Peter Seixas (2015) emphasises that historical consciousness embraces an understanding of the relationship between present, past and future and between “the knower and the known” (p. 4). Thus, “Historical consciousness is defined as the understanding of the temporality of historical experience or how past, present and future are thought to be connected” (Glencross, 2015, p.413). Retz (2016) stresses that history education today is concerned with “orienting oneself in the framework of time” (p. 514). Arguably this contemporary understanding of time is a

significant departure to previous conceptualisations of school history and underpins the focus on historical consciousness and understanding in this study.

The *AC: History* adopts a chronological framework and in Years 7 – 10, Australian history is to be taught within a world history context. Endorsed for implementation in 2011 and reviewed shortly thereafter (Donnelly & Wiltshire, 2014), the curriculum has been embraced differently by the States and Territories. For example, in Victoria, core elements of the *AC: History* were incorporated in 2013 under a hybrid model as the AusVELS framework which was implemented in 2014. In contrast, New South Wales (NSW), Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory (ACT) and Northern Territory (NT) have a centralised approach to curriculum. Like South Australia and Tasmania, the ACT and NT began implementation in 2013 while NSW commenced implementation in stages from 2014. In Western Australia and Queensland, history was introduced in 2012. Queensland state schools adopted the *AC: History* in its entirety in 2013 and dropped the integrated Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE). At the time, no changes were made to the content, skills or scope of the curriculum. Implementation in state schools was supported by the rollout of ‘Curriculum to the Classroom’ (C2C) history teaching materials representing an investment in professional support to consolidate teachers’ knowledge and preparedness for history in the classroom. More recently, in determining ‘core curriculum’, the Queensland Curriculum and Assessment Authority (QCAA) has recommended significant reductions to Year 7 – 9 History and proposed making Year 10 History optional (QCAA, 2016). The curriculum continues to be debated with little consensus on implementation.

Queensland teachers have long experienced significant curriculum change in the humanities. Since the 1990s, history in this State has been taught as one of the social sciences under the umbrella of SOSE. The change to history has been especially profound in the primary and middle school up to Year 9. Unlike New South Wales, which has always maintained history as a separate school subject within Human Society and its Environment (HSIE), in Queensland, history was subsumed into SOSE. Thus a generation of Queensland teacher graduates may have never encountered history as a discipline in their own education, either at school or at university. Moreover, non-specialists teaching history in Years 7 - 9 (middle years) may not have experienced any form of history curriculum studies in their own teacher education (Reid, 2009). As a history education academic, I am cognisant that many pre-service teachers conceptualise historical knowledge as factual recall. The findings of this study alert educators to explore the nature of history as a discipline and ‘historical understanding’ in initial teacher education.

This Queensland case study of five middle school history teachers aims to explore their knowledge for the history curriculum, addressing a gap in research on curriculum implementation (Green, Reitano & Dixon, 2010). The focus of the research was Year 8 (students aged 13- 14 years), a period when young adolescents experience disciplinary-based study for the first time in preparation for senior school (Pendergast & Bahr, 2010). As such, teachers’ knowledge and perceptions of the discipline are pivotal in shaping their practice. Case study data were analysed using the frameworks for alignment of the intended and enacted curriculum (Porter, 2002, 2004) and curriculum implementation (Dixon et al., 2015; Taylor, 2001). The following research questions frame the study:

- (1) How do middle school teachers perceive ‘history’ in the context of the national curriculum?
- (2) How do middle school teachers implement the Year 8 *AC: History* in the classroom?

The following sections explore the political context in which the curriculum emerged, describe its key features and investigates the conceptual framework of historical consciousness and intended / enacted curriculum. The paper then turns to the case study of the enacted Year 8 curriculum in the transition to the *AC: History*.

## **The Politicisation of the History Curriculum**

The role of history in a school curriculum, what history should be taught in schools (Husbands, 1996) and attention to procedural concepts in history has informed debates on history education in North America, Europe and in Australia (Lévesque, 2008; Taylor, 2006; 2009). History education has also been harnessed to furthering national goals. It serves a broader national purpose where knowledge of history is seen as critically important to furthering a nation's sense of its own identity (Tosh, 2008). History also develops the capacity for reasoning and making judgements about human affairs (Barton & Levstik, 2004).

