

**THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OF
AUSTRALIA**

Report by Jennifer Lawless

2009 Churchill Fellow

**The Northern Districts Education Centre (Sydney) Churchill
Fellowship to study best practice in the teaching of Primary School
History.**

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Signed : Jennifer Lawless

Dated : 25 March 2010

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INTRODUCTION

I have loved the study of History since primary school, transported to the ancient world through historical fiction and a teacher who narrated thrilling historical tales. I have been involved with the teaching of history in both schools and universities and in the development of History curriculum in NSW for over 35 years and still find it endlessly fascinating and challenging.

In May 2008 a Framing Paper was released by the National Curriculum Board (now Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority - ACARA) to guide the structure and content of a national curriculum in History. For the first time in Australia, History is to be introduced into the Primary curriculum as a distinct subject. Currently all States in Australia teach an integrated social studies curriculum with only a strand of History, currently termed *Change and Continuity* in NSW. This will involve a totally different approach to teaching and learning History in primary, impacting on the need for professional development, changes in teacher education courses and the development of exciting and engaging resources. The Churchill Fellowship has given me the opportunity to meet with leaders in the field of Primary History teaching including academics, curriculum designers, museum educators and to observe dedicated classroom teachers.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the Churchill Trust for providing me with the Northern Districts Education Centre Churchill Fellowship. It has enabled me to experience the unique opportunity of discussion with leaders in the field, forging professional relationships and networks, observing best practice in the classroom, museums and university theatres to inform my future curriculum work in Primary History.

I would like to thank Professor Peter Seixas and Dr Penney Clark of the University of British Columbia, Vancouver, Professor Ros Ashby, Institute of Education, London University, Dr Robert Guyver, Plymouth University, Hugh Moore, Sue Temple and Professor Hilary Cooper, University of Cumbria for their insights and hospitality; Dr Joyce Henderson of *Learning and Teaching*, Scotland and the education staff at the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, British Museum, Imperial War Museum, Winchester Museum, *Search for History*, Gosport, Bath Roman Museum and the National Museum of Scotland and the teachers and students who welcomed me into their classrooms. Finally, I would like to thank Carol Taylor and Paul Hewitt of the NSW Board of Studies for their encouragement in applying for the Fellowship.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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The Northern Districts Education Centre (Sydney) Churchill Fellowship to study best practice in the teaching of Primary School History – in Canada, Britain and Scotland.

Highlights:

- Meetings with Professor Peter Seixas and Dr Penney Clark, University of British Columbia, Professor Ros Ashby, University of London, Dr Robert Guyver, Plymouth University, Hugh Moore, Sue Temple and Professor Hilary Cooper of Cumbria University, Dr Joyce Henderson, *Learning and Teaching*, Scotland.
- Observing Primary classes in engaging lessons at the British Museum, Imperial War Museum and local schools
- Attending a professional development meeting of primary teachers in Carlisle Castle examining original documents from the time of Elizabeth I
- Engaging discussions with Museum Educators including Jill Baird, Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver, Richard Woff, British Museum, Helena Stride and Rosie Fuller, Imperial War Museum, Jane Masters, National Museum of Scotland

Recommendations:

- Endorsement of the Federal Government's commitment to the teaching of History as a discrete discipline in Primary schools
- Provision of substantial Government funding for professional development for current primary teachers in historical content and methodology and financial support to state professional associations for this purpose
- Introduction of specific History courses for both content acquisition and specific History teaching methodology for Primary pre-service training and establish History specialists in each Primary school
- Funding for the development of engaging teaching/learning resources to support the implementation of Primary History throughout Australia through State curriculum authorities
- Allow sufficient implementation time to allow for retraining and resource development.

Dissemination:

- An abridged version of this report will be forwarded to the Prime Minister, the Federal Minister for Education and all State Education Ministers
- The report and suggested amendments to the National Primary History curriculum will be sent to the Australian Curriculum, Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA)
- An article outlining the methodologies for best practice in Primary teaching of History will be submitted to the History Teachers Association of NSW Journal for publication.
- A key address and workshop will be presented at the 2010 History Teachers Association of Australia National Conference, Sydney in July of this year and again at a professional development of the History Teachers Association in both Armidale and Sydney and a teacher conference in Adelaide in May 2010
- Discussions have begun with universities including the University of New England to develop an online course for the introduction of courses in teaching History for Primary teachers.
- Teaching material and student work samples to be developed and published on the NSW Board of Studies website after publication of the National curriculum
- Depending on interest and funding, developing a national forum on the teaching of Primary History for teachers, university History educators and museum educators in 2011
- Continued contact with overseas networks now established to ensure Australia keeps up to date with the most current research and best practice in Primary History teaching.

PROGRAMME

7 January to 15 January – Vancouver, Canada

- Discussions with Professor Peter Seixas, Director of the Centre for the Study of Historical Consciousness and Dr Penney Clark, Director of the History Education Network, University of British Columbia
- Discussion with staff and observation of classes at the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver and the Museum of Vancouver
- Observation of several Vancouver classes of Primary History.

