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## What use is SoTL?: Using the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to Develop a Curriculum for First Year University History Classes

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# **What use is SoTL: Using the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to Develop a Curriculum for First Year University History Classes.**

**Jennifer Clark**

**University of New England**

‘reality is messy’  
(Spoehr and Spoehr, 1994, 74)

## **Introduction**

‘History is more than a discrete subject matter’, explained Robert B. Bain (2000, p. 332), ‘it is an epistemic activity’. Therein lies the first difficulty for history teachers. What should be taught? This is complicated further when we acknowledge the intellectual challenges of the teaching exercise, that is, how to marry the discipline content, once determined, with the most effective pedagogical practice (Mayer, 2006, p. 71; Ragland, 2008, p. 2). These problems have traditionally been addressed through the application of habit and experience because we tend to teach as we ourselves were taught but this pattern does not necessarily result either in effective or appropriate pedagogy (Ballantyne, Pain and Packer, 1999, p. 237). We can not continue to assume what we have practised in the past is useful now, or will be in the future, especially since the increased diversification of the student base. We need to develop reflective best practice born of an engagement with research into discipline-based teaching and learning. This engagement must also have a purposeful outcome. What use is the scholarship of teaching and learning unless this knowledge can be translated into improved learning outcomes? One way to achieve this change may be to use an understanding of the scholarship of teaching and learning to develop better curricula.

## **Methodology**

Can the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning be used to inform better curriculum development? Between 2006 and 2008 I was involved with preparing and teaching a new first year history unit for delivery at a rural university with a hugely diverse student population ranging from school leavers to the very elderly; including on-campus students and those studying by distance education around the world; and representing academically gifted students and those who entered university via specially constructed pathways. My colleagues and I identified pedagogical problems developing an understanding of the history discipline in new students and we saw how difficult it was for many of them to produce a high standard of written work in the form of a traditional history essay. We consulted the scholarship of teaching and learning for answers but found a gap between research knowledge and application in



curricula (Hitchcock, Shoemaker and Tosh, 2000, p. 55; Booth, 1997, p. 216; Seixas, 1994, p. 107; Booth, 2004, p. 250). The next step must surely be to ask whether it is possible to translate the knowledge of the scholarship of teaching and learning into a better curriculum for first year history students? The project plan followed five phases:

1. identifying pedagogical problems in the teaching of first year history;
2. searching the discipline-specific scholarship of teaching and learning;
3. applying the scholarship of teaching and learning to curriculum development taking into account institutional limitations;
4. teaching the new curriculum to a cohort of some 100 distance education students and thirty internal students for the first time in Semester II, 2008; and
5. evaluating the curriculum and making a judgement about whether knowledge of the scholarship of teaching and learning can inform a better curriculum.

This paper concentrates on the first four phases of the research plan. In particular, it follows a precedent established in SoTL research of developing links between theory and practical application, but traditionally such research involves small changes in quite specific areas. Particular pedagogies are chosen and implemented to achieve equally narrow outcomes, for example using constructivist learning strategies (Daley, 2002) or concept mapping (Doorn and O'Brien, 2007). Fewer studies have used the process of SoTL as the pedagogical grounding for holistic curriculum development. Rachel Ragland is one who has. Ragland wanted to 'engage students in applying the authentic disciplinary practices of the field'. She used disciplinary research to inform the content and SoTL to 'measure the success of the course design' (Ragland, 2008, p. 1). My approach is different again. I wanted to design a unit that was certainly based on disciplinary knowledge and like Raglan, was geared to 'authentic disciplinary practices' but I also wanted to use SoTL findings more proactively to inform the pedagogical practice at all stages, including curriculum design. The unit was designed with pedagogy in mind, following Raglan's view that 'helping students construct knowledge in an authentic context takes pedagogical knowledge on the part of faculty not just content knowledge' (Raglan, 2008, p. 2).

## Identifying Pedagogical Problems in the Teaching of First Year History

### Student diversity: teaching across a broad spectrum

For some time now those engaged in university teaching, especially at first year level, have grumbled about the difficulties and disappointments they encounter when teaching students the rudiments of discipline knowledge and practice (Barker, McLean, Roseman, 2000, p. 60). Some of this dissatisfaction has come about because the student body itself is changing. No longer is the university the place solely of elite learning, with students engaged in 'an apprenticeship in the community of scholars' (Nicholson and Ellis, 2000, p. 208; Taylor, Gough, Bundrock and Winter, 1998, p. 261; Barker, McLean, Roseman, 2000, p. 60, Maclellan, 2005, p. 130, Cowan, 1996, p. 23). It is no longer possible to assume a certain level of ability, interest, educational background, or aptitude among students (McInnes and James, 1995; Johnston, 2001; Muldoon, 2004; Wineburg, 2001, p. 109.). Nor indeed, can high standards of literacy and numeracy even be expected. At the same time Ramsden (2003, p. 4) believes that '[t]oday's undergraduates are at once harder to teach and less indulgent towards indifferent teaching' than ever before. Although a shift in the makeup of the student cohort has been broadly identified, at some universities the trends are more noticeable than others (Brooks, Gregory and Nicholls, 2000, p. 17; Quinn and Godwin, 2002). At

