

# INNOVATION IN HISTORY TEACHING THROUGH TRAINING — POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITATIONS

Miss R.B. Mulholland (Johannesburg College of Education, HOD History)

Professor Trumpelman's erudite address has drawn attention to a wide range of topics and problems which are of concern to all those who wish to improve the teaching of history in our schools and to promote its recognition as an essential ingredient of any educational system. He has pointed to the many challenges facing history specialists who want to protect the subject from the hands of those who neglect it and those who abuse it. Innovation will meet with success only if we take cognizance of pressures on education, if we can manifest our subjects resistance to negative input and offer a convincing argument to demonstrate its potential contribution to a wider market.

I have a firm belief, which I am sure you all share, that history is one of the most beneficial subjects any child can learn. It shares with science the need to hypothesize, the need to collect and verify evidence and the need to draw logical conclusions. History at its best is a search for truth. It is unique amongst the school subjects in that whilst having a rigorous base rooted in the factual it deals with mankind in a direct and potentially compelling fashion. It is the knowledge of mankind's development, success and failures, choices and options that, if correctly taught, can give the child a special view of reality. All of us make decisions based on past experience. Our own or that of others. Social and political decisions are made by people according to their perception of the realities of human existence and experience. If the view conveyed in the history classroom is distorted, the decisions which take their genesis from so dubious a source will be inadequate, misguided and often dangerous. Any innovation in the training of history teachers must take the subject structure into account and decide what we want to do and how it is possible to do it through training.

Innovation has difficulties, not the least of which is that schools in all societies are inclined to be conservative institutions seeking to maintain the status quo. Furthermore recent research into the evolution of history teaching in South Africa (Mulholland) reveals clearly that in the last one hundred years history teaching has reflected the dominant ideology of each period. Milnerism, although one of the more extreme examples, was not unique in its abuse of the subject for ideological ends. The current values of each era have been faithfully reproduced in the school history texts. Teachers, albeit unwittingly, have passed on the dominant philosophy of those in power and justified political and social attitudes in terms of historical events. Much of the history taught in schools has been so selectively chosen, so narrowly interpreted that myth rather than truth has reigned in many classrooms.

But, once research has made us aware of the ideological dimensions of education, it is possible to modify our approaches so that all subjects assist children to perceive the real world and not to present them with myth and fantasy — which however colourful or politically expedient are socially and existentially harmful.

A more serious charge is that learning history develops few skills useful to those living and working in the twentieth century. In a scientific age of utilitarian values many do not see the relevance or value of a subject which they perceive is founded on the memorization of facts about past events and civilizations. Their impression would be valid if that were what the study of history achieved. This

is not the case. Instruction based on the necessity to memorize a fixed body of knowledge is no longer regarded as methodologically legitimate.

The training of history teachers must be based on the commitment of all who are so engaged, allowing the nature of the subject to instil in students a respect for the truth, to give them a Socratic vision and approach. The historical attitude is hostile to system-making and a desire to see regularities and laws within structures. The first principle of every person responsible for training future history teachers is that History may not be abused to serve vested interests. It should not even be used to serve noble ends. Hopefully, the teaching of history will enable those who are well instructed to have more sympathy and understanding for others, but commendable as it is, this is not our goal.

The central aim of all courses must be to sensitize future teachers to the nature of history and the methods of the historian. A student well trained in the methods of the academic historian will have the most essential requirement of the history teacher — the ability to research and conceptualize particular areas of content.

It does not matter whether students accept our conclusions. It is often better if they question them. What does matter is that they learn from the methods of instruction. These must involve a search for sources, critical examination of new and old paradigms, the assembly and testing of evidence, the inquiry into new methods of social investigation, and the application of reason and logic to establish an understanding of the relationships which occur in a dynamic society.

The organizational procedures of the academic historian, which necessitate the ability to:

- Explore
- Collect
- Question
- Evaluate
- Detect Bias
- Recognize gaps in material
- Synthesize
- Establish Relationships

are clearly the mark of an Evidential Study based on Mode of Enquiry.

It is these characteristics which make history relevant in a computer age, when a memorization of facts is of least importance and interpretation is of prime importance.

Because this is the nature of history the training of the would be historian and that of the intending teacher must not differ. The mode of enquiry requires the following skills:

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|---------------|---------------|
| REFERENCE     | ANALYSIS      |
| MEMORIZATION  | SYNTHESIS     |
| COMPREHENSION | EXTRAPOLATION |
| VOCABULARY    | EVALUATION    |
| COMMUNICATION | INSIGHT       |

and the subject requires a knowledge of:

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|------------------|---|
| CONTENT          | SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT                      |
| CHOICES MADE     | VALUES UPHELD                           |
| CAUSAL RELATIONS | POLITICAL, ECONOMIC & SOCIAL FORMATIONS |

The objectives of such a study are clearly to develop concepts of time, continuity, and change. Through evidence and enquiry students are led toward drawing tentative conclusions which recognize complexities and distinguish between fact and value.

Therefore, I would diverge from Professor Trumpelman on one point.

That is, I do not believe that there is a significant divide between the methods of training academic historians and those of training the future teacher of history. The more firmly the future teacher grasps the essence of the subject through academic endeavour the easier it is for the subject-didactician to guide the student toward innovative methods which help to make history exciting and relevant without betraying its essence. For, if approached correctly, academic history equips the student with the tools of analysis, the ability to research and draw conclusions, to see past trivia and to grasp that which is relevant. These are also essential skills for the history teacher.

