Virtual history teaching in LAMS

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This paper explores the implications of the Australian Curriculum, suggesting the need for new conceptualisations of history teaching in teacher education. The development of the virtual history fieldtrip module in LAMS illustrates the possibilities of new learning designs, which are technology-mediated and underpinned by an educational psychology framework. The theoretical and practical links of the virtual history fieldtrip module to the goals of the new Australian curriculum are explored in detail.

Keywords: Australian curriculum, history teaching, teacher education, LAMS, learning design

Introduction

The first time in history, Australia will have a national curriculum for K-12 schooling. The emerging Australian Curriculum (2008-2013) is being developed progressively. The inclusion of History in the first phase of the development, together with English, Mathematics and Science, is based on the realisation that today's young are generally disinterested in and ill-informed about Australia's system of government, its current role in a globalised world and its recent history. An example of the lack of historical literacy is provided in a report prepared by the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (2006), which explains that the vast majority of Year 10 students (77%) in a national Civics and Citizenship proficiency assessment did not know that the Australia Day celebrations are attributed to the arrival of the first fleet of 11 ships from the British motherland in 1788. A more recent study conducted by Anna Clarke (2008) into the ways students and teachers think about Australia's history found that there is an acknowledgement of the importance of the learning area. Significantly, it was found that the disconnection of students with History as a subject matter is attributed to the way it is taught. Clarke (2008) observes:

> While … students overwhelmingly acknowledge the importance of learning about the national history in school, many of them criticise the subject for being boring and repetitive. …[T]eachers frequently felt disappointed they couldn't do more for the classes. And even in those schools with better access to resources there remains the question of how teachers use the material available to them. (p. 5)

Students' lack of interest in and understanding of History has a complex set of reasons and this learning area will need to reinvent itself. History education is not the simple and low-level acquisition of commonly available facts. History education includes the goal to commit students, at all levels of education, to become active and informed citizens, able and willing to express their own views and to be creative in the pursuit of knowledge. Hence, it is important to engage students of History with questions of values, beliefs and attitudes that relate to the teaching and learning of historical facts and concepts.

Historical inquiry

The emphasis on the development of 'soft skills' in the new Australian Curriculum shows the tension between rhetoric and reality. There is a consensus among educational researchers and policy makers that inquiry-based learning and teaching in general, and historical inquiry in particular, provides students with opportunities to experience an immersive learning environment and develop these transferable skills (Clark, 2010; Paterson, 2010). Moreover, there is ample evidence that such learning experiences are often more engaging and effective than traditional teacher-centric and content-driven approaches (Tobias & Duffy, 2009). Despite the acknowledgement of its benefits to students, the widespread implementation of inquiry-based learning and teaching of history in teacher education and subsequently in school education has not yet been achieved. As Lendol Calder (2006) so eloquently notes: "When I claim that the typical, coverage-oriented [technique] is a wrongheaded way to introduce students to the goodness and power of history, I am not saying anything

outrageous or new. But pedagogical inertia happens." (p. 1359). Similarly, Charles Seller observed seven years earlier:

> The notion that students must first be given facts and then at some distant time in the future will 'think' about them is both a cover-up and a perversion of pedagogy. … One does not collect facts he (sic) does not need, hang on to them, and then stumble across the propitious moment to use them. One is first perplexed by a problem and then he makes use of the facts to achieve a solution. (Charles Sellers in Williams, 2010)

A deliberative understanding of new History teaching and learning assumes that students' interest can be transformed through the process of deep engagement through joint inquiry and deliberation. Hence, the new mandate for teacher education is to assist future teachers of History to understand the need for different learning design. Teacher educators need to teach specific and new design aspects to teacher education students. These are planning for, implementing and evaluating learning and teaching activities that provide opportunities for teacher education students to develop their historical literacy as outlined by the Australian Curriculum Assessment and Reporting Agency (ACARA) in the new Australian curriculum (ACARA, 2011), rather than simply learning to remember disjointed facts. This holistic conception of History teaching and learning includes the development of affective processes and cognitive information processing (O'Donnell, Dobozy, Bartlett et. al., in press).

