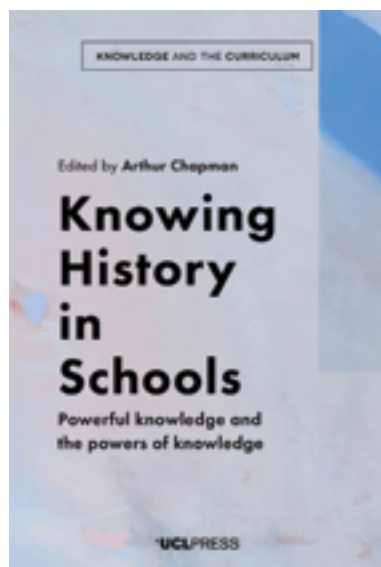


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Knowing History in Schools

Edited by Arthur Chapman

January 2021

UCL Press

Open access PDF

266 pp with line drawings

ISBN: 9781787357303

Free download from <https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/130698#>

Reviewed by Phillip O'Brien, McKinnon Secondary College

Current trends in History education, particularly in a secondary context, place strong emphasis on the acquisition and refinement of historical skills to arm students with the necessary tools to unlock and understand the past. In some contexts this has led to cross-curricular studies and blended units of inquiry, overlapping History with other disciplines as a method of engagement and learning. With the emergence of a broader 'knowledge turn', particularly in the United Kingdom, many schools are now rethinking their approaches to subject

knowledge, placing it at the centre of a school's purpose rather than as an outcome of skill acquisition and social constructivism. In *Knowing History in Schools*, a collection of ten brief essays explores this topic through a range of lenses in terms of broader curriculum trends, subject enrolments and History education itself.

Arthur Chapman's introduction outlines the rationale for this collection: growing concerns with the quality and identity of school curricula, especially in regards to History, alongside uneasiness in terms of the status of knowledge in schools and growing focus on learning at the expense of teaching, citing increasing generalist programs, changing educational policies and political administrations and, in some cases, a failure to deliver competency-based models effectively. With this in mind, a return to knowledge—a theme echoed throughout the book—can potentially overcome the focus on generic competencies that is increasingly widespread in schools.

The book draws heavily on Michael Young and David Lambert's work in advocating a 'Future 3' scenario that fills the space between traditional didactic subject-based learning and the blended inquiry-based curriculum. In this scenario, the boundaries between subjects are stable but not fixed, allowing subject knowledge to flourish alongside cross-curricular skill sets, supporting the delineation of school knowledge and everyday knowledge.

The link between disciplinary knowledge, cultural literacy and powerful knowledge fuels a curriculum principle built on content selection. Alison Kitson's essay discusses this in the context of social realism: how can powerful

knowledge enable students to see the world in new ways? To engage in broader debates and conversations? To understand how one might accept or reject interpretations of the past? Such knowledge bridges the inquiry framework, allowing students to understand how the past can be distorted or misinterpreted and how powerful knowledge can inform and guide historical thinking. As such, it has a key role to play in informing powerful pedagogy: 'a critical way of realising powerful knowledge in the classroom' (p. 47).

Catherin McCrory's essay further unpacks this concept, exploring the what-how of education, the balance between effective pedagogy and content delivery and the need for this equilibrium to differ in the History classroom as it may to other disciplines such as English. Given that 'pedagogical how' is distinct from 'disciplinary how', teacher training and practice is put under the spotlight here, illustrated within this chapter through a lens on language and ways in which meaning both represents and infers accordingly. Again, powerful knowledge has a key role to play in this distinction.

Arthur Chapman and Maria Georgiou consider the role of classroom learning in relation to powerful knowledge through data drawn from both the United Kingdom and Cyprus, navigating the preconceptions and misconceptions students themselves hold, and drawing on student agency to understand how one might support students in building both knowledge and experience.

In their respective essays, both Richard Harris and Katharine Burn explore systems and preconditions in terms of the education system itself. This begins with an exploration of equality

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of access, presenting fascinating data on both time allocations and enrolments for History in different secondary education contexts, raising interesting questions around school priorities for the discipline of History and the perceived outcomes for students—and therefore the schools themselves—in terms of end-of-school achievements. This data holds broad significance for Australian schools too; there are real parallels between differing socioeconomic contexts and school priorities that have the potential to inform practice and policy in a range of ways. Burns further outlines the importance of partnerships between schools and teacher-training institutions in strengthening this connection.

The political aspect of curriculum decision-making is explored by Joe Smith and Darius Jackson, who unpack the distinction between radical and traditional social realism, and to what extent curriculum can challenge structures in dominance and encourage social mobility.

Kenneth Nordgren's brief essay advocates for a '45-degree approach' that supports a recontextualisation of content, stating, 'History must actively refer to the contemporary world to make sense' (p. 23). Drawing parallels between the past and present is central to this recontextualisation, making powerful knowledge relevant and purposeful as well as embedding intercultural understanding, democratic values and specialised knowledge. This speaks more broadly for the need for teachers to review their content in step with the world around them and their changing student cohorts.

Mark Sheehan draws further on the intercultural aspect and role of History education in the context of New Zealand in addressing the

monologue narrative of colonial history, exploring the differing experiences and perspectives of all parties to encourage a culturally responsive pedagogy that aims to help address the injustices of the past. Indeed, building a solid understanding of the diverse experiences of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples is very much a platform for effective reconciliation. Shifting from content knowledge to powerful knowledge arms learners with tools for positive change.

Given the emphasis on powerful knowledge as an agent for social change, Nick Dennis presents an interesting counterpoint in his essay. He argues that teacher self-perception can create a different kind of powerful knowledge—one that can be self-congratulatory in terms of social realism yet neglects hidden histories at the same time. He cites the examples of West Indian communities in England, where scarce discussions and marginalisation led to cultural exclusion and racism. This reality is very much at odds with 'the progressive narratives that History teaching tells about itself' (p.26), with History teaching publications of the period paying scant, if any, attention to the issue. This sobering reality is a reminder that powerful knowledge has a very real role to play in social realism, but it must also remain dynamic, reflective and inclusive.

In the final essay, Michael Young reflects on the contributions within the book and on powerful knowledge itself, raising salient points and questions for considerations that will lead the reader to think deeply about their own curriculum, school experiences and future possibilities.

Knowing History in Schools draws on recent data and school trends

to present an informed series of essays that hold real relevance to Australian schools, particularly in the context of ongoing debates in the media regarding the nature and purpose of History teaching. This book is an excellent read for those in the business of teaching History, especially to inform planning and decision-making at a faculty level, as well as in terms of professional learning and growth.

The only potential downside here is the scale of the book and the potential ability of busy teachers to get through it. With this in mind, the resulting short essay components make it far more accessible.