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# 'It's More Complex Than I Assumed': Examining Pre-Service Teacher Reflections On Preparing To Teach History In The Australian Curriculum In Years 7-10

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Pre-service history teacher education, national curriculum, Australian Curriculum: History, inquiry, historical thinking, history education

**'IT'S MORE COMPLEX THAN I ASSUMED': EXAMINING PRE-SERVICE TEACHER REFLECTIONS ON PREPARING TO TEACH HISTORY IN THE AUSTRALIAN CURRICULUM IN YEARS 7-10**

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**Abstract**

*As with many nations, the teaching of history in Australian schools is often contested. Two prevailing standpoints can be identified, the first of which, in broad terms, emphasises the acquisition of historical knowledge. From this perspective, history is conceptualised as a source of tradition and identity (Berend, 2012) gained by learning about those significant historical events identified in mandated curricula. The second standpoint emphasises the potential of history to provide young people with critical understandings and skills for interpreting the past (Tosh, 2008) by developing conceptual understandings and historical thinking and reasoning skills which can also be applied in their everyday lives and as active and engaged citizens. Such polarising views, however, do not necessarily reflect what actually happens in classrooms where teachers may adopt a repertoire of pedagogies which blend a range of different perspectives and approaches. This empirical paper draws from one component of qualitative research on the ways in which a group of Australian pre-service history teachers in Queensland reflect on their preparation to teach history in secondary schools. It investigates what shaped their knowledge and assumptions about teaching history prior to and during their history curriculum studies unit in their teacher education course as the first national history curriculum was being implemented in Australian schools. In doing so, the paper examines future history teachers' thoughts about practice as they prepare to work from the new Australian Curriculum: History (ACARA, 2013) in order to teach students aged from 12 to 15 in the lower secondary school grades of Years 7-10. Findings revealed a range of positions about what constitutes historical understanding and pedagogic practice.*

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**Introduction**

This paper draws from a small study which aims to build on, and contribute to, work in the field of the impact of national curricula in positioning education with particular attention to pre-service history teacher education. Whereas the complex and contested nature of history curriculum implementation processes in secondary schools has been acknowledged in the international literature (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Nicholls, 2006; Van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008), to date there is scant research on the Australian mandated curriculum context with reference to the perspectives of pre-service history teachers. This paper examines some of the beliefs and assumptions pre-service teachers bring to their history curriculum studies, how they explore theory-practice relationships and whether they rethink their approaches to teaching history in the Australian Curriculum context. In doing so, it draws from the voices of pre-service teachers for, as Cochran-Smith and Zeichner (2005) remind us, much of the research on teacher education has been shaped by the perspectives of teacher educators. It must be noted that as this was a small-scale qualitative empirical inquiry, the author does not make claims for the representativeness

of the findings. Rather, this research is shared in the spirit of providing insights into an issue that warrants a much larger study. As such, it is small-scale localised research.

The paper is organised as follows. First, it introduces the particular constitutional arrangements that shape curriculum development in Australia. Second, it briefly addresses the literature on teacher professional knowledge and beliefs. Third, by way of providing a context, the paper provides an overview of those factors that led to the configuration of history in the Australian Curriculum as a phase one mandated learning area from the early years of schooling, termed Foundation (F) or Preparatory (P), to Year 10, prior to a federal government-initiated review of the curriculum in 2014. As will be seen, this emphasis on discipline-based knowledge in the new curriculum marked a change in practice after a decade of the predominance of integrated approaches in social sciences curricula in many Australian schools. Fourth, the paper refers to the empirical research and in discussing the findings, concludes, following Ellis (2007), that pre-service teachers have different categories of knowledge and require explicit scaffolding to assist them in interpreting and planning to teach from the new history curriculum.

### **The Constitutional constraints for national curriculum development in Australia**

Currently, schools in Australia are experiencing a significant period of change that commenced in 2012 as the three-staged implementation of Australia's first national curriculum continues. It must be noted that achieving agreement on a national curriculum is complex in Australia because under Section 51 of the Australian Constitution, the States and Territories retain authority over education, and this autonomy has prevented previous federal governments from succeeding in developing a national curriculum framework (Henderson, 2015). As curricula have traditionally been developed by States and Territories, and they still retain their constitutional power over education, including assessment, the Australian Curriculum can only be mandated if States and Territories continue to endorse its implementation in schools. This factor, together with debates about what knowledge is deemed in the national interest, and how such knowledge can be framed in curriculum documents, indicate some of this complexity.

The rationale for the inclusion of history as one of the four core subjects in the framework for the development of the first phase of the Australian Curriculum emphasised that students need to develop knowledge, understandings and skills considered critical for future citizenship roles in a complex, rapidly changing and increasingly globalised world. However, this attempt to prescribe what should be taught and learnt in history classrooms across the nation also raised many questions for 'no other discipline has its portals so wide open to the general public as history' (Huizinga, 1960, p. 39). Contestation about what represents national history has occurred, and continues to occur, in many nations as the construction of national histories are formative to fostering a sense of community, nationality and nationalism. In this context, stories from the past help provide what Benedict Anderson has described as 'profound emotional legitimacy' (1983, p. 6). For example, interpretations and representations of the past have been contested in terms of memory and commemoration in relation to the Second World War in nations such as Japan and Germany (Taylor and Guyver, 2013). In Australia, disputes about the nature and legacy of colonisation are manifest in contested narratives about the treatment of Indigenous Australians on the one hand, and the development of democratic traditions and struggles during periods of conflict from the First World War to Vietnam, on the other. With reference to such disputes, Attwood observed that 'securing the past in the present is seen as critical to securing the future' (2005, p. 12).

