Student learning activities in Australian History textbooks: An assessment tool to examine historical empathy and cognitive domains

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ABSTRACT: Historians study what has already happened and so must have a mechanism to reconstruct the past in the present. The past is revived via the historian's imagination and perspective, as Parfitt (2001, p.7) asserts, "to imagine something is to make that thing present and real for ourselves." To empathize in history is founded on the assumption that the past can be reconstructed—at least in part—and accessed so that the thoughts, intentions, and actions of historical actors can be understood and so connect the past and the present. This paper examines activities in Australian high school history textbooks that include empathy activities to engage students in learning history, focusing on the Australian civil rights movement and reconciliation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders throughout the 20th century. The paper introduces an assessment tool which incorporates Ashby and Lee's (1987) levels of empathetic understanding and Biggs and Tang's (2007) Structured of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy to aid in evaluating historical empathy activities included in textbooks designed for the *Australian Curriculum: History*. Data shows that the majority of historical empathy tasks require only low level empathetic responses and cognitive complexity. This paper concludes, that although modern-day textbooks have opportunities to provide a rich array of multimodal sources to inform historical empathy tasks, they predominately call on students to produce unsubstantiated and ahistorical responses.

KEYWORDS: Historical empathy, SOLO taxonomy, history education, textbooks.

Introduction: Empathy in the discipline of history

Historical empathy came to the fore of History education debates, discussion, and research in the 1990s and early 2000s. Since that time, although there has been significant research in historical empathy in education context (see, for example the work of Retz, 2018) there has been limited new practice-based or curriculum-specific research that seeks to examine how historical empathy is actioned—rather than just conceptualised—as a classroom activity. The role of empathy is part of a larger debate about the relationship between the historian and the past, the role of objectivity and subjectivity in history and the nature of historical representation. Historians study what has already happened and so must have a mechanism to reconstruct the past in the present. The past is revived via the historian's imagination and perspective, as Parfitt (2001, p. 7) asserts, "to imagine something is to make that thing present

and real for ourselves." To empathize in history is founded on the assumption that the past can be reconstructed—at least in part—and accessed so that the thoughts, intentions, and actions of historical actors can be understood. This raises many problematic issues, such as, drawing on Jenkins (1991): understanding the context of past lives; re-constructing narratives from fragmentary and incomplete primary sources; filtering the information via the historian; and, in the case of history education, via the teacher as well.

The definition of the term *empathy* remains contentious among researchers and practitioners (Yilmaz, 2007; Cunningham, 2009, Berkovich, 2018). The influential philosopher and historian, R.G. Collingwood (1946) claimed a central role for what he termed "historical imagination" in the construction of history and his *The Idea of History* resonates in the contemporary discourse (as cited in Hughes-Warrington, 2003, p. 18). Collingwood argued that the scientific method of observation and classification was not suitable for the study of history. He theorized that the historian was not able to observe in the same way as the scientist and that in the historian's work events and their participants are examined from the temporal distance between the past and the present. Further, these unobservable phenomena have two components: an "outside," the actual happening; and then the more elusive "inside," the thoughts, beliefs and motivations of the people involved. To Collingwood, imagination is the process that is used to construct or re-construct pictures, ideas or concepts and to create a narrative (Lemisko, 2004). Similarly, the well known historian, Trevor-Roper (1958, n.p.) defined historical imagination as "the art of making the past fully intelligible to us by enabling us to enter, as it were, into the minds and passions of people who, in some ways, seem very different from us." Here the term has been used to denote a process which incorporates an affective dimension and whose role in understanding the past is more subjective. But should novice historians in secondary schools be expected to balance the cognitive and affective? Is encouraging the use of imagination in their historical studies too dangerous or perhaps confusing for students? There is much debate and little consensus in history education in answering these questions. Foster and Yeager (1998, p. 3), prominent researchers in this field, explain historical empathy as a combination of "adductive and logical thinking associated with the use of evidence with inferential and appropriately creative skills that seek to bridge the gap between what is known and what may be inferred from history." The paper introduces an assessment tool which incorporates Ashby and Lee's (1987) levels of empathetic understanding and Biggs and Tang's (2007) Structured of Observed Learning Outcomes (SOLO) taxonomy to aid in evaluating historical empathy activities included in textbooks designed for the *Australian Curriculum: History*.

