

Farewell to *The History Teacher*

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As we approach the publication of the final edition of *The History Teacher*, I thought it timely to reflect on past editions and track the development of the journal from the *Newsletter of the Queensland History Teachers' Association* (1963-1971) to the *Queensland History Teachers Bulletin* (1972-1980) to *The History Teacher* (1981-2007).

The QHTA has already published the first annual journal, *QHistory*, with a trial edition distributed to members in December 2006 and with positive feedback received from members, an annual edition will be continued, to be released towards the end of each year—just in time for summer reading!

The newsletters, bulletins and journals of the Queensland History Teachers' Association have always sought to inform members of current issues facing history teachers, assist with curriculum advice and materials and offer a way to create a community of history teachers in Queensland. As increasing media and government criticisms are lodged at teachers, and specifically history teachers in a lot of cases, a voice for history teachers continues to be an important role the QHTA seeks to play.

Due to the large volumes of interesting information available, it has been decided that this article will take a snapshot of the first twenty years of the QHTA, 1963-1983. Keep a lookout for the QHTA publications from 1984 onwards in a future article!

This article, rather than seeking to offer a commentary on past editions of *The History Teacher* and the publications which preceded it, will instead replicate sections of past articles, which may be of interest to members. Just as in 2006 we were faced with controversy surrounding the teaching of history in schools; we can see echoes of the same debate from previous years.

Common phrases seem to appear throughout the over 40 years of publication history. Phrases used to describe the teaching and learning of teaching can be found to be worded along the lines of "teaching history this year will be a challenge..." and "decreasing students studying the subject...". It seems the old cliché remains firmly in place; that whilst so much has changed so much still stays the same!

So, from the silent corridors of the UQ SS&H library where all QHTA publications are catalogued and housed, enjoy the reflections of past editions!

1964

We begin our look back with the earliest available edition of the *Newsletter of the Queensland History Teachers' Association* published in February, 1964.

HISTORY TEACHING, 1964

Members of the History Teachers' Association are aware of the challenge facing history teachers in 1964. New courses, new books and new teachers all pose special problems for the teaching of history. The History Teachers' Association will endeavour to assist members during the implementation of the new courses and will bring news of new books appropriate to the courses to members as they are published. Much remains to be done in the provision of inservice training for teachers who are without adequate academic qualifications in history.

Source 1: Editorial. (February, 1964). *Newsletter of The Queensland History Teachers' Association* Vol. II, No. 1, p. 1.

The Junior Examiner's Report was included in the June 1964 edition of the newsletter. Mr J. Sparkes had addressed a meeting of the QHTA and a summary of the content was then included in the newsletter. Here, Mr J. Sparkes describes issues related to marking exams and student effort. He also advises teachers on how to best prepare students for the exams. Poor literacy was used as an example of students not doing well, an issue that is still topical today!

JUNIOR EXAMINER'S REPORT

About fifty members were present at the Staff Room, Church of England Grammar School, on Friday evening, 29 May, to listen to Mr. J. Sparkes's comments on the 1963 Junior History papers. (Mr. Sparkes is Chief Examiner in Junior History).

Mr. Sparkes reported that there was no marked difference in the general quality of papers from previous years. There were still signs of superlative work being done by some students. (As each question is marked out of 17 marks, it is possible for a student to secure 102% and indeed this had occurred in 1963 while there were other instances of percentages from 95 upwards).

As a general rule, the percentage of A passes favoured the metropolitan areas (although one small country centre secured A passes for all its candidates).

There still remained, however, a disturbing number of candidates who scarcely attempted to answer the examination paper thus making their failure certain. The Australian section of the paper appeared to be the most popular.

Mr. Sparkes reminded teachers to insist that students numbered their questions to correspond with those on the paper. The loss of time and consequent irritation involved in searching for answers, could not be to the candidate's interest. Mr. Sparkes drew attention to the deplorable spelling of proper names which should be well known to any Junior candidate. He also pointed out that too many candidates had an undeveloped time-sense and suggested that teachers might make more use of time-lines and similar devices in their teaching.

A great deal of the discussion at question-time revolved around the length of the Junior History paper and the time allotted to it. Some members expressed the view that candidates should not be expected to answer more than five questions in two and a half hours as sufficient time was essential to the ordering of a good answer.

Some members also expressed the need to vary the type of questions so as to permit less brilliant students the chance to pass. For example, one question might be the objective test kind. Mr. Sparkes replied, however, that the Junior History papers for the remaining years of 1964 and 1965 would be modelled on previous ones.

The meeting gave members an opportunity to express their opinions and listen to those of others. It was a fruitful discussion. The Chairman, Mr. H. Alsopp, thanked the Principal of C.E.G.S. for the use of a very comfortable staff room.

Source 2: Junior Examiner's Report. (June, 1964). *Newsletter of The Queensland History Teachers' Association* Vol. II, No. 3, p. 1.