In relation to schooling in Australia, history and history education became increasingly politicised during the 1990s as part of broader ideological debates about the nature Australian history, identity

and cultural values, referred to as the culture wars and/or the history wars (Clark 2006; Macintyre and Clarke 2003). It could be argued that the positioning of history as one of four fundamental academic domains in the first phase of the Australian Curriculum was indicative of a view reiterated during Australian cultural debates in recent years that history has both value and utility for society as a whole (Henderson, 2011), and is of particular significance in the education and socialisation of young Australians (see also Taylor, 2015). Furthermore, as Lee (2004) warns us, there is also an assumption that history education is often thought of as 'a relatively straightforward matter' (p. 129), when the research evidence 'suggests otherwise' (p. 130). Concomitantly, Deng and Luke (2008, p. 81) maintain that while school subjects draw from a discipline-knowledge base, they can be considered 'distinct entities that constitute an important area of curriculum inquiry'. Collectively, these factors indicate that the teaching of history in schools involves significant, multifaceted curriculum knowledge work and the next part of the paper relates this to the literature on knowledge for teaching. This is followed by a brief overview of the ways in which school history has been reconfigured in Australian syllabus documents to reflect some of the emerging international research on the nature of historical inquiry and the complexity of historical thinking.

### **Pre-service teacher knowledge and beliefs**

Given that pre-service teachers have to learn how to interpret and implement curriculum documents, they will, as future teachers, be 'integral' to how the curriculum is 'constructed and enacted in classrooms' (Clandinin & Connelly 1992, p. 363). The process of enactment draws upon a rich interplay of different sorts of knowledge, and in this role teachers can be envisaged 'as brokers of scholarly knowledge' (Kennedy, 1990, p. 14). The literature on knowledge for teaching suggests the following as key elements: knowledge about the content, knowledge of the curriculum, knowledge about how to teach, knowledge about learning and learners, knowledge about self, and knowledge of educational contexts. In their discussion of the research derivation of teachers as curriculum makers (or 'brokers'), Craig and Ross (2008) refer to Schwab's (1978, 1983) viewpoints on the nature of content knowledge and how, in turn, this work informed Shulman's (1986, 1987) contribution to curriculum and teacher development. Shulman (1986, 1987), drawing from theoretical positions put forward by Dewey (1897) and Schwab (1978, 1983), addressed the knowledge base of teachers by conceptualising three broad areas, namely subject-matter knowledge as content knowledge; pedagogical content knowledge; and curricular knowledge. Pedagogical content knowledge (PCK) is particularly useful for articulating the 'amalgam of content and pedagogy that is uniquely the providence of teachers' (Shulman, 1987, p. 8).

It must be noted, as Deng (2007) reminds us, that Shulman's theorisation of the knowledge base for teaching is 'predicated on the necessity of classroom teachers' understanding and transformation of the subject matter of an academic discipline' (Deng, 2007, p. 503). Furthermore, as subject content knowledge refers to propositional knowledge and an understanding of the structure of the discipline, it goes beyond factual knowledge and reflects substantive knowledge, syntactical (procedural) knowledge and beliefs about the subject (Turner-Bisset, 2001). With specific reference to knowledge of the discipline of history, this can relate to knowledge of historiography, and a deeper knowledge of historicity, or historical awareness of how critical inquiry in history can provide young people with a deeper understanding of present-day problems (Tosh, 2008). Of course, such complex knowledge, or teachers' pedagogical reasoning, continues to develop as teachers work in different school settings.

In addressing this context, Ellis (2007) argues that subject knowledge is relational to its context for it is 'complex, systematic and emergent in practice' (p. 459). Significantly, Ellis also contends that pre-service teachers lack distinctive categories of knowledge and claims that their subject knowledge, namely 'the amount and organization of knowledge per se in the mind of the teacher'

(Shulman, 1986, p. 9), develops as pre-service teachers experience and respond to 'collective processes' in the school environment and classroom (Ellis, 2007, p. 459). In this way Ellis extends Shulman's schema to contend that subject knowledge is 'a form of collective knowledge' (Ellis, 2007, p. 458). Indeed, pre-service teachers directly encounter subject knowledge as 'form of collective knowledge' in their teacher education course during their practicum, or period of allocated practice teaching, under the supervision of history teachers in schools. The literature refers to this experience as a form of 'cognitive apprenticeship', or a process whereby learning develops 'through guided experience on cognitive and metacognitive, rather than physical, skills and processes' (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989, p. 456). The notion of cognitive apprenticeship has its origins in social learning theories, as an individual cannot engage in a cognitive apprenticeship alone, for it is dependent on expert demonstration (modelling) and guidance (coaching) in the initial phases of learning (Collins et al., 1989). Yet it cannot be assumed that cognitive apprenticeship approaches are unproblematic. As will be seen later in this paper, findings indicate that some of the pre-service teachers in this small study were challenged during their placement in schools by what they observed and what they were expected to do by their supervising teachers in history classrooms.

