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# **CONFRONTING HISTORIES AND THE LEARNER PROFILE**

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# ABBREVIATIONS

DP	Diploma Programme
IA	Internal Assessment
IB	International Baccalaureate
IBDP	International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme
MYP	Middle Years Programme
PYP	Primary Years Programme
SACE	South Australian Certificate of Education
VCE	Victorian Certificate of Education

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## INTRODUCTION

This project, *Confronting Histories and the Learner Profile*, examines the ways teachers and students engage with confronting history and how the study of difficult topics can be linked to the development of the attributes of Learner Profile. Its key questions are:

- What are the connections between historical thinking, as it exists in the curriculum for International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme History, and the Learner Profile?
- How does learning with ‘confronting histories’ contribute to the development of the Learner Profile attributes in students?

## BACKGROUND

History’s capacity to promote the development of personal and social values is widely accepted by historians and history educators (Ammert, 2015). The Learner Profile provides a framework to support the development of certain values, although its attributes can be interpreted differently in different contexts (Rizvi et al., 2014). This study connects the Learner Profile and its attributes to elements of historical thinking highlighted by history educators and scholars (see for example: van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008; Seixas & Morton, 2013).

The study of confronting history appears to have particular affordances for supporting values learning, including, for example, the development of empathy, open-mindedness, interpersonal acceptance and cooperation (Riley, 1998; Stern, 1998; Brophy, 1999; Trofanenko, 2011; Savenije, van Boxtel and Grever, 2014; Zembylas, 2015; McKernan, 2017). The scope for addressing confronting history in the IBDP History course is considerable, and attention to both the affective and analytical potential of history study provides an important way forward for the development of international-mindedness.

## METHODOLOGY

The study focused on teachers’ and students’ perspectives on learning and teaching with confronting history. Interviews were conducted with one teacher and between four and six students at each of the four participating schools. A multiple case study approach provided insight into teaching and learning at each of the schools.

Interviews with teachers were one-on-one and focused on teaching practices relating to confronting topics and the Learner Profile. Interviews with students took place in groups, with one group interview per school, and explored students’ experiences of learning with confronting history, and their beliefs about the relevance of the Learner Profile to this learning. All interviews were semi-structured in nature, allowing a depth of discussion on topics of particular interest or importance to participants.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The four schools presented with a range of similarities and differences, often with explicit alignment between the discourses of the participating teacher and their students. A clear tension between the analytical facets of historical study and the emotional engagement with the past emerged. In some instances, students and teachers seemed to seek a study of the past that was devoid of emotion; a more analytical and ‘objective’ approach to learning. Almost all participants noted that the capacity for an emotional engagement – for instance in line with the attribute of ‘caring’ – made history more meaningful, more interesting, and ultimately allowed more insight into the connections between past and present. An awareness of the ‘past in the present’ was highly evident amongst student participants. Their capacity to see ‘patterns’ and understand the motivations of historical actors allowed considerable insight into contemporary events. In most cases, this awareness contributed to students’ commitment to open-mindedness, caring, and their capacity to reflect.

Throughout all of the discussions, the relevance of the Learner Profile to history was evident, and connections between the attributes and historical thinking were implicit in many examples discussed. There were particular challenges, though, for open-mindedness, in that students sometimes appeared to believe that being open to others’ perspectives meant they had to accept them. This was problematic in some instances, and there appeared to be a connection between the tendency to ‘accept’ certain historical perspectives and the tendency to feel more hopeless about humanity’s capacity to avoid atrocities in the present and future.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study found clear affordances for engaging with confronting, contested and complex histories in order to support the development of the Learner Profile attributes. Ultimately, the most powerful learning appeared to be where the analytical was entwined with the emotional, and students could employ both cognitive and affective strategies in understanding historical events. The study highlighted a range of factors teachers should consider in teaching with traumatic or confronting material – these are outlined below.

**Purpose:** a sense of purpose in teaching with the confronting past makes learning more meaningful for students, and can empower them to seek to work towards a better world.

**Knowledge:** teachers need to be knowledgeable both about content and about the students in their classrooms – in particular, teachers should be aware where students are likely to be personally affected by topics covered.

**Materials:** the right materials could make history more engaging and meaningful for students, and the learning experiences that seemed to stand out for students included multimodal sources.

**Time:** time was a challenge for teachers in the study, and engaging with confronting content requires time to engage with complexity and to debrief on challenging issues.

**Courage:** both teachers and students in this study demonstrated considerable courage in learning about confronting topics. It takes significant courage to face the impacts of violence and injustice, and a ‘caring’ approach to the past carries a great deal of learning potential.

**Hope:** when we teach without hope, we rob students of agency – emerging from a study of the confronting past with a sense that we can work to be better is vital.

**Vulnerability:** vulnerability was an important attribute for some teachers in the study – a willingness to be a learner alongside students was a powerful teaching tool.

# INTRODUCTION

## INTRODUCTION

Students in the International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme [IBDP] are expected to learn about a range of global histories. In many instances, the historical events they are required to examine are likely to be ‘confronting’ to students. To take one example, through the prescribed subject of ‘Rights and Protest’, IBDP students may investigate extreme race-based violence in the United States. This is a topic that students may find emotionally upsetting due to the scale of the injustices that it explores. Indeed, most topics covered in the syllabus contain elements that are likely to be confronting in some way to students.<sup>1</sup>

The objective of this project is to investigate the ways the teaching of these ‘confronting histories’ may contribute to students’ development of the attributes of the International Baccalaureate’s Learner Profile. The following key questions guide the project:

- What are the connections between historical thinking, as it exists in the curriculum for International Baccalaureate Diploma Programme History, and the Learner Profile?
- How does learning with ‘confronting histories’ contribute to the development of the Learner Profile attributes in students?

As Bullock (2011, p.2) notes, ‘the IB Learner Profile has met with almost universal acceptance among educators in IB World Schools’, however there remains a need to explore in more detail the ways teachers and students can use the curriculum to create opportunities for the deliberate development of these attributes.

This investigation of the relationship between historical thinking and the Learner Profile provides knowledge to support the teaching of confronting history for the development of Learner Profile attributes. The project takes existing understanding about the ways in which history contributes to values learning and explores the potential for explicit connections between the IBDP History curriculum and the Learner Profile. Importantly, it includes both teachers’ and students’ reflections on learning in history and provides guidance to teachers of IBDP History in addressing the attributes of the Learner Profile through their teaching.

The term ‘confronting’ is used in a number of ways throughout this study. In one usage of the term, any attempt to study the past may be confronting in that it frequently addresses events where there are multiple or conflicting perspectives of what occurred. As the *History Guide* (2017, p.6) notes:

*History is an exploratory subject that fosters a sense of inquiry. It is also an interpretive discipline, allowing opportunity for engagement with multiple perspectives and a plurality of opinions. Studying history develops an understanding of the past, which leads to a deeper understanding of the nature of humans and of the world today.*

Coming to understand that others see things differently – and, in the words of the IB mission statement, ‘can also be right’ – can itself be a confronting experience for students. Historical learning that explores especially contested interpretations of the past – including many of the topics in the IBDP History curriculum – has a particular capacity to challenge students and teachers alike.

This research also deals with history that is confronting in the sense that it shows us the harm that humans are capable of inflicting on one another. Some IBDP History topics deal with significant violence. They may also address patterns of injustice through studies of national and global social movements, war, genocide, and authoritarian states. In all of these examples, students are exposed to the often violent and unjust treatment of other human beings. Students are also required to understand the reasons and causes of violence and injustice, creating potential for a deeper engagement with confronting material. In inquiring into the Holocaust, for example, students must come to understand the motivations of historical actors like Adolf Hitler and Joseph Goebbels. For many students, this understanding is confronting and difficult to accept. Considering the violence inflicted on marginalised people throughout history is likely to be confronting for students and teachers alike.

These ideas about confronting history are interwoven in many ways with notions of ‘historical thinking’ that inform the history syllabus, which in turn can be linked to the attributes of the Learner Profile – we expand on these connections below. Ultimately, the study finds that history is uniquely placed to support the development of Learner Profile attributes in the senior years of the Diploma Programme, and that confronting histories offer significant opportunities to engage particular attributes, even when not explicitly addressed by teachers.

1 Note: The majority of students who participated in this project were working with the 2017 History Guide, and this has been the focus for the discussion in this report.

# LITERATURE REVIEW

The power of history to promote personal and social values is widely acknowledged by historians and history educators (Ammert, 2015). According to Samuel Wineburg (2001, p. 5), 'history holds the potential [...] of humanizing us in ways offered by few other areas in the school curriculum'. It may well be that ethical values 'form the very basis of our relationship to history' (Ammert, 2015, p. 117), however, the processes by which this occurs, how this learning is assessed and evaluated, and what significance it has remain contested (Schultz et al., 2001; Dulberg, 2002; Endacott & Brooks, 2013). To some degree, this is true of values learning generally. While values are at the core of the IB Learner Profile, researchers have suggested that it remains unclear 'how these values, attributes, ideals, aims or learning outcomes are to be applied or reflected in actions, and it is even less clear how the IB or schools evaluate the efficacy of their application by students' (Wells, 2011, p. 177).

The 'almost universal acceptance' of the Learner Profile that Bullock (2011, p.2) describes doesn't necessarily mean that teachers in every IB programme incorporate these attributes into their teaching. There are also important considerations to make in relation to the ways the attributes are understood in different cultural contexts; this is necessary in a programme seeking to be 'international', but can mean that attributes are defined and taught in different ways throughout the world (Rizvi et al., 2014). Human values are a contentious and complicated subject in social science research and in education. These sorts of challenges are not unique to the IB, but rather reflect a broader area of uncertainty in teaching and research, with the added complexity of an international focus for the IB.

The brief literature review below connects conceptualisations of historical thinking to the attributes of the Learner Profile, noting where history has particular scope for addressing the development of these attributes. Building on this foundational understanding, it also considers the place of 'confronting' history in supporting historical thinking and the Learner Profile.

## HISTORICAL THINKING AND THE LEARNER PROFILE

Several models of historical thinking exist. Perhaps the most commonly applied has been that developed by Peter Seixas and the Center for the Study of Historical Consciousness at the University of British Columbia. Seixas and Morton (2013) note six concepts in historical thinking, with students expected to:

- establish historical significance;
- use primary source evidence;
- identify continuity and change;
- analyse cause and consequence;
- take historical perspectives; and
- understand the ethical dimension of historical interpretations.

These features of historical thinking are evident in the IBDP History Guide and in the practices of teachers and students in this study. They position students as practitioners of history; students undertake the practices that historians do, working with sources to analyse the past, often with a view to better understanding events in the present. The Dutch researchers van Drie and van Boxtel (2008) also provide a model for historical reasoning, which includes the below disciplinary practices:

- asking historical questions;
- use of sources;
- contextualisation;
- argumentation;
- use of substantive concepts; and
- use of meta-concepts.

There is considerable overlap between these models, and ultimately they speak to practices of inquiry into the past, with emphases on different aspects of historical thinking or reasoning. Common to the models are the use of source evidence and the use of meta-concepts (such as continuity and change, and cause and consequence). Seixas and Morton (2013) place greater emphasis on ethical and moral facets of historical inquiry – the taking of perspectives can be linked to historical empathy, and engagement with the ethical dimension is an explicit practice. Van Drie and van Boxtel (2008) take a more analytical focus, emphasising the building of argument through historical inquiry and contextualisation.