1965

The Editorial for June 1965 starts by painting the teaching of history in a very positive light with comments such as "...increasingly common to hear remarks made by well informed people that...there has been a significant improvement in the standard of history teaching in our schools."

However, towards the conclusion of the editorial, the sentiments of the editor take on a different perspective and a negative picture is painted of teachers without academic qualifications in history, teaching the subject and the scarceness of the subject after grade eight being available for students to

choose. Debates surrounding the implementation of SOSE in recent years seem to have a lot in common with this editorial.

It is becoming increasingly common to hear remarks made by well informed people that over the last few years there has been a significant improvement in the standard of history teaching in our schools. Many factors contribute to rising standards. Many more teachers of history have made a recent study of their subject at the University than was the case in earlier years. Indeed among the graduate students who complete the Dip. Ed. course it is common to find that each student has studied at least three units of history and often more, including Political Science. Australian History, Asian History and American History are widely studied. School textbooks and works of reference have increased in number and quality. Paper backs, either originals or re-prints, are cheap and challenging. Documents are available in various forms, including facsimiles and collections in book form, to provide students with the stimulus of the authentic record.

The catalogue of development is not complete, even when the above achievements are listed. Unfortunately far too many teachers of history are without adequate academic qualifications, too many classes are still dependent on the one textbook, too few schools have history rooms and too few teachers regard themselves as history specialists. In this last regard the non-government schools are much better off as it is common to find in these schools at least some teachers who are regarded as history teachers and teach the subject regularly. Although history is a subject taken by all students in grade eight, it becomes increasingly difficult for students to continue to study history as they move towards the Senior class. The subject could be given a much better chance of success if the structure of courses offered included history other than as an alternative to a key matriculation subject. Over the years the State Department of Education has trained many teachers of history, who rarely get an opportunity to teach the subject for which they received special training. This policy can only be described as a waste of public funds, short-sighted, to the detriment of history, and probably to the other subjects taught without the same degree of academic preparation. In view of the disabilities, it is a tribute to the teachers of history that so much is achieved.

Source 3: Editorial. (June, 1965). *Queensland History Teachers' Association Newsletter Vol. III, No. 3*, p. 2.

1971

The editorial for the first newsletter in 1971 is directed at a call for teachers to submit examples of classroom practice to the newsletter for publication. This call is still one that the QHTA makes regularly to teachers of history and SOSE in Queensland.

It is my hope that the Newsletter will become a forum for the expression of the views and ideas of all those engaged in History teaching in Queensland. Certainly we do not want the Newsletter to be dominated by a handful of writers. Because we will be concerned with the "bread and butter" issues of History teaching, no teacher should feel inhibited about submitting an article, letter or notes on some aspect of the teaching of the subject, and its problems, for publication. The Newsletter can become a very effective way of linking History teachers throughout the State, but its effectiveness will, ofcourse, depend very directly upon the type of support which it gets from its subscribers.

Source 4: Editorial. (February, 1971). *Queensland History Teachers' Association Newsletter Vol. IX, No. 1*, p. 1.

The March 1971 edition of the newsletter was written under the theme *The teaching of History in the Post-Radford Era* and lists issues associated with the implementation of the new syllabuses. Some of the criticisms of history teaching addressed in the contributions of 1971 have remarkably similar echoes to recent debates in the history and cultural wars which have impacted significantly on the teaching of history in the past few years. Issues associated with the transition from external based exams to internal exams and moderation continued to be brought up in other editions of the newsletter, making it an issue that was very important to teachers at the time.

It is possible that the new administrative arrangements emerging in the post-Radford era may erode History courses as we know them. Semester units will make possible shorter courses in selected areas of study; pressure from Subject Advisory Boards may result in the partial submergence of History in Social Science syllabuses.

These developments may be matters for regret to History purists, but I feel we too often support existing courses because of the subconscious desire to get a few more years from the lessons we already have prepared and know so well. New courses require new effort, and we are too pressed in with many cares to be able to make the effort on an adequate scale.

But then what is the value of History to the students of today? Certainly, well learned, the subject is invaluable in developing awareness in the affective area, and in building up the capacity to perceive cause-effect relationships. Skills in synthesis and relevance-selection are also by-products of a History course well read and well assessed.

More recently we have witnessed an extreme swing of the pendulum in the opposite direction - we have seen students struggling pitifully with details of Asian domestic events of even less significance than the personal relationship between Queen Victoria and Benjamin Disraeli.

To justify the matter of our subject (as distinct from the skills it encourages) we will have to meet the challenge of making it relevant to society today. Do we not, as historians, claim to possess greater insights into the problems of the present because of our vision of the past?

We must therefore be prepared if necessary to simplify and modify our treatment of nineteenth century topics in order to spend more time on twentieth century realities.

A rushed course lasting for most of the sub-senior year is not going to develop a love of history nor yet an understanding of the historical method.