History delivered online

The inclusion of History in phase one of the progressive development of the new Australian Curriculum signifies a newly gained prominence of this learning area in the future Australian school education. Although it is not the first time a national curriculum is on the agenda, it is the first time it is being actualised. The reason given by the current Federal Government concerning the need for a national curriculum, which is "one of the first in the world to be delivered online", is "to ensure Australians are armed with the knowledge and skills to meet the demands of the 21st Century" (Australian Labor, 2011). This development is in line with technology-mediated life experiences, which are on the increase. This 'ICT-isation' (Rush, 2008) or 'digital turn' (Buchanan, 2011) of all aspects of our lives, through the increased importance that is placed on technology-mediated (inter)action, is greatly affecting education. However, many History classrooms still operate in traditional ways, showing the occasional war movie or taking children to the local museum. As one student in Clarke's (2008) study observed: "The videos are shocking and some of the textbooks, too, are like from 1988, and that's how old we are' (p. 7). This example illustrates two current problems in education: (a) the persistent disconnect between students' 'life world' and classroom experiences, and (b) the ineffectiveness of 'ad-hock' and 'add-on professional development solutions' to the traditional teacher-centric, whole-class pedagogical strategies that have been successfully applied over the last few decades in schools and teacher education in Australia.

Technology-mediated learning design as a useful addition to the educational landscape will need to be introduced to teacher education students, not only in an isolated ICT workshop or course, but rather will need reinforcement and modeling through the embedding of technology-mediated learning design as part of their 'normal' learning experience and situated in context. The inclusion of technology-mediated curriculum design and the expansion of traditional modes of learning and teaching will need to be documented so that pre-service and in-service teachers will be cognisant of the range of new pedagogical strategies and are able to develop a view about their effectiveness. There is still reluctance in the education community to embrace technology-mediated learning and teaching as possibly providing more effective learning opportunities than traditional, whole-class face-to-face teaching, because it is highly interactive, flexible, personalised and relevant to today's students (Conole, Brasher, Cross, *et al.* 2008; Ertmer, 2005).

The virtual history fieldtrip module that was constructed in LAMS and used here as a case example illustrated the balancing of different learning goals as set out by ACARA (2011). The aim was to provide experiential learning opportunities for teacher education students and introduce them to a new way of history learning and teaching that is cost-effective, interactive and responds to school students' interest in and knowledge of Web 2.0 applications (Chu, & Kennedy, 2011).

A Learning Design approach to the teaching of history

The learning design (LD) of the virtual history module outlined below provides an opportunity to illustrate the learning intent, planning and enacting of a particular learning sequence in context, which in this instance

includes the topic of 'the customary history fieldtrip' and focuses on the provision of an immersive environment through active problem solving and deliberation. The strength of a LD approach in the development of new history learning experience for teacher education students is the visibility of the alignment between learning outcomes and learning activities, especially the interplay between deliberative, inquiry and review tasks. Moreover, another benefit of an LD approach is its generic application and content independence (see Cameron, 2011). In what follows, I provide a definition of LD, which is reflecting my current understanding of a LD approach:

> LD is a conceptual construct making explicit epistemological and technological integration attempts by the designer of a particular learning sequence or series of learning sequences. The design process is generally informed by social constructivist and/or connectivist learning theories and aims to share the LD theory/praxis nexus in an attempt to open the LD sequence/s up for adaption, adoption and/or enhancement.