A number of these concepts are also applied in the IBDP History curriculum. In particular, the influence of Seixas' work is highly evident in the six key concepts provided: change; continuity; causation; consequence; significance; and perspectives (*History Guide*, 2017, p.6). There are a number of important differences between Seixas' model for historical thinking and the six concepts outlined in the DP History Guide. The DP concepts include no verbs, while Seixas' model more explicitly focuses on the practices of student historians. The removal of the verbs is not necessarily especially significant in this instance, as the *Approaches to Teaching and Learning* further emphasise an active role for students, and the application of historical skills is central to the curriculum as a whole. Worth noting, also, is that two of Seixas' aspects of historical thinking are left out of the DP concepts – the use of primary source evidence, and the ethical dimension of historical interpretation – but are nonetheless implicitly applied in the curriculum. The former is foundational to historical study and is explicitly assessed, for instance through source analysis in Paper 1 or the Internal Assessment [IA]. The ethical dimensions of historical interpretation are highly relevant to definitions of international-mindedness, and this is also foundational throughout the DP History course.

There are obvious connections between historical thinking and inquiry, as defined above, and the attributes of the Learner Profile. Students of history must be *inquirers*, first and foremost. They must be *knowledgeable* – every element of historical thinking or reasoning highlighted in the examples above requires

knowledge, and that students of any discipline must be *thinkers* is self-evident. History's emphasis on understanding 'complex problems' in the past, and its capacity to teach the implications of 'responsible action' (or irresponsible action) also present an explicit link to this attribute.

Interestingly, neither of the models above highlight the importance of *communication* for historians; historians must be able to persuasively and compellingly communicate an argument, and so must history students. Seixas and Morton's (2013) model was initially developed as a framework for assessing historical thinking, and this failure to identify the capacity to communicate about the past – without which we cannot actually see evidence of students' capacity to practice any other elements noted – highlights the more expansive potential of the Learner Profile when applied to the history classroom.

*Principled* students are in some ways captured by Seixas and Morton's (2013) attention to the ethical dimensions of the past, bringing the past into the present by encouraging students to reflect on the implications of historical actions for 'fairness and justice'. Students of history must therefore be *open-minded* enough to critically examine a range of perspectives – this is essential both in examining the ethical dimensions of the past (Seixas & Morton, 2013) and in building a compelling argument (van Drie & van Boxtel, 2008).

*Caring* has an important relationship to historical empathy and the 'taking of historical perspectives'; given their significance in the context of this study, caring and empathy are expanded upon in the next section. The notion of students as *risk-takers* is perhaps reflected implicitly in historical thinking and reasoning that requires students to take up and defend an argumentative position, but its affordances in the history classroom are not fully articulated by these models. In history, *risk-takers* are often those who can be the most *open-minded* – there is considerable risk in approaching an argument with a willingness to be challenged and to change.

*Balance* is perhaps more an attribute related to students' lives outside the classroom, but its emphasis on recognising 'interdependence with other people' is important in considering the ethical and moral facets of historical thinking. Finally, history students must be *reflective* in order to support engagement in historical inquiry; this is foundational to open-mindedness and a range of other attributes and historical practices. Students who are reflective can engage with historical inquiry in more meaningful ways; they are critically aware of their own perspectives and assumptions, and can engage in questioning in a more authentic way.

There are clear links between what goes on in a history classroom and the attributes of the Learner Profile; some of these links are captured by historical thinking models, but there are also ways to think through the Learner Profile that could be productive beyond what the models allow. This is particularly true in terms of the values that students can develop through their study of the confronting past.

## HISTORY AND EMPATHY

Most scholars concerned with the development of values through history education have tended to focus on the promotion of historical empathy. Empathy is perhaps at the core of broader social justice aims in education. Thinkers from a variety of disciplines and fields have proposed that empathy is critical to notions of education for the 'common good' (Hoffman, 2000; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Slote, 2010). It has been described as 'the spark of human concern for others, the glue that makes social life possible' (Hoffman, 2000, p. 3) and a 'mechanism of caring, benevolence, compassion' (Slote, 2007, p. 4; both cited in Davison, 2015). This coheres with the affective aims of the Learner Profile, particularly those qualities of being *principled*, *open-minded*, and *caring*. IB students are encouraged to act with 'a strong sense of fairness and justice, and with respect for the dignity and rights of people everywhere'; to critically appreciate 'the values and traditions of others' and 'evaluate a range of points of view'; and 'show empathy, compassion and respect' (IB Learner Profile, 2013). Arguably, empathy is near to the core of these aims, and is intrinsically linked to the IB's focus on developing internationally-minded global citizens. Certainly, it is a precondition for compassion and the appreciation of alternative points of view. While the notion of justice is ultimately a partisan concern, empathy with victims of historical oppression can serve to sharpen such moral responses to 'foster a desire to prevent similar wrongs in the present' (Endacott & Brooks, 2013, p. 45).

Given its significance, a number of scholars have sought to define the concept of historical empathy (Boddington, 1980; Foster & Yeager, 1998; Blake, 1998; Verducci, 2000; Lee & Ashby, 2001; Dulberg, 2002; Barton & Levstik, 2004; Bryant & Clark, 2006; Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Endacott, 2010; 2014). A widely agreed upon contemporary definition characterises historical empathy as broadly synonymous with 'perspective taking' in a cognitive and affective sense (Endacott & Brooks, 2013; Seixas & Morton, 2013). While students must be able to empathise cognitively with past ideas and contexts, 'affect' (used here to mean feeling or emotion) remains a vital component of the process. This affective or emotional empathy can be a 'way in' to deeper thinking about history (Dulberg, 2002). Likewise, perspective taking without some affective engagement may render history education a stale and technical affair. This emotional engagement also assists the development of caring attitudes and dispositions. Care is critical to meaningful empathy; 'empathy without care sounds like an oxymoron' (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 228). At the same time, 'care' can overrun cognitive engagement with historical events, emphasising the importance of teaching historical context (Metzger, 2012). Encouraging students to empathise cognitively and emotionally can also promote respect, another partisan and rather diffuse concept. Deep consideration of alternative perspectives invokes 'a definition of character development as treating other people well, interacting with respect by incorporating others' perspectives in one's relationships' (Schultz et al., 2001, p. 4). An aspect of this is respect and open-mindedness towards other cultural values and traditions (Skolnick, et al., 2004; Zinn & Macedo, 2004). These developments again align closely with the aims of the IB Learner Profile.

Numerous researchers have sought to identify methods and strategies for the development of historical empathy and its related qualities (Doppen, 2000; Davis et al., 2001; Grant, 2001; Kohlmeier, 2006; Brooks, 2008; Colby, 2008; Jensen, 2008; Endacott, 2010; D'Adamo & Fallace, 2011). Learning exercises designed specifically to encourage the taking of alternative perspectives have been suggested as useful to the development of empathy (Davis et al., 2001). Historical empathy has been associated with more traditional tools within history education. Close reading of primary literature as historical source material, for example, has been argued to promote historical perspective taking (Zinn & Macedo, 2004; Brooks, 2011; Brooks & Endacott, 2013; Ammert, 2015). It is urged that 'students should learn the words of people themselves, to feel their anger, their indignation' (Zinn & Macedo, 2004). Likewise, a more general empathy can be encouraged by enabling students to make personal connections with the past through connecting to prior experience. These serve as 'personal "points of entry"' (Dulberg, 2002, p. 13), and are distinct from historical empathy in that they require little contextualisation. Other researchers have sought to develop taxonomies for assessing the acquisition of values such as empathy and compassion through history education, often to support this as a goal of national curriculum frameworks (Ashby & Lee, 1987; Hartmann & Hasselhorn, 2008). Indeed, scholars have provided 'a variety of theoretical and practical approaches to utilizing historical empathy with students', leading, particularly during earlier research 'to persistent confusion about the nature, purpose and fostering of historical empathy' (Endacott & Brooks, 2013, p. 41).

The teaching of difficult and confronting history has been shown to be one method for the promotion of values learning, including empathy, open-mindedness, interpersonal acceptance and cooperation (Riley, 1998; Stern, 1998; Brophy, 1999; Trofanenko, 2011; Savenije, van Boxtel and Grever, 2014; Zembylas, 2015; McKernan, 2017). In the IBDP History syllabus, confronting and contested topics might include 'Rights and protest', 'Conflict and intervention', the history of authoritarian states and leaders, and the various wars addressed across subjects and topics. The potential for difficult and confronting history to promote empathy may derive from the role of affect or emotion in historical learning. In the teaching of events such as the Holocaust, one researcher notes that 'the horror and authenticity are what arouse their interest and empathy'; 'cruelty, tragedy and the horror' have served as an entrance point (Ammert, 2015, p. 127). Barton and Levstik (2004) further support the capacity for confronting history to engage learners. The teaching of difficult history also has the power to provoke outrage and condemnation, prompting the urge to condemn contemporary injustice (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013). For example, *Facing History and Ourselves*, an international project for the study of the Holocaust, aims 'to promote the development of a more humane and informed citizenry [...] By studying the historical development of the Holocaust and other examples of genocide, students make the essential connection between history and the moral choices they confront in their

own lives' (*Facing History and Ourselves*, 2018). Studies have shown that students in this program have exhibited 'increases across the school year in relationship maturity and decreases in racist attitudes and self-reported fighting behaviour relative to comparison students' (Schultz et al., 2001, p. 3). In this case and others, the sheer scale of loss and tragedy provokes the urge to resist its repetition. It might 'lead us to wonder why they had to suffer and die, and to begin discussing how [we] might avoid such tragedies today and in the future' (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p. 97).

The connection to the attribute of caring arrives through this focus on empathy and compassion, but the Learner Profile's definition of the attribute also highlights a commitment to action. The literature reveals an important relationship between empathy and attitudes that are supportive of social justice, but there is a need to further examine the ways these attitudes might inform action beyond the classroom – what is the impact of the study of confronting history on students' actions and beliefs? The Learner Profile, as part of the foundation for the IBDP History curriculum, presents considerable affordances for supporting students' affective and analytical engagement with history. The literature suggests a particular role for confronting histories in supporting many of these attributes. Contentious histories of injustice and trauma provide considerable scope for historical inquiry and debate, and may allow students to develop attitudes supportive of social justice and international-mindedness.

# METHODOLOGY

## OVERVIEW

The research project was a qualitative study involving four case study schools. Its focus was on student and teacher interpretations of the Learner Profile and its place in history learning. Semi-structured one-on-one and focus group interviews sought participants' understandings and beliefs about the way confronting history might support the development of a capacity for historical thinking, as well as the Learner Profile attributes. The project took a multiple case study approach, allowing insight into 'real life contexts' and the variations in experiences and implementation of the IBDP History curriculum. Each school in the study formed a 'case', and our focus was *instrumental*, in that we proceeded with a particular concern – the teaching and learning of Learner Profile attributes through engagement with confronting history – and did not attempt to capture a fuller sense of the school's practices and culture (Hamilton & Corbett-Whittier, 2013).

The project's scale was limited to allow a depth of analysis of each teacher's practices and beliefs about the Learner Profile and its place in history, and their students' experiences of learning with confronting history. Qualitative interviewing encouraged detailed responses and created opportunities for both teachers' and students' varied insights and experiences to emerge (Kvale, 2007). Four schools participated in the study, and at each school one teacher and between four and six students took part in an individual (teachers) or focus group (students) interview.

## SAMPLE

As noted previously, there were four participating schools in the study, all in Australia, located in the cities of Melbourne, Victoria and Adelaide, South Australia. The sample is in some ways narrow, but reflects general trends in the implementation of the IBDP in Australia; all schools in the study were suburban and close to large cities, and all were independent schools with relatively high fees. The majority of IB schools in Australia share these characteristics.

One teacher from each school participated in an individual interview with the lead researcher, Amy McKernan. Each teacher had a significant amount of experience in teaching IBDP History, and demonstrated considerable depth of understanding of the curriculum.

### Teacher participants

Pseudonym <sup>2</sup>	School	Location	Years teaching IBDP History
Andrew	East School	Eastern suburbs of Melbourne	9 years
Alice	South School	Southeastern suburbs of Melbourne	11 years
Ines	North School	Inner Melbourne	10 years
Rosie	West School	Southeastern suburbs of Adelaide	17 years

At each school, a group of between three and six IBDP History students were also recruited. In most cases, the students were members of the participating teacher's class, however at one school (North School), students came from two different classes – all had previously been taught by the participating teacher but were not currently in her class.