my own university, this characteristic is pronounced, largely because the percentage of students enrolling from rural and isolated backgrounds, where educational disadvantage is more common, is higher than the national average (Muldoon, 2004, p. 37). In practical terms diversity in educational preparation has highlighted the inadequacies and inflexibility of traditional teaching practices and their supporting institutional cultures, which carried with them an implicit expectation of student success and where ‘expertise in teaching tends to be regarded as a natural corollary of excellence in research’ (Booth and Hyland, 2000, p. 2). Although simplistic ‘imparting knowledge’ may have always been an inadequate pedagogy, Laurillard explains that ‘while higher education was an elitist enterprise, it was possible to make this failure the responsibility of the student, reified in the “fail” grade’ (Laurillard, 1993, p. 13; Booth, in Booth and Hyland, 2000, p. 31).

It has become increasingly apparent that student diversity coupled with higher expectations of teaching staff, fewer resources and external demands for greater accountability have all pushed universities to pay more attention to teaching priorities (Boyer, 1990, p. xi). More specifically, these developments have ‘required history programmes to address a greater number of individual learning needs’ (Nicholson and Ellis, 2003, p. 208). Booth and Nicholls are subsequently quite explicit both about genuine pressures on teaching staff and the way the scholarship of teaching and learning must become part of the reinvigoration of effective teaching practice saying that ‘at a time when history teachers in higher education face multiple challenges, the need to discuss teaching in ways informed by up-to-date pedagogic scholarship has never been greater’ (Booth and Nicholls, 2005).

#### **The Meaning of History: teaching an ‘epistemic activity’**

History teaching is challenged by forces operating across the university sector, including inequity in funding between the humanities and more vocationally oriented courses, but it is troubled further, and closer to home, by complexities inherent in the discipline itself. Excellent history, enlivening, engaging and ground-breaking history exists to model discipline best practice. ‘But how, exactly’, asks Sam Wineburg (2001, p. 50) ‘do we turn portraits of excellence into programs that develop it?’ Partly transference difficulties stem from the inherent nature of historical enquiry and the uncertainty or perhaps inherent conflict in knowing the past. Some history teachers focus on the historical content, perhaps because student passion and attraction for history is found in the romance and adventure of its stories. Certainly, this is the area that is clearly easiest to teach but ‘[H]istory teaches us a way to make choices’, says Wineburg (2001, p. ix), ‘to balance opinions, to tell stories, and to become uneasy – when necessary – about the stories we tell’. The more complicated qualities of historical practice - history as a reflective and revisionary process - present the teacher with substantial difficulties: How can we help students to grab hold of a moving target? How can we give students the courage to step away from the perceived safe repetition of historical facts and enter the dynamic world of historical enquiry? The difference perhaps rests with providing students with the ‘intellectual apparatus’ of the historian to develop a more sophisticated understanding of the past, the construction of history and the tenets of their own historical consciousness or collective memory (Laville, 2004, p. 1273; Halbwachs, 1992).

#### **The Meaning of History: finding a pedagogy of History**

Diversity and lack of consensus within the history profession defines the discipline, supports its complexity and speaks of its dynamism. History is constantly pressing against its disciplinary boundaries, scavenging methodology from sociology, anthropology, literary criticism, cultural studies and others. This complexity is equally

reflected in the diverse way history is taught in universities (Booth, 2004, p. 248). It may be possible to transfer some general pedagogical principles into the history classroom but there still remains the question of how best to teach the peculiar features of discipline knowledge and practice. Although the discipline defines the academic (Becher, 1989; Booth and Hyland, 2000, p. 1; Booth, 2004, p. 247) and academic teaching is framed by its disciplinary content, there is very little known about pedagogical differences across disciplines, so that '[o]f the literally thousands of studies of teaching, learning and teacher evaluation in higher education, very few have examined disciplinary differences' (Hativa and Marincovich, 1995, p. 2; Neumann, 2001, p. 135; Lindblom-Ylänne et al., 2006). Moreover, any specific interaction between the discipline of history and pedagogy has, until quite recently, been limited. As late as 2007, when Richlin and Witman surveyed the disciplines to determine the importance and impact of the scholarship of teaching and learning, they found that there is 'relatively little representation of the SoTL in the discipline of History' (Richlin and Witman, 2007, p. 6). The scholarship of teaching and learning must become part of total professional practice in universities, indeed Pecorino and Kincaid call SoTL 'a fundamental obligation' (Pecorino and Kincaid, 2007, p. 6). If this is the case then it will become imperative for historians to engage with teaching and learning research as part of professional practice leading closer to Boyer's broad redefinition of professional scholarship to include the 'scholarship of teaching' (Booth, 2004, p. 251). Most important in this process will be identifying what Shulman (Calder, 2006, p.1358) calls the 'signature pedagogy' of the discipline.