Objections and obstacles to historical empathy

There have been many objections voiced to the notion of students using historical empathy in their studies of history. Much of the debate centres on the affective/cognitive axis (Verducci, 2000) and the misgivings that arise from the idea that students are being asked to share the feelings of the people in the past. The critics often cite the dictionary definition of empathy and argue that feelings cannot be assessed (Low-Beer, 1989). This criticism takes a narrow view of empathy as sympathy and discounts the investigation of how beliefs, motivations and values impact on events. This objection is sustained by those that object to using empathy as they maintain that it is impossible for historians to think themselves into the past as the past is "never empathetically retrievable" (Jenkins & Brickley, 1989, p.22). The argument claims that this empathetic approach devalues evidence and gives credence to unsubstantiated *intuitive* deductions and that these deductions are often based on *presentism* and stereotypes.

Doubtless, lack of verification and alignment with historical evidence undermines conclusions, the problem often stems from a lack of deep knowledge and understanding of the

past rather than the approach. As Lee and Ashby (2001, p. 25) assert, "empathy demands hard thinking on the basis of evidence. It requires students to know some history, and to be able to use that knowledge in order to explain actions and institutions." Foster (1999) supports this notion of historical empathy and maintains that historical empathy does not require the student to identify with historical characters as it is impossible for a student in the present to take on the persona of another from a different time and place. He explains that attempting to do so "ignores the perspective of hindsight and is alien to the principle that historians are contemporary interpreters of the past" (p.19).

The seeming prevalence of the *empathy exercise* has only increased the passion of the dissenting voices. These exercises are criticized as works of imagination, over-identification and sympathy (Yeager & Foster, 2001). The mixed messages are evidenced by the empathy exercise which routinely requires students to imagine that they are in the past, for example, imagine you are an Egyptian pharaoh. This type of exercise suggests that it is possible for present-day students to think themselves into the values, culture and historical setting of an individual to the extent where they can speak the thoughts of the past and tends to encourage fantasy, rather than historical writing. It is obvious that over-identification and sympathizing with people from the past can be counter-productive to a considered evaluation of all available evidence and must be carefully handled in the classroom of novice historians, for example, *imagine that you are an African slave being transported to* America. Write a letter to your brother telling him how you feel. Over-identification leads to stereotyping historical agents and viewing the past in terms of *right* and *wrong*, *good* and *bad* without proper appreciation of the complexities and dangers of simplified judgments. This is also found in research that investigates intersections between historical consciousness and moral consciousness in student responses to activities (see, for example Ammert, Sharp, Lofstrom, & Edling, 2020).

Textbooks as data

Textbooks were selected as data for identifying how historical empathy is evident in History classrooms. This curriculum resource can be viewed as a hermeneutic conduit between the official knowledge (Apple, 2004) as set out in the *Australian Curriculum: History* and the classroom. While textbooks can be sneered at and their use and influence downplayed as curriculum materials, their common and widespread usage cannot be ignored. The textbook publishing context in Australia sees (the majority of) textbooks published by private, commercial companies who produce materials only when there is an economic market to do so. As Issitt (2004) points out regarding their use in the classroom, "as a teaching aid and as part of the learning experience, they are practically ubiquitous . . . on the one hand textbooks are derided, but . . . the reality of their universal use cannot be denied." Unlike in former eras, textbooks are no longer written, published, and provided by Departments of Education. Publishers contract writers—usually discipline academics, history education experts, or History teachers—to contribute chapters to textbooks and then market them alongside competitors. As they are only published when there is an economic impetus to do so and as they are competing with other publishers, it is the case that these publications reflect the content as set out in the Australian Curriculum and state and territory based Syllabuses.