Students were invited to choose their own pseudonyms. Some students who took up this opportunity selected historical or fictional characters, in some instances (Machiavelli, and Claretta Petacci – mistress to Mussolini) these pseudonyms were quite tongue-in-cheek. For students without a pseudonym preference, random names were selected. There were nineteen student participants overall, with nine in year two of the IBDP History course, and ten in year one of the programme.

2 Teachers' pseudonyms were selected from lists of popular names.

## Student participants

Student pseudonym	School	Year 1 or 2
Machiavelli	East School	2
Ava		2
Gandalf		2
Lexi		2
V		2
Claretta Petacci		2
Lauren	South School	1
Townsperson #1		1
Hannah		1
Sarah		1
Lara		1
Nancy Drew	West School	1
Tim		1
Ruby		1
Chelsea		1
Natalie	North School	1
Phoebe		2
Holly		2
Lachlan		2

## INTERVIEWS

Both the individual teacher interviews and the student focus group interviews followed a semi-structured life-world approach, seeking to elicit ‘descriptions of the life world of the interviewee with respect to interpreting the meaning of the described phenomena’ (Kvale, 2007). In this case, we focused on the participants’ experiences of learning and teaching with confronting history, explicitly – and at times implicitly – connecting these experiences to the attributes of the Learner Profile. Interviews of this nature are flexible and conversational (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007), however the roles of each party are dramatically different. An awareness of the imbalances present in the relationship is crucial to ensuring the success of the interview; often, in educational research, teacher and student participants feel a sense of being ‘assessed’ or judged. An interview is, fundamentally, a ‘social encounter’ (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007, p. 350).

Establishing rapport was a particular challenge of this research, given that participants had never met the interviewer prior to the appointed date. Early questions were designed to put participants at ease; they addressed simple facts about the teacher’s or student’s experiences and preferences as an ‘ice breaker’ (Morgan, 1997). Students, for example, were asked to state their favourite subject when introducing themselves for the recording; this often elicited laughter as students confessed a subject other than history. In most cases teachers were also present in the room for student focus groups, although they did not participate. While it is possible this constrained student responses, it was clear that all students had good relationships with their teachers and it is likely their presence made students feel more comfortable.

Focus groups with students presented a number of challenges, in that students had varied degrees of confidence in sharing their views (or, conversely, all wished to speak at once). Methods for taking turn were employed to ensure each student in the group had an opportunity to speak, but students were not forced to respond to questions they did not wish to respond to. The focus groups also provided opportunities for the interviewer to act more as a facilitator of student discussions – while the researcher asked the majority of questions, students also spoke amongst themselves and clarified or debated various points (Morgan, 1997).

There were a number of important ethical considerations in this research, given its focus on confronting history. While the students and teachers spoke predominantly about topics they had studied in class and demonstrated a degree of comfort with, at times the discussion addressed very difficult knowledge about violence and injustice in the past and present. This did at times needed to be redirected – it was not the intention of the study to have students, in particular, dwell on issues that might prove overwhelming for them. All participants were informed, prior to the interviews, that they were free to leave at any time and should contact a support person or the interviewer if they experienced distress in relation to the interview. Participants were also informed that any statements they made that they later regretted or were embarrassed by could be removed from the transcripts. These factors, and the capacity to choose a pseudonym, were intended to encourage a sense of agency in participants; avoiding making a subject ‘feel like an insect under the microscope’ is essential in qualitative interviewing (Kvale, 2007).

The capacity to redirect and respond to the emotional input of participants is an important feature of a flexible, semi-structured interview, and was essential to this research. Example interview questions are included in Appendices I and II, however each interview and focus group followed a slightly different pathway and elicited responses more characteristic of each case study participant group.

## ANALYSIS

The approach to analysis of qualitative interviews is constructed before, during and after the interviews; it is built into the structure and nature of questioning throughout the process, and interviewers undertake analysis while the interview is underway, using interpretation to inform subsequent questions (Kvale, 2007). In this case, a series of questions were developed for each type of interview, and during the sessions the interviewer reframed responses, condensing and interpreting meaning in order to clarify and extend on participant responses (Kvale, 2007). This approach to interviewing allows participants to correct the interviewer's misunderstandings, provides opportunities for greater depth of explanation, and can also validate responses and build participant confidence. This last facet helps to overcome the common reticence of participants in situations where there is a power imbalance, for instance between the students and university researcher in this study. Questions were also designed to support the nature of the research and its aims, as well as the report we intended to produce (Morgan, 1997). They were centred on teaching and learning, and most likely to be of interest to students and teachers in IBDP History.

Following the interviews, recordings were transcribed and an analysis of the text of each session was undertaken by the researchers. Analysis began with a set of categories or themes drawn from the research questions, including historical thinking, confronting history, and the Learner Profile. We took an inductive approach, allowing emergent themes to arise during the analysis (Williams, 2008). In this approach, a connection to the data is important (Williams, 2008), and researchers read closely to identify and interpret information in relation to the key themes, while noting ideas that emerged that were not expected.

The focus for analysis was on the meaning, rather than language; researchers sought to make critical and deeper interpretations of what participants said in relation to the research focus, both during and after the interviews (Kvale, 2007). In order to strengthen the validity and consistency of this approach, researchers worked with a framework constructed from key terms relating to the research questions, including historical thinking, the Learner Profile, and confronting history. It was, however, important to allow space for statements to be interpreted as 'other' – still relevant to the research or significant in some way, but not easily assigned to a set category. This allowed a rich and detailed picture of each case to emerge, and supported a deeper understanding of the experiences and ideas of participants.

## LIMITATIONS AND SIGNIFICANCE

This was a study with limited scope; the four case studies provide significant insights into the teaching and learning of confronting history in the IBDP, but their value lies in their specificity rather than in any generalisability. The insights teachers and students were able to provide through their interviews were considerable, and the depth of discussion often quite remarkable given the time allowed. These were a particularly thoughtful group of students and teachers, but also a well-resourced group overall. The teachers were also very experienced, and as such their ideas and beliefs were well-developed and present valuable learning for all IBDP teachers of History.

More broadly speaking, the study provides insight into the practices of teachers in relation to 'confronting' material and themes; it highlights the possibilities of engaging with these topics to activate the attributes of the Learner Profile and to work towards developing students' values and senses of themselves as 'global citizens'. The research also, however, brings to light some of the challenges and issues with engaging young learners in the study of difficult content; there are important strategies that may support a more productive engagement with confronting history, and which may ultimately contribute more to the development of young people committed to 'creating a better, more peaceful world'.

# LEARNING WITH CONFRONTING HISTORY: CASE STUDIES

The following sections detail findings and analysis from each of the four case studies. Teacher and student data are considered together to gain a sense of the experiences and practices of confronting history within the case study school, and analysis is – in line with the approaches to qualitative interviewing outlined above – interwoven with findings.

## NORTH SCHOOL

North School is a large, co-educational independent school with three campuses – the fieldwork for this study took place at a campus close to Melbourne's central business district. Students at the school are generally from middle and high socioeconomic status families, and there is a relatively small percentage of students from non-English speaking backgrounds (ACARA, 2018). North School has offered the IBDP for almost thirty years, and also offers the PYP and MYP. Students may also elect to undertake the Victorian Certificate of Education [VCE], a state-based curriculum for the final two years of schooling.

### Historical thinking and the Learner Profile

Both student and teacher participants at North School noted that the Learner Profile was not explicitly taught at the DP level in the school. Ines, the teacher interviewed at North School, perceived important connections between the Learner Profile and the history program of the IBDP, but felt that this relationship was more implicit. Ines noted that the Learner Profile attributes are not addressed specifically in her classes, and compared this to the MYP, which 'has far more of a culture where it's sort of more talked about and used and referred to'. She emphasised several attributes in particular in her comments:

*I think history in particular drives inquiry. To be honest I agree with all the other [LP attributes]. We sort of do all of them, but yes, the kids are forced to become more open-minded because they're forced to look at lots of different perspectives and different things. They are forced to become excellent communicators and thinkers. I think a lot of them [LP attributes] are absolutely implied into it but there's no explicit mentioning of them.*

Here, Ines highlights inquiry, open-mindedness and communication in particular, believing that skills of historical inquiry make students 'such good writers and arguers'. This is directly connected to the quality of being open-minded, as students 'have to look at so many different points of view' in their historical work.

Students at North School shared this focus on open-mindedness as an important attribute for students of history. Natalie, for instance, saw historical learning as having an important role in the development of empathy and open-mindedness. Natalie stated that history has a role 'in shaping values' such as empathy and cultural understanding. For example, she made the point that

*From a western perspective, we could look at eastern countries and say, like, 'why are they doing that? That's illogical or irrational.' Then if we look at the histories of the countries, we think it's understandable. So I feel like history gives us a way to understand why certain countries or communities of people do things. Having that understanding is really important to our compassion and empathy and interactions with people.*

This is a clear delineation of the process by which Natalie has developed historical empathy, and made connections with the present. Worth noting here is that Natalie, like many of the students in the study, does not distinguish between general definitions of empathy and historical empathy.

Ines talks about how she sees genuine historical understanding as a means for establishing connections to the present. She intends for her history teaching to be 'very impactful' for students thinking about contemporary social, cultural and political events:

*when I'm able to make really strong connections between history and present [there's a big impact]... Also when we can make a really strong conceptual link that they go, 'oh, so this is how they consolidate power, this is the policies'. It's interesting what's happening currently in America, Brazil, Hungary, and Turkey. It's really interesting when they make those [connections].*

Here, she draws politicised connections between the ascendance of historical fascist and nationalist regimes, and the contemporary populist administrations of led by Donald Trump, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Recep Erdogan in Turkey, and the right-wing nationalism of the Fidesz government in Hungary. What is interesting in relation to Ines' focus on these politicised histories is that she prefers to avoid presenting her own political views to students. While she doesn't consider this being 'unprincipled', she does note that it sometimes prevents her from referring to the past 'in terms of justice and fairness'. It may, therefore, inhibit some of the scope for addressing the attribute of principled in her history classrooms.

In our focus group, students on the whole concurred with the suggestion that historical understanding aids understanding in the present. One student, Phoebe, made the point that

*since I've done history, it's been easier for me to draw connections between, you know... we've got a lot of conflict right now between really powerful leaders. I think it's really easy to draw connections to things that have happened in the past. It's scary but it's also interesting.*

This emotional reaction from Phoebe – one of fear – is particularly interesting, and is perhaps evidence of the contemporary significance that Phoebe attaches to the historical events she has studied. This point is picked up in the following section, as it is evidence of one of the risks of historical study focused on confronting events.

Ines does make some comments on the structure of the IBDP itself in relation to her teaching. She emphasises in particular that she believes that DP history curriculum is very ‘full’, forcing teachers to design the curriculum for the maximum ‘overlap’ between topics and subjects. Ines feels the level of content in the DP may prevent her from developing deeper historical understanding and engagement with her students:

*It stops me from lingering on the interesting cool bits, because I’m like, ‘oh my god, it’s week five, we need to be on the Chinese Civil War now, we can’t stop here’. It just means that as teachers and as students we feel constantly pressured to move through the content. [...] you’re constantly sort of chasing to try to get through the enormous amount of content.*

Interestingly, she believes that this might explain why there is less explicit emphasis on the role of the LP attributes in her and others’ classroom teaching in the DP. As she puts it: ‘I get the feeling that the teachers and the students are like, “oh my god we have so much to get through, let’s just do it. We don’t stop, we do not stop to look at that”’, referring to the LP attributes specifically. It is for this reason, perhaps, that the focus at North School appeared to be on a more analytical than affective approach to the teaching of confronting history.