Another important factor in any discussion of pre-service teacher education relates to the forms of knowledge they bring to their studies. Lortie (1975), for example, asserts that teachers' prior experience of schools as students themselves impacts profoundly on how they see themselves and envisage the nature of their work in the classroom. Furthermore, as pre-service teachers' assumptions and prior knowledge serve as filters through which they respond to teacher education (Britzman, 2003; Bullough, 1991), the importance of learning more about the perspectives and needs of these future teachers in order to prepare them for the profession are paramount (see Eraut, 2000). For whilst pre-service teacher education programs provide a formative base from which to enter the profession, the next stage of the teaching journey in schools presents many challenges. As Feiman-Nemser (2001) puts it, new teachers simultaneously deal with two jobs: 'they have to teach, and they have to learn to teach' (p. 26). Huberman's (1989, 1993) research on the impact of such work on teachers' professional identities with Swiss teachers, indicated that the initial years of teaching were characterised by processes of survival and discovery; consequently some pre-service teachers find curriculum decision-making and the challenges of negotiating the content and pedagogy too daunting and do not complete their teaching degrees.

It can also be argued that pre-service teachers enter teacher education with prior beliefs and assumptions about teaching in general, as well as teaching history in particular. For example, this can encompass beliefs about the nature of history as a subject; about pedagogical approaches; how students learn in the history classroom, and what students are capable of learning. The literature suggests that pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs are shaped by their personal belief systems (Burn, Hagger & Mutton, 2003), and that their concepts of valuable teaching are, in turn, influenced by these beliefs (Pajares, 1992; Schon, 1987). Such beliefs and assumptions are critical as it is possible for pre-service teachers to prepare to teach from a new history curriculum that is different to the one that shaped their own education as students in schools without actually understanding the *nature* of the sort of practice required. Indeed, in their research, Thomson, Turner and Nietfeld (2012), identified a range of complex beliefs among pre-service teachers, including narrow pedagogy understandings and difficulties in articulating pedagogical teaching goals. It could be argued that if these beliefs are *not* addressed, beginning teachers' assumptions about pedagogic practices could remain unchanged during their careers. With specific reference to history, Endacott and Sturtz's (2015) research on experienced teachers' pedagogical reasoning in history, indicated that a *limited* degree of the pedagogical reasoning required was adopted and that 'a critical introspective stance towards pedagogical reasoning was warranted' (p.15), to ensure students in history classrooms are taught in ways that foster meaningful understanding.

Hence, a consideration of pre-service teachers' pedagogical beliefs is significant to developing teachers' professional practices (Endacott & Sturtz, 2015; Penso & Shoham, 2010; Rossum & Hammer, 2010).

As noted, teaching involves multifaceted work, for it relies on the integration of different kinds of knowledge and the constant application of skilled judgements as teachers interpret the planned curriculum in official documents, enact it by applying professional judgment, and then devise appropriate teaching strategies so that the curriculum is experienced in valuable and engaging ways for students (Marsh & Willis, 2007). It can be argued that pre-service history teachers are particularly concerned about what they will need to master in order to teach in schools as the discipline-based Australian curriculum continues to be implemented. This is because when these pre-service teachers were students in the primary and junior school many of them did not study history as a separate subject but rather experienced it as a 'strand' or component of a generic social science learning area termed Study of Society and Environment or Social Education. Research by Biesta, Priestley and Robinson (2014) on teacher beliefs, suggest that effective and meaningful teaching is always informed by past experiences, including personal and professional biographies and that teachers' beliefs and values are enacted in the present and influenced by culture and context (p. 626). With reference to this context, the next part of the paper provides an overview of the factors that have shaped the teaching of history in Australian schools.

### **The context for teaching History in Australian schools**

History curricula in Australia have been transformed in the past thirty years to reflect the distinctive characteristics of the discipline and mirror the ways in which professional historians engage with evidence to emphasise inquiry based approaches to the investigation of the past in the classroom. In the most recent version of the online curriculum, the rationale for the 7-10 *Australian Curriculum: History* states that '[h]istory is a disciplined process of inquiry into the past that develops students' curiosity and imagination' (ACARA, 2017). This inclusion of the term 'disciplined' signals that history contains distinctive inquiry processes and concepts. As explored later in the paper, Peter Lee's (2004) work on 'first order' and 'second order' concepts as organising ideas that provide structure to the ideas of the discipline of history was significant in the development of the curriculum as was the work of Peter Seixas (2004, 2006, 2009) in proposing distinctive concepts critical for the development of historical understanding.

However, until the 1970s, longstanding practices in teaching history in primary and secondary schools in Australia were largely celebratory and Eurocentric. As in some of the other former British colonies, national exploits and the achievements of powerful individuals were conveyed to Australian students in unquestioned narrative accounts as factual truths about the past which students in history classrooms dutifully memorised and regurgitated in examinations (Hoeppe, 2004). Often referred to as the 'Old History' this approach to teaching history 'where the sole activity is taking notes and committing to memory' (Price, 1968, p. 346) was gradually challenged by a series of innovations in history education in the United Kingdom (UK). First, Mary Price (1963) questioned the commonly-accepted Piagetian view that only academically bright students could study history effectively whilst also warning that in many schools history was taught in an 'excruciatingly, dangerously, dull way' (p. 344) which was of 'little apparent relevance to pupils' (p. 344).

Second, during the late 1970s the innovative approaches of the Schools Council History 13-16 Project (SHP) in the UK began to influence how teaching history was conceptualised. Influenced by Jerome Bruner's (1960) view that any school subject can be taught to any child during his or her development, provided the structures of the subject or discipline are made explicit, the SHP

took as its starting point the distinctive character of history. The SHP's 'New History' emphasised that the study of history 'involves some attempt to rethink the past, to re-enact it and to empathise with the people concerned in any past situation' (SHP, 1976, p. 17). It also advocated that historical knowledge was contested and that young people needed opportunities in the history classroom to learn to think like historians. The SHP prompted considerable interest in Australia and the Project's evaluator, Denis Shemilt (Shemilt, 1980) was invited to deliver the opening keynote speech at the 1980 National Conference of the History Teachers' Association of Australia (HTAA) in Sydney.