### **The Historical Sense: Searching the Discipline-specific Scholarship of Teaching and Learning**

While historians have slowly begun to consider that teaching must be seen as a scholarly activity, it is the cognitive psychologists, led perhaps by Samuel Wineburg, who have first explored the development of the all-important historical sense. Psychologists have recognised thinking historically as a cognitive function but not known how to identify it or how to encourage it in students and yet it goes to the heart of an historian's practice. 'I had no clue', explained Wineburg (2001, p. x), 'why some students could, and others could not, arrive at interpretations that seemed to me self-evident'. It is clear in the teaching process that 'students have difficulty negotiating what it means to think and write like historians' (Green, 1994, p. 91). This disparity between the work of the expert and the novice has guided much research in this area in an attempt, first, to identify the elements of historical thinking and then to distil them for transference into pedagogy (Green, 1994; Seixas, 1994). The research specifically tried to track the thinking of professional historians to see what strategies they employed to gather a deeper awareness of historical texts in comparison with students who tended to seek information in a far less sophisticated way. As Wineburg (2001, p. xii) asked so plainly, 'What is it, exactly, that historians do when they "read historically"?' The important obvious corollary is, what must students learn to do?

It appears that historians recognise that texts are 'slippery, cagey, and protean, reflecting the uncertainty and disingenuity of the real world' (Wineburg, 2001, p. 66). They recognise the place of the writers in the text and the role of the audience while at the same time making judgements about the content and its context (Wineburg, 2001, p. 70). Historians read to identify a narrative, to find a sequence of events, to learn details, to identify bias and purpose, to juxtapose discipline knowledge with new meanings, to engage with contradictions and to acknowledge the nuances and complexities in history (Rouet, Britt, Mason and Perfetti, 1996, pp. 479-487). Their experience allows them to bring topic knowledge to their reading and to recognise

intertextual references more easily or make comparisons. Students were far less capable of reading into the text. They did not comfortably negotiate the text or work with it. They did not ask useful questions of the text or relate it to knowledge of other texts. They read it without experience and in isolation because they read only to gather information from the text and not to engage with it (Wineburg, 2001, pp. 76-77). 'Reading is not merely a way to learn new information', says Wineburg (2001, p. 80) 'but becomes a way to engage in new kinds of thinking'.

Developing historical thinking is a complex cognitive operation that requires a far more sophisticated reading of a text than students currently employ. Much of this procedure must be cultivated in the student as a thought process rather than as the retrieval of information from the text. 'If wisdom, or some less grandiose notion such as heightened awareness, is to be the end of our endeavors', suggests Robert Scholes (in Wineburg, 2001, p. 84), 'we shall have to see it not as something transmitted from the text to the student but as something developed in the student by questioning the text'. As teachers we perhaps wrongly assume that students will naturally develop this perspective, that they will structure their thinking around engagement and that they will develop perception. Rarely do we consciously structure our teaching in explicit ways to develop historical thinking in students.

Historians operate with many documents at the one time, each offering a new insight into an historical problem, the goals of which are 'ill-defined and vague' (Wineburg, 1991, p. 74). The issues are involved and complex, the problems vexing and not immediately apparent. Wineburg suggests that '[e]ven the point at which a historian can say "I know enough to render an account" is ill-defined' (Wineburg, 1991, p. 74). Historians write for a wide audience. They are prepared to open up debate, to question and explore and raise issues. They do not necessarily write the 'correct' answer. There is, perhaps, a line of best fit. They are prepared to accept the complexities of the past and to acknowledge the twists and turns that they expose. They embrace complications rather than ignore them, indeed, they seek them out with probing questions (Seixas, 1994, p. 108). Often, it is the question that is more important than the answer. The historian makes judgements about the sources they read, some of which they give a more privileged position to than others. This process requires complex reasoning skills.

The historian uses evidence to develop an argument and support a judgement by organising prior knowledge and new knowledge into a representational framework. In the comparative research of the cognitive psychologists students did not link issues in the same way (Green, 1994, p. 95). They were less able to develop 'a sense of authorship', less able to interpret evidence not only because they lacked contextual knowledge but they 'lacked the kind of disciplinary knowledge that would have enabled them to set their ideas in context and justify the issues they chose to write about' (Green, 1994, p. 94). Green's idea of discipline knowledge may include how to find, assess and connect causes with effects, how to deal with apparent contradictions – 'reality is messy' – how to discuss and assess a variety of arguments (Spoehr and Spoehr, 1994, p. 74).