The framers of this syllabus have, I fear, failed to realise that a love of history - a true involvement in the process of reading from several sources, in developing written answers to questions demanding thought and decision, in discussing topics which have been read at sufficient depth to make discussion meaningful - comes from depth studies undertaken at reasonably frequent intervals. The 1971-72 syllabus practically denies this for the whole of the sub-senior year.

The Post-Radford era will however, see us endowed with the opportunity to devise our own courses, provided they receive the approval of the new Subject Advisory Board. History has always been a 'social' study; we can perhaps, through our enthusiasms, see that it remains the most significant of the social studies.

But to do this we must be prepared to adjust, adapt, activate and if need be, advertise.

H.R. (Russell) Cowie.

Church of England Grammar School.

12th April, 1971.

Source 5: Cowie, H.R. (Russell) (March 1971). 'History Teachers' Forum: The Teaching of History in the post-Radford Era'. *Queensland History Teachers' Association Newsletter* Vol IX, No 2 pp. 9-10

The introduction of the semester system, envisaged in the Radford Report, should bring history within the scope of some students who have not previously had an opportunity to study it. Students whose courses have been directed towards Mathematics and Sciences may now be able to fit in a semester in History. However, the semester system may breed a whole host of new mini-subjects to compete with History and, for example, Geography - subjects such as Consumer Education, Environment Studies, Practical Psychology, and so on. Some of these may have a partial historical content, as do various forms of Social Studies on a topical basis, such as War, and the Roles and Status of Women; but their historical content does not make them a true substitute for History. Similarly, courses in Social Science that have a very strong core of sociology make only a limited use of historical studies.

The new Senior History Course being taught in Grade 11 for the first time this year (1971) goes a long way towards meeting former criticisms that History was merely being taught sequentially, and did not serve much purpose in assisting students to understand and cope with the (at least, allegedly) complex modern world. The topics to be studied in Grade 12 are concerned mainly with the twentieth century, although some attention is to be given to linking them with the past, and the students have already unshed through modern history since 1789 in the Grade 11 year. From the historian's point of view, this historical background and content are better than nothing, but it is doubtful if History in the true sense is being studied. If historical studies are to be used to

Source 6: Logue, W.P. (March 1971). 'History Teachers' Forum: History in the Post-Radford Era'. *Queensland History Teachers' Association Newsletter* Vol IX, No 2 pp. 17-18

1972

Sister M. Joan contributed to *The History Teachers' Forum* in the February 1972 edition of *Queensland History Teachers' Bulletin* with an opinion piece on the then-current generation of teenagers and how to teach effectively. Reading her first paragraphs many teachers may still feel this way about their students by replacing words such as "transistor" and "television" with "Ipod" and "Playstation".

We are educating a mass media generation - teenagers who eat their morning cornflakes to the blare of a transistor, digest their midday hamburger and the latest release in the record world with equal relish, and at tea time view television with the same appetite as they show for their curry and rice. How does our modern approach to teaching and planning in the educational field cater for the needs of our students - mass media products?

An invitation to attempt to relate the concept of freedom to teach and freedom to learn to the concept of critical thinking, and then to relate both of these to a major purpose of education - commitment to national ideals - presents a challenge. It is a timely challenge, for today our mass media engender fears that in some ways the concept of freedom to teach and to learn may interfere with the development of sentiments of loyalty to our country. Granted, that if interpreted too loosely or too broadly distortions may result. However, I do not share these fears; rather, I believe that freedom to teach and to learn is an essential part of our Australian way of life.

Source 7: Sister Joan, M. (February 1972). 'The History Teachers' Forum' *Queensland History Teachers Bulletin: Newsletter of the QHTA* Vol X, No. 1 pp. 7-8

1974

The July 1974 edition of the *Queensland History Teachers Bulletin* saw criticism lodged at the Radford System in an article written by G.D. Story. He writes his article, *Teacher Criticism of the Implementation of the Radford System*, from the perspective of his experiences with the then-newly implemented Radford system and the moderation meetings.

Some criticisms based on teacher experience under the present implementation of the Radford System.

The stated aim of the Radford Report was to liberalise the class-room situation and so enrich learning by releasing both teacher and student from the incubus of the end-of-year external examination.

In practice, the aim has not been realised. The writer shares, with quite a large consensus of humanities teachers the following opinions of the impact of the present implementation on the class-room situation.

I have had first hand experience of an invidious competition between teacher for results, at moderation meetings where the allotted time is quite inadequate for the purpose of the meeting; and even schools carry such competition into their rating procedures. Such meetings are a ridiculous time-wasting farce which takes up more teaching time in an already reduced semester; they diminish the dignity and professionalism of the teacher, and vitiate the learning experience enjoyment of his pupils.