In his address, Shemilt offered some evidence of the SHP's success in raising the quality of adolescent historical learning. In particular, Shemilt reiterated some of the main findings of the *History 13–16 Evaluation Study* (Shemilt, 1980) including that evidence constitutes the building blocks of historical explanation and narrative; that inquiry approaches assist learners' thinking about historical evidence; and that teachers' grasp of the principles and processes of history teaching and learning affect the growth and quality of adolescents' historical reasoning, amongst others. These findings, together with the School Council's emphasis on inquiry and raising young people's awareness of and thinking about the connections between the past and the present, served to prompt a significant phase in the development of history teaching in Australia. During the 1980s, every State and Territory Syllabus defined new sets of aims and objectives incorporating in varying terminology, notions of what counted as 'knowledge', 'process' and 'skill' objectives. Furthermore, history topics for in-depth inquiry were framed through key guiding questions (Henderson, 1989; Hoeppe, 2004).

Two other international developments impacted on the revision of history syllabi in Australia. One factor was influenced by research in the area of historical thinking in the UK (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Ashby, Lee and Dickinson, 1997); New Zealand (Levstik, 1999), Ireland and the United States (Barton, 1998) and Europe (Angvik & von Borries, 1997). The other impact on State and Territory syllabi developed during the 1980s reflected the historiographical interest in social and cultural history. With reference to findings from interviews with 20 historians, Becher's (1989) research on disciplinary typologies noted:

It is almost impossible to draw the boundaries round history: they are 'potentially endless'. They have been greatly extended in recent years, as history has moved outwards to incorporate various aspects of the social sciences. (Becher 1989, p. 264)

In this context, history education began to widen its scope, from a narrow cultural sphere to broader perspectives (VanSledright, 2009). Hence, the homogenizing nationalistic project of the 'Old History' dissipated as history in schools reflected the increasingly multicultural nature of societies in many countries shaped by post-World War Two movements of people and immigration (Faas & Ross, 2012; Wilschut, 2010). Ironically, just as history syllabuses, most notably in the senior school, were reflecting the above trends, by the late 1980s history in the primary and junior school was being reshaped into a broad social science learning area that encompassed geography and civics and citizenship, amongst other subjects and perspectives, referred to as Studies of Society and Environment (SOSE) in most Australian States and Territories. By the mid-1990s SOSE dominated the curricula in all the States and Territories in Australia except New South Wales which did not adopt an integrated social science approach to teaching history in secondary schools.

In Australia concerns about the impact of the 'teaching history-within-SOSE' approach on student learning increased, and in response to lobbying from history teacher associations and academics about falling history enrolments in senior secondary schools, the Commonwealth Government

announced the National Inquiry into School History which was subsequently published in a significant report, *The Future of the Past* (Taylor, 2000). This report found that there was a gap between the stated curriculum presented in policy statements, curriculum documents and syllabi and the enacted curriculum in relation to what actually happened in schools as many teachers did not have the specialist discipline knowledge to teach a cross-disciplinary and integrated approach to SOSE. Significantly, based on Year 12 enrolments in history subjects, Taylor's (2000) report found there was a decline in the number of students studying Ancient or Modern History. It also found that in two states SOSE was not valued as a learning area, taught ineffectively, often by generalist teachers (see Taylor, 2000). Critics of the SOSE approach to structuring curriculum knowledge labelled it as a 'deficit' approach to knowledge (Henderson, 2005) and argued for the return of history as a specific subject in the school curriculum (Henderson, 2011). Such was the concern about the teaching of Australian history in schools that the Prime Minister, John Howard, delivered an address on the eve of Australia Day in which he emphasized history's role in representing the 'national story' and in shaping an 'Australian identity' (Howard, 2006). Furthermore, that same year Prime Minister Howard convened a national History Summit to develop a draft for a new history curriculum to be implemented nationally. When Howard lost the federal election in 2007, the newly elected Rudd (Labor) government announced a national education reform agenda for a 'world-class' school system which was formalised in the policy document, the *Melbourne Declaration on Educational Goals for Young Australians* (MCEETYA, 2008) (hereafter the *Melbourne Declaration*). Under the auspices of the newly established National Curriculum Board (NCB), and then the Australian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (ACARA), a national curriculum framework was devised to deliver the goals set out in the *Melbourne Declaration*.

The first publication of this national curriculum process, the *National Curriculum Development Paper* (NCB, 2008), articulated that discipline-based 'knowledge, understandings and skills' would 'assist young Australians 'in their future lives' (NCB, 2008, p. 2). The development of the Australian curriculum meant that for the first time, history was now a mandated area of study in every Australian state from Foundation (F) to the final year of compulsory education in Year 10. Following a decade of generic social education, referred to as SOSE above, the re-emergence of discipline-based teaching and learning in the new Australian Curriculum signalled that history education mattered for young Australians. As history was positioned in the new national curriculum's phase one learning area, many welcomed the opportunity to focus on a disciplined-based approach to knowledge and viewed it as an important development for the learning and teaching of history in Australia.