History is not a science, it relies on perception, interpretation and judgement. Its human dimension is reflected in the subject matter but also in the way it impacts its audience – 'history holds the potential, only partly realized, of humanizing us in ways offered by few other areas' (Wineburg, 2001, p. 5). Human agency is also most apparent in the way History is best taught. 'For history students the key yardstick of a successful course is the quality of the tutor-student relationship' (Booth, in Booth and Hyland, 2000, p. 35). Booth argues consistently for the value of the human dimension in history teaching - enthusiasm, clarity in explanation, commitment to students.

Learning the discipline knowledge and the patterns of disciplinary understanding occurs through interpersonal activity - discussion, exploration, thinking out aloud, modelling approaches, and personally demonstrating historical method. Moreover, this personal dimension is particularly important in teaching a subject where the historian as the interpreter of evidence is such a dynamic factor in the production of history. Students must understand the role of the historian in writing history, and this relationship must be reflected in the pedagogy of history. Students of history are thrust into a discipline that thrives on uncertainty, choice, selectivity, inconsistency, change, evolution and adaptability. To embrace such an intellectual life is the challenge of teaching history.

### **Marrying Cognitive Research with a Skills-Based Approach**

Cognitive psychologists call the development of an historical consciousness conceptual learning but historians interested in teaching have seen the 'signature pedagogy' of history as the development of skills. Theoretically there is some contradiction here. Usually skills acquisition relates to learning a task or a behaviour. This is far different from conceptual learning which involves encouraging students to explore new ways of thinking (Maclellan, 2005, p. 135). Partly the thrust for skills development has come from demands to provide students with a better capacity for lifelong learning and equally from demands for accountability. History graduates claim to have identifiable skills that can easily be transferred into the workforce (Booth, 2001, p. 487). The seemingly incongruous marriage of conceptual learning through skills development has perhaps been best brought together in a pedagogical package called 'Decoding the Disciplines' developed by a team from Indiana University (Pace and Middendorf, 2004). In this model the teacher identifies areas of student difficulty, models to the student professional ways of overcoming those difficulties and provides continuing opportunities for the students to practise the new techniques. The learning process is analysed and then systematised so that students focus on techniques and practices that historians and teachers take for granted. The process is written as a seven-step teaching and learning model: '1. What is a bottleneck to learning in this class? 2. How does an expert do these things? 3. How can these tasks be explicitly modelled? 4. How will students practice these skills and get feedback? 5. What will motivate the students? 6. How well are students mastering these learning tasks? 7. How can the resulting knowledge about learning be shared?' (Middendorf and Pace, 2004, p. 3). The advantage of the 'Decoding the Disciplines' model is that it recognises the cognitive underpinnings of disciplinary methods as described by Wineburg and then transfers expert discipline practices as knowledge to be learnt by students as skills.

The 'Decoding the Disciplines' program, of course, taps into a body of inter-disciplinary pedagogical research developed over the last 30 odd years. The proven value of authentic learning (Herrington, 2006), task-based teaching (Salter, Richards and Carey, 2004) and of course, using both deep and surface learning techniques (Prosser and Trigwell, 1999; Biggs 1993; Marton and Säljö, 1976) underpin the process outlined in the model. Research into the broad cognitive processes of learning has provided a knowledge base into which the teaching of historical thinking can be nested but as Peter Seixas notes 'there is something distinctive about the teaching and learning of history, which cannot be known by simply applying general principles of teaching and learning to issues of history education' (Seixas, 1994, p. 107). It is through the scholarship of teaching and learning, which is very much discipline-driven, that synergies can be found across pedagogical theory and discipline demands.

### **3. Applying the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning to Curriculum Development**

Brooks, Gregory and Nicholls (2000, p. 18) call for ‘more understanding of the implications of research’ and Booth argues that: ‘The link between research, teaching and learning is not direct, automatic or necessarily positive, but must consciously be created in the design and delivery of courses and degree programmes’ (Booth, 2004, p. 250). To test whether the scholarship of teaching and learning can have any systematically useful application I have developed a new unit for delivery to first year students with close reference to current thinking in the History-specific scholarship of teaching and learning. This means integrating skills development with content in order to support the cognitive basis of learning historical thinking. The unit aims to engage the skills debate following Booth and Nicholls’ advice that ‘[a] pedagogy that addresses the skills agenda does not have to be utilitarian – indeed, properly developed it is challenging, creating capable, reflective, critical and creative learners’ (Booth and Nicholls, p. 2). Hitchcock, Shoemaker and Tosh argue that ‘most history curricula could do more to promote the development of history-specific skills’ (Hitchcock, Shoemaker and Tosh, p. 55). So what are the ‘History-specific skills’ I have chosen to address in my attempt to use the scholarship of teaching and learning as the basis of curriculum development? Broadly, the overarching ‘skill’ must be the development of historical thinking as explored by studies in cognitive psychology because it is learning to think historically that ultimately defines the discipline. Historical thinking is what makes the difference between students who understand the process of history-making and those who just repeat information. To this end I have integrated into the curriculum the ‘Decoding the Disciplines’ methodology so that aspects of thinking historically, including human agency, are modelled, practised and evaluated in a co-ordinated and strategic way.

