Teaching history in confined spaces

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ABSTRACT

Much of the research on literacy learning for young people relates to the practices in school classrooms. This response to Honan’s key paper continues the theme of literacy learning in classrooms but in the confined spaces of a prison. The reflection focuses on historical literacies and takes up Honan’s position on the role of social practices and spatiality that contribute to meaning making in the confines of prison. Space and the movement of people are strictly controlled in an incarceration centre. This was the place in a Queensland Corrective Centre where the author taught 12 students for 2 hours a week for 7 weeks. The pedagogies employed focussed on developing students’ historical literacies in their studies of Investigating Australian History. The author utilised the writings of Paulo Freire and Queensland’s Productive Pedagogies theoretical framework, and technical guidance to prison planning for the framing of this report.

This paper provides a personal reflection of my time teaching a history unit to a small group of offenders currently serving time in an Australian incarceration centre. The reflection focuses on historical literacies and takes up Honan’s position on the role of social practices and spatiality that contribute to meaning making in the confines of a prison, with a particular group of people whose daily routine is extremely controlled and repetitive.

Incarceration

Incarceration centres have four major purposes. These purposes are retribution, incapacitation, deterrence and rehabilitation. Retribution means punishment for crimes against society. Depriving offenders of their freedom is a way of making them pay a debt to society for their crimes. Incapacitation refers to the removal of criminals from society so that they can no longer harm innocent people. Deterrence means the prevention of future crime. It is hoped that incarceration centres provide a warning for people that the possibility of going to prison will discourage people from breaking the law. Rehabilitation refers to activities designed to change offenders into law abiding citizens, and may include providing educational courses in prison and teaching job. Rehabilitation is the focus of this paper.

Like the raw recruit proceeding through the steps of military training, the offender goes through a process of ‘entering prison’ where he/she is admitted, inducted and classified. This three-step process involves firstly recording of physical description, personal details and removal of personal property apart from a plain wedding ring and a watch. The offender is then subjected to a medical examination, issued with prison clothing, photographed, interviewed by a counsellor, given an identification card and allocated a cell (Queensland Government).

Spatial design of incarceration centres

Cell dimensions are only just part of the physical requirements of prisons. At a fundamental level, prisons should provide a safe place and a quality of life for offenders and staff. The physical infrastructure of a prison should promote a safe environment for the rehabilitation of offenders which provides access to education, work, and programmes to address their offending behaviour. From a
design perspective, prisons are partly process-oriented (like airports) and partly space-oriented (like schools). The movement of offenders is tightly controlled, but they should be free to move around within selected spaces.

A ‘prison that is controlled, safe and secure can allow the prisoner population a greater degree of freedom’ (United Nations Office for Project Services, 2016, p. 20). So, it is critically important to create a physical environment where movement of offenders is easily controlled so they can be out of their cells during the day to spend more time engaged in positive activities. But the fact remains that offenders experience two timelines moving at different speeds. The first is the repetitive nature of daily life one of continuity; they cannot choose when to eat, wash, sleep or awaken. The second timeline refers to the events in the outside world, one of change; offenders are generally out of sync (Englebert, 2012). Whilst students have access to digital television and radio at this incarceration centre, they do not have access to newspapers or the internet, thereby limiting the depth and breadth of information from the external world. Regular media attention to crime, court proceedings and prison sentences are a fact of daily life, but for the great majority of the population like me, the confines of a prison and those who inhabit it belong to another world.

My decision to teach in a prison was based on three broad reasons. The first is based on altruism, to give back to the community, that is, a selfless concern to assist offenders in their rehabilitation. We live in a civil society and those who are incarcerated have rights. One of those previously mentioned is rehabilitation in preparation to transition back into society. Just because people are in prison does not mean they are less human. Like schools, prisons are part of communities. Offenders bring to the classroom their own set of literacy practices which they then intertwine with historical literacies learnt in the classroom and as a result, broaden their literacy practices within the prison classroom and the prison as a whole.