In other words, a LD approach allows teacher educators and their students to visualise pedagogical decision-making, prior to the engagement with specific sequenced activities. Based on this conceptualisation, I built an online module constructed in LAMS and seamlessly embedded through a plug-in in the Blackboard LMS. The online learning module was designed to replace a three-hour face-to-face teaching session and introduce undergraduate and/or graduate diploma teacher education students enrolled in the compulsory Society and Environment units (SSE2105/SSE4215) to the principles and practices of virtual history teaching, through the illustration of the nature and purpose of virtual History fieldtrips. LAMS is an ideal tool for the actualisation of LD, described by Dalziel (2005) as a 'learning design system' (p. 1), which is remarkably different from conventional LMS, such as Blackboard, Moodle or Desire2Learn (Dobozy, Reynolds, & Schonwetter, 2011). The major difference is described by Dobozy et. al. (2011) is in the way these online learning systems are conceptualised and used by lecturing staff and students. Whereas LMS are used mainly as resource repositories and for management purposes, LAMS seems to have a pedagogical focus (see also Dalziel, 2005).

The virtual history module in LAMS

The virtual history module commenced with a general introduction about online history teaching, alerting to the extensive resources and various mediascapes developed recently by Australian and international educational authorities (see Figure 1 for an 'author's view of the complete module). One of the many attractive features of LAMS, as a learning design platform, is the possibility of seamless integration of external resources into the learning activity, making access easy and convenient for learners (see Figure 2). Students can choose to explore as many of the outside resources provided as they see practicable or useful for their learning, or simply engage with the set activity. Although customary LMS are frequently used as resource repositories by lecturers, LAMS's ability to provide carefully designed and sequenced learning tasks that involve outside resources, making it possible to include multiple text forms and viewpoints into a learning story. Educational psychology as a field of study concerned with the improvement of how students learn and teachers teach has provided evidence of the importance of learning styles and the need to assist students' engagement with learning (Dobozy et. al., 2011). The seamless integration of various resources and teaching tools into the learning sequences as shown in Figure 2 provides an opportunity for teacher education students to learn about the various support materials available. Using the example at hand, the LAMS activity challenges them to apply their information literacy skills or step outside their comfort zone and develop these highly prized soft skills by finding 'the Pandora archives' and the reference to their current location (Western Australia), linking content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge acquisition. Being able to view the complete sequence at the beginning of a learning module makes the deliberate design decision explicit to teacher education students.
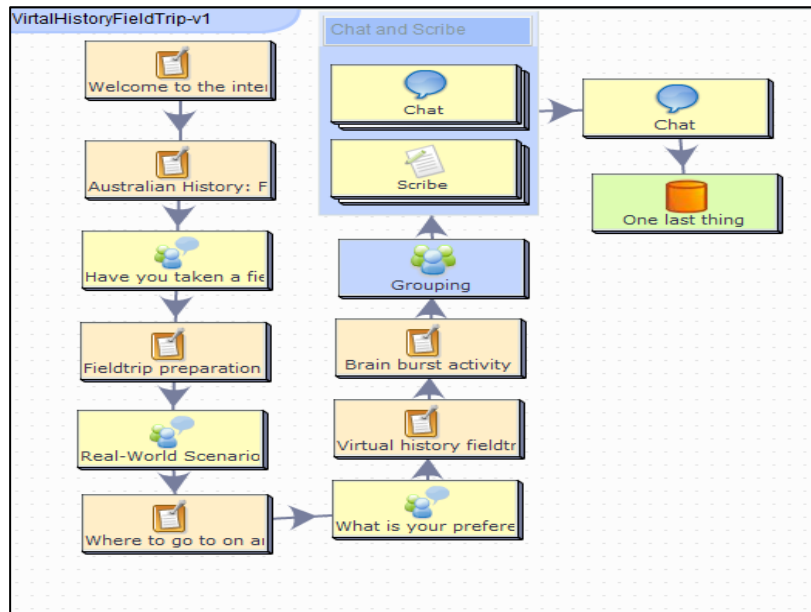
Figure 1: Author's view of Virtual History learning module

Now let's look at some Australian initiatives. I am certain that you will find the various mediascapes developed by Australian educational authorities very useful indeed. Remember, they have been made available to you *to encourage pedagogical exchange and professional learning*.