Because history is about man in society in the remote, distant and recent past and is multi-faceted it allows academic concerns and content to be simplified and presented in a manner suitable for use in the schools. Each area of history can be adapted to the interests and abilities of the children who study it. The geographic, political, social economic, cultural intellectual and military aspects can be used to generate enthusiasm and engender an understanding of international, national or regional history and to give insight into present situations as well as past events.

The evidential nature of the subject dictates that the teacher must act as researcher and collect balanced examples of primary, secondary and tertiary sources for pupils to interpret. These skills must be learned through the rigour of academic study. A wealth of information is contained in written records, such as letters, official documents, diaries. Unwritten evidence in the form of artefacts, oral tradition, clothes, architecture, and works of art. All enable the teacher to choose suitable material for children to use. Pupils learn to draw conclusions from the evidence presented to them. This interaction between content and enquiry will enable them to escape from the tyranny of the stereotype and become thinking beings capable of rational choice.

We must provoke in students and pupils at tertiary, secondary and primary level an active response if intellectual benefit is to accompany the learning process. Innovation starts in the lecture theatre. Research as far back as 1974 (Steele) suggests that it is not so much content, as the method of instruction, which determines the methods future teachers will apply in the classroom. It must become second nature to them to formulate their own hypotheses, exercise skills of analysis on evidence and express their own conclusions. Only if it becomes habitual for students to think and work in this way will they seek to encourage the same skills in the children they teach. In an experiment at Chorley College Thompson and Gilbert (1975) used the evidential approach and found that "The historian's sources were no longer a mystery; respect for his work and problems increased". Although it is desirable to get more pedagogical coherence by developing a more structured theory of history the immediate priority is to insure that the existing reforming movement has impact. In South Africa many teachers have not implemented the findings of the researches of a decade ago.

#### Areas of concern

There are of topics of importance which must be addressed before innovation can be successful:

- In Colleges of Education the national criteria play a large role in the possible subjects students may study. Any restructuring of the teacher training course should allow future teachers a wider range of choice, with a proviso that subjects taken complement one another. I would agree with Professor Trumpelman that Sociology, Economics and Political Science are invaluable. I would add that Philosophy and Formal Logic would make a significant contribution.
- Thought needs to be given to the restructuring of Teaching Experience, taking note of experiments such as those conducted in the universities of Sussex and East Anglia. But a major problem is that any form of in-service apprenticeship would fail if teachers in the schools were unable or unwilling to accept and promote innovation. The Ford Teaching Project of 1975 enabled in-service teachers in England to realize they were dominating the supposedly 'child-centered' approach they were using in the classrooms. Once they had used the enquiry method they realized that they achieved far more in terms of the promotion of skills and the general cognitive development of pupils. Ten years later many teachers in our schools are not aware of these methods. This indicates the necessity for a more vital in-service programme.
- We must always keep in mind that we should work in a community of discourse. There are those who i) create new directions ii) those who extend constructs and iii) those who teach at tertiary level and in schools. If innovation is to take place we must establish meaningful links between each sector. The elitist stance of many in the universities does little to promote the rapid adoption of new ideas. Furthermore, all teacher-educators — most of whom have extremely heavy teaching loads, must be given time and opportunity to research the latest trends in methodology and pursue the current debates in their subject areas. Visits to overseas institutions would help circulate ideas more rapidly, provided that feedback to the profession as a whole was organized through an association such as the one proposed here today.
- A further matter of concern in Colleges is the question as to whether or not the Colleges of Education should be producing generalists. Whilst it is both economical and suitable that those trained to teach in the Junior phase of Primary School be generalists, it is time we gave some consideration to specialist training for those who will teach in the Senior phase of the Primary School. In a society faced with complex technological and philosophical problems each child deserves the best possible foundation upon which to develop his knowledge, skills and abilities. The foundation laid in primary school radically effects each child's possibilities in high school, and these in turn affect the opportunities available at the tertiary level. We must therefore insure that each child is able to build on the best of foundations. These can only be laid by the best of teachers, who have a knowledge of their subject and a desire to teach it effectively. It has been the experience of my Department that when we are observing lessons given by our students in the schools many are able to give extremely competent lessons in subjects such as Maths, Afrikaans and even Science. These same

students often struggle to give a good history lesson. The complexity of the subject requires that sound training and a great deal of hard work on the part of the student is necessary before a satisfactory performance in the classroom is possible. If this is so should we then leave history in the hands of generalists whose only exposure to the subject may have been a course in subject didactics?

- Professor has emphasized the need for the subject-didactician to have an involvement in the academic component whilst being aware of education and educational practice. We are particularly fortunate at the present time in that the people in charge of our methodology at J.C.E. have academic qualifications in the subject, (a Phd in one instance,) have degrees in education and experience in teaching at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. Their experience has made it possible to involve them in all aspects of the Department's work. This has proved of such value that it would seem that all institutions engaged in teacher training should aim at producing people who will have this fortunate blend of experience and qualification.

In conclusion I would suggest that there are a number of models of training which might be considered for both future teachers and future teacher educators and one of the tasks of the proposed association will be to evaluate these. But what is essential and what can be done immediately is show each aspirant teacher how to follow the steps of the historian and be the intermediary between the pupil and the body of knowledge we call history.

Without minimizing the difficulties of the task ahead I think it is possible to make our subject one which is an indispensable part of any curricula. History well taught develops social and political insights and establishes

habits of logical analysis essential to the education of all, irrespective of their chosen careers after they leave school. It is the foundation for responsible choice so necessary to good citizenship. It assists interactions between people for it is more likely that these will be based on tolerance if historical insights bestow an understanding of cause and motivation in human action.

The rewards are sufficient to make cooperation in the proposed Association for the Training of History teachers a challenge and a responsibility. Certainly the members of my Department look forward to contributing and participating in a venture of such exciting potential.

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