Source 8: Story, G.D. (July 1974). 'Teacher Criticism of the Implementation of the Radford System' *Queensland History Teachers Bulletin: Newsletter of the QHTA* Vol XII No. 2 pp. 37-38

1977

Errol McDonald, History Subject Master at Mt Gravatt High School writes of the benefits of project work in history classrooms, including the teacher needing to accept the "...problem...that a class at work on individual or group projects, is noisier and more mobile than a class...in strictly disciplined conditions." This article is one of many since the establishment of QHTA which provides useful information to history teachers from the perspectives of fellow colleagues.

To me, History is a subject full of drama and adventure. The young History student (Grades 8 to 10) is generally quite interested in what has happened before his time, and therefore is ready to experience and relate to this drama and adventure. The young student has a spontaneous curiosity concerning the past that we should not let wither because of remote, tedious or indifferent presentation of our knowledge of the past. The teacher has to make the student feel that History has something to say to him - something that will interest and excite him.

Identification with his own topic is particularly valuable with the less able student. It enables that student to become an 'authority' on a topic, and as a result, he tends to lose a little of the feeling of academic inferiority which he might have held previously. Many students reveal unsuspected ability and interests when they are able to work at their own speed on their own topic. This is definitely a major plus for the project method.

One 'problem' however from the teacher's point of view, is that projects tend to involve more exhausting work than normal class teaching. Although the work is more demanding, the results achieved are more than worth the effort. Another problem is that a class at work on individual or group projects, is noisier and more mobile than a class where all are working on the same topic in strictly disciplined conditions. The teacher has to be able to maintain order in seeming disorder, and to allow movement, consultation, exchange of reference material and ideas, and yet at

the same time, ensure that the talk and activity is purposeful.

With project work of this type, the teacher takes more of a 'tutorial' role, and should be a 'mine' of useful ideas and general knowledge on which the student can draw. The teacher can provide guidance on presentation, illustrations, information sources, and methods of construction of models (if these are part of the project attempted.) It is the student, of course, who should be the 'authority' on his subject, and in this sort of situation, there is no need for the teacher to try to be all-knowing. It is a great boost to a young student's ego, and his self-confidence, if the teacher can admit that the student knows more details about a specific topic than he/she does. Especially too, if the teacher indicates an interest in the student informing him further about the topic.

Source 9: McDonald, E. (June 1977). 'Project Work in History' *QHTA Bulletin* Vol 15 no 1 pp. 7-8

Long-standing executive—and founding—member of QHTA and editor of the Newsletter for many years, Russell Cowie was a regular contributor to QHTA publications. Now retired, he still has an interest in the Association, not only by being a Patron, but also through attending events of the QHTA, like Annual General Meetings. In the December 1977 edition of the *QHTA Bulletin*, Cowie's address to the National Conference of the History Teachers' Association Conference is published. Titled, *History in Schools—'The Wisdom of the Ages' or a Response to the Needs of Society today?* Cowie discusses the place of history teaching in schools.

History has long been accepted as a school subject. Indeed perhaps the 'second oldest profession' is that of History teacher, because even in the most primitive of tribes, the lessons of the past were conveyed from the old to the young as a matter of grave tribal ritual.

We have all been recently involved in the debate on whether or not 'new' methods of learning are desirable. Those who have awarded themselves the title 'progressive' have been challenged. Their opponents claim that the over-eager innovators may in fact be regressive in their influence. We have a Campaign Against Regressive Education - a clear indication of concern within the community. Defenders of existing and past practices cry out 'What's Wrong with Tradition'? Why must we 'meddle' and 'tinker' with proven methods?

History teachers are guardians of tradition, they are one of the transmitting agents of the 'wisdom of the ages'. But History has always been a response to the present. Without questions stemming from the present day society, there is no History. History - the questions we ask of the past - comes from our needs, and our world. The myriads of facts about past events have no meaning unless they answer questions from the existing society. The few facts selected as 'significant', are significant only because they potentially fulfil a current need. The so-called 'wisdom of the ages' is thus ever-changing. It is not a static body of indispensable information.

Source 10: Cowie, H.R. (December 1977). 'History in Schools: 'The Wisdom of the Ages' or a Response to the Needs of Society today?' *QHTA Bulletin* Vol 15 no 4 pp. 2-15

1980

With "history wars" and "culture wars" being common expressions in the past few years, we can see the emergence of this term as far back as 1980, when Stephen Paul, History Subject Master at Kelvin Grove SHS wrote an article *First Shot in the History War* in response to a decline in the number of students studying history—Can we hear a similar theme in today's history classrooms?

At the end of 1979 I was shocked to discover that in 1980 there would be only 22 students undertaking Grade 11 Modern History at Kelvin Grove. A decline had been expected, indeed it seemed part of an overall pattern of a drift away from the humanities, but 22 students in a school of 1200 odd was obviously grounds for great concern. This was particularly so when students were given an open choice i.e. none of the subjects was competing against each other. Students were simply asked which 6 subjects they would most prefer to take (and only 22 opted for Modern History.)