### **History in the Australian Curriculum**

The *Shape of the Australian Curriculum: History* (NCB, 2009), hereafter the *Shape paper*, which established the parameters for the drafting of history in the new national curriculum, built on the seminal work of the SHP referred to earlier in this paper, by foregrounding inquiry-based approaches and engaging students in the syntax of the discipline. Accordingly, the *Shape paper* emphasized that history education was more than a function of memorization and regurgitation of facts (the 'Old History') and in developing the national history curriculum, and it drew on key international research in the area of historical inquiry and historical thinking. This included the work of North American scholar Sam Wineburg (2001) and Canadian-based researcher Peter Seixas (2004, 2006, 2009) to identify components of historical understanding which, as noted earlier in this paper, Peter Lee (2004) identified as those organising ideas that 'give meaning and structure to our ideas of the discipline of history' (p. 131). The following extract from the *Shape paper* makes this clear:



Historical understanding denotes the concepts that together define the nature of history as a discipline. These include, for example, evidence, continuity and change and contestability. Historical understanding differs from intuitive, memory-based understanding of the past because it requires negotiating between the familiar and unfamiliar, and involves investigation, debate and reasoning about the past. (NCB, 2009, p. 5)

Whilst the history *Shape paper* writing team situated Australian history in a 'world history' context, it made also clear the nation's story was to be emphasised:

Australian history will retain an important place in a national history curriculum. We fail students - both those who have arrived recently and those with many earlier generations in this country - if we deny them a familiarity with the national story, so that they can appreciate its values and binding traditions (NCB, 2009, p. 13)

In the iterations of the online history curriculum that followed from 2010, selected aspects of Australian history were presented across year levels within a time frame spanning from ancient to contemporary times with particular chronological contexts identified for each year of schooling. Such developments suggest that beginning history teachers are entering the profession at a time of unprecedented curriculum change and, as will be seen, the participants in this study expressed a range of views about their preparedness to negotiate this agenda. The next part of the paper focuses on the ways in which a group of 4th year pre-service teachers engaged with the Australian Curriculum for Years 7-10. These years served as the focus for the small research project as the curriculum mandates that teachers in Years 7-10 must select three (3) in-depth studies of topics for sustained inquiry per annum, thus providing optimal time to develop the hallmarks of quality learning in the history classroom, namely, the development of historical thinking and reasoning (Van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008). In the next section, the history curriculum unit is described together with the research method including participants, data analysis, findings and discussion.

### **The history curriculum method unit**

Guided by the research question 'how do pre-service teachers reflect on preparing to teach history in the Australian Curriculum 7-10?', this interpretative, qualitative study aimed at 'understanding the phenomena of interest from the participants' perspective, not the researcher's' (Merriam, 1998, p. 6). The larger study, of which this is a part, took place during a semester-long history curriculum methods course in the fourth and final year of the undergraduate degree and after the subsequent professional experience placement in schools. The unit was designed first, to build on the knowledge and understanding of inquiry-based learning students developed during their third year foundational history curriculum unit. Second, history curriculum classes were structured as 'lectorials' of interactive three hourly sessions rather than the traditional one-hour lecture and separate two-hour tutorial, and were supplemented by online enrichment activities. Lectorials were designed to engage pre-service teachers in a social world (Vygotsky, 1978) of interlocking, recursive learning experiences (Bruner, 1966) where they selected depth studies and developed teaching strategies and inquiry processes to foster inquiry based approaches for the classroom and disassembled the pedagogical processes involved in these experiences. Accordingly, during weekly interactive sessions, in individual, pair and small group contexts, pre-service teachers participated in the actual learning experiences they, in turn, could devise for their own students as future teachers. As Darling-Hammond (2008) observes of teacher education programs, 'teachers need to not only understand but also to do a wide variety of things, many of them simultaneously' (p. 1321).

In this context, lectorial activities included time for pre-service teachers to share their planning and preparation for teaching a topic in depth (for example, 3 or 4 lessons per week for 6-8 weeks in a school) from the Australian Curriculum: History (ACARA, 2013) for Years 7-10. In order to embed historical thinking as central (Seixas, 2009) to shaping their planning for classroom pedagogy and assessment, a series of tasks were set. First, pre-service teachers had to work from the curriculum to devise their own key and sub questions to frame a sequential inquiry, and to list the historical topic knowledge and information about the historical event or development that they would expect their students to study. Second, those critical first order concepts, such as colonisation; and second order concepts, such as evidence, significance and perspectives, for example, had to be identified. Pre-service teachers were also required to devise specific classroom activities to guide their students through the critical examination of a range of primary and secondary sources for their selected depth-study topic. These activities were to be structured with questions that prompted different levels of thinking ranging from comprehension, interpretation, analysis, synthesis to evaluation. The final requirement involved devising and writing the formative and summative assessment tasks for the unit with accompanying marking rubrics.

### **Research method: participants, data collection and analysis**

Following receiving ethical clearance and the finalisation of semester grades, pre-service teachers were invited to participate in the study. This part of the paper reports on one component of the research by exploring the findings from 10 of the participants (n=10), 3 male and 7 females, who agreed to take part in one semi-structured interview. In this interview, participants were invited to reflect on the links between how and what they were taught at school, the history content and curriculum units they studied at university and what they observed in the history classrooms they worked in during their professional placement in schools. All interviews, each of which was approximately 40–50 minutes in duration, were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. An inductive approach was used to analyse transcripts and identify and define substantive themes as they emerged from the data according to the protocols set out by Braun and Clarke (2006). With inductive analysis, themes are strongly linked to the data itself rather than being theoretically driven; this allows for coding of data without fitting it into pre-existing themes. Participant anonymity was provided in this paper by allocating letters to each participant, namely from A to J.