16 January to 5 February – Britain

- discussions with Professor Ros Ashby and Jonathan Howson at the Institute of Education, London
University
- discussion with Richard Woff, Head of School Education, British Museum and Helena Stride, Imperial War Museum.
- observations of classes at the British Museum and Imperial War Museum conducted by Rosie Fuller
- observation of students in the Winchester Museum dealing with artifacts
- discussion of programs and resources at *Search for History*, Gosport with Janet Wildman
- discussions with Dr Robert Guyver, University of Plymouth concerning implementation of a national curriculum
- observation of student groups at the Roman Bath Museum, Bath
- discussions and student observations at the University of Cumbria, with Hugh Moore, Lancaster Campus, Sue Temple and Professor Hilary Cooper at Carlisle Campus.
- observation and discussion with Primary teachers at a professional development evening at Carlisle Castle
- observation of teaching program and resources at Hadrian's Wall.

7 February to 13 February – Scotland

- discussions on Primary History syllabus development with Dr Joyce Henderson, *Learning and Teaching*, Glasgow
- discussion of teaching programs for primary at the National Museum of Scotland with Jane Masters.

MAIN BODY

Current State of Primary School History in Australia

Since coming to power in 2007, the current Federal Government has implemented a revision of education in Australia with the introduction of a National curriculum, commencing with the subjects English, Maths, Science and History.

The study of History in schools across Australia has been inconsistent. NSW has had a mandatory secondary History syllabus since 1992. Victoria introduced History as a discrete subject in 2007. Other states and territories have taught an integrated Social Studies curriculum that has incorporated History as a strand, generally referred to as *Studies of Society and Its Environment* (SOSE). In all States and territories, Primary History has been a strand of Human Society and its Environment (HSIE)/SOSE, including NSW with its current syllabus published in 1998. This approach generally does not encourage the teaching of distinct understandings and skills that define History as a field of study.

Most primary HSIE/SOSE syllabuses introduce the study of History as one strand of four, such as in NSW, termed *Change and Continuity*. The Rationale of the current NSW Primary HSIE syllabus is rather vague in relation to History and emphasises that History is only a part of the total curriculum: 'it provides a knowledge base for students to gain understandings about change and continuity, cultures, environments and social systems and structures ... The focus in the K-6 syllabus on events and people in Australia's history up until Federation, for example, provides a basis for learning about people, events and consequences until present times ...'.¹ The objective in relation to the *Change and Continuity* strand provides further explanation: 'By studying change and continuity, students should develop historical knowledge and understandings about their heritage and the past, and how these have influenced the present and may influence the future'.² Though the syllabus refers to specific skills concerning sources, they tend to become lost in the sheer volume of syllabus content. Children often do not make the connection between HSIE, *Change and Continuity* and History. I am yet to discover a child who has come home excited about what they learnt in *Change and Continuity*!

¹ NSW Board of Studies, Human Society and Its Environment K-6 Syllabus, 1998, p. 7.

² NSW Board of Studies, Human Society and its Environment K-6 Syllabus, 1998, p. 8.

In 2008 the Federal Government called for the creation of a body to oversee the development of National Curriculum with a set of content and achievement standards to commence implementation by states from 2011. This body was the National Curriculum Board (NCB), later to become the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Authority (ACARA). Led by historian Professor Stuart Macintyre, a small group produced a framework to guide the approach for a national curriculum in History. This was to become the *National History Curriculum Framing Paper*, published in November 2008 and was available for consultation.

Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History

The resulting *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History* was published in May 2009 as a guide to the writing of the history curriculum. Aim 3.1 was to ‘develop knowledge and understanding of the past in order to appreciate themselves and others, to understand the present and to contribute to debate about planning for the future’. It included an outline of content for both K-2 and Years 3-6 and following international trends, historical method and sources were to be introduced.³ Generally the methodology of the historian has been missing from most primary history curriculum and the inclusion of historical methodology is a welcome development.

The Draft K-6 History Curriculum

On March 1st 2010 the Draft National History Curriculum was published. Consultation is to occur around Australia and the final syllabus is to be published in September/October 2010. This is a timely period for my research to be included in the consultation process.

The curriculum includes specific historical knowledge and understandings and skills and provides an overview for Years K-2 and Years 3-6. In the earlier years, emphasis is on learning about personal and family history, ‘family, friends and school and the significance of the past. They are to engage with the remains of the past, develop a concept of time as present, past and future and use their imagination to speculate about the lives of others in the past’. Years 3-6 focus on state and national history and the relationship between past and present. They draw on previous learning ‘to develop their understanding of the world and

³ *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History*, May 2009. Commonwealth of Australia, 2009, pp. 6-8.

their relationship to others past and present ... begin to understand and appreciate different points of view... develop understanding of the heritage of their community'.⁴

With all states employing generalist Primary teachers, most without specific History training, the introduction of specific History curriculum is a major reform that will require extensive planning and retraining.