The following statistics on student enrolments tell the story:

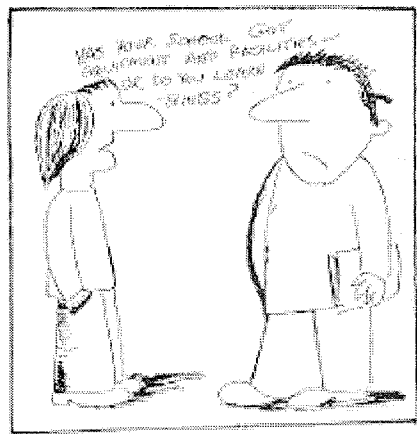
	Modern History	Economics	Geography	Ancient History
1977	80	120	56	36
1978	63	56	59	38
1979	50	39	56	12
1980	22	22	12	27

Source 11: Paul, S. (March 1980). 'First Shots in the History War' *QHTA Bulletin* Vol 17 no 4 pp10-17

1981

Editor, Debbie Henderson, includes an excerpt from *The Sunday Times* in the March 1981 edition of *The History Teacher*. Discussing the education outputs of students studying in sweltering conditions is still an issue that is debated in Queensland, especially at the start of each school years with the call for air-conditioned classrooms often made by parent groups.

From The Sunday Times
21st December, 1980.



Brian Hoepper's *President Report* in the April 1981 edition of *The History Teacher* provides members with information about the issues and concerns of the implementation of ROSBA.

LOCAL educational authorities, searching desperately for scientific data for last week's spending cuts, can celebrate some unexpected good news, writes Peter Wilby. The heady British child works better at low temperatures than his pampered American counterpart.

In the latest issue of *International Review*, Simon Kewan and John Howes, lecturers at John Abdon College, Quebec, point out that the British are accustomed to the colder weather conditions than the Americans. And their children are more likely to wear winter weather indoors while, across the Atlantic, this causes shivering in the home.

There is a catch, however. Kewan and Howes call for teachers to become "educational micro-climatology specialists"—they take a dim view of opening or closing windows simply because it keeps stuffy or draughty—and this must mean extra training costs. Simple thermometer readings are inadequate, they say. An "effective temperature," attempting for humidity and air movement, should be calculated. British children work best at 25° ET (which may be anti-90Z from the 60 to 73°C, depending on the task) whilst Americans prefer 22° to 24° ET (73°C to 75°C).

Teachers are advised to avoid temperatures above 35° ET (95°C to 34°C) under all circumstances, but children may work well at temperatures slightly below this if stripped to the waist (a condition, says the authors, " seldom met in the classroom "). Eleven children it seems, can stand higher temperatures than the few able to — a discovery that creates a further hazard for schools aiming at equality of opportunity.

Kewan and Howes are disturbed by the paucity of research evidence on this. Windowless schools seem infeasible, they venture cautiously, but nobody is quite sure. As for switching lights on and off at opening and closing blinds, educational micro-climatology provides little guidance. For the time being, teachers should apply these "principles" as such as " encourage students acclimatise shading their eyes or complaining of headaches." Assessment will let them know when they discover more scientific criteria.

Implementation of the R.O.S.B.A. proposals will have unavoidable consequences for all teachers of history in secondary schools. Already, many Q.H.T.A. members are involved in this implementation - on syllabus sub-committees of the Board, as teachers in Phase 1 schools. Many teachers have welcomed R.O.S.B.A., as a chance to develop teaching and learning approaches consistent with the principles of history as a discipline.

Executive wrote to the Board about this. In 1981, it seems that a priority of the new Executive should be a close monitoring of the unfolding R.O.S.B.A. scene.

Such proposals must concern Q.H.T.A. Fostering the teaching of history is the key aim of this association. Proposals which appear to threaten that aim should concern all teachers who believe that history still has a valuable part to play in the education of young people. I would hope that we are here today because we share that belief. ☐

Source 13: Hoepper, B. (April 1981). 'President's Report' *The History Teacher* Vol 19 no 1 pp. 8-9

Concerned with the amount of work that teachers must complete as part of their duties, *The History Teacher* addresses this in the November 1982 edition under an article titled *Burnout*.

A Boston University study diagnosed three stages of the burnout. First degree: Brief bouts of irritability, fatigue and frustration. Second degree: Same, lasting two weeks or more. Third degree: Physical illness such as ulcers, back pain and headaches.

These symptoms become quite chilling when put in the context of United States research on job stress published last year. The National Cancer Institute was informed that, although stress did not cause cancer in laboratory animals, stress permitted it to take place.

In Britain, it surfaced with the discovery that, in the decade 1976, the number of teachers qualifying for breakdown pensions had trebled. In Sweden, a teachers' union survey in 1977 found that, given the choice, 48 percent of teachers would not enter the profession again. The following year, a Chicago teachers' union study reported that 66 percent of teachers had suffered physical illness and 25 percent mental illness, from teaching stress.