The 2005 Cronulla riots, sparked by racial slurs against Australians of Lebanese heritage, raised new concerns about the role of history education and national values. The riots on the beaches of Cronulla (near Sydney) called into question the perception of Australia as a tolerant, peace-loving, multicultural society. An apparent lack of awareness of the nation's history generated a search for solutions, including the need to educate all young people, especially migrant and refugee youth, about common values and the national heritage. Harris and Bateman (2008) remind us that the impetus for a national history curriculum was the fear that a deficit in historical knowledge among young people would exact a terrible toll on a coherent and cohesive national identity. A renewal of teaching and learning history in Australia initially focused on the teaching of facts and Australia's democratic heritage (Bishop, 2006) and the need for a structured narrative on the 'Australian Achievement' (Clark, 2008; Howard, 2006). Initiated in 2006 by Howard's Liberal government (1996 – 2007), and developed through widespread consultation during the Rudd Labor government (2007 – 2010), the history curriculum has been politicised by successive Australian Prime Ministers (Taylor, 2006; 2009). The history curriculum as part of the new national curriculum also responded to national and international pressures for educational rigour, increased accountability and high standards of achievement (Harris and Bateman, 2008). The aim was to replace the integrated approach to studying history in SOSE with a new, nationally mandated focus on the disciplinary study of history as a school subject.

The intent was to foster an informed and responsible citizenry through a deep understanding of Australian history, but as Gilbert (2011) argues, the history curriculum was a result of political and media pressure, with inadequate justification for its inclusion as a compulsory school subject. The question of why we need a 'national' history curriculum was not addressed, even as the curriculum was developed with the expectation that students would learn the specifics of Australian history within a broader world context. Gilbert (2011) maintains that the history curriculum lacks not only a clarity of purpose and outcomes, but a convincing rationale for selecting the content for the curriculum. The result has been a curriculum heavy on content knowledge and light on modes of historical inquiry even though historical skills are included. Ditchburn (2015) argues that the Year 7-10 *AC: History* is the product of a neoliberal agenda and the result is a pragmatic, 'thin' curriculum preoccupied with content at the expense of teachers' professional autonomy and at the mercy of teachers who are increasingly being asked to teach outside their specialist area. Clearly teachers are expected to 'know' their subject and related concepts (Shulman, 1987) and examining the innovations in curriculum change (Fullan, 2016) offers insight into current practice.

## **The Australian Curriculum: History**

In *The Australian Curriculum*, the Year 7 – 10 Humanities learning area comprises four separate curricula for History, Geography, Economics and Business, and Civics and Citizenship. The curriculum for each learning area makes reference to the other curricula but

is underpinned by a foundation in Humanities. Additionally, there are seven “general capabilities” and three “cross curriculum priorities” which encompass the knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions embraced by the curriculum. In *AC: History* (ACARA, v8.2, 2016) these features are integrated with the two interrelated strands of Historical knowledge and understanding and Historical inquiry and skills. In the context of debates on national values, politicians called for greater attention to the facts of history (Bishop, 2006; Taylor, 2009). The Historical knowledge and understanding strand details history subject knowledge and is concerned with developing ‘historical understanding’ through seven historical concepts: evidence, continuity and change, cause and effect, significance, perspectives, empathy and contestability. The concepts are promoted in the curriculum as “integral to the development of historical understanding ... [and] key ideas involved in teaching students to think historically (ACARA, v8.2, 2016, p. 11). Historical skills is concerned with ‘the process of historical inquiry’ and promotes the five skills of chronology, terms and concepts; historical questions and research; analysis and use of sources; perspectives and interpretations; explanation and communication. The two strands are meant to be integrated with the Historical knowledge and understanding strand providing the context for the development of skills. The curriculum materials explicitly signpost that teachers focus on history content coupled with historical thinking, which is in itself a *process*. Developing historical consciousness or ‘historical understanding’ is integral to this endeavour.

The seven historical concepts discussed above are the foundation for understanding and critical to the way the *AC: History* is taught and assessed. Lee and Ashby (2000) argue that the distinction between substantive history as the content of history and second-order or procedural ideas about history “provide our understanding of history as a discipline or form of knowledge. They are not what history is “about,” but they shape the way we go about doing history” (p.199). These discipline-based ‘understandings’ of history are pivotal to the knowledge teachers need (Lee, 2006, p. 131); it privileges an approach to history education that emphasises an understanding of ‘the structure of the discipline’ (Schwab, 1978) and a strong focus on the evidential basis for history and source inquiry (Ashby, 2011; Lee, 2011; SCHP, 1973; Shemilt, 1980). Vansledright (2009) argues that the concepts and practices of historians are the “cognitive tools” (p. 434) that students need to make sense of the past. Indeed, Lee (2011) insists that students should acquire “an understanding of history as a way of seeing the world ... [which] ... involves an understanding of the *discipline* of history and the key ideas that make knowledge of the past possible” (p. 65). Counsell (2011) maintains the second order concepts such as cause, change and evidence are “intellectual categories essential to the practice of history” (p. 206). The aim is to promote ‘doing’ history in order to learn history.