Holly, a year two student, presented a particularly insightful view of the potential place of the Learner Profile in IBDP History that relates to this last point. She stated that

*I also feel like [the tendency to be analytical and not engage in the emotional facets of history]...is also why balancing the different [attributes] is important. Like you need to have critical thinking which is inquiry, knowledgeable, reflective thinkers and then balance that with the more emotional side of you. Because I feel like it’s just - I don’t know, for me, with history, it’s been like really important shaping my world view and how I see certain things, how I treat other people. While analysing sources, learning about things, and looking at it critically, I still manage to do that even though there’s the more, I guess, empathetic side where you can try to see things from the people who suffer or the people who actually inflict it on the others.*

This identification of the different – in this case described as ‘critical thinking’ and ‘emotional’ – facets of historical study and practice is demonstrative of what might make the study of history especially meaningful for students. It allows opportunities for critical thought, as many of the students described, however there is also capacity for an emotional engagement with the past.

## Teaching and learning with confronting history

Students at North School learn a range of topics that could be described as confronting. These include the 1917 Russian Revolution and the Civil War, and the policies of the subsequent Communist dictatorship, including the political repression of Stalin and the Holodomor (famine in the Ukraine). Students also study the 1949 Communist revolution in China and the policies of the Chinese Communist regime, including the Great Leap Forward, the Cultural Revolution, and so on. Their teacher describes these histories as confronting due to ‘the extreme nature of them’ and ‘the really huge sort of confronting and impactful events’ within them. Ines describes herself as ‘not really into that war, battle stuff, preferring ‘the social, political, cultural’ of different historical periods.

Ines ascribes significant benefits to the teaching of confronting history. In particular, she sees a crucial, contemporary purpose for the teaching of history likely to be found confronting by students. She believes that part of her role is to encourage young people to reflect on the processes by which tremendous atrocities and acts of injustice occurred historically so that they may prevent similar events occurring:

*Well when I read that book, The Rape of Nanking, I had to read it very slowly and I had to skip certain things and I still have some of those mental images which are just so confronting...it just makes it hard, but more real as well. In a way, I feel I have to engage with that in a way to honour the horrible things that have happened and...maybe then I am really principled in that way... I feel that as a teacher I have a role to play, that these types of things don’t get forgotten. Yes these horrible things have happened and we need to know so that hopefully they don’t happen again, that we’re not on a path where they could happen again.*

These comments pertain to Ines’ personal principles in relation to her teaching of confronting history, and although she highlighted the potential issues with being a ‘principled’ teacher in history, she clearly demonstrates a belief in justice and fairness. She sees a clear value for the present of her teaching of the past. Importantly, this is also an insight into the impact of confronting history on the teachers who teach it, and how they too have to grapple with the emotional and mental cost it can have.

Students also talked about what they consider to be the virtues of studying confronting history. They expressed the idea that learning about confronting history can be a tool for understanding in the present. Natalie expressed her belief that it caused her to reflect on the depths to which humans can sink in their actions, and the need to take active steps to prevent inhumanity. As she puts it,

*Knowing what we can fall to is really important to telling us how we can essentially...redeem ourselves in a way. Like treat others with more respect, understand the differences in cultures and societies and inform us on how we can interact with others to form more positive relations.*

She sees the horrific acts of inhumanity that people are capable of as instructive in creating a more peaceful society, speaking particularly to the need to create intercultural and interpersonal understanding.

All of the students at North School presented this strong historical consciousness, although at times this appeared to be linked to a sense of hopelessness and fear about the current state of the world. Holly, for instance, noted that 'history can make us very cynical about humans in general, because you look at all these things that people do and you're like, what's wrong with them?' The recognition of patterns throughout history seemed to contribute to a sense of hopelessness for Phoebe, who noted

*I think obviously there are always going to be people in the world who think that a communist state is the way to go or people who think that the only way to control other people is through the military and that sort of thing. I think when individuals like that gain power, that's when it starts - it's not that they haven't learnt from the past, it's that they don't see a problem with the past and methods that have been used and that sort of thing.*

Fear of repetition of patterns of injustice and violence in the past was evident in some of the students. At various points in the interview, there didn't appear to be a great deal of hope that things would be different in future, or that we could prevent the repetition of some of these negative patterns. This appeared to be linked to a deep understanding of the motivations of authoritarian leaders, in particular, and is perhaps demonstrative of the challenges of historical empathy; while it is important that we understand the motivations and beliefs of perpetrators of injustice in the past, we do not have to accept that these actions were inevitable or even understandable in an emotional sense. In part of the interview, this attitude appeared to be linked to the actions of another teacher at the school – not Ines – playing 'devil's advocate' in the classroom to challenge students' progressive views. The link is not well-established by this one interview, but it does suggest that teachers should exercise caution if using this strategy in exploring the motivations of perpetrators of historical atrocities.

Ines also noted a particular significance of confronting history in teaching historiographical points, particularly for teaching about the different ways in which history can be interpreted and understood in relation to political, national, and cultural perspectives. She talks about the ongoing controversy over the Rape of Nanking in Japan and China.

*I use the Rape of Nanking to then illustrate the differences in history and how history is treated in different countries and how it's used as a political weapon and how when [Justin Bieber] [...] visited [Yasukuni war shrine]... how incredibly raw it still is. [...] It's still so raw, it's still so real to all the people in China [...] The reason why this is so big for the Chinese is because it's a political issue and the government allows this to be a big issue because they want it to be a political issue with Japan.*

The extreme violence committed by Japanese soldiers against the Chinese civilian population is confronting but also contested, and the heightened emotion (as a result of the atrocities inflicted) contributes to the intensity of debates over the period. Despite her evident horror at what occurred at Nanking, Ines seemed to have made it a point to teach history in a way that considered multiple perspectives.

Students at North School emphasised that a more technical, 'objective' approach to teaching about history allowed them to develop aspects of historical thinking. While 'objectivity' in history teaching and historical work generally is a problematic and contested concept, students seemed to value a more 'objective' approach to history, defining the concept more broadly as looking at a multiplicity of perspectives, including perspectives that are often ignored or are perhaps more difficult to adopt due to personal aversions – linking to the attribute of open-minded.

In the same way, some students also seemed to guard against the role of emotion in clouding their ability to think historically, particularly their capacity to appreciate difficult perspectives. Students seemed reluctant to be moved emotionally by the confronting nature of the historical events they are examining, seeing it as necessary to avoid allowing those emotions to cloud their critical judgement. This was more evident in the year two students than in the comments of Natalie, a year one student. Lachlan, for example, made the suggestion that the 1941 invasion of Russia 'makes more sense [...] in the context of that time'. Phoebe goes so far as to argue for putting 'caring' feelings aside to exercise a more critical, 'objective' analysis. She says:

*I think sometimes you have to remove your emotion to properly consider how things occur and that sort of thing. I mean it's really, really hard to study stuff like the Holocaust and the Cultural Revolution. Millions of people died and the famines in Russia. I think in order to properly examine the patterns that occur and things like that, sometimes you do have to really remove that human part of yourself and that emotional part of yourself and not fall to that when you're trying to analyse it more.*

This is further illustrative of the distinctiveness of historical empathy and the dangers of conflating it with emotional empathy or with being sympathetic to the actions of perpetrators of atrocity.

This is an interesting insight into how students are able to engage in ‘perspective-taking’, even when they have an aversion to doing so, or when present-day perspectives make it enormously difficult. There was, however, a tendency for students to present their understanding as a justification for these actions; in a way this supports the notion that these atrocities could easily reoccur, when in reality there is no justification for injustice – rather a sense of the motivations and beliefs that underpin nonetheless inexcusable actions.

Teacher and student participants at North School highlighted the importance of certain kinds of historical sources in facilitating a deeper, more personalised engagement with history. Ines noted in broad terms that she seeks to go beyond ‘statistics and things’ to her own resources, including documentaries and ‘a whole set of photos and reporting from that time that gives the emotional content.’ Conflicting with the students’ discussion of the negative role emotion can play in understanding, Phoebe felt that confronting history can sometimes be reduced to numbers and figures and these can just ‘wash over you’ without true understanding. She spoke about how personal narratives, including fictionalised ones, through film and documentaries assist her in considering the individual experiences. Her views on the power of documentary and film parallel those of her teacher:

*I think a lot of times in history, we don't really sort of - it's really easy to read a statistic off a page and it says five million people died and you're like okay, that's a lot but you don't think about the individual. It's sort of when we do maybe documentaries and it has one person talking about their life during World War I or you watch a movie...*

Other students seemed broadly in agreement with this. Where their teacher was able to facilitate personal connections between students and people from history, students seemed able to make a deeper engagement. Confronting history seemed to be able to intensify this connection, as students empathised with individual stories of suffering and oppression. This emotional engagement didn't appear to negate their capacities for critical analysis.

Students presented mixed messages about the role of history and their approaches to understanding the past; in some ways, attention to confronting and contentious history was more focused on the analytical, and there was a desire to remove emotion. Conversely, students presented considerable empathy and caring for the victims and survivors of historical oppression and trauma. A sense of hopelessness about the present and future seemed more evident in analytically-focused discussions that supported understanding of the motivations and beliefs of perpetrators of atrocity, while a more emotional engagement appeared to negate the sense of inevitability in the catastrophic and cruel decisions of historical actors. As Holly noted, there is perhaps an important place for both the analytical and the emotional in the study of the past.

## EAST SCHOOL

East School is a large independent, co-educational school in the eastern suburbs of Melbourne. Its students have predominantly high socioeconomic status backgrounds, and there is a low proportion of students with language backgrounds other than English (ACARA, 2018). East School has offered the IBDP for about twenty years, and does not offer the PYP or MYP. Students may also elect to undertake the VCE as an alternative to the DP.

### Historical thinking and the Learner Profile

Six students participated in a focus group at East School, all of them in Year 2 of the Diploma Programme. For students, there was a strong emphasis on inquiry, linked to notions of a quest for the ‘truth’, while the teacher, Andrew, focused in particular on strategies for engaging students in debate and discussion of contested ideas about the past.

Andrew stated from the outset that he did not consciously address the Learner Profile in his lesson planning or teaching, but noted that it described many of the practices common to history study. ‘I know that I’m doing all of these things,’ he said in relation to the Learner Profile, ‘in writing an essay, you’re addressing all ten of the Learner Profile attributes.’ He described a range of strategies he used in his teaching, making connections to the attributes of the Learner Profile. He used a Harkness discussion method<sup>3</sup> to enable the activation of particular attributes: ‘You need to be the knowledgeable person here, you need to be the thinker who’s thinking outside the box, you need to articulate as the communicator, you get the idea.’ Students shared the view that all of the attributes can be applied in history.

Andrew and his students were also focused on assessment in IBDP History, noting that the IA provided scope for genuine inquiry, which both students and teacher found enjoyment in. The IA, according to Andrew, espoused some of the practices of historical thinking linked to the Learner Profile, but ‘there’s no replication of that in the end of year exams’. Inquiry was particularly important for the students, and students felt the IA was the best opportunity for it. As Claretta Petacci noted:

*we all did the IA, which was basically our own sense of being a historian for a while. We had to enquire, we had to be knowledgeable, we had to take risks. We had to be reflective of certain things and be aware of what exactly it is we're trying to achieve, but not negate certain parts of being open-minded towards different perspectives and things like that, as well.*

There was a clear connection between a number of the Learner Profile attributes and the historical inquiry process of the IA, reflecting the value of this assessment in developing students’ capacities for historical thinking as well as their Learner Profile attributes.

3 See: <https://www.exeter.edu/exeter-difference/how-youll-learn>

Inquiry also seemed to support an understanding of cause and consequence, as Seixas and Morton (2013) describes it – V highlighted the capacity to look for ‘patterns that can be commonly found in all sorts of events, so the common actions between countries that might lead to wars or civil war or economic regressions’. This was also linked, by Lexi, to an understanding of the past in the present. Historical study:

*gives context about what’s happening today, and also when I look at the news today, I can see things and I go, okay, well, this is the historical reason for that. A lot of things which may seem nonsensical... They all have a historical grounding, and just knowing history makes it a lot clearer to see how our modern world has come about.*

Lexi’s comments here are further supportive of international-mindedness, demonstrating the ways history can inform understandings of difference as well as the historical contexts for present-day events and issues.