Why travel to Canada, Britain and Scotland?

With such a major change to Australia's approach to the learning and teaching of Primary History, it was crucial that a review of international best practice be undertaken to contribute to the development of the National Curriculum. In preparation for my research for the Fellowship, I drew a comparison of Primary history across Australia, Singapore, British Columbia, Canada, Britain and Scotland. Canada, Britain and Scotland offered the most recent research and opportunities to observe best practice in the implementation of History in Primary curriculum.

Canada

From professional reading, I was aware of the outstanding History education research of Professor Peter Seixas of the University of British Columbia, particularly in the field of historical skills or historical literacy through The Centre for Historical Consciousness.⁵ Dr Penney Clark, Director of the History Education Network of Canada has worked to create a teacher network across Canada that provides resources and professional development for teachers of History (www.thenhier.ca). Indigenous and Aboriginal history is always a contentious issue in the teaching of History in Australia and a survey conducted in 2001 by myself and Dr Barry Harris at the University of Western Sydney indicated that this area of content was the one that caused the most concern for trainee Primary History students. Canada was an ideal choice as they have experienced similar Indigenous history concerns as

⁴ *Australian Curriculum, History*. Draft Consultation Version 1.0.1, p.3. Downloaded 5 March 2010.

⁵ P. Seixas (ed) et al., *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History; National and International Perspectives*, New York University Press, New York, 2000.

P. Seixas, 'Mapping the terrain of historical significance', *Social Education*, vol. 61, No. 1, pp. 22-27.

P. Seixas, 'The purposes of teaching Canadian History', *Canadian Social Studies*, vol. 36, no. 2, Winter 2002.

Australia and I wanted to discuss with the Anthropology Museum in Vancouver how they dealt with the issue through their education program.

Britain

Academics in Britain have led the way in publications to assist best practice in Primary History teaching. The British National Curriculum was introduced in 1992 and since that date many excellent publications have appeared. It is unfortunate that a seminal work by J. Fines and J. Nichol, *Teaching Primary History*, 1997 is now out of print. Dr Ros Ashby of London University worked to implement the National Curriculum in History and has written extensively on best practice in primary history.⁶ She was a critical authority to consult on the possible pitfalls and areas of concern surrounding implementation of a National History curriculum. Dr Hilary Cooper of Cumbria University has long been an authority on the teaching of Primary History.⁷ Cumbria University offers teacher education courses that allows specialisation in History for primary teacher trainees and I wished to observe some of their teaching workshops. Prior to my trip, Dr Robert Guyver of Portsmouth University had also addressed the issue of implementing Primary History curriculum and had developed a History skills taxonomy that I wished to discuss further.

Engaging resources have also been produced in Britain since implementation of the National Curriculum by the Historical Association, the BBC, the Nuffield Primary History Project (www.primaryhistory.org) and challenging and exciting programs in various museums. I was keen to observe these programs with students engaged in examining artefacts, role play, empathy tasks and other interactive programs.

Scotland

Scotland has a strong tradition in the teaching of national History and this has been strengthened in their revised syllabus. Dr Joyce Henderson of the Scottish curriculum authority, *Learning and Teaching Scotland*, outlined the revisions to take place in the Scottish primary curriculum. This is to include strengthening of the specific historical skills of source and evidence analysis that was so timely for the Australian experience. Issues of

⁶ R.Ashby, P. Lee (eds), *Understanding History*. Vol. 4. International Review of History Education. Taylor and Frances, London, 2005.

R. Ashby & P. lee, 'Children's concepts of empathy and understanding in History', in C. Portal (ed), *The History Curriculum*, The Falmer press, 1987.

⁷ H. Cooper, *History in the Early Years*, David Fulton, London, 1995.

H. Cooper, *The Teaching of History in primary Schools:Implementing the revised National Curriculum*, David Fulton, London, 2000.

professional development and creation of teaching resources was also pertinent to the Australian experience. ICT resources are to be developed and Dr Henderson cautioned the publication of very specific programs and units of work as teachers tended to rely on these instead of developing their own from the actual curriculum.

‘Teachers can’t teach what they don’t know’.

Three main issues have emerged during my Fellowship:

- the need for professional development for current Primary teachers and those in pre-service teacher training
- identifying the most engaging and effective methods of teaching History to Primary students
- determining what primary students can do in History.

Little research has taken place in the field of teaching Primary History in Australia apart from references in a report resulting from the Commonwealth History Project in 2003.⁸ Whilst various publications have been produced over the years to assist secondary History teachers, there has been little focus on Primary History mainly as it has been an integrated Social Studies course and the focus on pure History has been minimal. Primary History has often been lost in this integrated HSIE/SOSE approach, often represented by non-challenging black-line master sheets involving simple comprehension, ‘busy work’ and little else. However, individual teachers with either a love of history and/or a degree in History have often taught the subject well. It was obvious that many teachers are keen to upgrade their skills and knowledge base as 70 primary teachers attended a History Teachers Association NSW professional development day focussed on Primary History in Sydney in August 2009.