From the textbook, the focus of the data collection for evidence of historical empathy for this research is the activities within the books as this "enables an analysis of the exercises that guide students and emphasise what is important for students to learn" (Sharp & Ammert, 2017, p. 2). Textbook activities, with some scattered throughout and others at the end of a chapter or section are purposefully designed to cover the content covered in the main body of the text, to check for student understanding, and to further engage students in the content via

questions that go beyond comprehension. A further justification for focusing on textbook activities only rather than the main textbook body of text, is that while textbooks set out the content, and act as a translation of the curriculum and Syllabus documents, textbook writers can be restricted to what they include in the main text, the activities provide an opportunity for curriculum writers to direct student focus and learning on: aspects of the curriculum they deem important to highlight; and historical thinking skills, such as is the case for this paper, historical empathy. In this way, "the activities that commonly accompany the content, do provide textbook authors with the opportunities to hone in on areas of content with more flexibility" (Sharp & Ammert, 2017, p. 3).

Methodology

This research addresses how textbook activities approach historical empathy and perspective taking and to what extent they have the potential to engage students' affectively and cognitively. Through these activities, students' historical understanding and attitudes to the past is able to be gauged. Using textbook activities to discern how students are to demonstrate their understanding of historical empathy is the focus of inquiry. An assessment tool was developed to be used to examine historical empathy activities as presented in history textbooks. It combines Ashby and Lee's (1987) five levels of empathy and the Structured of Observed Learning Outcomes Taxonomy (SOLO, Biggs & Tang, 2007). The two-pronged approach was employed to demonstrate a) the levels of historical empathy that students are asked to engage in as set out by Ashby and Lee (1987). This makes visible the disciplinary concept aspect that sits behind the design of the activities. And, b) a general education taxonomy whose structure enables learning outcomes (or in this case, outputs) to be observed for their level of sophistication from lower order to higher order thinking processes (Biggs & Tang, 2007). This brings to the fore the pedagogical side of the textbook activities—what the students are asked to demonstrate.

The influential researchers Ashby and Lee have defined empathy as "where we get to when we have successfully reconstructed other people's beliefs, values, goals and attendant feelings" (Ashby & Lee, 1987, p.63). They found that secondary students were capable of using empathy as a heuristic that can reinforce and inform other forms of historical thinking and suggested five levels of sophistication. Ashby and Lee (1987) concluded that movement to the higher stages was facilitated by their familiarity with the subject and a learning environment rich in peer discussion and problem solving. They proposed five stages of development:

1.The past is stupid – because people in the past act differently to them

2.Generalized stereotypes – believe that all individuals from particular backgrounds held similar values and acted in similar ways

3. Everyday empathy – understand the past through a prism of current-day values and attitudes

4.Restricted historical empathy –   understand the past through the prism of their own knowledge

5.Restructured and contextualized empathy – learners understand the past through a range of perspectives based on research.

These levels were used as one of the two axes on the assessment tool.

The second axis uses SOLO, to grade the observable learning outcomes that students could reasonably demonstrate through successful completion of the activities. It sees student assessment—or rather as is the case in this research, completing set activities—as the performance of an intended learning. The taxonomy uses verbs to describe the degree of

complexity students should demonstrate at each level, such as *identify* at the lower—or *unistructural*—end, *compare/contrast* towards the upper—or *relational*—end, and finally *theorise* at the highest—or *extended abstract*—level of the taxonomy (see Figure 1 for the SOLO Taxonomy). Using the SOLO taxonomy as a guide in which to ascertain the level of thinking required of students is useful in determining the range of cognitive diverse activities students complete to demonstrate their learning and understanding of historical empathy. Assessing the selected activities enables a decision to be made on whether the activities encourage superficial or complex approaches to learning as is evidence from the types of responses students are able and likely to provide when responding to the activities as intended.