### **Findings**

Two major themes were derived from the data. The first theme concerned the powerful effects of their own schooling on pre-service teacher perceptions of and beliefs about what constitutes history. The second theme encompassed how pre-service teachers grappled with the extent of knowledge about history as both a body of knowledge about the past and also as a discipline with a specific syntax or method of knowing that must be mastered. The impact of schooling was twofold. It refers to *what* pre-service teachers studied in the lower secondary years and also in Years 11 and 12, the final years of schooling in Australia, as well as *how* they were taught history at school. The second theme of grappling with knowledge, with reference to knowledge about the past, was stressed by all 10 participants who were interviewed. As one participant (J) noted, 'I just don't know enough about anything in depth'. Similarly, with reference to knowledge of history as a discipline with its own specific syntax or method of knowing, all participants struggled with the procedural complexity of history as a discipline with its own specific method of inquiry. Another participant, (B) expressed this in terms of 'it's hard to frame these inquiry questions and identify the most appropriate concepts ... it is so challenging – it's more complex than I assumed'.

### **What pre-service teachers bring to their studies – the effects of schooling and beliefs**

All 10 students noted in varying degrees the ways in which their school experiences shaped their ideas and beliefs about history as a body of knowledge about the past. Significantly, 8 of the 10 students did not study history as a separate subject until they deliberately selected it to study in Year 11 Ancient History or Modern History. These 6 students encountered history sporadically in the lower secondary years in SOSE. As Participant E put it:

SOSE meant everything was so general, I don't remember anything specific about history at all ... it was only when I studied Ancient History in Year 11 that I really started to learn something. And I chose this subject because we'd been on a family holiday to Greece and that sparked my interest. (Participant E)

The data from Participant C indicated the lack of depth that occurred in some classrooms where efforts were made to emphasise history:

I was lucky as I had the same teacher for Year 8 and 9 SOSE and he did try to focus on the history component in some of SOSE topics. He tried to make it interesting by telling us lots of stories and showing us lots of DVDs and YouTube clips. But as I look back on it now ... it was pretty superficial, I mean I didn't really learn much. (Participant C)

Similarly, Participant F reflected 'I was taught SOSE by a different teacher each year and none of them were history specialists so I don't remember much at all about history in the junior school.' By contrast, the data revealed how significant studying history was in Years 11 and 12 for all 10 participants in terms of learning about history as a body of knowledge about the past. Participant A noted 'in Modern History I learned a lot about Australia's involvement in the First World and we did an interesting unit on the Cold War. My disappointment was that we didn't study Australia's involvement in the Vietnam War as my Grandad was a Vietnam Vet' [Veteran]. Another participant, G recalled 'I did learn so much but I got a bit bored with all the information we were given.' Similarly, Participant C recalled 'I learnt lots of bits and pieces about topics in Ancient History, but some of it I just don't remember as we covered so much in class and I didn't always understand it'. By contrast, Participant J emphasised the impact of a teacher who engaged the class; 'we were so lucky as our teacher was fantastic and she stressed the role of archaeology in learning about the ancient world during my 2 years of Ancient History. She made everything so interesting and this motivated me to study history at uni and become a teacher.'

With reference to how history was taught, Participant F noted 'my Modern History teacher was big on inquiry and she really pushed asking questions and we did lots of document studies that made us work closely with sources so I came to uni knowing about the inquiry approach'. Another participant, G recalled, 'my teacher was very boring and we had endless PowerPoint presentations. I know I can make history more interesting than that'. Meanwhile, Participant A stressed that he valued the small group activities in classes. This pre-service teacher recalled 'my Modern History teacher was very good at organising group work and I loved the classes where we worked together investigating sources.' Whilst all 10 participants noted that they were taught the distinction between primary sources and secondary sources and learnt about the significance of the inquiry process, only two participants, B and I, recalled teachers emphasising second order concepts. B observed:

My Modern History teacher always stressed the important concepts that were part of the topic we were investigating like nationalism and imperialism ... and he did emphasise words like evidence and perspective, but I had no idea these terms could be categorised as first order

or second order concepts. It was at uni in history curriculum method that I first heard about these concepts. (Participant B)

Comparably, Participant I recalled:

For every unit, my Modern History teacher insisted that we understand how significant the topic was ... we had a list of characteristics that determined significance to refer to and we also had to learn about contestation and specifically look for how different historians interpreted the past and how we could look for bias in the accounts we read. But we just referred to these as important concepts in history – there was no distinction between them. (Participant I)

In terms of the beliefs and assumptions pre-service teachers bring to their studies, three participants (n=3) emphasised the impact of family life and four (n=4) referred to personal experiences ranging from travel to playing computer games and engaging with film. Participant A recalled her Grandfather's struggles with depression and alcohol as a Vietnam veteran, noting 'from when I was small, I knew something awful must have happened to him when he was based at Nui Dat during the war ... I always wanted to find out more about this strange war'. For Participant E, whose father was an immigrant from the Greek island of Kythira, family connections to Greece prompted an interest in ancient Greece and the view that European civilization exemplified cultural achievements, whilst remaining family photographs and mementos shaped Participant C's view of the past as a remote and challenging time.