One of the main concerns raised during my Fellowship in Canada, Britain and Scotland was the lack of specific historical knowledge and skills of many Primary teachers. Prior to leaving Australia, I renewed my professional reading on this subject and it is important to revisit it here as it is one of the most crucial concerns to emerge from the Fellowship research. Research has emphasised the importance for teachers to have both content

⁸ T. Taylor & C. Young, *Making History. A Guide for the Teaching and Learning of History in Australian Schools*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2003. Dr Young also focussed on children’s historical learning for subsequent teacher workshops for the NSW History Project.

knowledge of their subject and a mastery of the methodology required by that subject. Research has identified relationships between knowledge and classroom practice, in particular, how specific subject knowledge impacts on what and how teachers teach.⁹

These findings were reinforced by a Commonwealth government inquiry into History teaching in Australia that revealed a lack of historical knowledge among primary teachers, leading to a reported lack of confidence in teaching the subject.¹⁰ A critique of teacher education reviews in Australia by the NSW Department of Education and Training concluded that there was a need to provide pre-service teachers with an appropriately comprehensive and deep intellectual grasp of the content, subject or curriculum areas in which they will teach.¹¹ A previous Australian study argued that teachers teach children ‘something’ and that this ‘something’ is content which changes constantly and teachers need to keep abreast of these changes. This study also concluded that ‘there is no tradition of encouraging teachers to be scholars in their content disciplines as a means to enrich their own teaching’.¹² A further study also concluded that ‘graduates should have a deep understanding of content and pedagogy which enables them to transform (organise, adapt, present) content’.¹³ Little has changed since these findings were published more than 20 years ago.

How does this lack of specific subject knowledge impact on teaching?

Specific weaknesses in teaching were discovered in teachers with little subject knowledge. These include:

- inability to promote an adequate depth and understanding of a topic
- inappropriate choice of resource material
- lack of specific subject conceptualisation
- inability to draw inferences and to ‘connect’ seemingly unrelated events, causes, issues

⁹ R. Turner-Bisset, ‘The knowledge bases of the expert teacher’, *British Educational Research Journal*, vol. 25, # 1, February 1999.

R. Turner-Bisset, ‘Learning to love History: preparation of non-specialist primary teachers to teach History’, *Teaching History*, vol. 1, #102, February 2001.

¹⁰ *The National Inquiry into School History*, Department of Education, Training and Youth Affairs, Canberra, 2000.

¹¹ P. Brock, *Two Decades of Sound and Fury But What’s Changed? A Critique of Recommendations Made in 212 National and NSW Reports Reviewing Teacher Education, 1980-1999*, DETYA, 2000.

¹² Australian College of Education, *Teachers in Australian Schools – a 1989 Profile*, Canberra, 1990.

¹³ K. Adey, *Preparing a Profession. Report of the National Standards and Guidelines for Initial Teacher Education Project*, Australian Council of Deans of Education, Canberra, 1998.

- less effective modes of explanation, justification, prediction
- inability to evaluate resources, opinions; more accepting of ‘factual’ interpretations
- less effective assessment of student work.¹⁴

However, specific content knowledge is not enough alone to promote effective teaching. Teachers who know more do not necessarily teach any better. Ability to teach well must be linked with the specific nature of the subject. Teachers need to know how to teach the subject to a range of students in a range of educational contexts. US researcher L. Shulman coined the term ‘pedagogical content knowledge’ in 1985. He argued that ‘teachers must possess that special blending of content and pedagogy that enables them to translate their content knowledge into forms that students can understand’.¹⁵ More recent research has supported these views.

Thus to teach History effectively in the Primary school, teachers require:

- expertise in the specific content area and curriculum (**what** to teach)
- skills in general pedagogy (**how** to teach)
- skills in pedagogical content knowledge (**how** to teach that **specific** subject)
- awareness of, and ability to evaluate, relevant and engaging teaching materials (**what** we can **use** to teach)
- knowledge of their specific learners and their educational context (**who** is taught)
- enthusiasm for the content and an intellectual curiosity (a **love** of teaching and the subject)
- ability to promote research skills, critical thinking and problem-solving (**how** to learn)
- ability to encourage student-centred and active learning that engages students eg research, debate, analysis of historical problems, developing a sense of historical empathy, stimulating classroom discussion, development of personalised content material, interactive activities, ‘hands-on’ activities, investigation of site studies, posing stimulating and appropriate questions.¹⁶

¹⁴ G. Halford, *Children’s Understanding*, Erlbaum, New Jersey, 1993.

J. Brophy, *Advances in Research on Teaching*, JAI Press, Greenwich, 1991.

¹⁵ L. Shulman, ‘Knowledge and teaching: foundations for the new reform’, *Harvard Educational Review*, 57, 1987.

¹⁶ S. Wineburg & S. Wilson, ‘Modes of Wisdom in the Teaching of History’, *Phi Delta Kappan*, 70, 1988.

So what does this mean for best practice in History?