The second reason relates to my interest in the nature of the penal settlement in 18th and 19th Century Australia. Whilst a number of convicts deemed incorrigible finished up prisons in Port Arthur and Norfolk Island, others were given the opportunity to transition back into society through the ticket-of-leave programs. My third reason is my passion for Australian history. History is not just about acquiring knowledge, it is also about understanding the events in history, how these events are interconnected, and the skills both cognitive and social necessary to fully grasp the significance of history. Social skills also encompass positive relationships, and a critical one is to make learning fun (Meador, 2018). As Honan suggests in her paper, in order to create this kind of learning environment, the use of the monolingual print-centric resources was simply considered as an add-on. The focus was on the more connected, more authentic, and more engaging way of learning that help to develop a community of learners. The following section reports on my journey inside an incarceration centre.

**Entering the incarceration centre**

The shiny, coiled barbed wire on top of the surrounding walls was my first glimpse of the prison, and a stark reminder that this establishment I was about to enter was an area that was more than just an extension of suburbia. The second thing that struck me was the soft range of colours that populated the buildings within the walled enclosure. I had expected a dull, uniform grey colour. The visitors’ centre was my point of entry, a separate building located in front of the prison.

At the visitor’s centre I was photographed, finger printed and contact details were recorded. My valuables, including my mobile phone, which is prohibited in the prison confines, were stored. A yellow card to wear worn around my neck indicated that I was visiting the prison for the first time. Directed towards the prison entrance; feeling very apprehensive, I pushed my way through heavy doors to yet another entrance where an airport like security system awaited me. After signing a visitor’s roster, a ‘duress’ alarm was attached to my belt. The alarm system operates on wi-fi, and once activated the wearer is linked in to the duty custodial staff who respond accordingly if the alarm is activated.
I then entered a cylindrical security portal for fingerprint verification; an image of my face appeared on a screen, and at the same time the security portal opened up at the other side allowing me, along with a staff member, to continue on through the staff walkway where we proceeded through a number of security doors before reaching the teaching staffroom. We were greeted with cheery hellos by other passing staff and offenders. At one stage we slowed briefly to say ‘thank you’ when a prisoner courteously released the throttle of his brush cutter. Interactions between staff and prisoners appeared cordial and respectful.

The classroom was painted grey; there was a whiteboard, 16 tables, 16 chairs, A3 blank paper, whiteboard markers, and coloured pencils. There were no overhead projectors, no laptops, so no power-points; I relied on the whiteboard, and wall maps for the explanatory phase of the lesson.

Two custodial staff manned a desk in the hallway and remained visible. Midway through our lesson custodial staff, as they did over the 7 weeks, appeared at the door to announce that a head count would take place; students immediately stopped what they were doing and kept still while the counting was conducted. I stood still as well. The same head count was conducted again as students returned to their cell blocks after the lesson.

Students in the history class
I had no background knowledge of my students apart from the fact that they were engaged in some form of tertiary studies from a local university, the majority of whom were studying for an engineering degree. There were students enrolled in the humanities program and no one in this group had progressed beyond Year 10 at school. All students in the seven weeks ‘Investigating Australian History’ course were volunteers and could withdraw at any stage from the program.

Establishing a community of learners
I shook the hands of students as they filed into the classroom; I sensed that they expected and indeed, wanted this protocol as we were about to be on a learning journey. I also think it was a way for them of normalising a greeting with another adult. A major focus of mine was to establish and maintain good working relationships with students from the beginning of the course. We tend to be creatures of habit and in this structured environment students always sat in the same chairs beside the same person from the first to the last day of the course, only to mix or sit with others when required to do so. I pick up Honan’s suggestion ‘that paying attention to the ways of engaging with texts, rather than the texts themselves, may be a productive way of thinking about community literacies.’ With this in mind, I explore the ways texts were utilised as the means of encouraging interaction, negotiated meaning and relevance to those examining them.

