



‘Thinking historically’: The role of NCEA research projects in motivating history students to develop disciplinary expertise

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Project start date: January, 2011

Project Finish date: January, 2012

Introduction

Working with approximately 100 senior history students in 3 schools (two in Dunedin and one in Wellington), this two-year project investigates how internally-assessed, inquiry-based, NCEA research projects motivate senior secondary school history students to engage with the disciplinary features of history and develop expertise in the subject. It also explores how this type of learning contributes to young people developing historical thinking and historical consciousness.

Aims

Drawing on international studies of historical thinking and the link between motivation and assessment, this study examines how internally-assessed, inquiry-based, NCEA research projects motivate senior secondary school students to engage with the disciplinary features of history and learn how to think historically. It has four key objectives:

- To identify how engaging in NCEA internally-assessed, inquiry-based history research projects impacts on students' learning and in particular how they develop historical thinking and disciplinary knowledge in the subject.
- To ascertain factors that make a difference to history students in achieving successful outcomes when engaging with NCEA internally-assessed, research projects.
- To identify the barriers and challenges to students developing disciplinary competence and expertise in history when conducting NCEA research projects
- To disseminate findings, recommendations and suggestions that will inform researchers and teachers about how internally-assessed, inquiry-based history research projects can contribute to successful student outcomes in NCEA.

Why is this research important?

Finding out how research projects motivate students to engage with the disciplinary features of history is important, because history plays a prominent role in preparing young New Zealanders to make sense of the challenges they face in participating in an increasingly diverse, globalised and cosmopolitan society. The emphasis on disciplinary thinking at this level (both in the achievement objectives and the achievement standards which are currently being aligned with the curriculum) is also important to understand as topics are no longer prescribed in history and thus teachers have considerable autonomy in shaping their programmes. In this context teachers require detailed New Zealand-based research to help them construct and implement programmes that develop historical thinking, to respond to the needs and interests of their students, and to motivate learners to achieve successful outcomes.

While internally assessed research projects have been a prominent feature of school history programmes for over 20 years (and they appear to play an important role in motivating students to engage with the subject) how this type of learning contributes to students developing disciplinary knowledge and what makes a difference in this process is as yet far from clear. This study aims to address this gap.

What we plan to do

Data and Analysis

A mixed methods approach to data gathering will be adopted and we will collect a wide range of qualitative data over this two year period. Students will keep research journals while they are working on their research projects and engage in online discussions about their research via social networking sites.

We will interview students during the research process and ask them to complete a questionnaire. We will also closely analyse student's actual assignments as well as samples of draft questions/proposals and other written examples that demonstrate how they conducted their research. After coding using NVivo the interviews and written raw data will be subject to an in-depth, systematic analysis by the researchers shaped by the research questions.

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