The aims of the unit reflect a rejection of an unequivocal and naive focus on teaching facts and teacher-determined interpretations. They recognise history as multi-faceted, multi-dimensional and difficult to control. They acknowledge the diversity of history and the role of the historian in creating history. They operate as much to induct students into the rhetoric and practice of historians as they do to introduce them to stories about the past. They translate the discipline’s expectations for students rather than teach something other than history as practised by historians. They are also focused on student learning outcomes not on teacher-directed activities. Lastly, they provide an opportunity to analyse the development of historical consciousness. These broad aims are:

1. to develop an understanding of the complexity of the history discipline, following the idea of Spoehr and Spoehr – ‘reality is messy’ – through a critical examination of historical events and developments;
2. to develop analytical, critical and sophisticated approaches to historical materials including the ability to ask pertinent questions, to seek explanations from source material and to negotiate apparently contradictory sources;
3. to encourage an engagement with historical writing in secondary sources rather than seeking only after information. To identify and make judgements about arguments and to appreciate diverse forms of historical writing;
4. to develop a sense of human agency in the practice and writing of history;
5. to develop an ability to write for a wide audience based on an argument supported by documented evidence;
6. to promote reflective learning practice.

There are several principles in the practical delivery of the unit that can be followed if 'history-specific skills' are to be taught.

1. 'History-specific skills' must be *explicitly* taught within the context of content. It is here that the 'Decoding the Disciplines' model can be usefully employed because of its strong emphasis on explicit modelling and its links with research into cognitive psychology (Shulman, 1987; Brown, Collins and Duguid, 1989; Tobias, 1992-1993; Donald, 2002; Middendorf and Pace, 2004, pp. 1-2). It is inadequate and unproductive to assume that students will simply 'pick up' the idea of the historian's work as they go along. Each element of the historian's approach to 'doing' history should be identified, explained and taught systematically and purposefully and followed by student practice. None of the historian's practices of research, selection of relevant material, reading deeply into historical documents, developing an argument or constructing a written account should be implicit in the teaching or taken as assumed knowledge. For example: identifying relevant information from an historical document in order to answer a question can be demonstrated in class, practised in group activities and assessed in a simplified task that asks students to select, list and comment upon relevant material from an assortment of sources. In this unit students are asked to undertake this task using accounts of the first sightings and early exploration of the New World, for example, works by Columbus, Hakluyt and Raleigh.
2. 'History-specific skills' should be taught *incrementally*. The elements of historical thinking must be carefully identified with regard to how they fit together in the process of reading and writing history. Each skill must be isolated, presented, taught and practised so that a knowledge base is built. It is inappropriate to expect a student new to history to understand a complex process without having been shown its constituent elements, or how to bring them together in a finished product called history. For example: identifying the argument of a secondary source as opposed to repeating the points made in it can be teased out in class discussion, practised in class-based group activities and assessed in an exercise. In this unit students identify the arguments of strongly controversial secondary sources such as the classic texts on slavery by Stamp, Elkins, Kulikoff, Jordan and Levine.
3. Assessment should be tied to learning outcomes. The measurable learning outcomes of the unit operate under the stated aims. On completion of the unit a student should be able to:
  - a) select relevant from irrelevant information in order to answer a question (linked to aim 1)
  - b) research a topic in primary and secondary sources (aims 1 and 2)
  - c) construct an argument to answer a question (aims 1, 2, 3)
  - d) identify and critique an argument in a secondary source (aims 1, 2, 3,4)
  - e) write an essay (paying attention to feedback from previous assessment tasks) on an historical question using accepted referencing techniques (aims 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6)

Assessment patterns should be incremental in design, specific in intention and be geared to testing the students' understanding of the historical process, including how to read a text, how to engage with other historians and how to present their own argument. These elements should be tested *systematically* and *separately*. For example, incremental assessment tasks with good feedback, each of which address a particular aspect of the historical process and feeds into the next assignment, can help the student to break down the

historian's tasks into manageable and knowable pieces. Each piece can be assessed separately such as, reading for meaning, selecting evidence to support an argument, identifying an argument in a secondary source and engaging with it, leading to the construction of a properly documented short written argument. In this unit the four written assignments break down the elements of the traditional history essay and allow students to practise historical thinking at each stage.