Recently, the Queensland Industrial Commission, varying an award accepted that teacher stress had increased in the five years to 1980. Queensland Education Department research officer, Les Sampson, says comparative stress studies have been undertaken in Australia.

1983

Some time between the mid 1920s and the late 1930s (we do not have the resources to be more exact) the Junior syllabus subsection B (History of the British Empire) was replaced by 'Australian History to 1918'. This change gave a higher status to Australian history as such - though the subject was still called 'English History' - but there was still no local history requirement. The Senior syllabus continued to deal exclusively with European history.

Sometime between 1942 and 1955, the Junior modern history syllabus was substantially reorganised, being renamed 'History', and including sections on British History and the Commonwealth and Australian History. The latter was far more detailed than in former syllabuses, but there was still no local history requirement either in the syllabus or textbooks.

In 1979 the University of Queensland offered its first course in Queensland history. This was part of a rejuvenated interest in local and state histories occurring among professional historians through Australia, and the western world. At the same time history teachers were beginning to emphasise skill-based approaches, and developing a concern that students should experience an historical method of inquiry. The HOSBA initiatives are encouraging this emphasis on methodology (processes), and skills; and the new Junior HOSBA Syllabus acknowledges the benefits of using the local area as a vehicle for developing such skills and processes.

The post-HOSBA-1980's are likely to witness an acceleration of this recent trend toward local history in schools. Such a development would reflect trends occurring within the discipline itself, and among teachers and syllabus designers. The publication in 1983 of the LTHE Guidelines should encourage and support these trends, and help ensure that unlike in the 1960's, this time around student learnings in the local area will be historically sound.

Source 15: Gray, I. & Logan, G. (March 1983). 'Where We've Been: A Brief Look at the History of Local History Teaching in Queensland' *The History Teacher* Vol 20 no 4 pp. 15-16

1984

The perennial problems that beginning teachers experience is detailed in a soul-baring article written by Pat Danaher titled *That First Year: Confessions of a First Year Secondary History Teacher* in the April 1983 edition of *The History Teacher*. Teaching at Barcaldine State School Pat describes his experiences teaching a Year 9 History class.

INTRODUCTION

Confession is good for the soul, and repentance usually follows. This paper is a cold-blooded self-evaluation of my first year as a secondary teacher in a Queensland State school. This is a personal record, but my experiences are probably shared by many beginning teachers. My relations with my History class may also offer some hints about teaching the subject, if only what to avoid.

THE CLASS

My only History class was Year Nine and included twenty-three students of varying ability. History was timetabled with Citizenship Education and year level was streamed, so that I was teaching the most academically successful two-thirds of Year Nine students. Boys outnumbered girls sixteen to seven. Early in the year the assistant principal advised me, 'Everyone has a worst class', and for most of the year my History class was the largest bane of my teaching existence. This was despite my preference for the subject and my special interest in the units studied in both semesters of Year Nine.

Many secondary teachers of my acquaintance believe that Year Nine students are the most difficult members of the school population to teach. Pedagogically these students have often lost their initial awe of the secondary teachers and setting, but have not yet assumed the leadership role of Years Eleven and Twelve students. Psychologically they seem on average to have reached the least secure stage of adolescence, when the search for self-identity is generally heightened, and peer pressure is more powerful than the teacher's authority or personal ambition as a guide for behaviour.

Students in my Year Nine class generally conformed to this stereotype of insecure wilfulness. Competition with their peers created strong motivation, particularly in some girls, while many students were quick to deride poor performance in others, but were often defensive about their own command of the subject. Occasionally students complained about History's apparent irrelevance to them; I suspect that most students accepted the course as part of the pervasive monotony of school life. A few students were polite and interested in class, but many more were restless, conversed with one another, or showed little interest in my lessons.

TEACHING STRATEGIES

Personal preference and consistent advice from colleagues combined to make my lessons structured and my classroom authoritarian. My main teaching strategies involved teacher exposition and questioning, and students reading the textbook aloud, copying blackboard notes and completing worksheets.

During the year the emphasis of these activities shifted from non-directed discussion to written exercises with minimum verbal interaction between teacher and students to an amalgam of teacher exposition and directed discussion. These strategies generally resulted from the current nature of my relations with the class, but were also influenced by the content to be taught. Twice during the year, at the beginning of Semester I and in the middle of Semester II, each student presented a lecturette to the class in a series of lessons assigned for that purpose.

Many times during the year I was dissatisfied with the limited range and success of my teaching strategies. Beginning the year with lecturettes, in which students were encouraged to talk rather than write, was probably a mistake, as it later proved difficult to establish a classroom routine I should have created from the outset. It was certainly an unsettling activity, as it induced in students an expectation that all units would be equally interesting. Throughout the year I seriously overestimated most students' ability and underestimated the time they needed to complete activities. Ambitious plans for course content had to be modified or abandoned: for example, during the English Revolt unit I had planned to follow the study of the Stuart monarchs with a comparative discussion of the Hanoverians, but lack of time prevented this. Another problem was lack of variety in my teaching strategies, with the result that all units followed a similar pattern. This was due largely to my inexperience: I was concerned about covering the main areas of content, but I was unsure how to present these areas in a varied manner.