We began our lesson with a brainstorming activity, *Round Robin* (Frangenheim, 2010, p. 86). The students’ task, in groups of three, was to record as many different responses as possible to the question, ‘What is history?’ They then exchanged their sheets of responses with other groups who in turn wrote down different responses until ideas were exhausted; responses were then returned to the original groups. A volunteer then transcribed the feedback from the four groups responses onto the white board. From Frangenheim’s 10 advantages of this thinking strategy, my focus was student participation within their groups, across groups and as a class. Students were encouraged to draw upon their social skills of explanation, listening and negotiation through a non-threatening way of introducing discussion amongst the students. Students remained seated while the A3 paper moved around the groups, and my volunteer scribe was enthusiastic. The other advantage is that students were knowledge building, first in groups of 3 and then as a class. The next thinking strategy demanded more student movement.

As a precursor to European expansionism in the 17th and 18th centuries I introduced *The Silent Card Shuffle* (Frangenheim, 2010, p. 55). Two groups moved across the classroom and students merged
to make two groups of six students. Each group was given an envelope of pirate pictograms; these were then spread out on the tables and without any talking, rearranged into a storyline. A volunteer story teller from each group then told their group’s story to the class. This was a fun activity. During our debriefing we spoke about the impact of piracy on trade, how some countries encouraged their navies to engage in piracy against other competitor countries, and the nature of piracy that continues to this day. Students spoke, listened and negotiated as they constructed their stories, and noted that two different narratives emerged from the oral presentations. This thinking strategy reinforced the idea that knowledge is not fixed but evolves as historians, or for that matter storytellers, create new knowledge. Elements of the key historical concepts were considered, such as cause and effect, change and continuity, and significance (Table 1).

The next classroom strategy was perhaps the most challenging for students because it involved more movement within groups than the previously discussed thinking strategies above. Students were currently sitting in their usual groups or ‘home group’ of 4; I numbered off students 1, 2, 3 and 4. These new groups were called the ‘expert groups’ (Frangenheim, 2012, p. 90). Those in the first group were given the task of researching Abel Tasman based around a set of guiding questions. Groups 2, 3 and 4 were also allocated 17th or 18th century navigators to research. Limited by the no internet policy, students were provided with booklets about the navigators they were to investigate and A3 size coloured maps of the world. When given the directive to move from the home groups to their expert groups, there was a distinct pause from the students before each student moved to his expert group. Only one student refused to move. After 15 minutes I directed students back to their home groups to report their findings to each member of their group. Finally, four volunteers, each in turn, used the large wall map to indicate what part of the world their respective navigator had explored. Apart from new content knowledge, leadership and social skills of negotiation, speaking and listening skills were further enhanced by working with different students on the same topic (expert group), and then each student acting as the teacher in their home groups. Students were not only talking within their groups but across the class. Other skills I sought to promote were skills of research, asking questions, interpretation, explanation and communication, and analysis of sources (Table 2). We also alluded to the key concepts of cause and effect, significance, and evidence (Table 1).

The next two pedagogical strategies had students standing in lines rather than mainly sitting in their seats. The word ‘imagination’ was made up of 11 separate letters in an envelope; I asked each of the 11 students to take a letter and stand at the front, while the task of another student was to problem-solve, which he was able to do. This was definitely a fun activity; students initially stood side by side at the front of the class and then rearranged themselves to form the word, imagination. The point of this exercise was that knowledge is not fixed but always evolving and imagination plays a key part in creating new knowledge. I pointed out to students that imagination allows us to explore beyond the constraints of our environment and our reality, and critically, imagination can also decrease stress levels as it encourages problem-solving and possibility of positive outcomes and solutions (Lavelle, 2014).

The next active strategy involved the formation of a human timeline of Australian history. Each student selected a card which had a date with a brief explanation; I directed them to organise themselves in chronological order, and then each read out their date and the event surrounding that particular date. During these activities students stood and spoke in close proximity to each other – something which they would not normally do in this environment. Other benefits include the opportunity to address the class and discuss possible links between dates. We did this activity early in the course because I wanted them to think about the significance of these time markers in Australian history. As Taylor and Young (2003) state, chronology, ‘is one of the most important elements of time that students need to understand because it provides the fundamental framework that gives structure and coherence to the study of history’ (p. 23). In summary, I wanted as much engagement from students
as possible in an environment where they were able to express themselves without fear because their lives in prison are arranged around being told what to do, when to do it, and how to do it.

