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Towards a model of empathetic communication in teaching history

Harvey Waddington Newman
University of Wollongong

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TOWARDS A MODEL OF EMPATHETIC COMMUNICATION
IN TEACHING HISTORY

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the
requirements for the award of the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

from

THE UNIVERSITY OF WOLLONGONG

by

HARVEY WADDINGTON NEWMAN, B.A., M.ED[Hons.]

SCHOOL OF LEARNING STUDIES
(1988)

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"Man is the creature that
knows his fellows only
in himself".

Marcel Proust ; La Prisonniere.

- ABSTRACT -

The study of more human aspects of history has settled somewhat uncomfortably into the discipline of history. The close association of human characteristics and subjective analysis has tended to be in conflict with the objectivity required to maintain history's discipline. The introduction of empathy to historical treatments has accentuated this conflict. A closer examination of what gives history its objectivity in more subjective treatments and the processes involved is important in clarifying the extent to which empathy can be incorporated into the study of history. To deal with these issues is the central purpose of this study; in particular the problem addressed is to devise an holistic model of the empathetic process which may be applied as a general psychosocial process and as a substantial methodological process for the teacher and student of history. The implications of the importance of psychosocial theory to explain empathy are in need of closer scrutiny in historical interpretation. This scrutiny, if successful, may then be employed as a means of negotiating the objectivity of subjective 'human' treatments of history. In this study empathy is interpreted as a fundamental process of communication and thus arguably, one of the most important strategies for teaching and studying history.

The thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University, and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except when due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

Harvey Newman.