It means that pre-service trainees and current primary teachers will need to undergo professional development in the teaching of History. An analysis of the content contained in the 2010 Draft National History K-6 curriculum would require teachers to have knowledge and expertise in the following:

- basic history methodology, use of sources/evidence and use of historical language
- posing relevant historical questions of written and visual sources and artefacts
- understanding of chronology and the nature of sources
- knowledge of local history, heritage and historical site issues.
- historical celebrations, emblems, symbols
- family history, oral history
- early pre-contact Aboriginal history
- world exploration; early navigation
- contact history between Europeans, Asians and Aboriginal peoples
- convict transportation and life experiences of convicts and early settlers
- significant colonial personalities
- historical milestones in colonial Australia
- early democratic movements in Australia compared to international trends
- the British Empire and Australia's place within it
- Federation
- Australia's link with Asia and the Pacific
- migrations to Australia over time
- contributions of migrants to Australian life
- a specific migrant story

This requires a considerable amount of both Australian and world history knowledge, let alone the specific skills and conceptual understandings that also need to be taught.

E. Yeager, 'Thoughts on wise practice in the teaching of social studies', *Social Education*, vol. 64, 6, 2000.

D. Newton, 'Knowing what counts in History: historical understanding and the non-specialist teacher', *Teaching History*, August, I, 92, 199.

Much of the discussion with academics focussed on this area of teacher training and professional development. In Canada, Professor Peter Seixas and Dr Penney Clark at the Centre of Historical Consciousness, Vancouver have done much to further the expertise of Canadian History teachers. As in Australia, teachers' knowledge of Indigenous peoples is often lacking and the National history in both Australia and Canada is often perceived both by teachers and students as 'boring'.¹⁷ Political interest is often narrowed to a demand for students to know 'the facts' of the respective National histories. It was acknowledged that Primary teachers teaching an integrated Social Studies curriculum were often not engaged in areas of History. By encouraging and taking part in research in this field, considerable work has been done on historical understandings and skills. There has been a concentration on the development of substantive knowledge ('facts' and concepts of history) and 'syntactical' knowledge (the processes of history; historical methodology). By creating and promoting *The History Education Network*, teachers have access to latest research, seminars, resources and professional dialogue. Postgraduate researchers are encouraged to work in the centre. Canada has the additional issue of having to produce all teaching material in both English and French. In a technological age, resource sharing is made easier by the Centre having an active website (www.thenhier.ca).

In London, Dr Ros Ashby of London University provided valuable advice about the professional development needs of teachers being introduced to a Primary History National curriculum for the first time. She was instrumental in providing professional development for Primary teachers when the British National Curriculum was introduced in 1992. Considerable government funding was allocated to the task which involved a ten day History course attached to a number of Universities which could later be extended to a postgraduate degree. This was followed up with an additional ten days and a further ten day co-ordinator's course. *A Teachers Guide to the Teaching of History* was produced based on best practice and research of the time. She concluded that for an effective implementation of a national curriculum with new curriculum knowledge and skills the following is needed:

- professional development in the specific curriculum area for current teachers
- specific courses in History and History methodology for pre-service trainees
- encouragement of the training of a specialist History teacher in all Primary schools

¹⁷ A. Clark, *History's Children: History Wars in the Classroom*, UNSW Press, Sydney, 2008. Anna has also drawn comparisons between the teaching of History in Australian and Canada and found many similarities.

- development of engaging resources to support best practice
- publication of student work samples reflecting standards
- within the curriculum, keeping 'big ideas' and concepts simple and achievable.

The teacher educators at Cumbria University teach specific Primary History courses. The Primary pre-service course emphasise its working relationship with local schools, museums and historical sites in a area renown for its ancient Roman sites such as Hadrian's Wall. It offers fieldwork throughout Cumbria and the opportunity for students to specialise in history. A focus is on topics in the Primary National curriculum with 'lectures, seminars, role-play, fieldwork, workshops and individual tutorials with an emphasis placed on the enquiry-based approach and the acquisition of transferable skills'. (www.cumbria.ac.uk).

Courses that can be taken by primary pre-service students include:

- local C16th-19th history
- archaeology
- the ancient world eg Egypt
- Roman Saxon and Viking England
- the Tudors
- Victorian society
- Modern Britain
- co-ordinating History in schools.

Hugh Moore at the Lancaster Campus has a background in archaeology and museum curatorship and is an example of an academic who can inspire student to emulate best practice. He passionately models the use of artefacts and role play in teaching the methodology of History. In discussion with Sue Temple at the Carlisle Campus and observations of her classes at Carlisle Museum and teacher professional development at Carlisle Castle, I was again impressed with her programs that focussed so clearly on the development of historical method and understandings. Practising teachers met for a session on the use of primary sources at Carlisle Castle that also houses the local archives dating from the C15th. Original documents, one of which was signed by Queen Elizabeth I, were examined and discussed as possible sources for life in Carlisle in Tudor times. Obviously Australia cannot produce archives of such antiquity but certainly early colonial sources

could be introduced into Primary History. Professor Hilary Cooper is an outstanding educator in Primary history and continues to work in various international programs to promote best practice. I have drawn heavily from Dr. Cooper's research about best practice in Primary History teaching.