I employed movement to create this broad engagement by first having students exchange ideas through a brainstorming activity; second, by having groups of students link with other groups; and, third, by having movement of students to form new groups. So, I sought to gradually break down some of the possible tensions and hesitancies that may have existed between the offenders, and importantly for them to have fun in learning history. The following section relates to the pedagogical approaches I used to give students a focus, or to intellectually liberate them from their confined spaces by showing students how to confidently engage with the events that occur outside prison, and finally to promote an appreciation and love for Australian history.

Classroom pedagogies

I had two choices in my pedagogical approaches with my small group of students. I could have adopted the teacher as font of all knowledge where the model of teacher-student relationship is one of power and control over learners (Rogers, 1962). As Freire points out, education delivered in this mode becomes an act of depositing in which students are depositories and the teacher is the depositor. This is what Freire refers to as the ‘banking’ concept of education – ‘knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing’ (Freire, 2005, p. 72).

I opted for what Freire calls a libertarian form of education which underpins the reconciliation between teacher and student, so that both are ‘simultaneously teachers and students’ (Freire, 2005, p. 72). This process of ‘dialogical education’ or problem posing education rejects the vertical relationship between teacher and students by building mutual trust between the dialoguers which seemed to be very relevant in the prison context. The result is authentic education which is not carried ‘by A for B’ or ‘by A about B’, but rather ‘by A with B’ mediated by the world – a world which impresses and challenges both parties giving rise to views and opinions about it’ (Freire, 2005, p. 93). Since we were investigating controversial aspects of Australian history, I was keen to use this libertarian idea during our critique of Australian history. History is broadly organised into key historical concepts, key historical skills, and inquiry.

Key historical concepts

Australian history is contestable especially in terms of its colonial past, and the subsequent dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. I employed pedagogies in the classroom which gave students opportunities to read, discuss and debate different perspectives of the history of Australia since the arrival of Captain Cook. ‘Contestability’ is one the key historical concepts. It is not possible to teach and learn history effectively without considering the contestable nature of points of view, interpretations of events of the past and in the future. The strength of debates will depend on the nature of evidence which can include songs, images, illustrations and written sources. Because of the controversial nature of history, historians often disagree even if they have marshalled their arguments with formidable evidence. The other key historical concepts we engaged in were: continuity and change; cause and effect; significance; and, empathy (Table 1, Key historical concepts).

Key historical skills

Throughout the 7-week course we utilised the key skills of an historian. Students used the key skill of ‘explanation’ in the oral and written form in every tutorial and most homework tasks. In fact, students had the opportunity to engage in worthwhile oral explanation to me, to each other and as a class at the start and at the end of the tutorials. We studied articles from the newspapers to illustrate the contestability of perspectives and interpretations. This was also a focus in our tutorials. I ensured the
students were confident with the skill of chronology at the beginning the course because we referred to time over the 7 weeks. A critical aspect of evidence is the sources; we analysed both written text and images (See Table 2, Key historical skills). We used a 5-step inquiry process of ‘what are the facts, describe, analyse, interpretation, evaluation, reflect’ to deconstruct images. Most important in this process was the collaborative construction of meaning making.

Table 1. Key historical concepts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Key historical concepts</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Continuity and change</td>
<td>Exploring aspects of life that remained the same or those aspects that changed over time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cause and effect</td>
<td>Explanation of factors that led to a historical event or development and the consequent results.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Significance</td>
<td>The importance assigned to particular aspects of the past and explanation of why.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Evidence</td>
<td>Relevant information obtained from sources through analysis and asking a series of questions, which suits that particular inquiry. This information is then used to justify or refute a particular stance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contestability</td>
<td>Interpretations of the past are debated and considered according to different perspectives or their supporting evidence.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td>Engaging with past thought and feelings through a historical inquiry.</td>
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Source: Humanities and Social Sciences Curriculum F-6/7 which is within the Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority (2015); Taylor & Young (2003).