### **Historical Understanding**

The question of what history teachers need to know to teach history and how that knowledge base can be understood has a common sense response – they need to know their subject and know how to teach it (Husbands, 2011). Arguably, this view does not necessarily include an understanding of ‘what is history’, the nature of history as a discipline or how disciplinary practices can be taught as part of school-based history. The *Shape Paper* (NCB, 2009) which informed the writing of the *AC: History* distinguishes between “historical understanding” and factual or memory-based understanding of the past which needs “negotiating between the familiar and the unfamiliar, and involves investigation, debate and reasoning about the past” (NCB, 2009, p. 5). Van Drie and van Boxtel (2008) discuss the differences between various ways to describe learning history, eg., historical literacy,

historical thinking, historical consciousness and historical reasoning. They propose a theoretical framework for historical reasoning based on their definition that historical reasoning is an activity where “a person organises information about the past in order to describe compare, and/or explain historical phenomena” (Van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008, p. 88). The conceptualisation of historical thinking in *AC: History* is drawn from the Canadian Benchmarks for Historical Thinking (Gilbert, 2011; Seixas, 2006) which are historical significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequence, historical perspectives, historical empathy and moral judgement. History knowledge is based on substantive concepts such as revolution, imperialism and religion that explore what happened and procedural concepts such as continuity and change, evidence and perspectives that help us to make sense of the past (NCB, 2009, p. 6). Curriculum developers in Australia saw these “concepts as the foundational ideas of the discipline” (Gilbert, 2011, p. 254) and a means to revitalise school history along international benchmarks for history education.

The need to reconceptualise what history to teach and how best to teach it is linked to ‘doing’ history through the process of historical inquiry (NCB, 2009). The meta-concepts or substantive concepts are specific to each topic, while the procedural concepts construct historical knowledge. However, Lévesque (2008) warns against “the simplistic dichotomy of content versus skills, as too often happens in school history. It is impossible for students to understand or make use of procedural knowledge if they have no knowledge of the substance of the past” (p. 30). He argues that school history has failed to promote historical thinking because it is focused on transmission of facts and ‘memory-history’ in the form of master narratives at the expense of understanding and appropriating the procedures that arise when doing history to investigate tensions and conflicting ideas. Wineburg (2001) argues that historical thinking is to examine the tension between what is familiar and what is strange, “to traverse the rugged terrain that lies between the poles of familiarity and distance from the past” (p. 5). In similar vein, Lévesque (2008) maintains that “To think historically is thus to understand how knowledge has been constructed and what it means” (p. 27). To do so, however, demands an understanding of history as a discipline and to consider what this might look like when translated into history as a school subject. From a practical point of view, Lee and Ashby (2000) argue that school students tend to quickly forget their school history, so rather than teaching for factual recall, what students really need are “frameworks of history they are likely to use, frameworks that can assimilate new knowledge but are revisable and provisional” (p. 216). This case study raises the question whether teachers unfamiliar with the disciplinary basis of the curriculum have engaged with this approach.

### **Historical Consciousness and the Intended/Enacted Curriculum**

The framework of ‘historical understanding’ and ‘historical consciousness’ that underpins the curriculum is critical to the way teachers are meant to implement it. The *AC: History* is underpinned by the reality that modern Australia is a multicultural society where family and community narratives are important in shaping students’ understanding of history. The *Shape Paper* argues that the study of history “is the means whereby individual and collective identities are formed and sustained” (section 2.2, NCB, 2009, p. 4) and schools are the agency “that shapes historical consciousness” (section 2.8, NCB, 2009, p.4). The interplay of ‘identity’ and ‘memory’ as part of the conceptualisation of history is critical here; clearly the approach to history embraces far more than factual knowledge.

To educate for ‘historical consciousness’ (that is, historical understanding or awareness that goes beyond the topic or event being studied) teachers create inquiry-based learning opportunities for students to develop an orientation to time that purposefully goes

back and forwards between the past and the present. Historical consciousness is rooted in the German phenomenological tradition where Jörn Rüsen's (1993) functional approach to narrating history is largely based on modes of historiographical historical thinking (Kölb & Konrad, 2015). Historical consciousness has been very influential as a key concept in history education in Germany since the 1970s, alongside 'historical literacy' (North America) and 'historical awareness' (UK). Ahonen (2005) argues that historical consciousness "implies a trans-generational mental orientation to time.... Moreover, historical consciousness means an interaction between making sense of the past and constructing expectations for the future" (p. 699). It describes a way of seeing the world, a type of historical literacy, or what in the UK is now termed the 'usable historical past' based on pictures of the past, rather than a single 'big story' of the past (Husbands, 2011; Lee, 2011).

