Teaching and Learning Research Initiative (TLRI) – 2011-2012

How do students develop disciplinary expertise in history through standards-based, internally-assessed research studies?

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Why it matters?

The ‘argumentative and interpretive nature’ of history is not unrelated to the ‘carnival’ of competing perspectives that young people navigate daily as they interact with a ‘digitised culture filled with endless blogs, wikis and YouTube video clips’ (VanSledright 2009)
An ‘unnatural act?’

Sam Wineburg (2001): argues historical thinking (in a disciplinary sense) is an ‘unnatural act’. Requires the investigation of primary sources and the placing of these into context.

• Peter Seixas (1994) primary sources and context are important, but historical thinking also requires determining what is significant.
Theoretical Frameworks

• ‘Disciplinary approach’ to history education - history may be diverse, it has some characteristic organising ideas and that these can be divided into substantive concepts that are linked to content (the substance of history), and what he calls the ‘meta-historical’ disciplinary concepts, (such as cause, explanation, significance).

• Meta-historical concepts which relate student’s historical thinking to the discipline (in particular in regards to student’s ideas about the nature and status of historical accounts and evidence) that are apparent when young people engage with studies.
Methodology/ Data Sources

- 201/2012: 45 history students (ages 16-17) each year
- Three schools (two in the South Island and one in the North).
- ‘mixed method’ qualitative approach
  - online methodologies,
  - Semi-guided interviews and focus groups
  - documentary analysis (Research journal) during the research process.
- Analysis - grounded theory
3.1 PLAN AND CARRY OUT HISTORICAL RESEARCH

• Define an area for historical research and formulate significant and perceptive focussing questions.

Ask two **significant** and **perceptive** focussing questions that will structure your investigation.

• ‘Significant’ questions will allow the potential for you to gather evidence for a comprehensive coverage of the area of historical research.

• ‘Perceptive’ questions will reveal an informed and sophisticated understanding of the foundations of your research topic.
Gwen (name changed)
To what extent did the social conditions of the Islamic Empire promote scientific development? How did scientific developments of the Islamic Golden Age affect the Renaissance?

Bella (name changed)
What factors led to the 1918 influenza pandemic becoming particularly virulent in New Zealand? How successful were the attempts of the New Zealand government to manage the spread of the 1918 influenza pandemic?

Piriha (name changed)
In what ways was the ideology promoted by media and political organisations influential to the anti-Chinese sentiment in the 1880s-1920s New Zealand? In what ways did Chinese immigrants adapt to New Zealand society in the 1880s-1920s and how did this affect Chinese culture in New Zealand?
• Demonstrate initiative to select and record relevant and important historical evidence from a range of sources and organise it in accordance with the focussing questions.

• **Instructions:**
  • You could demonstrate this **initiative** by:
  • Resourcefulness in accessing appropriate sources
  • Taking a fresh and innovative approach
  • Willingness to access sources that are not readily available
  • Perseverance in using difficult sources
Gwen: I used initiative in my research almost from the moment I began my topic. .... because of the inherently Euro-centric (and even Anglo-centric) nature of resources and study available in English, finding enough in-depth and detailed sources on the history of a different religion was shaping up to be very difficult, as there appear to be very few online.... I got very good at combing huge, difficult indexes for many keywords good for my topic – initiative that vastly improved my skills …
• Bella
• I used my initiative in my research through my trips to the Parliamentary Library. I did this in the weekend and it was not suggested to me by a teacher or included in the assignment’s brief. I used knowledge about resources historians used in their books to research for my assignment…. I also used my initiative when I chose to change the focus of my research. It became clear to me that much of the information I had gathered could be more useful answering a different set of questions.
Piriha

The VUW where I used 2 different theses. This was the first time I had ever used a thesis and because the whole thesis partly related to my questions I had to read quite a bit of it but then ended up just using a couple of pages from it. The Paperspast website was also a first for me, and I found 2 newspaper articles. I watched a video from NZOnscreen which was also a first for me, unfortunately it did not help me much but it was interesting because there were interviews on it about what life was like for Chinese families during the 19th Century.
Evaluate the effectiveness of the research process from the historian’s perspective:

• If you were to repeat this assignment, what would you do differently? How could you improve the process?
• How and why did the focus of your research change during the course of this assignment?
• If you were to carry on with this research, what questions would you try to answer? What resources / evidence would you try to use?
• What historical debates did you uncover? How did you deal with these in your research?
Many of my sources were very stereotypically favourable in their description of the positive attitudes to scientific research in Islam, and their dominant focus was on how wonderful it all was. However, more recent sources… have started to question exactly how true this was, and if the cultural climate and scientific forums were as favourable as people think. In my research I have included information from a range of secondary sources, some of which praise the scientific climate of Islam and some which question it and present opposing evidence and argument.
Bella

The newspapers were a success. They gave me a feel for the time period I was studying. They were not only very useful for my questions but enlivened my topic. Although not included in my research assignment the ability to read about other issues from the time such as WWI made the topic seem more present and I believe gave me a greater insight into my topic. From the view of a student completing an assignment it is easy to forget that the subject of my research was not the only thing of importance to people from that time. I think reading more widely about the time helped me consider other aspects that may have affected the epidemic and better understand the people who were involved in it.
• Piriha
• If I were to carry on this research I would want to find out what was the appeal of New Zealand through the Chinese immigrants’ eyes. I would like to find this out because I would like to know why my great grandparents’ generation came to New Zealand. I think this would be quick a hard question to answer because it might be too closed, it might just have a few answers to it. I think if I did have to research that question I would have to change my dates because I think the best way to answer that question would be to interview Chinese immigrants.
Results/Significance of the study
Selected References


