

Teaching the Discipline of History in an Age of Standards

Jennifer Clark · Adele Nye
Editors

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 Springer

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Don't rail against the limits ... Discover them, play with them, extend them.

—Griffiths quotes Denning,

The Art of Time Travel, 2016, p. 123.

*Naturally for Andrew and Hannah who have
taught me much already.
For my parents, Elva and Bill Nye.*

Foreword

Into the Fray

Imagine this, please, for a new world around the corner
—Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Nationalism and the Imagination*, pp. 56–7.

History is not a discipline of agreement. Understandings of the past are advanced, unravelled, repositioned and even retracted, leaving us with the sense that being an historian or a history teacher means accepting that the ground is not stable. This makes us a particularly frustrating group of people to deal with if you just want to set things straight for a movie, a news article or a civics framework. In some contexts, this is an admirable virtue, a form of courage that expresses uncomfortable truths to remind people not to forget, silence or even harm others. In others, this is a form of stubbornness that means that we miss the benefits of large-scale cooperation in the name of helping more students to see the benefits of a discipline that does so much to help us think about what the world has been, is and might be.

Yet our orneriness has limits. For all our bluster, we are in remarkable agreement about some pretty basic things. Two stand out in the context of this book. The first is the assumption that the knowing and desired entanglement of history and politics is something that happens in the Global South, development or subaltern contexts. The fray is somewhere else. It's for Gayatri Spivak to argue for the imagination to unravel national identities in favour of a world in which new forms of identity are brokered and questioned. The subaltern is India's proud invention for the discipline of history, and it owns it. It's for Tuning Latin America to suggest that all graduating history students recognise, contribute to and participate in sociocultural activities, and understand the social role of the historian.¹ And yet wherever we are, there are individuals and groups that struggle for airplay in histories. I am not simply referring to the lobby groups that come with every

¹ Tuning Latin America (2011–13). Competencies for the Discipline of History. <http://tuning.unideusto.org/tuningal/index.php?option=content&task=view&id=232&Itemid=261>. Accessed 1 Oct 2017.

exercise in reforming or recasting a history curriculum. My comment refers to those whom we are blind to, or those whom we think we can acknowledge without really changing what we customarily do. One of the better-known examples is the push to move from writing women's history for women, or to simply adding some women into histories, to thinking about how the ways that writing, showing and teaching history might change if we take the experiences of women seriously. Another example are Indigenous histories, which still too often sit at chapter one—'pre-history'—in the history curriculum. The way that Australian Indigenous peoples think about events as taking place, over taking time, is world changing, but we just haven't really come to grips with it yet.

This is not an argument for the dissolution of the discipline of history and of history teaching into a billion identity fragments that make any discussion about standards impossible. It is simply an invitation for us to be more generous in our acknowledgement of others, because I don't see history as a 'nice to have'. Acknowledging others, living or dead, is the cornerstone of ethics.

Acknowledgement is not just a content conversation, and this brings me to the second thing that we tend to take for granted: students and teachers can demonstrate mastery of the discipline of history in a wider group of ways than we might otherwise acknowledge. We are the document exercise discipline, the essay discipline, the short answer and political cartoon stimulus discipline. We make the leap from learning outcomes about the critical examination of sources and effective communication to analysing and generating writing. And yet we know, for example, that oral culture is the engine room of Maori culture, as well as for many other cultures around the world. We sometimes fall prey to the belief that longer essays are better, and the longer the bibliography, the better the work, knowing full well how much good or havoc a museum label or a tweet can unleash. When students tell you that they believe you see the footnotes as more important than the argument in a history, then you know you have some work to do.

We do have work to do. The leap from general learning outcomes to specific kinds of assessment does not have to be made. The leap from historiography that bristles with political anger to the assumption that this is playing out somewhere else in the world does not have to be made. They do not have to be made because history teachers have far more opportunity to be creative, challenging and generous towards students than the dour appraisals of our discipline might suggest. We don't have to be that stereotype that gets fractious about a detail whilst missing the storm all around them. We can love the details and the big picture, and recognise that any discussion about standards exists at such a level of generality that there is plenty of room for the recognition of difference. This is why the territory of this book is so important. There is a new world out there, as Spivak reminds us, just waiting to be imagined.

Australia

Marnie Hughes-Warrington
Australian National University

Acknowledgements

The production of any book attracts huge intellectual and personal debts, and this one has attracted more than most. Writing a book on history teaching inevitably has caused us to reflect on and draw from our experience as students of wonderful history teachers over many years. The best teachers are those who light a spark of enquiry or who recognise in us something we don't even see in ourselves. We are grateful for the experience of teachers such as these. We are interested in teaching partly because we had teachers who made our time as students so enjoyable and who encouraged us to think that the past was worth studying as an exciting intellectual place to spend our time. Bob Hind and Richard Waterhouse at the University of Sydney and Alan Atkinson from the University of New England were important in this regard. They infused the classes they taught with their own humanity. Completely different in approach, they brought history alive to us in their own way.

Once we started to work in the field of teaching and learning, we immediately developed a new debt to colleagues who have been so generous in their willingness to share expertise and to welcome us into a warm community. One day our colleague David Kent, himself a splendid teaching role model, came down the corridor recommending a new book by an English historian called Alan Booth. That was an introduction to the insights of a great exponent of reflective practice in the teaching of history. It is not surprising that Alan's most recent work is about the passion of history teachers as he exemplifies his own philosophy in this regard. Alan has been a great friend to us in the pursuit of this project.

We remember fondly sitting in the Free House in Berkeley one afternoon with Leah Shopkow discussing with her the possibility of such a book as this. We were surprised and delighted that she thought it was a good idea. But Leah is like that, always supportive, always encouraging, always helpful. That's why she is both a great teacher and colleague. We knew that there was a community of scholars out there who were ready to join in: 'I won't let you down' wrote Adrian Jones as he scrambled to fit in all his commitments. His comment could have been duplicated many times over as chapters came in from very busy people juggling many projects

at once. But it's like that when we are talking about teaching. The community of historians interested in teaching is incredibly generous. We want to thank all of those who contributed to this volume with such commitment and insight.

Last but not least, we want to thank our immediate colleagues at the University of Adelaide and the University of New England who have taught us much about what is good teaching in their own inimitable ways. All teach with dignity, grace, good humour and passion. What more can you ask?

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