Significantly, in teaching for historical consciousness, students develop a relational understanding of the past which helps them understand the present and envisage the future. Seixas (2012) argues that history education is pivotal to the shaping of historical consciousness, that is, we cannot escape our own "historical condition" in the way we think of the past or represent it. The formation and representation of individual and collective memory, however, is based on "the interpretation of texts ... as a dialogical interplay with the contexts in which they were produced" (Seixas, 2012, p. 867). Thus the history teacher creates powerful opportunities for students to work with artefacts or evidence from the past and provides that all-important knowledge of contexts. Teachers create the conditions to generate historical consciousness and their capacity to work with the second order or procedural historical concepts is critical to that process.

Given that historical consciousness is key to the intended curriculum, it therefore shapes the over-arching theoretical framework for this study. A second approach is comprised of frameworks for alignment of the intended and enacted curriculum (Porter, 2002; 2004) and history curriculum implementation (Dixon et al., 2015; Taylor, 2001). Porter (2004) distinguishes three types of curriculum to facilitate measurement of the alignment between them: intended, enacted and assessed curricula. The intended curriculum is a public statement of requirements for each subject, the enacted curriculum refers to the content of what is delivered in the classroom and the assessed curriculum refers to its measurement. In researching the implementation of SOSE, Taylor (2001) found significant gaps in relation to the stated and enacted curriculum, or what was intended. Confronted with the difficulties of implementation, teachers reverted to what they were comfortable with, which he termed the enacted curriculum. The alignment between intended and enacted curriculum is important to ascertain the way *AC: History* is being realised. These constructs are further illuminated in the *History Curriculum Implementation Analysis Framework* as intended, stated, enacted and realised curriculum (Dixon et al, 2015, p. 16 -17). This *Framework* describes the 'intended' curriculum as the explicit and implicit "political, administrative and managerial intentions" of the curriculum and the 'stated' curriculum aligns with Porter's (2004) 'intended' curriculum as what is stated in the public curriculum documents (Dixon et al, 2015, p. 17). The 'enacted' curriculum speaks to how the intended and stated curriculum is modified in practice and the 'realised' curriculum is defined as the ways the students encounter the curriculum, their learning outcomes and the impact on teachers' professional knowledge. Given the scope of this study, the intended and enacted constructs of curriculum implementation as defined below were employed:

- 1) *Intended curriculum*: concerns how middle year's teachers interpret the public statements in the *AC: History* and school-based curriculum decisions.
- 2) *Enacted curriculum*: concerns how curriculum is taught by middle years teachers at the classroom level as evidenced through interviews, focus groups, teaching observations and school-based assessment instruments.

## The Case Study

This instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) explores middle school teachers' approach to enacting the intended Year 8 *AC: History* in one Queensland secondary school. The case is defined as the 2012 Year 8 History program (Simons, 2009) explored through interviews with five teachers, teaching observations, two focus groups with teachers in 2012 and 2013 and summative assessment tasks. The study aimed to provide insight into the challenge of understanding and transforming discipline-based subject matter for teaching (Deng, 2007). All data gathering activities were conducted on the school premises. Approval for the study was given following ethical clearance through Queensland University of Technology and permission from the school principal (pseudonyms are used for the teachers and the school). While the findings cannot be generalised to other school contexts, the challenges to middle year's history teachers' disciplinary knowledge are revealed.

### School Context and Participants

The *AC: History* was introduced in Queensland state schools from 2012 with a view to full implementation including teaching, assessing and reporting from 2013. The case study school, Banks State High School (Banks SHS) was selected because of a school-based decision to implement History in 2012 following a school initiative to separate history from the existing Year 8 Humanities program. Banks SHS is a large, well-established co-educational state high school on the outskirts of Brisbane. A diverse student body attends the school from a predominantly low socio-economic area. The school incorporates an ICT focus into most aspects of teaching and is well-resourced with class sets of laptop computers available for student use and a recently renovated library.

The participants represented a range of teaching experiences, history expertise and years of service. In 2012, five Year 8 teachers were responsible for history, comprising the Head of the Social Sciences department (David) and four other teachers (Robyn, Cora, Lynette and Melissa). David has postgraduate qualifications and is a highly experienced Head of Social Science. Robyn has an honours degree in History and 10 years' experience at the school. Cora and Lynette both teach English and History with 13 years and 5 years experience respectively. Melissa has taught for 28 years at the school and has coordinated the History program for all year levels. Prior to the Curriculum to the Classroom (C2C) materials in 2013, these teachers had not received professional development on the new curriculum.

It is important to note that at the time, these teachers were unfamiliar with some content and had been used to teaching history as part of SOSE; similarly, Year 8 students were new to the school and had no experience of history as a discrete school subject. As the study was investigating teachers' approach to 'historical understanding', students were not interviewed. The participants knew I was a history teacher educator researching teachers' approach to the new curriculum. Their willingness to freely share their experiences in a time of curriculum transition is acknowledged.