Table 2. Key historical skills

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Historical skills</th>
<th>Meaning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Chronology</td>
<td>Chronology refers to the arrangement of dates or events in order of occurrence. An essential element of time.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Historical questions and research</td>
<td>Students ask questions based on their research using specified boundaries for consideration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analysis and use of sources</td>
<td>Looking at historical sources to determine the type, suitability, and reliability of that source and then used to build a clearer picture.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perspectives</td>
<td>A set of ideas or beliefs that guide actions. Perspectives draw on a person’s or group’s age, gender experiences, cultural or religious background, ideologies and/or intellectual contexts, which influence their world view and inform their opinions, values, and actions.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interpretations</td>
<td>Ways of looking at history and attempting to explain a specific event, person, or development depending upon the sources used, the questions asked, and varying viewpoints.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Explanation</td>
<td>Using historical reasoning, synthesis, and interpretation (the index of historical literacy) to explain the past. Historical understanding is incomplete without explanation.</td>
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Source: Humanities and Social Sciences Curriculum F-6/7 which is within the Australian Curriculum Assessment Reporting Authority (2015); Taylor & Young (2003).

Productive pedagogies

As previously noted, Freire’s ‘dialogical education’ is a process where both teacher and student learn together; we investigated Australian history content together through the lens of key historical concepts, key historical skills and inquiry within the productive pedagogy’s framework (Mills, Goos, Keddie, Honan, Pendergast, Gilbert, Nichols, Renshaw & Wright, 2009). To clarify, one does not
teach key concepts for historical understanding; instead, one teaches historical content using the productive pedagogies including historical skills to promote conceptual understanding. But there were some elements of the framework that were not fully realised. For example, I could only establish a broad understanding of students’ backgrounds during the program. Nevertheless, I always gave them the opportunities to make connections between their own backgrounds and aspects of Australian history, to hold class discussions or working in small groups and indeed to promote the social process of making meaning.

Table 3. Elements of productive pedagogies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Intellectual quality</th>
<th>Supportive classroom environment</th>
<th>Recognition of difference</th>
<th>Connectedness</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High order thinking</td>
<td>Student direction</td>
<td>Cultural knowledge inclusivity</td>
<td>Knowledge integration</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deep knowledge</td>
<td>Social support</td>
<td>Narrative</td>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
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<tr>
<td>Deep understanding</td>
<td>Academic engagement</td>
<td>Group identity</td>
<td>Connectedness to the world</td>
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<tr>
<td>Substantive conversation</td>
<td>Explicit quality performance criteria</td>
<td>Active citizenship</td>
<td>Problem-based curriculum</td>
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<td>Knowledge as problematic</td>
<td>Self-regulation</td>
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<td>Metalanguage</td>
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Despite incarceration, the students still had rights, and an important part of this ‘humane containment’ is rehabilitation. An expected outcome of this Australian history course, then, was to promote a sense of active citizenship through an understanding of the actions of individuals and groups over time and their impact of the colonised in Australia, and how change is possible in a democratic society like Australia.

Respect is an important element of citizenship. A core value of this prison is respect between staff and offenders, between staff and between offenders. Although I was not given specific instructions on how to interact with my students during class times, I took on this volunteering role because I felt I could help students in their rehabilitation, so I sought, at the first instance, to instil this core value of respect by establishing a climate of mutual respect through class discussions, encouragement and risk taking.

From my conversations with students, boredom and how to use time effectively was a constant challenge. This course offered something different from their usual spare Friday afternoon, and from general feedback, put them in a good frame of mind for the NRL games that night. Academic engagement then was not a problem. All students were studying for a tertiary qualification so they had a high level of literacy and initiative. Even though I submitted a course outline to management, it contained sufficient flexibility for student input to shape the program. We engaged in substantive conversation through dialogue between myself and students, based on the application of ideas, posing questions and critical reasoning. In short, this course was about ‘doing history’ where the aim was to have students engaged using a variety of thinking strategies to promote historical understanding. I proceed next to the application of elements of the productive pedagogies model to the teaching and learning that occurred.