The five levels of SOLO, as conceptualised by Biggs and Tang (2007, pp. 77, 205-206) include:

> *Prestructural* responses simply miss the point or, like this one, use tautology to cover lack of understanding.
>
> *Unistructural*: Use one obvious piece of information coming directly from the stem. Verbs: 'identify', 'recognize'.
>
> *Multistructural*: Use two or more discrete and separate pieces of information contained in the stem. Verbs: 'list' and, in this example, 'compare', which is nearer relational.
>
> *Relational*: Use two or more pieces of information each directly related to an integrated understanding of the information in the stem. Verbs: 'interpret', 'apply'.
>
> *Extended abstract*: Use an abstract general principle or hypothesis that can be derived from, or suggested by, the information in the stem. It is sometimes possible to use a one-correct-answer format ('Formulate the general case of which the preceding (relational) item is an instance') or to use a divergent short-answer sub-item ('Give an example where (c) – the preceding item – does not occur. Why doesn't it?'). Verbs: 'hypothesize', 'design', 'create'.
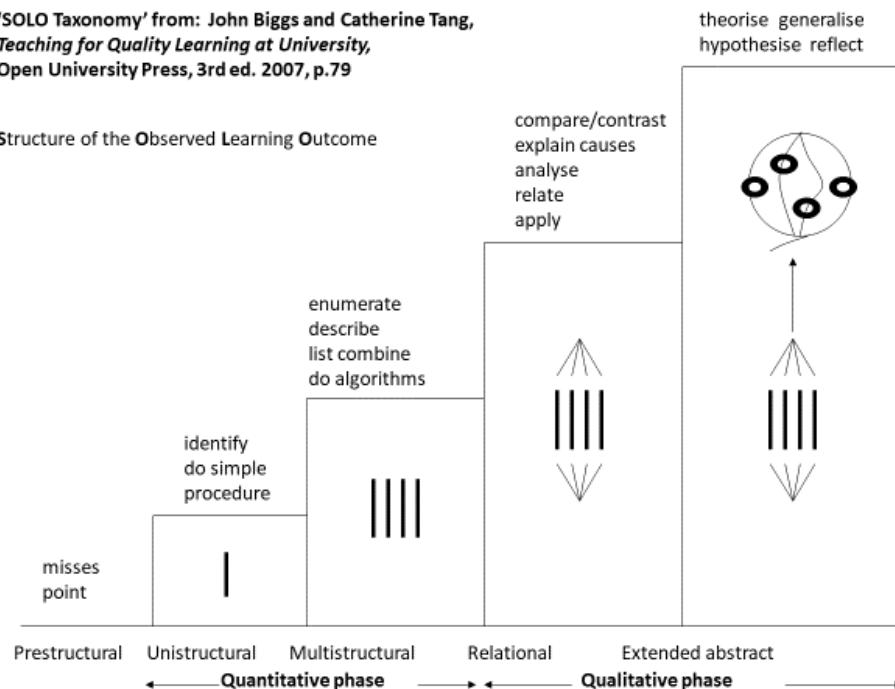

Figure 1: SOLO Taxonomy (Biggs & Tang, 2007, p. 79).

Data

Five textbooks were selected as part of this study, based on their availability and publication since the implementation of the *Australian Curriculum: History*. Each of the textbooks (see Table 1: Selected History Textbooks) is from a publishing company that adheres to the curriculum and provides connection to each of the State and Territory Syllabuses, is available nation-wide, produces a separate textbook for each of the high school years 7 to 10, and are used in History classrooms. The focus was *Rights and Freedoms* and each textbook contains a separate chapter focusing on this topic. To bound the data collection, only activities that included the Australian context of civil rights and reconciliation were included. This topic, included in the *Australian Curriculum: History*, is covered by States and Territories in their curriculum documentation also includes the US civil rights movement and it is often paralleled to the Australian context. It was decided for this study, to focus on the Australian history component only, as a way to engage with national traumatic pasts. Furthermore, the historical events included in this topic (both historical and more contemporary) provides a flashpoint in race relations of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders peoples. It is a topic widely known in popular culture, is taught across Australian schools in Year 10 as part of the compulsory component of History and remains a controversial topic in some sections of the Australian community. Recognising its importance in the nation's past, commemorative days are held annually (for example, NAIDOC[1] week and Sorry Day) to acknowledge past injustices and to focus on a more inclusive future of working towards reconciliation.