### Methodology and Data Gathering

Each teacher participated in a one hour, semi-structured individual interview and was observed teaching a Year 8 class in May-June, 2012. The teachers had been teaching three new history units to Year 8 students for the whole of first semester and reflected on recent teaching experiences. A focus group meeting was held in Term 3, 2012, when the teachers were teaching the same units to a different cohort of Year 8 students. A second focus group

meeting was held with the group a year later in Term 2, 2013, when the teachers were implementing the Year 9 *AC: History*. The focus groups generated interaction between the teachers and elucidated the teachers' overall understanding and approach. In addition to interview and focus group data, the school generously provided copies of the assessment tasks that were used in Year 8 History in 2012 and Year 9 History in 2013. These varied data sources proved invaluable to create a composite picture of the introduction of *AC: History* and evidence of teachers' thinking.

During the individual interview, teachers were asked questions such as: "What part have you played in preparing to introduce the Australian Curriculum in History in your school", "What strategies do you use to teach a history topic in Year 8 or Year 9?", "In your view, how important is it to emphasise the teaching of facts, names and dates when teaching history?" and "What do you think of when thinking about history as a discipline? What does it mean to you?"

The first focus group interview questions reflected that teachers were repeating the units, so the questions reflected the broader purpose of history education in the school. Questions included: "This term you are teaching the curriculum for the second time, how different is it?", "What are the opportunities for making links between history and other subjects?", and "Do you think that ACARA History is an opportunity to revitalise History for all students?" The second focus group held a year later had a Year 9 focus: "What is your approach to teaching history in Year 9 – and is it any different to Year 8?", "What strategies do you use to teach a history topic in Year 9 compared to Year 8" and "What are some challenges for you, personally, when teaching the Australian Curriculum?"

Four of the interviews and the first focus group comprising these interviewees were audio-recorded and transcribed. One of the participants did not wish to be audio-recorded, so detailed notes were taken during her interviews. As she participated in the second focus group meeting, notes were taken during this meeting and in class observations. Each data set was named for the interviewee (eg., Cora) and focus group (eg., Focus group 1). References to data are denoted by name and page reference to the transcript, eg., Cora, p. 3. Following inductive thematic analysis, the data was categorised into five themes: planning, enthusiasm, procedural and substantive concepts, research skills, and historical consciousness. The data in each category below is discussed in relation to 'historical understanding'.

## **Data Analysis**

### **Planning**

Each of the teachers had been invited to introduce History in Year 8 on the recommendation of the Head. The school had offered history, geography and English as a composite Humanities subject in Year 8. According to David (p. 7), as the new curriculum advocates discrete school subjects, the Year 8 curriculum was to be revitalised by separating each of these subjects. English would be taught through the year, while students would take a semester of History and a semester of Geography in Year 8. In line with ACARA guidelines, from Year 9 onwards, History would remain compulsory while Geography would become an elective.

2012 was considered a year to transition to the new requirements, but in effect, materials for the Overview and three history units on Medieval Europe, Shogunate Japan and the Aztecs were written and existing assessment tasks were adapted or new assessment was written. The teachers were surveyed as to which depth studies they wanted to teach. Robyn was very pleased with the choice of Shogunate Japan and the Middle Ages and David made the decision to teach the Spanish Conquest. "So I was really happy with those choices

because that worked in well with things that I thought the students would be interested in” (Robyn, p. 7). David was concerned that the topics chosen were “like death and mayhem, it’s all you know, it’s Shogunate Japan and it’s the Spanish in the Americas, and then it’s the Middle Ages...” and that it favoured the interests of boys rather than girls: “[b]ut we did make the choices based upon our sense of continuity as well as thinking also about the resources we had in the school” (David, p.10). Topic choices were affirmed when the Queensland Studies Authority published unit exemplars on the same topics later that year.

### **Enthusiasm**

At this early stage, the teachers and Year 8 students alike had enormous interest and enthusiasm for teaching the new curriculum. Cora reported, “Yeah, I think a few of us were just excited to get back into history for a start, because we hadn’t .... We haven’t had it for years, so just to have Year 8 History was exciting...” (Cora, p. 4).

Robyn, who developed a number of teaching resources and assessment tasks, emphasised that “our kids love the topics we picked” (Robyn, p. 11). She was happy with the teaching resources she had already developed for the history units “because they’re geared to a particular type of class” (p. 11). Robyn was particularly proud of her Year 8s who loved coming to class, brimming with excitement. The early enthusiasm for the new curriculum by students and staff alike seemed to be because the Year 8 topics were new and engaging and because history was a new school subject.