Dr Robert Guyver provided a table that he had devised on the taxonomy of historical skills from Kindergarten to Year 6. He is currently writing a paper on the introduction of a National Curriculum and what Australia may learn from the British experience.¹⁸ He will address the National History Teachers of Australia Conference in July this year in Sydney. Robert's taxonomy has been a very useful tool for me to begin my own table mapping what students could be expected to do for each year. After discussion and further dialogue, I have continued to revise this table and I hope it will be useful for later professional development for teachers. It will provide a starting point for teachers to understand the gradual development of historical skills and understandings from Kindergarten to Year 6.

Why Museums?

Much time was spent in museums speaking with museum educators and observing students in museum-directed programs and also teacher-led groups in museums. A well designed museum education program can enhance History curriculum to provide enriched experiences not normally available in most classroom settings. It may allow students to handle genuine artefacts, engage with teaching collections, role-play, evaluate sources and hone observation skills. I was particularly interested in discussions with Jill Baird of the Museum of Anthropology, Vancouver who teaches a primary course in Indigenous issues and to observe students in programs organised by the British Museum, Imperial War Museums and various local museums around Britain and Scotland. British Museums have had approximately 18 years to refine courses for the National Curriculum and visiting the museums provided an ideal situation to observe a range of history activities and skills. A British government document *Learning Outside of the Classroom* has encouraged school museum and historical site visits.

¹⁸ R. Guyver, 'National curriculum History: key concepts and controversy', *Teaching History*, 88, July 1997 London, pp. 16-19. The implementation of the British National curriculum has been a particular interest of Dr. Guyver for some time.

In my discussions and observations of Museum programs, it became obvious that teachers need to be aware of museum educational issues or be trained in dealing with Museum collections. In Canada as in Australia, one of the main issues was the lack of specific knowledge shown by teachers in Indigenous issues. This area is also a problem in Australia with a lack of understanding of Aboriginal history being the prime area of concern in the UWS 2001 study of pre-service primary trainees. All museum educators also raised the issue of their programs being ‘one-off’ excursions, often not linked closely to the class program. Little preparation if any was often made before the visit and no actual ‘follow-up’ provided. Thus the museum experience was often held in isolation. Teacher-led visits to museums were often at the most basic level of prepared work-sheets targeting lower order skills such as simply recording, copying and simple comprehension. Over 150,000 students visit the British Museum annually and Richard Woff estimated that 80% of these were teacher-led with no input from the museum educators.

Jane Masters at the National Museum of Scotland focuses on the development of historical skills through the program *Exploring the Evidence* and is currently working on new programs to support the revised Scottish curriculum. Overarching questions for classes taking part in artefact analysis include *What do I see? What do I think? What else do I need to know?* Another popular program is the *Create Your Own Exhibition* program where schools are allocated some space for their own museum exhibition. Students devise their own collection, deciding what is significant and important to display, connections to make, marketing, presentation and design, formatting of information and appropriate labelling. This program can also be integrated with other subjects quite readily. With professional development of teachers, Scotland has similar problems to Australia in regard to reaching isolated schools and staff. Scottish Museums need to connect with teachers in isolated regions such as the Shetland Islands and successfully use video-conferencing when necessary.

At the Museum centre, *Search for History* in Hampshire, the aim is to ‘give children access to artefacts and a unique encounter with the past’. Linked closely to the National Curriculum, the centre provides opportunities for both students and teachers to ‘observe, record and problem solve using genuine artefacts’. In the program *Archaeology in Action*, children sort and study excavated finds to begin the process of constructing historical hypotheses and in the Victorian town house, they develop a sense of historical empathy and

further understanding of the nature of historical evidence. At Carlisle Museum, Jill Wooding, curator and education officer, has created an Early Years Program to encourage young children from 3-5 years old to engage with museums. They discuss concepts of 'old' and 'new' and play with Victorian toys that need considerable flexibility and dexterity.

When students are well prepared for their Museum experience and the visit is integrated into a whole program with careful preparation beforehand and follow-up after the visit, it can only enhance the historical experience. It is timely that the University of British Columbia has just introduced a Master of Education course in Museum Education for teachers and other professionals to connect schools and museums, provide internships within Museums and to focus on Indigenous perspectives.

(eplt.educ.ubc/programs/grad/muse.php)

What is best Practice for the Teaching of Primary History?

History teaching goes way beyond the teaching of repetitive 'facts' and dates. Whilst good practice in NSW is more common in secondary History classrooms as teachers are generally specifically educated in History, many primary teachers require training in engaging methodology and courses in historical content.

As previously discussed, considerable research has been conducted in Britain on best practice in primary History.¹⁹ With the introduction of the National Curriculum in 1992, heated debate raged about whether or not primary students could learn history. Since 1992, there has been considerable time to produce relevant resources and to train teachers. Funding was supplied by the Government for specific training and various historical bodies provided resources.