- a) Assessment 1: the student familiarised themselves with primary and secondary sources, separated relevant from irrelevant information in order to answer a question and learned correct referencing procedures.
  - b) Assessment 2: the student researched a question in primary and secondary sources on early settlement using the Virtual Jamestown site as a finite source base and constructed an introductory paragraph to a hypothetical essay thereby demonstrating an ability to analyse sources, synthesise meanings, construct an argument and reference correctly.
  - c) Assessment 3: the student identified and evaluated the argument of a secondary source, demonstrating an ability to engage with a source and to make a judgement about it expressed as a short essay.
  - d) Assessment 4: the student brought all the taught elements together in a short research essay – demonstrating an understanding of the demands of a question, separating relevant from irrelevant information, finding and using a variety of primary and secondary sources, identifying and evaluating arguments, constructing an argument and supporting it with properly referenced evidence.
4. Human agency. History reveals people acting in the past and people interpreting those actions in the present. It is important that the idea of discussion and engagement is promoted both as part of the history-writing process and the pedagogical process. This unit uses discussion, group work and debate to develop analytical skills and critical thinking and to stress the human element in historical stories. Historiography can be used to map changes in historical thinking over time.

#### **4. Teaching the New Curriculum**

The matrix in Appendix 1 schematically presents the relationship between the principles of history teaching discussed in the most recent developments in the scholarship of teaching and learning as interpreted through the aforementioned six aims and applied to a ten-week course in first year history. The matrix reveals how the curriculum is planned to introduce students to the elements of disciplinary practice first and how that informs what is taught each week. The content, that is the historical stories the students will encounter, in this case about European contact with the New World, are secondary to my main purpose. Certainly, these stories are important, but primarily as a framework for students to practise historical skills and develop new cognitive patterns. These skills are broken down into compositional elements growing in complexity, difficulty and sophistication as the unit proceeds. Students are taught discipline practice in context explicitly and incrementally moving from the general position of what history is and what historians do to a point where the individual student can assert personal competence in history-writing. By improving their historical skills and developing an approach to the past that more closely approximates what working historians do, students should feel more comfortable studying history and find more enjoyment in uncovering the complex secrets of the past. An example of how complexity is explored is in the group reading of sources.

Students often read historical documents but do not engage with them. In this unit students form groups of three or four in class. They deconstruct a document collectively by talking to each other as they read, by noting unclear phrases, by discussing passages, and most importantly, by bringing knowledge to the text. They are encouraged to read more deeply into the document modelling an historian's common practice (Wineburg, 2001, p. 70).

The matrix displays the overall pattern of the unit but in any given week students were engaged in tasks to meet specific learning outcomes and to progress further along the path of developing engagement with the broader aims of the unit. The aims are difficult to measure or track in the short duration of the unit. Moreover, the aims were of a fundamental nature, that is, establishing an intellectual framework for the discipline of history that students will build upon in advanced studies in subsequent years. Historical thinking is a cognitive process that must be developed and nurtured over time. To engage with the aims, learning outcomes were devised which required students specifically to work with sources individually and in groups, teasing out meaning, discussing problems, debating the issues raised, dealing with inconsistencies, errors and misleading statements. They studied human agency by learning about the creators of the sources they read, their motivation, background and purpose for writing. At the same time they reflected on what they brought to the interpretation, knowledge, bias, personal belief structures. They asked questions, raised problems, and argued about interpretations. Each week students practised the historian's craft.

After teaching the unit I asked students in an anonymous written survey whether after completing the unit they:

1. had a better idea of what history is;
2. had a better idea of what historians do;
3. knew more about how to reference their work;
4. felt more confident about writing an introductory paragraph that established an essay's argument;
5. felt more confident about identifying the argument in a secondary source;
6. felt more confident about interpreting an essay question; and
7. felt more confident about writing a history essay.

On each question between 75% and 90% of respondents answered positively. Most students believed they had a better understanding of and ability to act within conventions of historical practice. When asked to provide qualitative comment students spoke positively about the way the unit helped them in specific ways by narrowing the focus of history writing skills. They identified an increased ability to select material to support an argument, to identify arguments as opposed to gathering 'information', to develop an argument, to use primary and secondary sources, to understand questions, to reference correctly, to read historical sources and to learn from mistakes. These are all elements of thinking historically as practised by historians and identified in the scholarship of teaching and learning. The ultimate success or otherwise of this unit can only really be determined by whether these students will be able to build on this groundwork in future history classes but in the short term these students believed themselves to have a better sense of historical practice.