However, by the time the same Year 8 units were taught for the second time in the introductory year, Robyn reflected in the focus group, “I still love the curriculum but I’ve had a terrible time with my class....Their behaviour is really bad....we like the programme, we’ve taught it and we enjoy it, but we’ve got a very different response from the students this time” (Focus group 1, p. 4). Robyn’s passion for history remained undiminished and her enthusiasm was supported by Cora who emphasised: “...we did a lot more stuff on blood and guts and fighting and anything the boys would be interested in” (Focus group 1, p.17).

Teachers’ enthusiasm for teaching Year 9 History in 2013 was similar, tempered somewhat by the reality of an unruly student body and Year 9 topics which students perceived to be boring. For example, Melissa reported students’ comments, “Are we only doing wars?” and noted she “was passionate about teaching history; the problem is the kids” (Focus group 2, p. 2). Teachers relished the chance to teach new material and indulge their passion for history.

### **Procedural and Substantive Concepts**

Despite the interest in re-engaging with history after many years of SOSE, at this early stage the case study teachers were not aware of and seemed uninformed about the procedural concepts that are the foundation of the curriculum.

Lynette struggled with the amount and scope of the content and had realised that she did need to consider concepts rather than factual knowledge: “Maybe [we] need to start looking at it as what is the main idea of Shogunate Japan. Why am I looking at it, not just for the facts, but why, what’s the main idea here that I want them to understand ....” (p. 20). Although she was aware that concepts would help organise her work, she struggled with “significance”: “Let’s look at more of the concept of why that was so important. So yes, maybe it’s just changing our focus as well ... it was very new for me, Shogunate Japan” and hoped that the second or third time she taught the units the “the concept or the idea that I’m teaching” would become clear (Lynette, p. 21).

Robyn did not refer to significance as a concept, rephrasing it as “logical conclusions” which she felt the students had difficulty with. Her understanding of substantive concepts was led by the students who “consistently came up with the fact that these people [Vikings, Spanish in Cuba] are fighting over land and I was amazed that they had come to this conclusion” (Robyn, p. 23). She maintained that this was an unintended outcome, one she had not thought of herself, which made teaching the unit easier “because all of a sudden they’ve got this really good understanding that battles through history have been caused because of people wanting another person’s land” (Robyn, p. 24). While Robyn could have harnessed this substantive understanding to the procedural concept of cause and effect, she did not explicitly refer to it.

### Research Skills

One of the aims of the 7-10 AC: *History* is to develop knowledge through depth-studies. To this end, the teachers referred to the procedural concepts of using sources and evidence to teach Year 8 and 9 History within the constraints of the school timetable, though Cora (p. 6) questioned whether a depth study was possible in 5 weeks. The lack of time meant that there was insufficient opportunity to teach research skills, use primary sources and develop essay writing. In Year 8 teachers emphasised writing a research-based paragraph and in Year 9 they taught students how to write a history essay (Focus group 2, p. 2). However, despite this general expectation, David explained that according to the curriculum, Year 8 students were expected to write history essays under exam conditions (Focus group 1, p. 23).

Considering the expectations of middle year’s students, Cora felt that her year 10 students had a poor grasp of research procedures, so she wanted it taught in Year 8 so they would be better prepared. “I mean I certainly taught skills to the 8s so I taught them how to write a paragraph and I taught them how to include a quote, taught them how to do a little bit of research in the Spanish unit. Apart from that it’s mainly content I think” (Cora, p. 11). She scaffolded the year 8 students’ approach to history research by providing them with material on worksheets, setting up their research record to facilitate and support the research process and showing them where to locate their research questions: “so I constructed the questions for them, gave them all of the research and then it was a case of organising it, I guess, together” (Cora, p. 12). She perceived that source-based teaching was somehow different and outside the scope of Year 8 History, but an important skill for the students to learn.

However, Cora was ambivalent about the extensive use of artefacts and sources because students found it boring, had difficulty connecting with primary source materials and preferred to hear the stories in history:

*I’ve always been interested in history because it is a story and hearing about people and you can read that to a certain extent but I don’t know looking at a pottery statue...Most of the kids aren’t interested in that either, and they find it hard to connect with something like that.... (Cora, p. 18).*

While she taught her students to use historical sources as part of their research, she preferred the narrative approach. In contrast, David was vehemently opposed, emphasising that History had to be based on evidence: “It means that it has to be based upon the analysis of primary sources...If it’s not, it’s a story and it’s English and I don’t want to know about it” (David, p. 31). He emphasised that all history teaching must privilege research based on primary sources. “If you’d asked me this 5 years ago I would have said no. Everybody’s just teaching straight from the text book, or teaching content, or teaching skills, not, you know, it’s just the story of history” (David, p. 32). He maintained that while private schools had always had a research approach, state schools had only recently shifted to this pedagogy.