Further to the question of assessment and the Learner Profile, Lexi felt that some attributes were challenged or excluded by the nature of assessments:

*I don’t like the way that the history assessments are done. I think it goes against the whole idea of learning about analysing things and using evidence from different people and stuff, just because of the amount of topics we do, to properly analyse any topic you’re given in an exam, you’ve really got to just spend so long memorising quotes and dates and so many different things that I think it kind of negates that time that you could be spending developing your own viewpoint and stuff, because there’s just so much to do.*

There was disagreement on this point amongst the students, but there was also consensus that the IA was a more genuine reflection of historical practice than the exam. Examinations in some ways present a particular challenge in a discipline such as history; they more easily assess what students remember, and historians generally spend a much longer time on research and analysis of sources than is possible in an examination.

Students at East School valued open-mindedness in studying history, noting that it was important to being able to understand the reasons for the confronting or ‘horrible’ actions of people in the past, as one student, Ava, described it. Their study of history seemed to encourage these students to understand perspectives that they felt uncomfortable with. A number of students stated the importance of ‘respect’ for the motivations of historical actors. There is a significant link here to the IB Mission Statement, in that ‘other people, with their differences, can also be right’. Ava notes the importance of understanding different views, but also highlights what we believe is a common misunderstanding of this aspect of the Mission Statement. Although others’ opposing views can be right, this does not mean that they always are, or even that every perspective deserves our respect.

Students seemed to share the belief that studying confronting history from a multiplicity of perspectives allowed them to challenge their own preconceptions and practice greater open-mindedness. Machiavelli believed that open-mindedness was the most important Learner Profile attribute in the study of history:

*because you’ve got many different perspectives which are just presented to you, and often they can be contradictory or somewhat dubious. Of course, you come into any investigation with your own biases and ideas, so you need to be willing to change that based on what you see within the evidence in order to provide a coherent explanation or interpretation.*

Machiavelli notes the importance of open-mindedness with the caveat that we must be careful about what we believe. The critical literacy demonstrated by these students is a highly useful skill today; students must be able to reflect on the biases and misinformation widely shared by any number of means.

Gandalf also noted the importance of open-mindedness, and connected it in practice to being reflective:

*before coming into the IB, I used to think that the US was this really good country that didn’t do anything wrong. They were like - I guess I still do like the US, I think they’re a really good country, but I know that they’ve done some really bad things and they’re not this super good, respecting all the people in the world and stuff and protecting all the people, [talking about studying the Cold War] and the Russians are the really, really bad people... Both of them have done really bad things, to each other and to other people, and this course kind of opened my eyes to that, because I feel like a lot of media and stuff thinks that America’s super, super cool.*

Students felt that reflection on the Cold War was made more possible by its temporal closeness – they expressed the experience that it is easier to be reflective when history can be linked to the present. Gandalf’s thinking about the present shows a more critical attitude toward a world power, with an acknowledgement that its actions are often presented falsely by media as positive and well-intentioned. This is a direct outcome of his participation in the IBDP. Claretta Petacci expressed the same sentiments, adding that engaging with alternative perspectives necessitated a degree of courage (or risk-taking):

*It’s one thing to acknowledge that, yeah, okay, I had a closed mindset, but it’s another thing to be like, but I changed that. I took the risk and I decided that I wanted to find out more and be open-minded towards it. That takes, I think, a little bit of courage, and a lot of people would perhaps just not worry about it and stick with their original perspective, but I think this class, in particular, in history really forces you to be like, okay, these are the different perspectives. I have to talk about them somehow, otherwise I’m not going to get the marks...*

History, as this student notes, forces students to take up a position and defend it. Students must also, as Machiavelli stated, be good communicators to make these arguments succinctly and in a compelling manner. The focus at East School, for students and teacher, was on historical inquiry and reasoning; there was limited attention to more affect-focused attributes such as caring and principled.

### Teaching and learning with confronting history

For Andrew, teaching confronting history is ‘enjoyable for me and hopefully mildly antagonising to the students and then they can reflect on that and come back and see that you can have a decent academic argument and knives don’t have to be pulled out.’ He stresses the role of confronting history in developing perspective taking. He believes it engages students and is ‘fun’, encouraging students to take up a position, and defend it, as a result. He suggests that it would be possible to teach a ‘sanitised’ version of the course, and not address the more confronting aspects of the history, however ‘you wouldn’t enjoy it as much’. Andrew’s aim is that these Year 2 students will be ‘comfortable going into a first-year [university] tutorial next year and having the confidence to espouse an opinion’. As he puts it:

*I encourage argument. I encourage dissent. I encourage different approaches to assessment. Specifically, the horrors of the Russian Revolution, 1921 famine; we can get really into the detail there. I do want to challenge their probable admiration for Lenin and for Trotsky, because that comes through being a 15, 16 year old obviously myself. I want them to see the down and dirty there, so I probably will amp it up to show the atrocities that took place there. So that’s confronting on two levels; I want to confront their perspective as well as confronting the horrors.*

Among the specific techniques he uses to develop student engagement with confronting historical events, Andrew uses personal stories and encourages students’ individual connections. Andrew makes history confronting – and less sanitised – by

*bringing in the personal aspects. When you’re talking about the Holocaust, I don’t do it too often but I have in the past, I will talk about death and death of someone close to them and get them into a position where they can remember a feeling of what it’s like to lose someone. Then put it in the context of multiply by six million, so that kind of thing is awfully confronting.*

This demonstrates a use of empathy in a sense, but it is much more emotional than historical, and used more for engagement than for historical thinking. Students shared this belief that attention to the confronting aspects of the past made studying it more interesting and engaging.

It is interesting to note that Andrew does not wish to engage in historical debate by addressing historiography. This is a requirement of the course, and Andrew expresses ‘despair that it’s become more a feature of assessment’. He notes that students struggle with the debate between historians, and just want ‘the answer’; this is particularly pertinent at this stage of schooling, as students approach high stakes examinations and entry to tertiary education. Andrew was more comfortable teaching with the opposing perspectives put forward by primary sources, and felt this had more capacity to engage students.

The emphasis on multiple perspectives was also linked to the Learner Profile attribute of caring by one student, V, who noted that:

*when there’s more perspectives, the victims of certain events can be heard more clearly and that they can - and that both sides are not the villains and both sides are not the heroes, so sort of linking back to balance, as well as to caring. It helps show this grey area that historians have to go through and source.*

This quote is indicative of the ways the attributes of caring and balanced were interpreted distinctively in the context of this school; caring was assumed to emerge from understanding perspectives that differed from the students’ own, and balanced related to weighing up the validity of these different perspectives. Claretta Petacci argued that understanding the impacts of historical events on people ‘shows us another side that maybe we might not have seen in humanity before...I think that provokes us to be more empathetic and caring towards certain things that have happened in the past’. She goes on to say that:

*For me, I think it’s a really interesting way to look at humanity and how humanity interacts with one another and our general nature. [...] Although there are different events that are caused from different aspects of humanity, it all boils down to how we interact with one another and how we deal with one another when we have differences.*

This is a nice connection between Claretta’s historical learning and her values in the present. Caring is clearly linked to the notion of historical empathy or perspective taking by these students, and comes through more strongly where the histories studied are confronting or contested.

## SOUTH SCHOOL

The participating students at South School, a girls' school in Melbourne's south-eastern suburbs, were all in Year 1 of the IBDP History course. South School students are from mostly high socioeconomic families, and around a quarter of students have a language background other than English (ACARA, 2018). The school is the oldest IB school included in the study, having offered the IBDP for almost thirty years; it does not offer the PYP or MYP. Students may also elect to undertake the VCE in the final two years of schooling.

### Historical thinking and the Learner Profile

The student and teacher participants at South School presented a striking similarity in their emphasis on the attribute of being open-minded. Clearly, this was a focus for the teacher that resonated with the girls in her class. All participants also demonstrated a belief that the Learner Profile in its entirety described the expectations of a history student – all attributes were considered relevant. Alice, the teacher at South School, noted that the Learner Profile attributes were

*all important, absolutely, because researching and **inquiring** and trying to find out is important. Making judgements that are based on **knowledge**, being a **thinking** person and that leads to **reflection**. You've learned something and that might mean you really evaluate your views. **Communicating** and discussing. I mean, all these are incredibly important. I suppose to take a **balanced** approach is making sure they're not, well, they might end up on one side of a perspective or another, but in the process they should try and be **balanced and open-minded**, as I've said. Yeah, showing **caring** and **compassion**. **Taking risks**. [...] I don't know whether I'd put one above another. I think all together they are really important.*

Significantly, Alice sees the attributes as linked to one another, all playing a role in the process of studying history. While she did not question the place of the Learner Profile in history, Alice did not explicitly address the attributes through her planning or teaching, 'I look at them and I say yes, I do really cover those but I don't actually say oh, I think I better address that this week'.

Alice spoke about two attributes she saw as connected – risk-takers and open-minded – in more detail. On risk-takers, she explained the risk for students in taking on perspectives that others, including their families, might disagree with, requiring that students be open-minded in relation to others' views. She provided the example of a Vietnamese student who, through her EE, came to have a different, more historically-informed perspective on Vietnam's past than members of her family (with experiences as refugees of that conflict) were comfortable with. One Vietnamese-Australian student in the focus group, Lauren, talked about how a balanced study of the Vietnam War and Ho Chi Minh allowed her to develop a more balanced perspective on Vietnamese communism in contrast to the fervent anti-communism of her South Vietnamese parents. She was able to acknowledge that, because of her family background, she

had 'grown up with a really, really strong prejudice'. Coming to a different view to her family was a considerable risk, but her responses to the history now were more sophisticated; she was able to understand the issues from more than one viewpoint.

Students seemed to broadly agree that historical learning is important to the process of developing open-mindedness and challenging preconceived ideas. One student, Townsperson #1, stressed the importance of 'considering multiple perspectives'. In her work in IBDP history, she was 'always going to be considering perspectives, and I think being an open-minded learner really helps with that'. Townsperson #1 also spoke about the qualities of an open-minded communicator:

*Carrying that through into everyday life, if you do come across an argument in political ideology maybe, instead of, I don't know, like having your goal in that conversation to be to shut the other person down, to shut down their beliefs, and say, "you're wrong", instead of coming to a consensus, and understanding why you think this, why I think this.*

The use of their historical skills, and in particular the open-mindedness that came with considering multiple perspectives of the past, carried these students through many of their daily interactions with peers. They demonstrated a strong belief in the IB Mission Statement's notion that 'other people, with their differences, can also be right'. Another student, Lauren, expresses similar ideas:

*There's a reason why we have so much controversy today, politics, is because there's merit to both sides. So it's about challenging your beliefs all the time, because there's always going to be a valid opposing argument; that's why people hold it. So it's about always hearing it, even though it might be confronting to you.*

This emphasis on open-mindedness and perspective-taking is crucial to the LP attributes of being open-minded, balanced, and caring.

Caring was noted as supporting a deeper understanding of the past and its impacts on victims of atrocity, although through the discussion students reached agreement that their capacity for caring had not changed through learning more about the past – it was always there, just activated by particular learning. Sarah noted

*I think it's really important to respect historical events, and what happened, and to properly acknowledge them, instead of kind of just going like, the holocaust killed six million people, and I guess making it into more of an academic thing. It's important to acknowledge that it's not just something you learn at school, this is something that actually happened, and it was responsible for catastrophe.*

Lauren did see a role for learning about confronting history in becoming more caring, noting that 'it probably increases your likelihood a little bit, of becoming more empathetic, because if you do understand a perspective more, you're more likely to sympathise'.