Textbook Title	Publication Year	Authors	Publisher
History 10: The Modern World and Australia	2012	Paul Ashton, Mark Anderson	Macmillan Education Australia
Connect with History: 10	2012	Vicki Greer, James Mason, Sarah Mirams, Margaret Pagone, Carmel Young	Nelson Cengage Learning Australia
History 10: For the Australian Curriculum	2012	Angela Woollacott, Helen Butler, Raymond Evans, Jenny Gregory, Richard Malone	Cambridge University Press
Oxford Big Ideas: For the Australian Curriculum History 10	2012	Geraldine Carrodus, Tim Delany, Kate McArthur, Richard Smith, Tony Taylor, Carmel Young	Oxford University Press
Retroactive 10: Australian Curriculum for History	2012	Maureen Anderson, Ian Keese, Anne Low, Brian Hoepper	John Wiley & Sons

Table 1. Selected History Textbooks

During the preliminary data analysis stage, textbook activities were examined and historical empathy activities identified based on activities asking students to respond in the voice of a historical actor. Activities were given an alpha code identifier followed by the chapter and page numbers (for example, M3: 134 refers to the empathy activity from the Macmillan published textbook, Chapter 3, page 134). *Table 2: Historical empathy assessment tool* shows each of the identified historical empathy activities assessed on the two axes—historical empathy (disciplinary concept) and SOLO (Assessing learning).

Empathy (disciplinary concept) SOLO (Assessing learning)	Level 1: Past is unknowable	Level 2: Generalized stereotypes	Level 3: Everyday empathy	Level 4: Restricted historical empathy	Level 5: Restructured and contextualized empathy
Pre-structural				M3: 134 (source response)	
Uni-structural		M3: 113 (source response) M3: 134 (role play) C3: 127 (role play)	M3: 226 (letter)		
Multi-structural		M3: 131 (source response)	M3: 103 (letter)		
Relational					J3: 154 (source response)
Extended abstract					

Table 2. Historical empathy assessment tool

Findings

It was found that two textbooks did not contain any historical empathy tasks for this topic (although it is noted these types of activities were included for the US race relations topic and other activities throughout the textbook). *Oxford Big Ideas: For the Australian Curriculum History 10* published by Oxford University Press and *Connect with History: 10* published by Nelson Cengage Learning had no historical empathy tasks, rather they included research-based activities that called for interpretation and evaluation of sources, rather than simplistic *imagine-style* questions. Students needed to refer to sources—and were only ever asked to respond as themselves—not as a made up or an out-of-context historical actor, or one based on a stereotype or a member of a group where it is expected everyone has the same opinions and attitudes.

Most of the examples (6) were identified in *History 10: The Modern World and Australia* published by Macmillan Education Australia. These were assessed as having low cognitive complexity on the SOLO scale and only one reached the fourth level of historical empathetic

understanding as per the Ashby & Lee levels of historical empathy (see *Table 2: Historical empathy assessment tool*). *History 10: For the Australian Curriculum* published by Cambridge University Press and *Retroactive 10: Australian Curriculum for History* published by John Wiley & Sons included one each. The strongest example in this topic was from the *Retroactive 10* textbook that placed historical empathy as a summative task, with the description positioned as a scenario, background information, a variety of sources including multimodal texts, explicit instructions on how to complete the activities both in terms of content and focus. This large activity that is spread across a textbook double page—goes beyond the requirement of students to describe or retell information in a comprehension style—requires students to interpret, evaluate, and collaborate in peer groups. Supporting students to complete the activity, a text type proforma is included in the online activities accompanying the textbook (students are provided with an online access key at the front of the book). The following section provides samples of the activity analysis, classified across the knowledge types and levels of historical empathy. The activities were selected as they demonstrated a range of historical stages and cognitive complexity.