### Historical Consciousness

The case study teachers' awareness of the historical concepts that engender historical consciousness was inconsistent. With the exception of David who was familiar with the curriculum, the others did not refer to the concepts of contestability, significance, perspectives or empathy, even though they may have alluded to these concepts implicitly in their practice. David considered that the analysis of sources also facilitated teaching other procedural concepts such as empathy and perspectives:

*So when you see a [print] of some Shogun in Japan or people getting speared or two clans fighting, you'll talk to the kids about - well these are two different family clans, how do you think they felt about fighting as a family. You can do all that sort of stuff through those source analyses (David, p. 33).*

In his view, history provided students with the opportunity to develop their capacity for empathy related to the context they were learning: "I don't know if we teach empathy but we allow empathy to be shown" (David, p. 33). He valued the emphasis on historiography and the contestability of historical interpretation as a focus in the new curriculum and new ways to teach history. He attributed this to the way new text books were being written to incorporate a variety of primary source materials (David, p. 34).

In contrast to David's enthusiasm for procedural concepts to be taught through the content, Robyn was adamant that history was not just about teaching history skills: "...I think some people think of it as skills or that, okay if we teach this they will have these skills, and I don't think of it as that. I think of it as wanting to expose them to ideas" (Robyn, p. 27). In Robyn's view, the skills were separate to the idea that history was about who we are as a society and a culture: "I don't think of history as something that's a skill, I think of history as like everything. It's everything the world used to be and what we are is going to be history in the future..." (Robyn, p. 26).

Here Robyn demonstrates an awareness of 'historical consciousness' as the sweep of history and that teaching for this type of understanding was a valuable and worthwhile approach to history education. Although she did not refer to the concepts of perspectives, empathy or significance, she explained exploring different perspectives was central to her practice: "So I've sort of trained my class that whenever we look at a new person we look at their perspective and their world and their life and what it's like to be that person" (Robyn, p. 13). These practices illustrate sophisticated ways of generating historical understanding and consciousness. Similarly, David alluded to source-based teaching, empathy and perspectives which he framed as valued history teaching strategies rather than realising the goal of historical understanding.

When participating in the focus group a year later, however, these teachers acknowledged that the C2C teaching materials which emphasised historical analysis had impacted their teaching practice. "The biggest difference between Year 8 and Year 9 is [we] are now focusing on skills. [It] is far more explicit" (Focus group 2, 2013, p. 1) They perceived that the history skills had greater value to the students than in Year 8, mainly because the assessment tasks were assessing the skills, while the Year 8 assessment tasks had been mostly about factual recall and knowing the content. This professional support had impacted the enactment of the intended curriculum although it was framed in terms of skills rather than historical understanding.

## Discussion

The teachers in the study implemented the new curriculum with the intention of revitalising History at their school and they generously shared their experiences with the researcher. They were juggling issues that typically impact teaching including time, student behaviour, students' prior knowledge and enthusiasm. Their grasp of history pedagogy and the tenets of history education, including the role of factual recall and content-based teaching, the skills associated with research and writing school history, and knowledge of historical concepts that are central to 'doing' history as opposed to 'learning history' was variable. Due to unfamiliarity with the topics, some also struggled to define the substantive concepts in their units.

There is some confusion as to what some of these terms might mean for history teachers and some may hold implicit rather than explicit understanding of the historical concepts. Husbands, Kitson and Pendry (2003) argue there is no professional consensus on the language of history teachers or on language used in research in history education. Teachers often refer to concepts which others consider to be skills, and it is acknowledged that terms such 'substantive and procedural', 'first order and second order concepts and 'knowing that and knowing how' describe similar ideas about history education in different ways (Husbands et al., 2003, p. 142). Indeed, Counsell (2011) comments that "history's second-order concepts exist in no tablets of stone" (p. 207), and advises teachers to engage with the concepts and debate how to use them.

In this case study, with the exception of the Head of Social Science, none of the other teachers appeared to be aware that the foundational historical concepts aimed to develop 'historical understanding'. Indeed the notion of historical understanding was never mentioned. Rather, teachers were anxious to ensure the students widened their knowledge of the world and be better informed. In Year 8, history was taught to develop an appreciation of the past and the present, and to teach research skills that would enhance learning in other subject areas such as English and Senior History. Surprisingly, although 'historical consciousness' was not mentioned, two of the participants showed incipient awareness of it. That teachers were not consistently teaching to develop historical understanding is concerning.

It should be noted that only two of the five case study teachers were considered specialist History teachers. To varying degrees they were keen and passionate about teaching history but they had only recently switched to teaching Year 8 History and in some cases were still teaching Year 9 SOSE. In view of the fact that they were undertaking their first steps with a new curriculum, their awareness of what was required for history pedagogy was based on previous practice and memories of how they were taught history. For example, Cora noted that in 'Year 8 probably, I might give them the first names and dates. I don't teach it the same way I was taught, where we would memorise all of that...' (Cora, p. 15). She considered that content knowledge rather than skills should be prioritised in year 8 compared to the reverse in Year 10 (Cora, p.13).

