

Historical thinking for history teachers: a new approach to engaging students and developing historical consciousness

Edited by Tim Allender, Anna Clark and Robert Parkes

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Historical Thinking for History Teachers is an edited volume of recent research and commentary focused on history teaching in Australia. It is a remarkably diverse compilation that includes chapters covering issues from digital historical literacies to the formation of teaching identities to the use of drama as a vehicle for historical thinking. There are chapters promoting inquiry approaches to history assessment and others promoting intelligent use of direct instruction. In short, this is an extremely rich collection offering much of theoretical and practical value.

This book is, as the editors correctly point out, “long overdue” (p. xx), and it is refreshing to see a volume providing Australian insight and commentary on many ideas that have become widely popular in the United States, Canada, Germany and beyond. The international historical thinking literature has stimulated discussion and practice among Australian history teachers for many years, but we have lacked volumes like this that offer perspectives from our own context and examples from our own curricula.

The chapters compiled for this book also contribute a powerful body of work demonstrating that research about historical thinking in Australia is rich, diverse and extremely useful. It makes a powerful case that the Australian history teaching community is not just a recipient of global wisdom but includes vibrant, active and discerning thinkers. If nothing else, this should encourage those in our disciplinary community that we are among a strong tradition with a very bright future indeed.

One particularly exciting aspect of the inclusive approach taken by the editors of *Historical Thinking for History Teachers* is that emerging scholars are well-represented. For example, Claire Golledge’s chapter (chapter 11, pp. 145–56) on social history in the classroom offers valuable thinking on how to bring history to life with perspectives “from below”. In addition, James Goulding’s chapter (chapter 17, pp. 231–44), based on his recent PhD research, explores the use of websites to develop historical thinking representing some of the new frontier in research about historical thinking. Both chapters include deeply practical advice for teachers of secondary history.

Beyond these important contributions are chapters by more established researchers and educators. These too are often highly practical, offering a distillation of the author’s experience. Craig Barker’s chapter (chapter 19, pp. 260–75) on the place of museums in broader history education offers powerful arguments to move beyond text, film and web to explore history in more tactile and public ways. Paul Kiem’s chapter (chapter 9, pp. 117–28) makes a strong case for history educators to resist more simplistic calls to promote generic skills over deep knowledge as we move further into the 21st century where edu-slogans can too easily stand in for deep thinking about curriculum. Stuart MacIntyre’s chapter (chapter 2, pp. 18–30) provides useful context for the Australian curriculum and a helpful (though at



times frustrating) explanation for how the “good intentions” that lay behind it were “imperfectly realised” (p. 28).

From the perspective of someone who is both a middle-career educator and involved in training pre-service history teachers, I did wonder whether this book was best pitched at beginning and early career teachers as the editors claim in their introduction (p. xx). There are many practical insights of great value for this audience but there is also a lot of abstraction. Much of this, I would argue, is more likely to benefit those with a stronger experience-base to draw from as they work through the chapters.

That said, there were three chapters that immediately stood out to me as highly beneficial for beginning history teachers. The first was Anna Clarke’s chapter (chapter 4, pp. 47–59) on historical practice and disciplinary method, which provides a succinct introduction to some of the “anxieties” that have become central to discussions about history education in Australia. The second was Robert Parkes’ chapter (chapter 6, pp. 72–88) offering some reflections on the various debates all history teachers will need to navigate in their first few years. The context he provides for common controversies and points of tension would benefit most beginning history teachers. The third was Nicole Mockler’s chapter (chapter 23, pp. 323–36) on navigating professional identity as an early career teacher. Professional identity can, in my view, be easily overlooked as an explicit aspect of teacher preparation in some pre-service programmes but it has real potential for helping early career professionals find their place within a complex political and cultural profession.

As I read *Historical Thinking for History Teachers* I also found myself readjusting my expectations of the book. Upon reflection, I think this was the result of seeing the work advertised in advance of receiving a copy for review. The subtitle of the book is “A new approach to engaging students and developing historical consciousness”. And yet, the book does not reflect “an approach” at all, rather it incorporates many different approaches. This is not a criticism of the diversity included in the book but a more modest question about how the work has been branded.

Historical Thinking for History Teachers provides a strong and context-specific research foundation for history teachers in Australia. On the whole, it is well-written, insightful and, in many parts, inspirational. This is a book that should be on the shelves of school history and university education departments around the country and I can only hope that it is updated as research into historical thinking in Australia inevitably evolves.

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