Classroom management was and remains my greatest weakness as a teacher, as it probably is for most beginning teachers. During the year my relations with my Year Nine History class consisted largely in my attempts to establish control over my students and their resistance of those attempts. Certain students had a reputation with other teachers as troublemakers, but this did not lessen my self-annoyance at my failure to subdue them. Their initially quiet behaviour made me underestimate their capacity for disruption, but for most of Semester I, I was concerned about their classroom conduct and my ineffectual struggle to improve it. I realise now that I made behaviour too much of an independent issue by stopping the class and abusing its members collectively, often for minor breaches of discipline by individuals. I declined to take the class to the library for research, and I would not consider taking them on excursions to local places of interest.

At the beginning of Semester II, I surprised my students and myself by displaying more aggression and a greater readiness to chastise wrongdoers. For the rest of the year we developed a roughly settled relationship, and for a few weeks I even looked forward to my History lessons. For most of the year my main punishment was written detention, and rarely I sent students to the Office. By the end of Semester II my relations with Year Nine History were not completely satisfactory, but were an improvement on our relationship during the year.

MY NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS

Time having healed my wounds and the Christmas holidays having restored my sense of perspective, I can record my confession and express my firm resolve for the coming year. I am in a position to profit from previous errors, as I am teaching Year Nine History again. This year I shall omit the introductory unit Issues in Australian Society Today and replace it with brief studies of What is History?, the Stone Ages and Mesopotamia. I hope to increase the variety of my teaching strategies, and to include in my assessment programmes the teaching and testing of the skill of paragraph writing. Greater acquaintance with the course should enable me to supplement difficult passages in Heritage 1 with my own material. Above all I wish to remain calm and collected in the face of student misconduct, and to effect a variety of disciplinary techniques.

CONCLUSION

This paper is a personal record of success and shortcoming by a first year History teacher. Some of the conditions and problems I have described are peculiar to my school, my class and myself; others are the common experience of many beginning teachers. It would be laudable if such experience were recorded and discussed in more school induction programmes.



Source 16: Danaher, P.A. (April 1983). 'That First Year: Confessions of a First Year Secondary History Teacher' *The History Teacher* Vol 21 no 1 pp. 18-22

History as Truth?

A Doorway into the Future?

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'How can we go forward if we don't know which way we're facing?' I think John Lennon coined that question. History teachers like it and also others such as, 'How can we understand the future if we can't understand the past?' Historical study is often seen as a doorway to the future. So what happens if students start closing the door?

Does it ever happen that you've just communicated something that you at least take to be something of substance and the student replies:

"That's just your opinion though, isn't it, Miss?"

OK teaching in a single sex school I don't usually get the 'Miss' part but when students first encounter History many do often assume that it is all subjective. Sometimes the smart ones may say, 'History is written by the victors'. Do you get this sort of response when teaching Mathematics? Physical Education? Art? Oh yes! I imagine in Art it may occasionally happen. In English too but maybe less so in the Junior School where what teachers say is perhaps taken as 'True'.

We SOSE and History teachers sometimes hear these voices. "There's no objective reality or even standards," they say, often by implication. It's all the fault of the History Wars. They've created a lot of doubting Thomasina's. These are the wars involving questions like:

- why are we teaching gloom and doom black-armband History?
- was Australia invaded or settled?
- does objective historical truth really exist?

For those of you who've missed it, the History Wars have been raging for a few years and for some people History is no longer a doorway to the future, because, well, it's all made up anyway. It's a doorway to fairy-floss land. It's all just a nice story. For others the History doorway remains rectangular and solid with glimpses of insights into the future sometimes quite clear.

The fairy-floss, 'there-is-no truth' doorway is often associated with a philosophy called post-modernism.

It used to have a little meaning but has come to mean almost anything. It can mean after modernism (subsuming and extending tendencies already present in