It is inherently difficult to evaluate the success or otherwise of this unit in more definite terms at this stage. A more sophisticated evaluation is outside the scope of this paper. Because the development of historical consciousness is a cognitive process, useful future research would require a longitudinal study of whether the skills and concepts introduced in this unit were captured by students and applied in later

years and in other units, in other words, whether a change in thinking had occurred through good modelling and targeted action learning of discipline practice. Current research to be published separately, intended to inform the ongoing development of the unit, involves an analysis of student assessment tasks to identify areas of difficulty that have not been successfully addressed by incremental teaching of scaffolded tasks, or, on the contrary, those areas that have demonstrated measurable improvement. Such an analysis will shed more light on whether learning outcomes and the aims of the unit have both been met in the process of developing an historical consciousness in first year history students through the process of curriculum design using SoTL as a design informant.

## Conclusion

Teaching history today is difficult. The student cohort has changed – it is no longer easy simply to blame the student for pedagogical inadequacy - the institutional environment is more demanding and academics are being forced to engage in an intellectual shift to reconsider the meaning of scholarship. Teaching is slowly assuming a higher profile in universities across the world and in our sights as a result. Added to these generic issues, the discipline of history itself is a dynamic one with no sure ground and no impenetrable intellectual position other than perhaps the primacy of evidence. Historians scream loyalty to their discipline but the discipline's boundaries are forever shifting. It is necessary for us to seek out what is useful in the vast pedagogical literature and to look specifically for that which helps us to define our disciplinary purpose and then to translate that knowledge into a more effective curriculum. The result must be a new curriculum that specifically teaches how historians engage with historical data and how they think historically *explicitly, incrementally* and in an *integrated* way. It must be a curriculum that accentuates human agency that encourages student engagement rather than the gathering of information and assesses student learning of *new cognitive positions*. It must also be a curriculum that puts academic research into a pedagogical framework and goes some way towards answering Wineburg's question: 'But how, exactly, do we turn portraits of excellence into programs that develop it?' (2001, p. 50.)

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APPENDIX 1:

Principles	Exploration and Exploitation			Settling British North America				At War – The Old World and the New			
	To explain what history is and how historians work	Development of History - specific skills embedded in content									
Aims	Starting Point – What is History? Diagnostic test/survey to identify how students understand the study of history and its difficulties. (Decoding the Disciplines)	Finding a New World	Meeting the Native People	Exploring & Exploiting the New World	Jamestown	Puritan New England –Witchcraft–	Virginian Plantations –Slavery–	Philadelphia –Arts & Letters–	The French & Indian War	The American Revolution	The War of 1812
	1. To develop an understanding of the complexity of the history discipline through a critical examination of historical events and developments	Explore different ideas about what history is, how it is constructed, recorded and presented.	Examine different ideas and perceptions about the New World. (reading accounts of discovery Columbus and Hakluyt)	Look at the experiences of Europeans and native people on first encountering each other. (las Casas as historian)	Consider different economic enterprises in the New World as a driving force for exploration and exploitation. (gold, fur, fish, sugar and tobacco)	Examine the early history of Jamestown as an example of settlement in the New World. Examine problems and difficulties, successes and achievements. (virtualjamestown.org)	Examine some of the tensions and problems encountered in establishing new communities (1692 witch hunts)	Explore the operation of slavery as a complex system of labour and social relations in the New World.	Examine the growth of the arts and sciences in Philadelphia. Look at the way the New World was visually and culturally expressed.	Explore the changing relationship between the Old World and the New through war.	Explore the increasing tensions between the Old World and the New. Why was the relationship so complex?
2. To develop analytical, critical and sophisticated approaches to historical materials including the ability to ask pertinent questions, to seek explanations from source material	What sources can be used to construct history and how should they be used?	Look for cues to understand a primary source better? (reading literary and non-literary sources eg: early maps as knowledge records, how to question documents, what to look	Read into and within a primary source and juggle sometimes contradictory information from different sources (las-Casas-Sepulveda debates)	Consider a range of different types of data as historical sources. Do different questions have to be asked of different sources? (Applications to parliament,	Read a variety of primary and secondary sources and select relevant material to answer a question. Compare and contrast the sources.	How reliable is the recoverable past? What can historians know? What is the role of generalisation, speculation or imagination in the historian's task?	How can we best understand the history of slavery? What are the limitations afforded by the sources? (white accounts, slave accounts, material culture of slavery)	How can we read cultural artefacts as historical documents eg: buildings? (Lawler on the President's House, Philadelphia)	How can different types of history add to our knowledge, eg: political, military, biographical?	Deconstruct a major historical document and place it in historical context. (Declaration of Independence, Jefferson's 'Summary View')	What were the origins and consequences of the War of 1812? Interpret historical materials to answer questions and solve problems.