Look around, take notice, and come back later ...
(AUS) OZ TEACHERNET
(AUS) EdNA ONLINE (check out the resources and National Curriculum links)
(AUS) History Teachers' Association of Western Australia HTAWA (check out the History Links)

See if you can 'click' your way through to the Pandora archives (without using the link) and find the reference to Western Australia in *Part 1 of The Federation Story*.

If you are unable to do this, try it backwards: 'click on the link (Australian History Timelines/Pandora Archive/Federation Frontline) and see if you can get to it from the HTAWA website - a truly handy resource to have when preparing History lessons!

Figure 2: Seamless integration of external resources into LAMS activities

The deliberate composition of multimedia texts, taking advantage of the possibility of multimodality (Kress, 2010) of technology-enhanced learning design, incorporating YouTube videos, digital archive documents, webpages, blog entries etc, aims to encourage a sense of agency in students. The new mode of communication, referred to by Anne Wysocki (2004) as 'new media texts', provides a platform for various forms of engagement with the multitude of resources that are 'pulled into' the particular learning activity. Wysocki (2004) explains the value of this form of LD as follows:

> I think we should call 'new media texts' those that have been made by composers who are aware of the range of materialities of texts and who then highlight the materiality; such composers design texts that help readers/consumers/viewers stay alert to how any text-like its composers and readers- doesn't function independently of how it is made and in what contexts. Such composers design texts that make as overtly visible as possible the values they embody. (Wysocki, 2004, p. 15)

The composition described here is the learning design process, which, naturally, is underpinned by LD principles and the definition of LD provided above. It offers opportunities for personal exchange in conjunction with the acquisition of new information provided through multiple media resources and activities. The deliberate design provides an avenue for student agency and freedom (see Dobozy, 1999).

Following on from the general introduction to the module, the learning sequence commenced with a statement about the common occurrence of fieldtrips in social studies classes and their relevance in the new Australian curriculum. It made reference to and built on students' previous curriculum topics in educational psychology units concerning 'cooperative learning', 'student motivation' and 'personal values developments'. This introduction segment, which was linking to various current national policy documents and information from previous units was then followed by an interactive learning activity developed using the LAMS Forum

tool. The task was purposely designed to ground the policy document review and past unit reference information by way of connecting them with personal experiences during students' primary and secondary school excursions and fieldtrip memories (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Interactive forum activity exploring personal experiences

The particular design sparked interest and encouraged students to participate actively in the discussions, sharing personal experiences. Following the goal of LD, this section of the paper is concerned with documenting the design process in a particular context, outlining the particular design steps of this learning module in some detail. Therewith the strength of an LD model can be made explicit, inviting constructive discussion and debate concerning pedagogical decision-making and its intended and actual impact.

The personal experience sharing activity is followed by the dissemination of technical and pedagogical information concerning the organisation of History Excursions (see Figure 4) and a case scenario that requires students' input and consideration, inviting them to analyse their prior knowledge, and synthesise the theoretical and practical information acquired from multiple sources (Figure 5).

Figure 4: Fieldtrip preparation — linking personal experiences with pedagogical knowledge

Jackie and Tim's **history class** will be taking a field trip to a nearby museum. The Maritime and Shipwreck museum is hosting a once-in-a-lifetime exhibit and Jackie and Tim show much promise in their understanding of Australian history. Their teacher, Ms. Rainier, wants them to have as rich an experience as possible, but she is concerned that without direct supervision, they will not be as engaged in the learning aspects of the trip as they could be. On the other hand, she does not want to turn a field trip into an unpleasant experience for them. What reasonable steps can Ms. Rainier take to make this a valuable and memorable learning experience for all children, including Jackie and Tim? Here are some suggestions:

1. *Prepare all the students for the trip by discussing some historical artifacts they can expect to see.*

2. *Assign student leaders of small learning teams that provide an after excursion report to the class. Ask Jackie and Tim if they wish to lead a group of student.*

3. *Have each learning team develop a set of questions to try to answer while they are at the museum.*