At this early stage of implementation, the case study teachers were not familiar with the general capabilities and cross-curriculum priorities of the national curriculum, although their teaching practice indicated their role in history education. There were passing references to literacy (paragraph writing and history essays), numeracy (mapping and timelines) and use of ICT in research. Reference to intercultural understanding and ethical behaviour was implied when teaching the Crusades and the conflict between Islam and Christianity and between the Spaniards ("really nasty") and the Aztecs (Focus group 2, p. 3). Teachers used stereotyping as a way to engage their students and to present "perspectives on who the goodies and baddies are" (Focus group 2, p.3). Although some may deplore this approach, it

engaged students with different ways of thinking. Only one teacher briefly referred to the cross-curriculum priority of Indigenous perspectives when teaching the Spanish conquest of the Americas.

Unless teachers of all year levels, both primary and secondary, consciously undertake to engage with the procedural concepts that underpin the *AC: History*, the goal of developing a deep and nuanced understanding of history will remain elusive. In discussing what history teachers know, Husbands et al. (2003) maintain that teachers in their UK study referred to the substance or content of history through a procedural lens. That is indeed the aim in Australia, but this case study shows that teachers were keen to keep the content and skills separate. They argued that in the middle years, the goal of history education was to tell the story, to engage students in the passion and colour of history, to teach research and writing skills that would assist in future education and to excite the historical imagination through attention to the facts, ready recall and the blood and guts of history. To some extent, these teachers promoted empathy which “relies on a disciplined imagination” (ACARA, v8.2, 2016, p. 12). However, until history education is harnessed to historical understanding through judicious emphasis on concepts it is unlikely that students will emerge with much more than an intuitive and memory-based understandings of the past.

## Conclusion

To what extent will the *AC: History* rejuvenate the teaching of history in Australia? This case study questions whether history teachers are aware of the curriculum aim of ‘historical understanding’ and the role of concepts to develop discipline-based understandings of history. The study also highlights teachers’ thinking and professional practice as they negotiate the transition from integration to discipline-based history education. In some middle school classrooms where teachers are not necessarily qualified or experienced in history, the ‘enacted’ curriculum may reflect entrenched and traditional approaches to history education which limit realisation of the ‘intended’ curriculum. The move towards ‘doing’ history rather than ‘learning’ history has been central to history education for the last forty years, yet the fascination with facts and memory-based history teaching remains pervasive.

With the exception of research skills and use of evidence and sources, middle school history teachers may be unaware of the value of ‘doing’ history in middle school; instead, they may prioritise factual understanding and recall as a way to engage their students. Despite the teachers’ passion for history, the case study indicated a limited appreciation that teaching content through concepts such as continuity and change, empathy, contestability and significance could engender ‘historical understanding’ of the past and the human condition. Teachers also need a range of strategies to teach for historical understanding; indeed, relying on ‘doing sources’ at the expense of inquiry-based learning risks alienating some students (Counsell, 2011; Husbands et al., 2003). In this study, the intended curriculum was not consistently enacted in relation to generating ‘historical consciousness’ of the past because teachers’ wider knowledge of the disciplinary-basis of the curriculum was patchy.

The case study illustrates the considerable challenges of understanding and transforming history disciplinary knowledge for teaching. Accordingly, it is important to prioritise the nature of history as a discipline in Humanities teacher education. The goal of historical understanding is well within the scope of all students and beginning teachers should be aware that ‘doing history’ does not come at the expense of ‘knowing history’. The politicisation of history education has highlighted factual knowledge and dominant versions of Australian history to promote national identity and social cohesion. However, teaching for a ‘deep understanding’ of the past means that students will both acquire knowledge of the

past and the ability to critically examine it. Undeniably, factual knowledge is important; yet relying on memory-based approaches has limited value. As such, historical consciousness is in the hands of history teachers (Taylor, 2006).

Teachers' perceptions of history are integral to their teaching practice and further research is needed into pre-service teachers' conceptions of history and to introduce them afresh to history as a discipline. Attention to the frameworks for historical reasoning and consciousness (Seixas, 2006; 2012; Van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008) in teacher education will give pre-service teachers a powerful way to make sense of the world, one they can use to teach their own students. In-service teachers would also benefit by professional development on disciplinary knowledge in *AC: History*, especially the focus on concepts. Historical consciousness is likely to remain in the theoretical domain unless teachers knowingly prioritise concepts and historical inquiry to develop 'historical thinking' and critical understandings of the past.

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