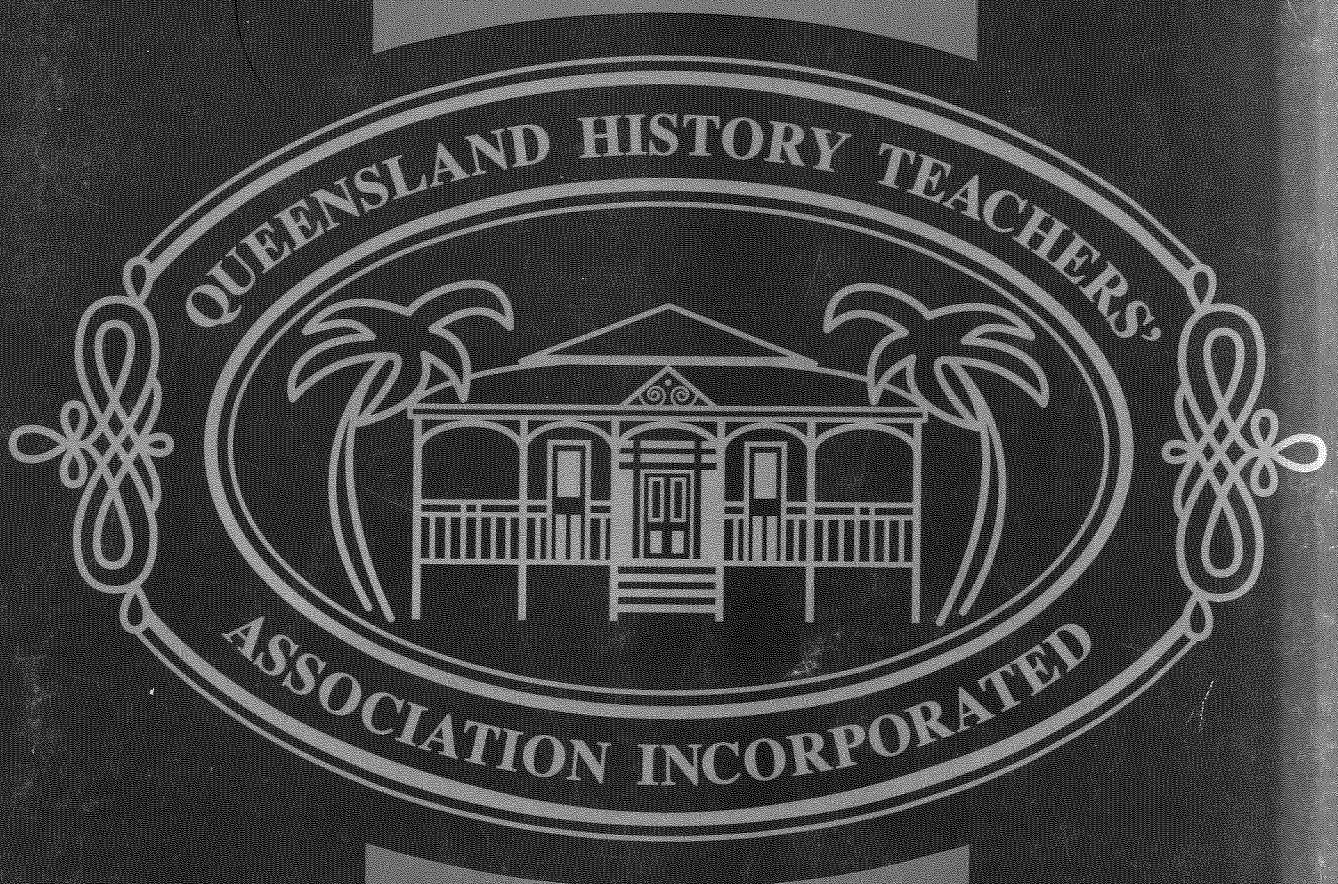
modernism); contra modernism (subverting, resisting, opposing, features of modernism); equivalent to "late capitalism" (post-industrial, multi- and trans-national capitalism) or lots more, I suspect.

Writers like Lyotard said post-modernism is a 'condition' where ideas like progress and civilization disappear. They provide a doorway that is a little fuzzy around the edges and difficult to progress towards. This condition could create an interesting state of mind, but I find it too presumptuous. It's a philosophy that rejects 'progress' because it sees progress as associated with evils like economic growth. Not that there's anything inherently wrong with economic growth, but what about progress as a movement towards deeper understanding of ourselves and others and God? What's wrong with that?

When post-mods promote the concept of 'discontinuous change' I get cranky. This is the idea that the present is so different from the past it is not connected to it. Yeh, right !! Tell that to an 80 year old. Ludicrous it may be, but try googling 'discontinuous change' and you'll score thousands of instant hits. Some see post-modernism and such concepts as providing a critical perspective. On the contrary, I think that from the early 1990s until now, it has become the dominant, conservative philosophy – especially in universities. I see it as the hegemonic paradigm that permits no other way of viewing the universe – a very fuzzy doorway indeed.

Some historians suggest everything is relative and that there is no knowable, objective truth. If so, this would mean no empirical evidence and that historians could never aspire to separate themselves from their work and think objectively. It would make distinguishing standards in student's work very difficult. But hang on, didn't the first real historian, Thucydides, try to distance himself from his own political system and write a work that examined critically what happened to Greece in the Peloponnesian Wars? Didn't he explain his own side's virtues but also its mistakes? Didn't Thucydides and, not to mention Leonardo Da Vinci and John Stuart Mill, try to step outside their own conditioning? Didn't they define History as the pursuit of truth about the past and isn't that definition worth pursuing?

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