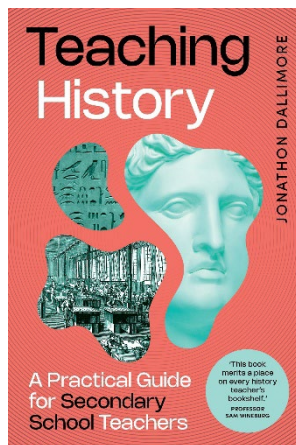


Book Review

Teaching History: A Practical Guide for Secondary School Teachers

Jonathon Dallimore, Melbourne: Amba Press, 2025. 210 pages. ISBN 9781923215481 (paperback; also available as e-book).



Beginning history teachers often don't see the relevance of the key concepts of history education and historical understanding. They regularly – and naturally – just want practical tips on how to teach. The idea of understanding the broader notions and concepts of historical understanding that are global and explain much of what their profession does seems lost on many entering history teaching. This book makes it clearer why these concepts and ideas are important to understand and can be seen in what they are supposed to teach and how they teach history.

This guide reflects how the teaching of history in schools has changed in the last few decades to focus on the teaching of the historical skills of historians to students so that they can become their own historians. They learn critical thinking skills about the past as well as the present. In many countries from Singapore to the United Kingdom, students study not just the history of the past, but historical thinking about how the past is constructed by historians. These historical thinking skills that are learned in history classrooms around the world include: significance, causation, change and continuity, perspectives, sources and evidence, and interpretations. These are reviewed in chapter 5 of Dallimore's book.

Dallimore writes that historical thinking skills have 'the potential to help students even if they are not planning on engaging with history beyond school' because the 'disciplinary aspects of history can equip students with ways of thinking that can help them navigate historical representations in the wider world. This includes thinking critically about the narratives they are confronted with in public life on a regular basis' (p. 49). In everyday life, he adds, the students later as adults will travel and visit historic sites, read history books, watch historical films, and generally encounter the construction of history in different mediums. When the students become citizens 'they will be confronted with stories about the past claiming to justify all kinds of political decisions that they may need to respond to through voting and other civic activity'. Thus, he concludes, 'helping students understand and appreciate this is a powerful aspect of teaching history'. (p. 51)

The book is a marvellous synthesis of theory and practice that helps beginning history teachers by providing many useful tips for teaching, but also by explaining simply many concepts, which are illustrated by being applied to practice. The author draws upon Bob Bain for his approach. He writes on page 1 and repeats it again on the last page (p. 210): 'If there is an overall argument of this book it is to stress what Bob Bain suggested when he wrote that secondary history teachers must remain "bifocal" by pursuing both *historical* and *instructional* lines of thinking'. Dallimore argues that 'sole emphasis on the "historical" might provide the teacher with a sound scholarly basis for the content and the ideas they foreground in the classes, but it may not translate into time well spent in class.' Alternatively, 'a myopic focus on the "instructional" might, on the other hand, make for efficient classes in which students develop shallow or misleading ideas.' (p. 2) The book is to be commended because of its successful integration of the ideas of historical thinking with the day-to-day realities of teaching history in secondary schools.

The first part of the book called 'Setting the Foundations' covers the key concepts of historical

understanding in the classroom. The second part of the book called 'Planning – Year Levels and Topics' is a practical guide to history lesson planning. The third part of the book, 'Sequences and Lessons' focuses on individual lessons and analyses what goes on in the history classroom. The book is broken down into very short chapters that are meant to be easy for teachers to digest and apply in their work. At the end of every chapter there are key questions that are asked of the history teachers, and a list of readings of the works of key thinkers in history education whose work is relevant to the ideas discussed in the chapter. Dallimore thoughtfully provides teachers with a clear and concise summary of each of these readings.

Dallimore focuses the book on not just the experiences of the history teachers but those of the students they are teaching. He writes that 'part of the argument of this book is that, to understand history, students need to become more comfortable with a degree of debate and open-endedness that lies at the subject's heart' (p. 210). In chapters 4 and 14, he explores critically inquiry-based learning in history, assessing how students react to it in class and how it can go wrong if students are just left by themselves to figure out problems without any guidance from the teacher.

This guide to history teaching has been very well put together and reflects over 20 years of experience of the author in the history teaching profession as well as his years at university teaching beginning history teachers their craft. The book is a valuable addition to not only the professional libraries of history teachers, but to the list of readings that can be provided to beginning history teachers in teacher training classes at universities around the world.

Kevin Blackburn,

Humanities and Social Studies Education,
National Institute of Education,
Nanyang Technological University,
Singapore