Students at South School also emphasised a role for the past in the present, connected in some ways to the attribute of caring. Lauren, for example, made the powerful point, supported by the rest of the focus group, that Adolf Hitler was not merely an historical accident, but that certain conditions could reproduce this type of figure. As she put it,

*We need to understand that anyone could become I guess the next Hitler [...] It wasn't just like he's just this one in a trillion person [...] He's not an extremely special person who had all this amazing ability, and he will only come – someone like him will only come every – I don't know – a thousand years or something like that, and then do this. [...] By seeing the human characteristics in Hitler, you kind of see the similarities between him and a few other people [...] It could happen again.*

Sarah noted that

*it wasn't just one person who started this entire movement, it's...the contributions of the entire country. You'd need the support of people to rise to power, so it's not just one person whose ideology was declined by everyone, and he just managed to overcome that. It was with support of his country that allowed [Hitler] to do that.*

These students also talk about this way of thinking as a tool to avoid historical crimes being repeated in the present. Sarah described this as

*noticing the – like [Alice – their teacher] says – when your antenna starts to wobble [...] noticing the patterns, the environment that was around in those times, and applying it to today, and the ideologies, and what allowed that rise to power, trying to notice it in today's politics and government.*

Sarah makes a tentative connection to the contemporary United States. While acknowledging that it is not a direct comparison, she talks about how there are 'more nationalistic sentiments going around, more conservative, and that could be related to financial situations, or the economic stability', just as the economic sanctions imposed on Germany contributed to the rise of German fascism.

Another student, Lara, talked about how understanding of history had helped her negotiate interpersonal conflicts in the present. She talked about how, as someone with a Taiwanese background, she observed tense relationships between Taiwanese and Chinese students, but did not share a desire to 'get into arguments', because she had a greater understanding of the impact of those tensions in the past. The analysis demonstrated by these students goes beyond common statements that we need to know the past to avoid its repetition – these students had a deep understanding of the historical conditions that led to conflict and widespread mistreatment of groups of people, and were able to identify patterns that might reoccur. They demonstrated a sophisticated capacity to step back and see the 'big picture' informed by historical consciousness.

## Teaching and learning with confronting history

Students and their teacher were particularly attentive to the attribute of open-minded. Significantly, there seemed to be some agreement that confronting history could be particularly useful for the development of open-mindedness. Alice clearly viewed herself as a learner as much as a teacher; she in fact modelled the attribute of open-minded quite explicitly for her students, and this likely provided important support for the students' considerable capacity to demonstrate the attribute. As she put it, 'I've come along on a journey as well with the girls, and I try to say that to them, that there's no right or wrong but it's always important to be thinking through and reflective on those things'.

Alice spoke openly about the ways her own perspectives are challenged by evidence, noting that both she and her students had made judgements based on misunderstandings of culture. She described the assumptions about Japanese people she held as a result of knowledge about historical atrocities in the Second World War and the Rape of Nanking, and the ways these views were challenged by a trip to Japan:

[Content warning: graphic violence to babies]

*I show the girls a video of the Rape of Nanjing...an elderly... Japanese soldier who was interviewed who had taken part in what happened in Nanjing. He was explaining what they did. So it was horrendous and so I warned the girls at the start. They buried babies to their heads and then they kicked their heads off their bodies as footballs. He was saying that they're not human. So we then talk about well, what would that soldier have experienced, and we talk about the brainwashing and the process of education... and their indoctrination from the emperor prior to the, they're sort of pawns on the chessboard... So we talk about what made these people what they were. So rather than just hate the Japanese, what terrible atrocities are committed? We're not justifying it, but we're trying to understand how this could have happened. [...] soon after teaching this last year or the year before, I went to Japan [...] So I had this image in my head and oh, why am I going to Japan? Anyway, the Japanese people were absolutely fabulous. They bent over backwards in terms of helping us try to locate from one railway station to another. So I came back and I told the girls this to give them the other side. We make value judgements and we make criticisms of these people and yes, you have a right to criticise those terrible actions, but we must try and see, well how, and why did they do this?*

Here, Alice has modelled the importance of open-mindedness for her students. She knows that her students 'make judgements... on what races are capable of' as part of their history learning. She is also careful to note the differences between understanding historical actions, and justifying them.

A broader awareness of patterns across history, particularly in relation to atrocities, was also seen as important by Alice. When students

*look at confronting evidence from various regimes, that makes them more aware that it's not [just] the Japanese that were so shocking or the Germans or Nazis were so shocking. These terrible things have happened in a range of societies or regimes. So I guess that opens their mind about making generalisations about races that commit atrocities.*

Alice's practice was focused on destabilising assumptions students held in order to ensure a more complex and sophisticated understanding of the historical contexts for atrocities and injustice. Without endorsing or sympathising with the actions and beliefs of those committing the atrocities, encouraging students to understand the historical factors that enabled them seems to have been important to the development of open-mindedness, historical empathy, and understanding.

Students also found history confronting when it challenged their preconceived notions about what happened in the past, and who was 'good' or 'bad'. As noted above, coming to think differently to their families or others from their cultural backgrounds could be a challenge, but the 'humanising' of figures like Hitler was also often quite confronting. Students did see value in this difficult knowledge though; they applied their sophisticated understandings of historical actions and injustice to events and cultural tensions in the present.

Townsperson #1 also spoke about the ways history affords a more comfortable way to examine confronting narratives by being a little more 'distant' than present day events. She noted that 'part of it that doesn't make it confronting to me at least, is that you're removed from it because you're looking at it in hindsight', and this was what made it possible to study the Rape of Nanking without being too confronted, even though she had a Chinese background. Confronting history could also be more engaging, as Sarah noted:

*They're not necessarily [histories] that you enjoy more, but I think they're definitely more important to learn. I think they're definitely more engaging to learn about because there's so much discussion around it.*

The students demonstrated a commitment to understanding histories of trauma, believing strongly in a purpose for engaging with those narratives. As Townsperson #1 noted, it's a problem when histories become 'taboo' or are not talked about:

*Being able to accept that that is part of our history, and being able to acknowledge it. Not just putting it into the past, even if it did happen in the past, it's relevant to the descendants of the people, or the victims, like in the present, because it will always sort of feel like there's – I guess I imagine there will always be some sort of – kind of getting closure almost, and showing that we, in our present, we have become better than the people in our past, [or our ascendants] in our past, who did do – or perpetrate – the wrong thing.*

This links to the students' ideas about the past in the present, supporting the notion that the histories studied were not 'finished' and continued to have impacts in the present, and students were able to make these explicit connections.

Alice was comfortable bringing in confronting material and content, and her experience and knowledge of the students clearly supported her engagement with some difficult topics. She stated:

*Well I think, I mean I wouldn't do it if I was, if you're new to a school and you don't know the girls and you don't know their parents, you tread a little bit carefully because you don't want to give them nightmares. But they know me, they trust me. My job is in a sense to confront them, albeit I'm relatively careful about it. Now that I feel very comfortable with them and they trust me, it's really important that they are confronted by what human beings are capable of, not only in the past but that they actually see relevance in the modern world because as I say to them, you're going to be voting soon and you can change the world. It's up to you to do something about what is happening and you see the perspective of what's happened in the past so it's your job to do something about it and feel empowered to do something about it because you're educated. So yes, I suppose I do, I mean I'm careful about it, but yeah, I do see my role as confronting them or opening their eyes...*

Sarah also presented the belief that the history classroom was a good place to begin engaging with these confronting topics. She noted

*when we leave school, we're not going to have an area where we can go to hide [from] the scary things, and things that we don't like, or we find confronting. So I think it's really important that even if we do find something confronting that we need to hear it because that's the only way you can expose yourself, because once you leave school, like this safe space, you're not going to have that kind of security around you all the time.*

Alice did work to ensure materials were curated to be suitable for the students in her class. She considered some images or films to be a step 'too far', and noted that she was informed by her own responses – 'I wouldn't want to be confronted with that myself', she stated about films of beheadings. Violence, she suggests, is the one to be most cautious about, and

*if [a student's] family or personal experience was touched on by what we were studying, they could find it deeply distressing... I would try and be aware of where their family histories are. I take the girls to the Holocaust museum as part of our study of Hitler and the Holocaust. Usually the girls who are from families who had family members who survived, and others who haven't, through the Holocaust, they usually want to go. They want to experience that. I try to be aware of where the girls are, to be a little bit sensitive to their views. [...] I think I'm relatively sensitive to the impact of what we're studying, but particularly if I know that girls have a deep connection to an area, I would tread a little bit carefully.*

The connections between the teacher interview and student focus group in this case were especially striking; the students reflected a number of facets of the teacher's philosophical approach to the past, and it was highly evident that Alice's capacity to model the attributes she wanted to see in her students was very successful. Students presented a sophisticated engagement with the past in the present, and a particular focus on open-mindedness in relation to both historical and contemporary debate.

## WEST SCHOOL

West School is a medium-sized, co-educational, independent school in the southeastern suburbs of the city of Adelaide, in the state of South Australia. Its students are mostly from middle or high socioeconomic backgrounds, and the school has a low percentage of students from language backgrounds other than English (ACARA, 2018). West School was accredited with the IB in the mid-nineties, and offers the PYP, MYP and the DP. Students may also elect to undertake the state-based South Australian Certificate of Education [SACE] in the final two years of schooling, as an alternative to the DP.

### Historical thinking and the Learner Profile

Like all of the teachers interviewed for this study, Rosie noted that she did not explicitly teach the Learner Profile attributes, however she did consider them in her teaching. She placed significant emphasis on the development of a range of attributes within the Learner Profile, seeing her history teaching as emphasising open-minded, principled, balanced, inquirers, knowledgeable, and communicators explicitly. Students agreed that the Learner Profile was 'there, [but] just not explicitly there'. All students at West School had also completed the MYP, and perhaps had more insight into the Learner Profile and the way it might be woven through curriculum as a result.

Rosie also demonstrated a sensitivity to historical thinking in her practice, noting, for example, that she is careful to encourage students to view historical events in context rather than from the perspectives of the present. This, she believes, allows for historical understanding.

*We're careful to be open to different opinions and perspectives and not try and approach it too...coming from where we are at this point. But we do talk about...how people's experiences impact their sense of right and wrong and the circumstances they're in...with our knowledge and our set of experiences and cultural heritage and everything that we've brought to it, we have to be really mindful of that in terms of how we judge people.*

Chelsea shared this view of perspective-taking and the need to contextualise the actions of historical agents:

*you know when you talk about them in normal life you're like how can these people like vote this person into power but when you look at these situations, you see how desperate times were and you can - if you were to be in that position you would obviously go for that because desperate times call for desperate measures.*

Students also made comments about how studying figures they had existing knowledge and assumptions about – such as Hitler – in more depth challenged them to understand the motivations and beliefs of both these figures and those who supported their rise to power, noting, for instance, Hitler's considerable 'success' as a leader.

Rosie used tools designed to encourage student awareness of historical thinking, specifically the 'visible thinking' routines developed by Ron Ritchhart and David Perkins.<sup>4</sup> She used 'a lot of thinking routines with the class', believing these to be important to encourage students to develop awareness of historical thinking, as well encouraging them 'to communicate their thinking'. Rosie linked historical thinking to open-mindedness and perspective-taking, as well as to the attribute of principled, noting that historical consciousness is important to 'fairness and justice'. She argued that, in history,

*you're not seeking to judge and condemn. You're seeking to understand and reason as to why things happened and why the outcomes happened, so you probably do try and remove that element of personal principles from it to try - I mean, we try to be objective judges but aware that we're bringing our biases all the time to everything that we're looking at. I guess it's being aware of our biases. We do talk about that quite a lot.*

This was an interesting comment in relation to the ways the students spoke about personal narrative and emotion, which will be addressed in the next section. There appears to be some tension between the 'objective' aims of history, and its capacity for (and the learning potential of) emotional or affective engagement.