The dimension of intellectual quality stresses that the importance of all students, regardless of their cognitive ability and background are entitled to be presented with intellectually challenging
The first element of intellectual quality framework is higher-order thinking, a level of thinking whereby students are able to move from basic facts and ideas through to analysis, interpretation, synthesis, generalisation, conclusion and hypothesis. A critical component of this journey and the best chance to gain new meanings is for students to manipulate data, problem-solve, that is, hands-on learning of history. Lower-order thinking tasks, on the other hand, require students to recite factual information through repetitive routines; students are merely the receptacles of knowledge, or as Freire puts it, students are depositaries and the teacher is the depositor. Throughout the lessons I created activities for students to engage in higher-order thinking activities in which we were the constructors of knowledge, that is, the teacher and students learning together.

To assist us in higher-order thinking strategies, I drew on Ditchburn and Hattensen’s (2012) *Connecting with history: Strategies for an inquiry classroom*; and, Taylor and Young’s (2003) *Making history: A guide for the teaching of history in Australian schools*. For matters relating to Australian colonial history, especially Aboriginal dispossession, I relied heavily on the *Weekend Australian* and the *Courier Mail*. These newspaper items were made up of opinion pieces and letters to the editor. Other supporting resources included timeline cards, wall map of the world, multiple copies of world maps, A4 size multiple colour images depicting ‘significant’ historical events; and images symbolising European power.

We analysed the image of the ‘Founding of Australia 26th January 1788 by Captain Arthur Phillip RN Sydney Cove’ by Algernon Talmadge (1937). I gave each student an image of this event along with the ‘Template: Analysing images’ (Ditchburn & Hattensen, 2012, p. 35). The 12 students, sitting in the Think, Pair, Share (TPS) mode went through the process of analysis, starting with the basic of gathering the facts about the image; describing what they see; interpreting the artist’s message; evaluating the reliability of the image; and finally, reflecting on the image. Skills used in this activity are perspectives, interpretation, and analysis and use of sources. The TPS process allows students to listen to each other’s ideas negotiate and engage in knowledge building. The same inquiry process was applied to analysing the image of Brisbane City Hall tympanum. The sculpture which is entitled *Progress of civilisation in the state of Queensland* (by Daphne Mayo, 1930) has been in the triangular tympanum above the front entrance of Brisbane City Hall for almost 80 years. In the sculpture, the state of Queensland is symbolised by a robed woman sending forth her explorers and settlers to tame the land. On the far left are two Aboriginal people. The first is depicted in a submissive pose with his spear pointing down to the ground while the second is lying under a shield and appears to be dead. Others argue that the second figure is in fact sleeping. This was the point of our discussion, the contestable nature of the tympanum which typifies the way Aboriginal people were treated in the past – and should the sculpture be there at all?

I began the next inquiry process with students by writing three dates on the whiteboard; 1776, 1783 and 1788. While I usually have students at my university use technological devices to identify the significance of the events behind these dates and the links between these events, in this instance without internet access, I explained the connection of these dates, with reference to the wall map. Since most did not know the difference between a primary and secondary source, I also wrote a written explanation on the whiteboard. I presented an envelope of 8 sources to students and then pointed to the question, ‘Why did England establish a penal settlement in Australia?’ which was duly written down at the top of the A3 sheet. Students worked in pairs as they analysed each source to determine whether it was primary or secondary; they then wrote a brief explanation about each source. Students were building knowledge they would apply when answering the inquiry question. Students first reported to the class about the nature of the sources and then responded to the inquiry question in writing, including mapping the journey of the First Fleet. The concepts promoted in this activity were, cause and effect, evidence, and significance. Apart from an enhancement of social skills, students developed their skills of analysis of sources, interpretation, explanation, and synthesis.
Students demonstrated a high level of ability in this activity; they identified which sources were primary and secondary with little delay and responded succinctly to the inquiry question. The fact that the theme of this inquiry was the living conditions of convicts in 17th century England and their movement to other parts of the world was of interest to the students. Surprisingly, it did not spark any discussion about their own personal circumstances and the conditions in this correctional centre.