4. *Allow Jackie, Tim and other team leaders to explain their group's problem solving strategy to help them find answers to their questions efficiently and effectively.*

5. *Ask the students to rate the exhibits according to a classification system developed by the class.*

Subject	Started by	Replies	New	Last post
What artifacts?		86	87	16 June 2010 2:14:44 PM GMT+10:00
Why ask Jackie and Tim?		69	70	12 May 2010 8:11:24 PM GMT+10:00
What questions could be asked?		50	51	12 May 2010 8:15:11 PM GMT+10:00
What classification system?		48	49	12 May 2010 8:17:37 PM GMT+10:00
What interdiciplinary link?		45	46	12 May 2010 8:21:45 PM GMT+10:00

New Topic   Refresh

Figure 5: Scenario-based collaborative learning

Following on from requesting students to provide their ideas and considerations to a number of questions, a list of possible locations for the History Excursion is provided. The activity then invited students to review possible excursion sites that do not include the typical local museum trips, but instead provide attractive alternatives, complete with links to websites and other multimedia resources. Students are required to explain their top three preferred history excursion places and calculating the financial cost and time investment for one of their choices. Completing the segment on the customary physical history fieldtrip, students were then introduced to the concept of virtual history fieldtrips and their organisations, again complete with external links and plenty of resources (see Figure 6).

Virtual History fieldtrips

Teachers report that they lack knowledge and experience in organising virtual fieldtrips. So, let's go on a (shortened version of a) virtual field trip and gain hands-on experience. Hopefully, this trip will be memorable and inspire you to organise your own virtual History fieldtrips in the not so distant future.

This is how I would start:

Let's go on a virtual history fieldtrip

Your question for today's virtual fieldtrip is:

"What did 12-year-old girls wear in the Age of Napoleon?"

Learning outcome:
Students understand the similarities and differences of dress codes of the Age of Napoleon (1799-1815) and the Age of Google (today), making comparisons between live in the past and the present.

Learning process:
Older students conduct e-research to find a number of exhibitions on "Dress in the Age of Napoleon". After exchanging information on "the most valuable sites" students write a journal entry and prepare a poster presentation. For younger students, you would provide them with some resources. It is important that you, as the teacher, will have researched the topic and are aware of the resources that students are likely to find, irrespective of the fact that you will provide them with the resources or let them find them by themselves. Remember the saying: Help me do it myself! Do not do for students what they can do themselves.

For older students or students experienced in project work:

If the teacher decides not to make available the resources of her/his own e-research, s/he could say:

Now embark on your travel back in time, exploring the relationship between fashion/clothing, social and political life and history.

For younger students, or students who are not (yet) able to engage in independed e-research:

If the teacher decides to make available the resources of her/his own e-research, s/he could say:

You are now invited to travel back in time, exploring the relationship between fashion/clothing and the way of life in the past in Europe.

Good places to start your trip:
- The 1998 movie *Les Misérables* after the novel from Victor Hugo (1863) with the same title
- The Fashion Era website
- The History Guide website (see also) developed by Steven Kreis

Enjoy your trip!

Les Misérables
by
Victor Hugo
Adapted by Charles Victor Hugo and Paul Meurice
(1863)
from Victor Hugo's Novel *Les Misérables*.
**translated and adapted by
Frank J. Morlock.**
(Google Image)

Les Misérables movie (1998) order from library or check on YouTube

Of course, you are able to simply watch the movie with the children in your classroom, all at the same time, and direct the children to prepare a journal entry and produce a poster. This would then be classified as a teacher-directed in-class activity.

Figure 6: Experiential, problem-based learning example

Only after exploring traditional physical fieldtrip preparations and reflecting on personal past experiences did the module progress to outline the nature and purpose of virtual history fieldtrips. Many practising and trainee teachers have limited knowledge and understanding of virtual history fieldtrips, their purpose, organisation and benefits for teachers and learners (Brush, Saye, Kale, et. al., 2009). Hence, it was important to provide teacher education students with sufficient information and interaction possibilities to experience the preparation and enactment of various forms of history excursion.