IBDP History students at West School and their teacher agree that the structure of the DP History course has contributed to their ability to think historically. Most students seemed to agree with Ruby, that

*what's good about the DP course is that we have lots of—like I've noticed that we have a lot of time to delve into one subject. I've never done a History course where I've spent a whole term looking on one thing, usually it's like you spent a few weeks on it. So, I liked the fact that we can really take our time to know what we're talking about and see different perspectives and make connections and look at different sources. You can get a really good understanding about one thing.*

4 See: [http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking\\_html\\_files/VisibleThinking1.html](http://www.visiblethinkingpz.org/VisibleThinking_html_files/VisibleThinking1.html)

This was in contrast to what teacher Rosie noted, in that she felt the need to be ‘selective’ about the content covered in order to best prepare students for what she saw as a limited examination; it reflects something very positive about Rosie’s skill as a teacher that students didn’t appear to feel this sense of limitedness in relation to the content covered. Students in this focus group talked generally about how they had a sense that their experience in the DP had allowed them to engage deeply with the historical events and processes they studied.

Students agreed that history was important to the present, particularly to improving present social conditions and preventing historical crimes from recurring. Nancy Drew argued that ‘history is not just retelling of the past, it’s looking back on it and [...] analysing and using it to improve things for the future’. Tim agreed, remarking that ‘in our lifetimes, we’re sort of just plunked into this world that’s already here and we don’t know why, so looking back sort of helps us understand why things are the way they are around us’. This is important ‘for making better choices in the future and for correcting the mistakes of the human race I guess—progression.’ Ruby concurred and drew similar connections between historical thinking and human progress. She expressed a belief that

*it’s an innate thing that you want to make things better for yourself because you want to be happy and you look at the past mistakes and they are mistakes for a reason. You were not happy during that time, so you try to make things better.*

Nancy Drew perhaps captured the essence of these points by offering an adage: ‘Those who don’t study history are doomed to repeat it’.

The West School students were particularly interested in discussing the attribute of caring in relation to their history study. They linked this to the understanding of different perspectives – connected by Chelsea to the attribute of being open-minded. The students also at times made interesting comparisons between history and ‘real life’ – suggesting that the present is more real than the past – we do not suggest that the students didn’t believe the past was real, but that this language reflects a relationship to it where connection to the present makes historical study more meaningful. As Ruby noted, speaking about caring,

*in terms of applying it to real life. When you’re seeing all these kinds of traumatic or like really terrible experiences in history, you kind of get this compassion to really not want that to happen again to anyone. So no one wants a Holocaust, no one wants a massive famine in China ever again because we’ve seen it happen and now we care enough to not be stuck in our ways. We care enough to invest our time to actually make what we think might be the right decision as opposed to the easy decision.*

This is illustrative of the ways these students’ engagement with confronting history supported their determination to make good decisions in their own lives – linking to the ‘reasoned, ethical decisions’ of IB thinkers. Students also stated that knowing

more about the past made them care more about the present; in particular, they were concerned and wanted to know more about issues where their historical study had given them insight into historical causes and contexts.

These remarks clearly demonstrate aspects of historical thinking, and also connect with the Learner Profile. They show the process of students directly connecting historical thinking to their personal development and to social development more broadly.

### Teaching and learning with confronting history

Students at West School covered a range of confronting topics throughout their History DP classes. According to their teacher, topics included Global War and Authoritarian States. Within these topics they examined the German Nazi regime, the Chinese Communist regime under Mao Zedong, and historical events including the Nazi Holocaust, the Japanese invasion of Manchuria and the Rape of Nanking, among other atrocities.

Various strategies seemed effective in developing LP attributes through confronting history, and confronting history seemed to lend itself to particular attributes, such as caring. Students and their teacher were clear about this in relation to the study of the Holocaust. Rosie emphasised the power of her students meeting a Holocaust survivor, believing it encouraged ‘empathy’ and ‘understanding personal experience’. She talked about how this man,

*spoke about how he and his family were all lined up out in their street. The family next to them was taken off and they never saw them again, but his family wasn’t and he doesn’t know why – because they were Jewish. For whatever reason, his family managed to survive through it. Having someone talk about, I guess, that ever-present fear and potential for your family to be ripped apart like that [...] it just puts that human, personal face on it.*

This is part of a broader theme in relation to the power of primary sources of history. Students also talked about the power of video footage and photographic images, particularly colourised ones. Their teacher, Rosie, shared a belief in the power of primary source material. Students connect with case stories, memoirs, individual stories, pictures, and video footage, and sometimes find numbers and figures more abstract. Chelsea expressed her feeling that

*as history goes on, you look at this number and then there’s another number that’s more than that and you’re like that’s nothing compared to this one and it just keeps on going. You do become desensitised to it until you come across that one story that focuses on that one person and it becomes deeply personal to you.*

Tim makes a similar point about seeing images. He ‘always find the pictures more confronting than statistics and words.’ In this instance, he found that ‘it was really confronting when we were shown the colourised pictures’ of the Holocaust. Whereas ‘black and white photos almost depersonalise the person you’re looking at...putting colour onto it makes you realise how similar they

are to you'. Ruby agrees that this makes the history 'real' and 'relatable'. She makes the same point as Chelsea, that 'the images of people outside the concentration camps, like their bodies in a pile, that's—it really hits you, like these are real people. Whereas, like you said, if you see it as a number like 60,000, you don't think'. Tim again agrees. Talking about the numbers of people who died under the dictatorships of Mao and Hitler, he asks: 'how do you compare these numbers when you don't have the stories?'

The power of images was a recurrent theme. Photos and video footage were deliberately incorporated by the teacher as a tool for historical thinking. Similar to the power of meeting a Holocaust survivor, Rosie describes documentary film as 'putting a face on' history. She attributes this especially to colourised documentaries:

*There are so many documentaries that they see which are black and white. It is confronting, but I think it's something that... it seems removed. It seems in the past. [...] We were talking about Great Leap Forward and the famine and everything that happened [...] We're not even 100 years ago.*

It is worth noting that 'documentaries' can be a powerful means to connect students to primary material through actual footage such as this.

The confronting nature of images and topics was not something Rosie went to particular lengths to prepare students for. She did note some attempts to 'prepare' students for graphic content by making statements about what they would see. She also referred to a purpose for using difficult material: 'it's horrific, but it's important for us to see stuff like that'. Rosie's experience and her knowledge of students were factors she cited as supporting her use of confronting material. Conversely, her experience may have desensitised her in some ways; she has used some sources for several years and only notes second guessing some materials at the moment she uses them in class.

There were some features of histories that made them more meaningful or confronting for students. Unfamiliar narratives, particularly those related to histories the students felt they knew, could be particularly confronting. Nancy Drew, for instance, noted that learning about the treatment of marginalised groups other than Jewish people during the Holocaust was confronting. Familiarity, though, could also increase the sense of the seriousness of historical atrocities. As Ruby noted,

*Somehow in my mind I feel because I've learnt more about Hitler and it's just constantly out there, you know thousands died in the Holocaust that that's worse even though millions and millions more died under Mao. It's just like how do you compare these numbers when you don't have the stories?*

There also appears to be a suggestion here that the familiarity with popular culture representations of the history might further drive home the confronting nature of these events. One student also hinted that histories could be more confronting to students

who identified with victims. There were also suggestions that history was more meaningful when closer in time, or closer geographically. One student, Nancy Drew, noted the importance of emotion in learning:

*I think also in that sense learning is based on emotion quite a lot. So looking back with emotion, like feeling things about these different areas we learn about definitely helps us understand why things are bad.*

There were certainly examples of how emotion might be engaged through historical study, however the emphasis of the majority of both interviews was on the more analytical, intellectual practices of history.

Like students at other schools, participants in the West School focus group seemed to demonstrate an awareness of historical thinking and its relationship to empathy and perspective-taking. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many make comments to the effect that history can be studied in ways that have little emotional impact on them. Alternatively, it can be studied in ways that are emotive and impactful. Other West School participants seemed to agree with Ruby that at times they study confronting history 'impersonally', in which they are 'analysing the events and the leaders involved', and that 'studying the events and its role politically on a global scale really depersonalises you.' A focus on dates, names and numbers seems to characterise this approach to history learning.

# DISCUSSION

The Learner Profile is at the heart of the educational purpose of the IB. It speaks to international-mindedness and the attributes of learners who seek to 'create a better and more peaceful world', but it can also exist in tension with the more pragmatic aims of the Diploma Programme; attributes unlikely to be scored highly in examinations can fall by the wayside. We identified a number of broad patterns in our interviews and focus groups with IBDP teachers and students. Here we discuss these patterns with implications for teaching and learning about confronting history in relation to the attributes of the Learner Profile. The sense of confronting history as both 'interesting' and 'important' is a theme throughout the interviews in this study, and there are clear affordances for the discipline of history in supporting the development of Learner Profile attributes.

As we note in our literature review, the potential for difficult and confronting history to promote empathy and caring may derive significantly from the role of affect or emotion in historical learning. In the teaching of confronting material, it is likely that the horror of the events arouse interest, serving as a sort of entrance point to historical thinking and historical empathy (Ammert, 2015, p. 127). This was acknowledged by teachers and students at most schools. The teaching of difficult history also has the power to provoke outrage and condemnation, which may translate into thinking about and condemning contemporary injustice (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Endacott & Brooks, 2013). In other words, activating emotional connections to history is vital to the process of developing values and attributes such as empathy, open-mindedness, caring, and understanding.

There seemed, however, to be a tendency among both teachers and students in our research to seek to distance themselves from the emotional impact of historical events. In some cases, teachers appeared to forget that particular historical events may be confronting for them and for their students. There seemed to be a suggestion that by 'intellectualising' difficult events, such as the atrocities committed by Japanese soldiers during the Rape of Nanking, it is possible to mitigate the discomfort likely to occur while learning about these events. Some students felt it was necessary to detach from their emotions and to 'be less caring' so that they could 'properly understand' what occurred. Lachlan from North School, for example, expressed the belief that 'you do have to really remove that human part of yourself and that emotional part of yourself and not fall to that when you're trying to analyse it more'. Phoebe, also at North School, described this as 'removing the emotional side because you also do need to understand the implications of events on people'. The teacher of these students did not explicitly share this view. Her belief that confronting history could be effective for the teaching of historiography does point to a degree of intellectualisation of the material, though we acknowledge that this itself is an important process.

Given what we know (and have discussed above), we question the need to 'remove emotion' from historical analysis in relation to confronting material. Emotion can be problematic in the process of historical analysis and history teaching if it is allowed to improperly influence the methods and instruments for analysis, such as through the manipulation of evidence, unduly neglecting some sources and privileging others, for example (Zinn, 1990). It is clear, however, that an emotional engagement with the history is

precisely what makes it 'confronting' and precisely what informs a more 'principled' and 'caring' engagement with the past. Across the participant groups, teachers and students reported higher levels of engagement, as well as feelings of empathy and caring, in response to historical trauma and suffering. These attributes of the LP (*caring* and *principled*) seem clearly to be activated.

Interestingly, the debate above may point in subtle ways to an additional tension between the values of empathy or caring in historical thinking and that of being open-minded. To deeply empathise with Chinese civilians subjected to extreme cruelty by Japanese soldiers at Nanking, for example, it might be harder to be open-minded towards historical explanations for their crimes. It is possible that our indignation towards the offending Japanese soldiers might obscure our ability to appreciate their heavy exposure to imperial propaganda and racist ideology, for example, or their damaged mental and emotional state as a result of heavy combat prior to the massacres. This is only a possible tension rather than an inevitable one, and empathy and open-mindedness can also complement one another.