We also examined newspaper opinion pieces and letters to editors about issues surrounding exploration and debates about British occupation. I set aside the opinion pieces for students to read and respond to questions for homework, while we discussed letters to editors in class. For example, Christopher Allen (2017) writes about the generally sympathetic and curious attitudes towards Australian Aborigines especially by Captain Cook, and the artists who accompanied Captain Nicolas Baudin’s expedition around the southern parts of Australia 1802–1803 (September, 23/24, Weekend Australian). The point of this exercise was to show students that Captain Cook was just one of number of navigators exploring the Australian coastline during the 17th, 18th and 19th centuries. Also attitudes towards the indigenous population during this period were not always malevolent.

We discussed the different perspectives in class about whether Australia was invaded or settled (Courier Mail, ‘Limiting Language won’t settle debate’, April 2, 2016; Courier Mail, ‘Was Australia invaded or settled’, April 2, 2016; Invasion Day call ‘just garbage’, Australian, August 29, 2017). These views were generally non-conciliatory, so I set students a less hysterical opinion piece by David Hill for homework, ‘Invasion not intended, but trouble was inevitable’ (Australian, June, 17, 2016). We discussed Stephen Fitzpatrick’s reviews of recent publications: ‘Hidden in plain view: The Aboriginal people of coastal Sydney’ by Paul Irish; ‘Dark Emu, Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accidents’ by Bruce Pascoe; ‘The Vandemonian War: The Secret History of Britain’s Tasmanian War’ by Nick Brodie. (Weekend Australian, July 29–30, 2017).

Through our work together interesting events and relationships were uncovered. We were surprised to read that in 1834 four Englishman were seen fishing with Aborigines from a rowboat outside of Sydney Heads. We noted the importance of continuing historical research to uncover new knowledge about Australian history. I reinforced the concepts we addressed in the newspaper items such as, cause and effect, significance, empathy, and evidence. We used skills such as perspectives, interpretation, analysis, synthesis; and new knowledge gained from our newspaper items.

Concluding remarks
On the last day of the course I presented students with certificates of attainment which outlined the topics covered over 7 weeks and acknowledged full attendance. Because the course was voluntary and did not count towards their tertiary degree programs, I did not include an end of course examination; rather they were set a 500-word written assignment where they were required to weave a historical narrative around at least two key historical concepts. I justified the presentation of a certificate of attainment as an acknowledgement of completion of the course as well evidence they can present to their prospective employers to demonstrate their general awareness of Australian history, an acknowledgement of the wrongs committed against Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and a sense of reconciliation.

I wanted students to have fun learning history so I gradually introduced movement in the class to generate a community of learners, to talk, listen and negotiate with others they normally do not associate with. This pedagogical approach was also about knowledge building where students taught each other, such as in the Jigsaw thinking strategy. The course was also about providing intellectually challenging tasks and engaging in substantive conversation so we were, in Freire’s words, simultaneously teachers and students, or as Honan stated, ‘a flattening of traditional teacher/student hierarchies and a redistribution of the concept of expertise’. Through this approach there is recognition of the complexity, diversity, and richness of literacies and languages used in and outside
the classroom. In this prison environment my focus was on the ways in which groups of offenders interact with each other, through the shared practices and performances of ‘doing literacy’. In terms of historical literacy, the course was designed for students to develop a love of history and to develop conceptual understanding – how concepts relate to the whole discipline; and the procedural, that is, students understand the process of inquiry and the skills, both social and cognitive required to successfully complete this process. Finally, ‘Historical literacy is not just about purposeless knowing of facts about the past. Historical literacy is about personal, social and political empowerment’ (Taylor & Young, 2003, p. 32). This 7-week history course gave the students the opportunity to make meaning with each other through collaboration to think about the actions (and consequences) of people in the past, the present, the future, to reflect on their own journey in life, and to consider their own positive contributions to society outside prison.

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