and to negotiate apparently contradictory sources.		for, reading for meaning)		accounts of trade etc)							
3. To encourage an engagement with historical writing in secondary sources. To identify and make judgements about arguments and to appreciate diverse forms of historical writing.	See history as interpretation.	Read a secondary source to gather information about the topic.(eg: Hornsby, Elliott, Armitage and Braddick)	Read a secondary source to identify its arguments. (Hanke, Merwick, Jaenen, Nash, Jennings)	Critique historical writing and make judgements about it. (Hornsby, Weber,Elliott, Andrews)	Identify and consider arguments relating to the establishment of Jamestown (Appelbaum and Sweet)	Examine the Salem witch hunt literature as historical debate showing the way historians build on the work of each other and open up new areas of enquiry (Boyer and Nissenbaum, Caporaal, Demos, Knight etc)	Evaluate controversial and different approaches to slavery (Levine, Morgan, Kulikoff, Jordan, Elkins, Stamp, Fogel and Engerman etc)	Explore the value of interdisciplinary study in the writing of history – art history, archaeology, heritage studies, history of science etc	Explore the writing of military and political history (Anderson, Hornsby)	What is the value of Atlantic History? (Elliott, <i>Empires of the Atlantic World</i> )	How have historians explained the War of 1812? Historians make choices and construct arguments.
4. To develop a sense of human agency in the practice and writing of history.	Identify how history is constructed by people for particular purposes.	How do we make judgements about the importance or credibility of sources? (Columbus)	Explore how different historians bring different approaches to encounter history (las Casas to Merwick)	Look at different types of history eg: economic, social, ethnographic and Atlantic History. How do they differ?	Visit Virtual Jamestown. Look at the way human agency works in creating, selecting and interpreting sources (Rose on Frethorne's letters).	Can we ever find historical truth?	What is the purpose of history? (Champion, Jordan, Katz-Hyman)	Research a topic on Philadelphian cultural History.	What can different types of history bring to the study of the past? (Olson on Wolf)	What are the purposes of writing the history of the Revolution? (Gould, Wills,Green, Bailyn)	Why did America go to war in 1812? I can offer my interpretation of the past.
5. To develop an ability to write for a wide audience, based on an argument supported by documented evidence	Look at the purpose of historical writing and the way to document evidence from sources.	Practise documenting evidence and learning documentation techniques. (guidelines provided)	Recognise the difference between an argument and information by identifying relevant information to answer a question and commenting upon it to add meaning.	Posing questions: what to ask of sources? How to interpret a given question.	Reading, interpreting and gathering evidence from diverse sources to formulate a coherent argument.	Engage with the historiography of the Salem witch hunts. What do historians tell us and what new questions must we ask?	Engage with the historiography of slavery. Why have approaches to slavery changed over time?	Present findings of research to the class in the form of an argument supported by relevant evidence.	Examine how the French and Indian War has been presented in History writing. What do historians know? How do they write what they know?	How can we understand the causes of the American Revolution? (debate)	What is the significance of the War of 1812 for America? I can support my argument with documented evidence.
<b>ASSESSMENT TASKS</b>											
6. To promote reflective learning practice.	Consider what it means to be a reflective learner.	Think about thinking historically. What does this	Consider what it means to be a reflective historian. How	Reflect on the impact of finding a New World. What	Reflect on feedback from the first exercise.	Reflect on the ways in which European ideas and practices	Reflect on the relationship between conditions in	Reflect on the way historians undertake research, the	Reflect on how our own research can make use of	Reflect on the feedback received on previous	What have I learned about the relationship between the

		mean?	can we identify our own bias or background influences?	questions should historians ask about the past?	Reflect on the Jamestown readings. How to move from collecting information to constructing an argument.	were transferred to the New World.	the New World and Old World ideas.	methods they use and the outcomes that can be achieved.	historians as models of practice.	assessment tasks. How can this be used to improve essay writing techniques?	Old World and the New? I think about what I am doing.
7. To engage with ideas about the discovery, exploration, exploitation, settlement and eventual loss of the New World by the Old between 1492 and 1812 in an essay.	What is a history essay?	<b>1. Learning to Reference</b> Select and list evidence from primary and secondary sources to answer a given question and document each entry properly using footnotes and a bibliography.	<b>2. Construct an argument</b> Read different sources from virtualjamestown.org about the settling of Virginia. Select appropriate and relevant evidence that can be used to support an argument that answers a given question (practised in assignment 1) and construct an introductory paragraph that establishes the argument for a hypothetical essay. Document as appropriate (practised in assignment 1).	<b>3. Interpret and evaluate a secondary source.</b> Identify the argument of a secondary source and evaluate it. The essay should have a strong introductory paragraph (practised in assignment 2) which establishes the argument of the essay. The essay should be properly footnoted and contain a bibliography (practised in assignment 1).	<b>4. Research and write an Essay</b> Read a variety of primary and secondary sources identifying and recording evidence to support an argument that answers a set question (practised in assignments 1 and 2.) Engage with the secondary literature on this topic so that your argument is placed in context of our known knowledge (practised in assignment 3). Develop and sustain the argument throughout the essay. Reach a conclusion.	I can research a topic, develop an argument, support it with evidence and communicate that argument clearly and confidently.					