








Teaching history in the primary classroom, Using the National History Challenge as a stimulus

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Teaching history in the Primary classroom has taken on an added impetus with the advent of the VELs and the standards for assessing and reporting. In Level 1 and 2 the 'learning focus statements provide advice about learning experiences' and at level 3 the standards apply. These have been determined so that when the student finishes their primary education they have the necessary strategies and knowledge to obtain Level 4.

Skills need to be developed over the seven years of primary schooling to enable students to successfully complete the progression points of 'Historical knowledge and understanding' and 'Historical reasoning and interpretation' at Level 4.

They need to be able to

-  use a range of primary and secondary sources to investigate the past.
-  frame research questions and plan their own enquiries.
-  comprehend and question sources, make judgments about the views and values being expressed and the completeness of evidence
-  develop empathy
-  use appropriate historical language and concepts to develop historical explanations
-  present their understandings in a range of forms.
-  know the difference between fact, supposition or theories













At Level 4 the use of Primary and Secondary sources are introduced.

'If a student leaves primary school knowing how to use primary and secondary sources he or she is thinking historically'.

Taylor.T; Young,C. Making History, Curriculum Corporation, 2004, p50








Primary sources are linked to an event or series of events in the past, they are not necessarily text based, but all must have an authority. The ANZAC tradition kits which include pictures, videos and CD's, have an authority because they are produced by the Department of Veteran's Affairs.

Primary sources :-

-  Photographs
-  Diaries
-  Newspapers - editorials, letters
-  Paintings
-  Interviews with person's involved or who lived at that time.
-  Official Records
-  Maps
-  Statistics
-  Speeches
-  Autobiographies
-  Internet
-  CD's & videos

Photographs are an excellent primary source tool to introduce a historical learning experience to children in the Early Years. Using children's photos a story can be written about events in the past, or a storyboard created about the family. A family photo taken before the child was born, (of an event which the children would not have experienced), can give them an understanding of past events, places and fashion.

Secondary sources are usually sources that are produced after the events such as

-  Text books
-  Biographies
-  Historical Novels
-  Non fiction books
-  Encyclopaedias
-  Internet
-  Interviews with a second party

It is through gaining an understanding of primary and secondary sources that students will develop the skill to differentiate between 'facts', 'the truth', theories, supposition and evidence. Students need to check all sources for authenticity and relevance. Just because it is on the Internet or written in a text book does not mean it is historically correct. Research should be checked against at least 3 other sources for verification.

The teaching of history prior to the 80's concentrated on students acquiring knowledge, learning dates, facts, cause and effect and sequence of events. Today, we need to develop empathy -the ability to see and understand events from the point of view of the participants. Give students an understanding of motives and reasoning behind past actions. Looking at different points of view develops empathy. There are many graphic organisers such as De Bono's OPV's (Other people's views) that are excellent tools for developing empathy. Ned Kelly is seen as a hero, and the police the aggressor, whereas in reality Ned Kelly was a bushranger and the police had a duty to protect people and property. Understanding the implications for the Aboriginal people when the First Settlers arrived will give a new perspective on teaching about the First Fleet.

An effective way of developing empathy in upper primary is to use historical fiction. While serial reading, teachers are able to break down the text and develop the student's deeper understanding of how the participants felt and the reasons for their actions.

A historical language needs to be developed because language itself has history. In the WW2 *blitz*- meant bombing – to children today '*blitz*' has a different meaning .Words like *revolution*, *uprising*, and *rebellion*

are specifically historical as are *past*, *last year*, and *long ago*. The teacher is required to select their texts carefully and a specific glossary to support the text may be needed.

Through all Levels it is possible to incorporate Asian and Global perspectives into students 'learning experiences' and the teaching of history. Level 1 are required to 'Learn about the cultures and histories that have contributed to Australia's history'. By Level 4 students should have an understanding of the change and continuity over time of the establishment of Australia, and how our migrant population have contributed to the complex, multifaceted and evolving Australian identity.

St Monica's is an eLearning school within the Catholic Education system, and the teaching of history fits well into the 'inquiry approach'. Over the last three years students in Yr 6 have entered the National History Challenge, resulting in individual students winning state prizes and others travelling to Canberra to receive National awards. It is a research based competition which gives students a chance to be historians, to investigate their community and explore their past. The Challenge emphasises and rewards the depth of their research and provides a vehicle to investigate an issue or part of history with a real purpose. Students are able to select their favoured method of presentation, including three dimensional dioramas and multi-media, therefore catering for the use of multiple intelligences and different learning styles.

The competition lends itself to the 'Inquiry approach' and development of research and bibliographic skills. A Rubric is essential for the required level of presentation.

In 2004 the theme was 'Australia is a multicultural nation'. St Monica's entered five categories. A diorama showing that St Monica's school history reflects the migration patterns in Australia won the State and then the National Prize for a Museum display

'Australians All' the theme for 2005 was applicable at Level 4 of the VELS, and we entered 7 categories. It was a perfect vehicle to integrate Asian Perspectives. An essay about 'Tan Le, Young Australian of the Year 1998' won the State and then the National prize for Asia and Australia sponsored by The Asia Education Foundation. Another entry about Sir Paul Edmund de Strzelecki also won a State award. A diorama about Indigenous players in the AFL was the State Runner Up for Indigenous Australia, and we also received two Highly Commended certificates.

This year every student in Year 6 participated and 9 categories were entered. The theme was 'Turning points,' and we received the State prize for a website on the humanitarian endeavours of Sir Paul Edmund de Strzelecki and another for the History of Sport diorama which showed the tradition of the ANZAC day match between Collingwood and Essendon.

In 2006 Year 4 participated in the Commonwealth History project 'Making History come alive'. 'What the river saw' is embedded in the VELS History Level 3 Discipline Based Learning Strand. The learning foci are 'To investigate settlement patterns and land use of the banks of the Maribyrnong River, and how they have changed over time.'

A timeline sequenced the key events and the changing use of the river.

Taylor.T; Young.C. Making History, Curriculum Corporation, Carlton South, 2004
Victorian Essential Learning Standards, VCAA, Melbourne, 2006