Both my parents experienced a lot of poverty. The few photos we had a home showed relations with severe expressions and in drab clothes ... Mum has a cracked tea pot and some old crochet doilies she kept from my Nana ... it was all a bit sad really. So I guess I always assumed that the past is linked to a lot of difficult times and things. Participant C

By contrast, Participant F recalled that playing personal computer games, such as the Age of Empire series, convinced him that history 'just had to be exciting', and Participant B noted the impact of DVD movies ranging from 'Gladiator' to 'The Last Samurai' in making history fascinating. Two participants referred to the ways in which travel shaped their beliefs about history as inherently interesting. For example, Participant B referred to the impact of his gap year spent travelling through South East Asia and that 'my visit to the Borobudur Temple in particular convinced me that I just had to learn more about Indonesia's incredible past'. Similarly, Participant I referred to travel in terms of 'it just sparked my interest in history as the more I saw in different cultures the more I just had to find out, it all seemed so remarkable'.

### **Pre-service teachers reflect on their university studies**

With reference to studying history at university and the debates about what history should be taught, 6 of the 10 participants noted that it was not until they entered university that they were aware of the intensity of the ideological debates about what should be emphasized in the teaching of Australian history. Of these, 5 participants noted how rewarding they found the history content unit in which the debates about the representation of Indigenous history (Attwood, 2005) and the history wars (Macintyre & Clarke, 2003) were studied. However, 4 participants expressed concern about managing student questions about the nation's past with reference to strong opposing views about the 'settlement' of Australia versus the 'invasion' of Australia and dispossession of Indigenous peoples; as Participant A commented: 'we have to be very careful we don't upset parents or seem like we are out on a limb'. Similarly, another pre-service teacher reflected:

I know we can refer to the different sources ... say do a document study on Windshuttle's views compared what Henry Reynolds writes ... but I worry that the kids will put us on the spot and ask what we think. I mean some people feel so strongly about these issues and what if I have some Indigenous kids in the class too? What if I have a very conservative Head of Department? (Participant D)<sup>1</sup>

It was also notable that all 10 participants commented on the distinction between studying history content units and their curriculum units. Participant J noted: 'it really hit me when I looked at the history curriculum as even though I'd studied 6 different history units before the curriculum units ... I knew so little about the topics listed for investigation and the methods of teaching history. I was overwhelmed by what I didn't know'. A similar sentiment was noted by Participant E: 'there is just so much you have to know as a history teacher, will I ever know enough?'

In terms of how history should be taught, participants also expressed degrees of concern about the challenges and skills involved in designing an inquiry-based study of a topic. Four participants found writing questions to promote critical analysis of sources challenging and frustrating. One noted: 'I felt like dropping out [of the course] at times as I found this so hard. I was so [expletive] fed up with this focus on framing questions ... I mean ... do we really have to emphasise this so much?' (Participant E). Participant G reflected 'I don't remember history being this hard at school, there is so much preparation involved in teaching history and it is just so hard'. Similarly, Participant B recalled: 'even though I had a great teacher in Year 11 and 12 and I was good at history at school, I have been challenged by the curriculum unit and I didn't realise how difficult it is to teach history'.

Concomitantly, participants noted that their history curriculum unit did prepare them for some of the challenges of the professional placement. 'Even though I didn't value these activities that much on campus, when I was on my placement, I used some of the questioning strategies and small group activities we'd workshopped and it really helped me to feel more confident' (Participant J). Another participant recalled: 'if I hadn't done all those worksheets on devising inquiry questions ... I wouldn't have coped on my placement as my supervising teacher was not helpful and quick to criticise my work' (Participant I). Participant B recalled that his supervising teacher was very pleased with his detailed planning and complemented him on his thorough work; 'she couldn't believe that I took the initiative to identify and classify the important concepts for the inquiry unit into first order and second order concepts in my planning'.

Two of the pre-service teachers expressed disillusionment with what they observed during their professional placement in terms of what their supervising teachers emphasised and in their degree of preparation.

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<sup>1</sup> Historians such as Henry Reynolds (1982), amongst others, argue that the process of colonisation transformed the Australian landscape into a site of 'conflict' not 'settlement' and that conflict over possession of Indigenous lands resulted in both 'war' and 'resistance'. It is also argued that 'frontier' conflict established the general pattern of relationships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and that this history continued to impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. According to Attwood (2005, p. 39) 'this conflict was sporadic but the cost was high: perhaps 20,000 Aborigines and 2000 settlers died. The Aboriginal population drastically declined, but this was largely the result of smallpox, measles, influenza, venereal diseases, respiratory diseases (such as tuberculosis), malnutrition and alcohol abuse.' By contrast, Keith Windschuttle (2002) argued that such interpretations of the treatment of Indigenous people on the frontier of white settlement amounted to fabrication, contending that academic historians writing about the frontier were politically inspired. Windschuttle (2002) also claimed that the work of 'frontier' historians was poorly researched and was not supported by evidence.

I had to be so careful ... I had a very traditional teacher who insisted on the Year 10 students writing summaries in the final part of each lesson. The kids did not like it. And she paid lip service to inquiry and was a real know it all ... the lessons were all about her telling the kids her version of Australia's involvement in the First World War. I was so glad to finish that placement'. (Participant G)

Similarly, another participant was disappointed by the conduct of her supervising teacher.