Example 1: Children holding photographs

The first example highlighted in this paper is the concluding activity (one of six) in Chapter 3 of the Macmillan textbook, *History 10: The Modern World and Australia*. This was assessed as being uni-structural on the SOLO axis and as generalized stereotype on the empathy levels axis. The activity contains a photograph of a group of children, each holding a framed, black and white photograph of individuals (see Figure 2: group of children), captioned: "Source 3.63. Children holding photographs of members of the Stolen Generations at the Apology to the Stolen Generations at Parliament House, Canberra, 13 February 2008" (p. 134). The accompanying activity under a subheading *Crossing cultures* reads: "'Imagine you are one of the children in source 3.63. If you had been asked to speak for one minute at the Apology, what would you have said?" (p. 134).

This source response activity is itself a stereotypical historical empathy activity, instructing students to *imagine*. It is very difficult for students who haven't experienced this kind of trauma, to make a speech in response to the Apology. Responses by students would likely be contained to value judgements, presentism, and speculation. The photograph which forms part of the activity does not communicate any contextualization of who the children are and their relation to the subject of the photos.—there is no way of knowing if the children in the photograph have any relationship or connection to the people in the photographs they are holding up on public display. So, the exercise leads to students making up a response, as they might do in a creative writing exercise.

Furthermore, adding to this activity's generalised stereotype is that fact that there is no coverage in the textbook about the Apology—an important issue in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander reconciliation—and the focus of this activity. Students are being asked to respond not only on a low cogitative level (uni-structural), and there is no historical context for them to formulate a meaningful response communicating their ideas. As low as this activity is assessed on the assessment tool, students are not able to demonstrate historical understanding. The source is contemporary rather than historical, and an opportunity has been missed to teach secondary school students about this major, long-awaited, and at the time politically charged event towards Reconciliation.

SOURCE 3.63 Children holding photographs of members of the Stolen Generations at the Apology to the Stolen Generations at Parliament House, Canberra, 13 February 2008

Figure 2: Group of children[2]

Example 2: Margaret Kay

The second example is an activity from Chapter 3 of the Macmillan textbook, *History 10: The Modern World and Australia*. This was assessed as being multi-structural on the SOLO axis and as a everyday empathy on the empathy levels axis. The source the activity is based on, in the middle of the chapter, features a photo of a young Aboriginal girls in what appears to be a servant's uniform (see Figure 3: Margaret Kay activity) and is captioned "Source 3.9. Margaret Kay at Cootamundra Girls' Home, 1923." (p. 102). The question (the fourth in a set of 15) put to students is: "Assume that you are the girl in source 3.9. Write a letter home to your mother describing conditions at Cootamundra Girl's (sic) training school. You could include a description of the day you were photographed and your feelings about being away from home" (Macmillan, p. 103).

Here, the students are asked to assume the feelings of a historical actor based on scant information as the photograph on the preceding page is the only information about her in the textbook. The only information about Margaret Kay, referred to in the activity as "the girl" does not have any information about her in the text. There is some contextual information—a few sentences from Peter Read's book The Stolen Generations: The Removal of Aboriginal Children from NSW 1883-1969 are included. —in an additional source which is a very generalised description of life for the girls and young women living in the Cootamundra Girls' Home. The source reads as opinion, with the objective of presenting an entirely negative impression. With not attempt to make her as an individual, this anonymizing of Margaret Kay encourages students to see her as having no agency or point of view, merely representative of a victimised group—she is nothing more than a photograph in the textbook to the reader.