The virtual history fieldtrip activity (see Figure 7) was design to be the highlight of the module, providing a clear example and experience of a virtual history fieldtrip based around a problem to be solved in collaboration with peers. Teacher education students were able to experience the benefits of accessing multimedia resources that have been carefully chosen and linked in with the activity. Using LD principles, the module was constructed in a way that permitted students to spend as much or as little time with the additional resource material provided, dipping into the movie or watching the complete segment, depending on interest and motivation.

History Brain Burst

You have been put into ramdom groups of six students.
Now it's time to let your creative juices flow.
Remember - just write down whatever comes to mind!

The fact is:

We only have two hours (max) per week allocated for S&E related topics.

The two questions we would like you to discuss are:

Q 1: How much time per week or term should be devoted to History teaching?

Q 2: How much time should be devoted to the teaching of skills (historical inquiry) and how much time should be devoted to the teaching of knowledge (historical facts/events)?

Figure 7: Collaborative reflection about pedagogical reality in primary classrooms

More importantly, the final discussion activity intended to draw learners' attention to the vast time investments required of teachers, security concerns and financial costs associated with traditional History fieldtrips. This LAMS module was designed to engage teacher education students, many of whom were, similar to the school students they will be teaching in the not so distant future, not particularly interested in or excited about History as a learning area. Providing more opportunity to (a) connect personal experiences with theoretical information (such as illustrated in this LD-Type 2 example), and (b) enlist Web 2.0 technologies in teaching and learning, for example, through virtual history fieldtrips, may help students gain interest in and connect with the new Australian curriculum. Although this module did not form part of students' assessment requirements of the unit, it was encouraging to see the general interest in and engagement with the curriculum content provided.

Discussion and Conclusion

The underpinning notion of LD, as exemplified in this paper, is that learning design decisions can be made explicit so that teacher and learners get a better understanding of pedagogical decision-making. It was argued that unless there is greater clarity about pedagogical decision-making in the teaching of History in teacher education, it is unlikely that future History teachers will adopt novel design principles, such as LD.

The introduction of the nature and purpose of virtual history fieldtrips to teacher education students as a particular case example of the implementation of a LD approach illustrated the pedagogical strength of LAMS as a LD system, enabling the documentation and critiquing of explicit pedagogical decisions. The virtual history filed trip case example makes explicit the operationalisation of an LD approach and the design decisions taken in a particular context, with the aim of informing other teachers of the affordance of LD and also to invite critique of particular, contextualised learning and teaching processes. Hence, it is a case illustration, not of a 'perfect' case, but rather, in the sense of 'perpetual beta' of a 'case in the state of becoming'. For this idea to flourish, it is vital that pedagogical, conceptual and epistemological considerations are documented and shared with the wider professional community. In this sense, the current paper outlined how the module was purposely designed to commence with learners' personal experiences as students, providing a 'hook' into the topic. This activity was then linked with considerations and preparation activities of teachers which need to be observed for physical fieldtrip activities, such as the need to describe learning goals, contacting the institution to be visited, booking the venue, education officer, parent helpers and transportation, writing parent letters, gaining consent from the school administration and parents/guardians of students, prepare a budget and organise the collection of funds etc, prior to focusing on the vital element of preparing the children for the fieldtrip.

LD and the introduction of virtual fieldtrips in LAMS provides teaches with a framework to enhance the engagement of students with history learning that can be adopted, adapted or expanded. Enhancing the provision of technology-mediated learning is not only a requirement of the new Australian curriculum, but is also potentially improving the quality of history learning and teaching through the application of LD principles. It was further argued that by making the teaching and learning process explicit, the emerging field of LD is potentially able to contribute substantially to teacher and/or learner accountability, in an environment that requires a departure from traditional teacher-centric and content-driven low-level knowledge production and testing of the past, in favour of more complex knowledge and skills development, vital for success in 21st century knowledge societies of the present and future.

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