Best practice in the classroom cannot be gained without teacher expertise and enthusiasm, supported by good programming and engaging resources. Primary history is often reduced to a simple narrative. Hilary Cooper pointed out that rarely are younger students given more than one version of a story about history. They are rarely provided with the opportunity to

¹⁹ H. Cooper & C. Sixsmith, *Teaching Across the Early Years 3-7*, Routledge, London, 2003.

H. Cooper, *The Teaching of History in Primary Schools*, David Fulton, London, 1998.

R. Turner-Bisset, *Creative Teaching History in the Primary Classroom*, David Fulton, Abingdon, 2008.

Historical Association, 'Learning to love History: preparation for non-specialist primary teachers to teach history', *Teaching History*, 102, February 2001, pp.36-41.

develop concepts of time and change, motive, cause and effect, similarities and differences. Investigations are rarely based on real sites, a real building, real historical evidence.²⁰

Students need to be encouraged to pose questions about the past, to be stimulated by exciting questions and intriguing problems and ‘mysteries’ of the past. They need to observe history around them, to be curious about the past, to observe similarities and differences. History is about asking ‘how do we know’ about the past. Students need to be introduced early to sources and evidence. What do they tell us of past lives and events? To develop empathy, students need to be able to place themselves in other people’s shoes – standing in another era, another time. How do they react? What are their lives like? Can we ever understand? Why did people behave as they did? They can conduct oral history interviews with grandparents, older relatives. How has life changed? What do artefacts from the past tell us?

Teachers need to model curiosity, to tell engaging stories about the past, to be unconcerned enough of their dignity to dress up as a convict, don a silly hat and ‘become’ a historical personage. Students could thus question an early British explorer or a convict about their lives and skilled teachers can establish a ‘time-gap’ between students and the historical figure before them. Literacy can be taught through history in so many ways. It may involve a thrilling narrative, story-telling and reading of myths, historical novels, drama and the writing of history. The gradual introduction and use of the specific language of history and concepts is also important. In British museums, students aged 7-8 years were observed to use specific language of World War II such as *air-raid warden*, *ration cards*, *black-out*, *shrapnel*, *blitz*, *Anderson shelter* etc.

Historical sources are all around us – oral history, family stories, grandma’s photographs, drawings, gravestones, old books, newspapers, artefacts. Teachers need to ask the right questions about sources, to ask about significance – what does it tell us of the people who made and used the object? Examples of source analysis skills were observed at *Search for History*, Hampshire. A group of primary students became museum curators for the day, choosing artefacts from a suitcase that could be used as objects in an exhibition on WWII life in Britain. As a group, they had to identify the object, provide a tentative date with the

²⁰ Cooper, *The Teaching of History*, p.1

aid of sale catalogues from 1942 and objects displayed on a time-line. They discussed the possible use of the objects and decided which objects did not belong to that era. The group had to justify their choice, including responses such as 'because they didn't have plastic then'. They also had to select the objects which clearly demonstrated life at that time. How would these objects be best displayed?

Teachers need to be aware that some things may never be known and that there are generally several different interpretations of any historical event or opinion. Empathy exercises that placed students in an actual historical situation and having to make decisions were also observed. At the Imperial War Museum, students were transported back in time to London in 1942 in the program *Through Childrens' Eyes*. Using genuine photographs and details of real children, the historical context was recreated. Photographs showed children farewelling parents at London railway stations on their way to the safety of the countryside, small suitcases in their hands. The situation was explained to the students in groups: you are about to be evacuated from your home in London during the Blitz in World War Two. You have only this suitcase (a small case is shown). What would you pack – and why? After a discussion, each group was then presented with a suitcase filled with various objects 'belonging' to an individual child. In each bag there was a range of evidence: a letter, ration cards, photos, artefacts such as a piece of shrapnel. They were asked to piece together the 'clues' to describe the child who owned the case and to suggest what life was like for them at the time. Students examined each item and tried to explain why these items may have been included. From the individual suitcases, groups were able to describe the individual children's interests and the subtle ways of 'making do' in times of hardship, such as a mended dress or clumsily resoled shoe. Groups demonstrated the ability to pose questions, comprehend simple documents, synthesise the evidence and draw conclusions. A question was asked about how they may have felt in this situation. Students responded with suggestions such as: 'I would be scared', 'you couldn't go out to play', 'scared for my dad who was at war', 'I would be sad to be moved from my family', and 'what would happen if the people in the country were not kind'?

These skills of empathetic understanding were also observed in some of the classes at the Hampshire *Search for History* museum. Groups of 7 to 8 year old students were located in a mock World War II era house. They had been well prepared and had experienced previous lessons on life during the Blitz. A small boy dressed as an air-raid warden, complete with

hard hat and long overcoat, seriously explained to me that he would have to blow his whistle as the dark 'black-out' curtain was not closed properly as it let out light that may be spotted by the enemy. A little girl, dressed as a housewife explained to me why I couldn't have bacon for breakfast as her ration cards did not allow it. Others scrambled under the dining-room table in preparation for an air raid. All could explain how life was different from their own.