Rather than requiring historical understanding, this activity calls students to draw on everyday empathy of what life may have been like in an orphanage or similar institution and *assume*—which is akin to imagine—the emotional response of Margaret Kay. With the simple instruction of "include a description of…your feelings about being away from home", this is not drawing on anything historical, rather it requires from students only a descriptive recount of what it might be like to be homesick—ignoring the historical issues at play of children and young people forcibly removed from their homes, potentially reigniting intergenerational trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students in the class, as in many cases, these children were permanently separated from their parents and kin. This is a historical issue potentially rich for exploration, however this activity treats it in a superficial manner. Only requiring students to describe this activity can only be as high as multi-structural because it

requires students to draw on the photograph and use two sets of information to form a response.

SOURCE 3.9 Margaret Kay at Cootamundra Girls' Home, 1923

Figure 3: Margaret Kay activity

Example 3: Freedom Ride

The third example is the final activity from Chapter 3 of the John Wiley textbook *Retroactive 10: Australian Curriculum for History*. The task itself reads, "Write four blog entries as if you are taking part in the Freedom Ride through NSW in the summer of 1965. You want to let people know what is happening and support you as you travel in the bus with other students" (p. 154, see Figure 4: Freedom Ride). This was assessed as being relation on the SOLO axis and as a restructured and contextualized empathy on the empathy levels axis, and features as the activity graded the highest for cognition and affective levels on the assessment tool. This source response activity is set across two pages and is the culmination of a chapter on the Australian civil rights movement of the 1960s to 1970s which featured the activist Charles Perkins and events such as the Freedom Rides. The activity stretches beyond one question and answer activity, instead it is named as *Project Plus*, a task that will take several lessons to complete. It sets out a scenario, provides detailed description of the task and output (four blog entries), tells students how to complete the activity with accompanying text type in the online sources. Multiple sources are provided for students to use to inform their response, such as archival footage, photographs, eye witness accounts, as well as secondary source material. The activity calls on a rich collection of support materials and templates to scaffold the task so that students can demonstrate their historical understanding of this era and event (the Freedom Ride) and to display historical empathy.

It sets up a rich task as it requires students to consider a range of perspectives, to consult multiple sources, establishes motivation and historical agency. Students are supported to produce a quality output as the information they are required to draw on is contained within the chapter of the textbook—that is, they have been exposed to already to the content—and learning is further extended by referring explicitly to further source material students can access in constructing their four blog posts. Teachers are supported with this task—that they could reasonably set as a research assignment—as the online support materials (that all students have access to via a code listed in the textbook) also contain a marking rubric and samples of a blog text type.

Figure 4: Freedom Ride

To do historical empathy well, as identified in this research, activities need to go beyond a one-question and answer style activity. Students need extensive context and a variety of primary and secondary sources to compare and contrast and to synthesise information. A very clear focus needs to be provided so that students have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of historical empathy as it applies to the topic they are studying. Portal recommends that empathy ought not to be a separate section of syllabus, but a "characteristic dimension of each of the other historical skills" (Portal, 1987, p.34). Rather than empathy exercises, empathy embedded in the inquiry from the point of view of historical agents are integrated into the exploration of the evidence and the development of the narrative.

The research suggests that historical empathy and perspective taking can be enhanced by scaffolded learning agendas that utilize a variety of source formats and has been has found to be impacted by teacher practice (Yeager & Foster, 2001; Dulberg, 2002) Grant (2001) claims that students taught history primarily through a teacher-exposition approach did not develop an understanding of the multiple perspectives. Conversely, those who were exposed to different perspectives by participation in a variety of educational exercises, including simulations and the multi-media resources, achieved "intellectually complex" understandings

of perspectives (p.101). He uses his findings to argue for the importance of "the role of the teachers' practice in shaping, supporting and/or extending students' conceptions of history" (p.102). This is supported by Kohlmeier (2006) who found that successive utilization of the Socratic Seminar to interpret historical documents increased her students' recognition and understanding of multiple perspectives.