My teacher was patronising and told me that I had to teach history for at least 8 years before I'd be good at it. The thing was ... he was not that good himself ... he just used the text book all the time and put no effort into his preparation ... and he didn't engage with the online curriculum much at all. So looking back I am pleased I learnt what I did at uni as all I learnt on my placement was how not to teach history'. (Participant A)

## Discussion

Space prevents further elaboration of the findings; however the themes from the data presented in this paper indicate some of those complex factors history pre-service teachers grapple with as they prepare to enter the profession. With reference to the first theme of the continued effects of schooling and pre-service teacher beliefs about history, all participants nominated Year 11 and 12 as the most formative years for shaping their understandings of what constitutes historical knowledge. Most (n=8) participants reflected that their studies at university provided the opportunity to rethink the extent and nature of this school-based knowledge in terms of their subject knowledge. For some, (n=3) it was quite challenging to consider how history involves not only acquiring some knowledge based on the fragmentary remains of the past but also developing discipline-specific knowledge of those distinctive concepts and inquiry processes that produce particular ways of understanding the past. This reflects Ellis's (2007) observation that pre-service teacher subject knowledge is relational to its context and that it is 'complex, systematic and emergent in practice' (p. 459); and it was most evident as the participants reflected on coming to terms with interpreting the Australian Curriculum: History in their history method unit after they had completed their professional placement in schools. Data also revealed the ways in which pre-service teachers bring certain beliefs about history to their studies, as seven of the participants (n=7) referred to some views about the past, ranging from family life to personal experiences, as impacting upon their assumptions about history and why they wanted to teach it. This confirms Burn, Hagger and Mutton's (2003) viewpoint that pre-service teachers' personal belief systems are influential in shaping their conceptions of valuable teaching.

As noted, the second emergent theme indicated that pre-service teachers grappled with their syntactical and content knowledge about history and all participants in this study, (n=10), expressed anxiety about 'knowing enough' as beginning teachers. This anxiety was compounded by the fact that these 4<sup>th</sup> years were about to enter the history teaching profession at a time of considerable change. Some (n=4) expressed specific concerns about their capacity to deal with curriculum change, and these sentiments were encapsulated by Participant F who noted 'I'm not sure how I can handle this as I am only just getting to know how to deal with the history curriculum as it is now and I am not experienced enough to be on top of these things'. It was also worth noting that some of the pre-service teachers found their practicum experiences in school disempowering with Participant A referring to her supervising teachers' disengaged practice and Participant G recalling the supervising teacher's poor pedagogical practices. However, for others, the practicum in schools served as an invaluable 'cognitive apprenticeship' (Collins, Brown & Newman, 1989) whereby a pre-service teacher could demonstrate history teaching skills to a supervising teacher (Participant J) and share planning and gain positive feedback from a more

experienced teacher (Participant B). Another participant, C reflected on how the history curriculum 'lectorials' prepared them for making decisions during and after the practicum, noting 'I gained experience implementing new perspectives and interpreting the curriculum on my placement, so I think I am ready for this sort of work in teaching when I graduate'.

Most participants (n=8) commented on the effectiveness of not only learning to understand effective pedagogic practice for the history classroom during lectorials but also to simultaneously participate in those small groups activities they will use with their future history classes as learners themselves (Darling-Hammond, 2008). As Volpe (2002) puts it, 'the best-learned lessons are the ones that students learn themselves, through their own struggles' (p. 4). As noted, whilst all the participants in this study expressed concern about dealing with curriculum change at the same time as they were learning 'to teach' (Feiman-Nemser, 2001, p. 26), as well as anxiety about the depth of their subject matter knowledge, the findings also confirmed Beijaard's (1995) view that that the professional identity of secondary teachers is derived from the specific subject/s they teach as all 10 participants reiterated their pride in their identity as history teachers. Significantly, all the participants also commended history as a subject that was rigorous and worthwhile. As one participant put it:

What I've come to realise at the end of my course and learnt to teach history from the curriculum is that it isn't a soft option at school. Lots of my friends think that history is just about learning dates and recalling facts in essays ... but history is harder than subjects like biology and some of the other popular science subjects. Kids learn to think deeply and to write well. (Participant J)

The rigor of teaching in ways that encourage students to learn to think historically was also noted by the other participants as challenging intellectual work. As one participant noted, 'I had no idea how much structure and careful planning you need to put into history lessons so that students can learn to think deeply about the reliability and representativeness of sources' (Participant F). Despite these challenges, all 10 participants noted it was rewarding and important to teach in ways that encourage students to develop their analytical and critical thinking skills in the history classroom. Although the context of curriculum change in Australia might suggest that these pre-service teachers were about to enter the profession at a very difficult time, it could also be argued that the issues raised in the findings were not unique, but indicative of the fears and anxieties of what might be expected from many final year university students about to enter the History teaching profession. Nonetheless, the findings from this small study contributed to the revision of the history curriculum unit and more explicit guidelines to assist pre-service teachers to embed historical thinking concepts in depth studies they prepared to teach history from the new Australian Curriculum were adopted in the next iteration of the unit.

## **Conclusion**

In examining some of the beliefs and assumptions pre-service teachers bring to their history curriculum studies, the impact of their university studies on their thinking about history as a discipline and how they explored theory-practice relationships, this paper has highlighted the complexity of teaching history as a school subject. Whilst all participants noted that their university studies were significant in preparing them to teach, they consistently expressed concern about their lack of subject matter knowledge about the past. Furthermore, they reiterated how challenging it was to learn to teach in ways that emphasise those distinctive inquiry processes and concepts which characterise the discipline of history. The findings also suggest that pre-service teachers were effectively engaged with the Australian Curriculum History for Years 7 to 10 and that they valued this as worthwhile work for what it offered young people in terms of valuable thinking skills.

Whilst this appears to augur well in terms of preparedness to teach, the limitations of this small study must be noted and it is not possible to arrive at a finding about whether these final year pre-service teachers are ready to enact their self-reported approaches to teaching history in the Australian Curriculum context, for this will only be evident once they commence teaching their own classes.

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