Research suggests that younger students may be helped to develop arguments about historical evidence if we specifically teach them how. Teachers need to provide engaging experiences, ask simple, open-ended questions and teach relevant vocabulary. Children can develop an understanding of other points of view and values different from their own. They can be introduced to historical concepts if specifically taught, using visual, tactile images. They can specifically taught to present a coherent argument, explore alternatives, draw conclusions.²¹

Ashby and Lee (1987) found that students reached higher levels of understanding when arguing out a problem among themselves rather than on their own, provided that they had been taught strategies to deal with group discussion. This became obvious on observing students engaged in activities in all of the museums visited. Cooper has argued that structured discussion, using learned concepts, is essential to a development of students' understanding. Evidence in history can only be interpreted through language so History is an excellent vehicle for literacy development. All groups observed were encouraged to use historical language specific to the task and topic before them.

An excellent example of students working together in groups to solve problems was observed at the British Museum *Mission to Tenochtitlan* program. Here students became Spanish explorers of the C16th who had to advise the King of Spain whether or not it would be worthwhile to invade and colonise South America. They were allocated roles, had been well prepared beforehand and were reminded of appropriate language and concepts eg empire, kingship, colonisation etc. The session began with the students 'transformed' into the C16th by donning ruffs and cloaks. They then were addressed in a video by the King of Spain. He explains their mission. The educator checks understandings at this point.

²¹ H. Cooper, *The Teaching of History in Primary Schools*, David Fulton, London, 1998, pp.10-20.

Students explain that Mexico 'is rich', 'has lots of land' and 'many rich things like gold' and 'the king wants to show off to other Kings'. The groups have specific tasks to gain information and to report back to the King eg is the land rich? Do they have a strong army? What gods do they worship? How strong is their king? Students were able to gain their information from the excellent Aztecs exhibition staged at the time at the museum. They then returned to the museum classroom, where they were greeted by the King and asked to report to him. The reports were detailed, carefully thought out and the final advice was not to invade as the Aztecs would probably win! Some brought up ethical issues and they weighed up different opinions. The educator finally related to the students what the King of Spain had actually decided and what eventuated.

To demonstrate best practice, what do I want young students of History to do?

- to be curious and pose interesting and engaging questions about the past – and be aware there will always be gaps in the evidence
- be aware of the history around them and to ask 'how do we know'?
- knowing there is more to history than a list of dates and 'facts'
- being aware that there are many stories – not just the 'official' version
- to develop historical skills that question sources, draw conclusions based on evidence
- to have the opportunities to engage in exciting classroom experiences that involve a range of sources, role play, oral history, museum and site visits, archaeology, interpretations, empathy, historical fiction and film, family history and heritage, local history, re-enactments and historical drama.

CONCLUSIONS

I would like to again commend the Federal Government on its commitment to the development of a Primary National History Curriculum for Australian students and particularly for identifying History as a core learning area placing it in the first round of subjects for implementation. However, the success of such a bold reform will rest upon adequate funding from both Federal and State levels and development of resources and time for teachers to develop the skills and appropriate programs.

It is timely that more specific teaching of History is extended to Primary schools. It will serve as a solid basis for further development in secondary school and offers many exciting possibilities in the fields of history and literacy.

It has been argued that best practice in History can be achieved in primary schools. Secondary teachers and curriculum planners have underestimated the capacity for primary students to engage in history. We can introduce lively, engaging History lessons in Primary that provide opportunities for students to develop depth in understanding and exhibit a range of sophisticated skills. However, without adequate professional development and teacher training and development of relevant resources, the introduction of a National History Primary Curriculum will fail.

The training of teachers in specific History skills and content knowledge is essential to promote best practice. Students can be specifically taught to ask relevant questions, understand concepts, use appropriate historical language and learn to present a reasoned argument based on evidence. It needs specific teaching and the teacher needs to know what and how students need to learn!

I would finally like to once again thank the Churchill Memorial Trust for this valuable opportunity to have time for reflection, to take part in professional dialogue with leaders in the field and to observe a range of engaging and teaching and learning in this field.

Recommendations

- I endorse the Federal Government's development of a National Primary History curriculum and commitment to the teaching of History as a distinct discipline in Primary schools through its allocation as a first round subject for development and implementation
- the provision of substantial Government funding for professional development for current Primary teachers in historical content and methodology and financial support to state professional associations for this purpose
- introduction of specific History courses for both content knowledge acquisition and specific History teaching methodology for Primary pre-service training and establish History specialists in each Primary school in Australia
- professional development opportunities for Primary teachers in the use of museums and historical sites
- government funding for the development of engaging teaching/learning resources to support the implementation of Primary History throughout Australia through State curriculum authorities
- that there be sufficient implementation time to allow for retraining, resource development and the writing of programs in schools.