Conclusion

Barton and Levstik (2004, pp.207-8) argue that historical empathy "invites us to care with and about people in the past, to be concerned with what happened to them and how they experienced their lives." This conception of empathy gives emphasis to decisions about historical significance and avenues of exploration, reactions to historical outcomes and applications of what has been learnt in the past to the present. The examples in the textbooks are, in the main, not rich enough to enable this to occur. Across all the activities selected (including those not highlighted as examples), the common trope or go to activity is based on a sentence beginning with Imagine you are a <insert anonymous historical actor, eg a boy, slave owner, bride> and write a diary entry or letter describing your day with one or no sources to inform student response. Where there is some kind of stimulus, little in the way of background knowledge and conceptual understanding is provided, so the activity encourages fiction responses and project students' contemporary values, attitudes, expectations, and roles onto the past. There is a paucity of content to stimulate an empathetic response to the historical narrative and to understand the lives of historical actors. Often, historical empathy tasks include no critical inquiry or source verification to be demonstrated by the students.

Even more than producing fiction, the activities (with the sole exception of *Example 3: Freedom Ride*) perpetrate a sense of the past through a simplistic and a-historical binary of good/bad, right/wrong, victim/perpetrator. In the examples from Rights and Freedoms, these historical empathy activities position Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people without individual agency. This is troubling as this portrayal could be sustained in students' thinking today about Indigenous issues. The danger in having students undertake activities like this is that experiences of people in the past is romanticised and trivialised. The examples in textbooks reinforce stereotypes such as racism, they engage in 'othering', and create situations in which students are emboldened to write from their own misconceptions—even if the students themselves think they are being sympathetic. They also serve to validate negative prejudices, for example about historical enemies and racial groups that are different from the student.

Empathy and perspective taking are emphasised in the Australian Curriculum: History. That two textbooks don't have historical empathy related activities in a chapter covering national historical traumas is a concern and may be an indication of *uncertainty* or *discomfort* of how to manage students' affective responses in the classroom. Research has shown that historical empathy should not be passive—students can show their understanding and connection to this historical thinking skill through their responses. If the activities are not of a sufficient high cognitive level, students are not presented with opportunities to learn this skill nor demonstrate whether or not they have a deep appreciation of how it fits within a history discipline thinking process. Repeated exposure to historical empathy may promote understanding of complex ideas, decision-making and historical action (Doppen, 2000; Endacott, 2010; Foster,1999). In addition, when students view historical figures as agents of historical change, they are able to identify characteristics of historical change agents and reflect on their own abilities to act for positive change (Endacott, 2010; Endacott & Sturtz, 2015).

Most teachers are genuinely interested in creating engaging and interesting lessons and activities for their students. With the increasing crowded curriculum and time impositions on teachers (for example, non-teaching related matters), they frequently defer to the authority of the textbook writers and publishers. Contemporary textbooks can provide rich opportunities for historical empathy, supplemented with online scaffolds, links to primary sources and further research. With many textbooks including an online component, the issues of page limits associated with costs of printing no longer exist, therefore there is opportunity for these curriculum materials to engage historical topics in greater depth in a variety of multi-modal platforms.

For teachers designing their own activities, using the assessment tool featured in this paper when historical empathy tasks are used in assessment can support teachers to develop the activities and to assess the sophistication (cognitive and empathetic) of student answers. It can support teachers to make tasks more cognitively challenging as tasks can be classified against the assessment tool to ensure they are equipping their students with the opportunities to communicate higher levels of thinking skills and historical empathy.

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Endnotes

[1] NAIDOC (National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee) Week celebrations are held across Australia each July to celebrate the history, culture and achievements of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. NAIDOC is celebrated not only in Indigenous communities, but by Australians from all walks of life. The week is a great opportunity to participate in a range of activities and to support your local Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community. (NAIDOC, n.d., para 1)

[2] Please note, that figures 2 and 3—like figure 4—include all the information about the activity (other than the question for each source as it appears in a question bank at the end of the chapter). Nothing has been omitted.

Acknowledgements

About the Author

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