This does however highlight the tension between historical and emotional empathy. Students at North School identified a significant relationship between open-mindedness and historical empathy. Historical empathy is an analytic practice with elements of emotional engagement, but it arguably does not require that we always feel compassion for those in the past. Students in most of the schools in this study, North School included, demonstrated the distinctiveness of the practices of historical empathy – an analytical understanding of the motivations and beliefs of different historical actors – in relation to emotional empathy – a more invested sense of what it would be like to 'be in the shoes of' historical actors. Phoebe, for instance, noted that

*I mean you want to blame everyone in Germany [for the Holocaust/ rise of Nazism] but at the same time, they had a big economic crisis and there was this whole history in Europe of Jewish people being [seen as] inferior and stuff. . . it's a little bit different than us going back now and saying they were all terrible people because they allowed this to happen and that sort of thing. So yeah, I think it is really important to be open-minded when you reflect on these things [..] I think especially so that it doesn't spill out into our current understanding of the world. So we don't particularly look at some people or some countries or something as having biases and so that we don't have particular biases against them, we need to understand that everyone acts for a reason and it's a different context than we have now. So yeah, I think it helps us form more positive relations with other countries and other people and cultures.*

Phoebe's understanding here represents a sophisticated sense of historical empathy; she understands complex motivations and is able to contextualise them. She also navigates a pathway between open-mindedness and caring, presenting an expansive view of the possibilities for cross-cultural understanding through historical empathy.

The importance of looking at confronting historical events (or forces or ideas) from multiple perspectives was frequently talked about by teachers and students as encouraging open-mindedness and reflective consideration of world events. Many

talked about how looking at history from different perspectives improved their understandings of the present in positive ways. Students talk about being more critical of the foreign policies of global powers, such as those of the United States after studying the Vietnam War; being more tolerant of cultural difference, such as after studying something like the Rape of Nanking; having a greater awareness towards the social dangers presented by right-wing populist or nationalist political leaders after studying authoritarian regimes; and having a greater sensitivity and concern for people affected by contemporary political repression.

There seemed to be an interesting association between the teaching of confronting history and historiography. Some teachers believed that confronting history was a good way to teach about historiography as, in some cases, the events are emotionally evocative and sharply contested in the present. This was the case with Ines (and other teachers) talking about the Rape of Nanking and its contemporary treatment by some in Japan. The 'living' nature of confronting historical events, such as debates over the ways in which Japanese military action in Nanking is commemorated, may enhance the teaching of historiography by demonstrating the power that historical understandings can have in the present. Certainly the students in this study presented a remarkable awareness of the patterns and connections across seemingly separate events in the past and present.

We might note that historiography is often perceived as more tedious than other aspects of history learning. For example, the teacher at East School, Andrew, expressed outright distaste for having to study historiography. He claimed that students prefer 'the answers' to historical questions rather than historiographical debate. This was not a view that emerged through discussions with students at any of the schools though; at no point did students express a desire to engage with less contentious ways of understanding the past. Rather, higher levels of student engagement with history appeared to be linked to its capacity to confront and challenge; combined with active contemporary debates about the significance of what occurred, this is likely to be a positive feature of the study of historiography. This might be particularly significant for the development of the LP attributes, as historiography lends itself to the attributes of being open-minded and balanced, allowing for engagement with a diversity of opinions and approaches, including those that are disagreeable or perverse. The study of historical debates also clearly supports a range of other, more cognitively-focused attributes, including inquirers, thinkers, and reflective.

Across virtually all of our interviews and focus groups, students and teachers talked about the role of primary historical sources for engaging with and developing the LP attributes. They talked about the power of colourised photos and video footage, personal memoirs and individual stories, and exercises such as meeting Holocaust survivors. These types of sources seemed to activate students' emotional responses and facilitate personalised historical learning for students, allowing them to make human connections with figures in the past. In particular, it seemed to allow students to empathise with victims of historical violence and oppression. There was broad agreement among students that this sort of qualitative approach supported by primary sources impacted upon their sense of empathy, caring, and understanding.

A number of students noted images and film as sources that helped to narrow the sense of distance from the past. Students across a number of case study schools described factors that made history feel more or less 'distant' (and more or less relevant, as a result). Colourised images narrowed the temporal distance more effectively than black and white images. Some students also expressed that the emotive power of certain confronting histories was increased when the history was recent.

Students clearly appreciated a more emotional engagement with the past. An emphasis on the analytical facets of perspective-taking (focusing on 'facts') at the expense of an emotional engagement with the past (in which, for example, students could consider the impacts of actions on individuals) may risk 'over-intellectualising' confronting history. This over-intellectualisation at times appeared to be responsible for a sense that the actions of historical actors responsible for atrocities were 'understandable' or inevitable. While it is important to consider a range of historical perspectives, 'perspective-taking' does not require students to accept those perspectives, or judge them to be valid, or support the actions of perpetrators of violence. We can, to use a commonly raised example, understand Hitler's motivations and beliefs while roundly condemning his actions. This distinction – between understanding and acceptance/justification – was not always clearly articulated by students; at times, it appeared students did accept perspectives that we would consider troubling. This tended to reinforce a sense of inevitability in relation to traumatic histories and is, we suggest, something for teachers to guard against. It may in some ways be a consequence of thinking uncritically about the attributes of being open-minded and balanced. While interrogating entrenched assumptions and preconceptions is important to developing empathy, we do note that an undue emphasis on 'balance' can have an evident limitation – it may lead to a kind of moral relativism that diminishes historical crimes and denies accountability for them, in which 'neither Japanese soldiers nor Chinese civilians', or 'neither Nazi leaders nor Jewish victims of the Holocaust' are truly at fault. In simple terms, it is not always true that 'both sides' of a conflict have merit to their ideas and actions. There is certainly no social value in attempting to highlight the 'merits' of German fascism, for example, but there is considerable value in understanding the social conditions, collective beliefs, and motivations that led to its rise.

Finally, several teachers commented on aspects of the structure of the IBDP in relation to history. There seemed to be a shared feeling that there was too much content in the DP history curriculum, which teachers felt restricted their ability to focus more deeply on confronting aspects of their topics. This is significant, as our research has also pointed to the power of personalised narratives within confronting history to facilitate the development of the LP attributes. While students attest that this approach to history is more engaging than so-called 'dates and names', this latter type of content is arguably still important, serving as domain knowledge for this deeper and more personalised engagement. 'Drilling down' into individual experiences may be harder if the course is too 'full' of content.

# CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Ultimately, there are clear affordances of engaging with confronting, contested and complex histories in order to support the development of the Learner Profile attributes. It is also clear, however, that engagement with these histories requires time, knowledge, and a range of strategies to support students to historical understanding. The implications for studying confronting events in the past for social justice, and in particular cultural recognition, are evident in many student and teacher responses. The importance of studying these difficult histories is evidenced by the ways student understandings of present-day issues and events were informed by historical understanding. All of the students in the study demonstrated a keen awareness of the connections between the past and present, and the potential role for historical understanding in their futures.

The study of historical violence and injustice, and the awareness of its continuation or reemergence in the present, appears to have the capacity to either inspire students in a commitment to social justice and productive debate, or to leave students feeling a sense of nihilism and hopelessness. Nihilism and hopelessness are not in line with the IB's mission or Learner Profile, and we suspect few teachers would want these to be outcomes of their teaching. How, then, can teachers work to ensure students are empowered to make change, and to imagine a better world?

Teachers demonstrated a high degree of comfort with the analytical aspects of history teaching, and a tendency, perhaps, to present confronting history in ways that were intellectualised to the point where they lost significant affective power. A major finding of this research is that students responded to more 'emotive' representations of the past; images of human beings, personal narratives, and emotional films stuck in their minds and made them think more deeply about the past, the present, and the future. While examinations cannot generally assess the emotional engagement of students, findings from this study suggest that students with an affective connection to the history could use this emotional engagement to deepen their understanding of the past. This worked in complex ways and presents a very strong need for the attribute of reflective; students who demonstrated a greater capacity for reflection could understand the role their own emotional response played in their understanding, and consider the ways their understandings might be biased.

The following recommendations make suggestions for teachers wishing to engage with confronting topics in productive ways. They are not exhaustive, but represent a range of factors highlighted in the discussions with teachers and students who participated in this study.

## TEACHING WITH TRAUMA: A FRAMEWORK

### Purpose

The purpose for teaching traumatic content and material clearly matters, and findings from this study suggest this purpose needs to move beyond the development of skills needed for the examination. What will the confronting topic teach students? Why does it matter? What is the 'hidden curriculum' of your representation of the confronting past? An awareness of a purpose for understanding terrible human actions appeared to underpin a sense of empowerment in students in this study.

### Knowledge

It is, of course, very important to be knowledgeable about the content of the subjects we teach. In the case of teaching confronting content, it is also especially important to be knowledgeable about the students in the room. Are there any students likely to be personally affected by the content covered? How will you manage this? Consider strategies to ensure the safety of students in the room here – content warnings are one example. Teachers also need to be knowledgeable enough to engage with difficult questions – we may not always have the answers, but we need to know enough to facilitate respectful debate.

### Materials

Related to content knowledge, having the right materials to support the study of confronting history was clearly important to teachers and students who participated in this study. Primary sources were prioritised, and students responded particularly strongly to sources that engaged them in understanding personal narratives and experiences of confronting history. There is also considerable power in the use of images and film; these appeared to make history more 'real' to students and enhance their understanding of the connection between past and present.

## Time

Time is always an issue in education – there never seems to be enough time to cover everything. In the case of confronting history, having enough time to unpack complex, conflicting perspectives is essential. The most meaningful approaches to engaging with the study of confronting events require significant time, and this was not always possible within the confines of the IB DP History course. Teachers should work to find ways to include the representations of the past that students engaged with most – personal narrative, in particular – whilst addressing the demands of the curriculum. While it was not a focus for the study, it did appear that teachers very carefully selected materials to have the greatest possible effect in terms of engagement, content delivery, and opportunities to practice historical thinking. This careful planning could help to mitigate the challenges of a limited time frame.

## Courage

Teaching confronting material is hard, because knowing and understanding the possibilities for human cruelty is intensely difficult. The teachers in this study were courageous in their engagement with complex and contentious histories, but in some instances appeared to intellectualise the study of collective trauma to remove its capacity to confront. This is sometimes necessary, but we lose the power of confronting history when we reduce it to facts and figures. It takes courage to take the risk of allowing students access to a fuller understanding of the past, including its emotional impacts. Students, too, need to demonstrate courage when examining these events, as the students in this study did.

## Hope

Holding knowledge about the confronting past without building hope for a better future is unlikely to inspire action or a commitment to social justice. When we teach without hope, we rob students of agency in their lives; key to teaching the terrible aspects of human experience is highlighting the value of learning, the commitment to do better, and the human capacity for survival and hope. This links, too, to the notion of having a purpose for engaging with this history beyond what's going to be assessed in the examination; what can learning about the dark past give us?

## Vulnerability

Linked to courage, vulnerability appeared to be an important characteristic in some teachers in the study. A willingness, in particular, to be a learner alongside the students in the class presented considerable power in changing minds and informing understanding. Teachers also need to manage their own exposure to confronting materials; no one filters content for them, and the easy accessibility of materials means that teachers can expose themselves to a vast amount of quite traumatic content in order to find appropriate resources for students. We strongly encourage teachers to take care when researching new topics not to 'over-expose' themselves to confronting content.

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Teaching with confronting history can clearly be as analytical and intellectual an activity as teachers and students wish it to be; an engagement with the contentious and difficult past supports the development of both historical thinking concepts and the more cognitively-focused Learner Profile attributes. The more affective attributes, however, highlight an important facet of history that can be undermined by this more analytical approach; incorporating attributes such as principled, caring, and open-minded creates considerable scope for powerful learning about the past. As many of the students in this study demonstrated, an emotional engagement with the past informs a deeper understanding of the present, and a strong commitment to a better, more peaceful future.

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# APPENDIX I: TEACHER INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

## Confronting Histories and the Learner Profile

**Please note:** In both interviews and focus groups copies of the Learner Profile were provided to participants for ease of reference.

1. What have your students been learning in history this term?
2. What are some of the topics you most enjoy/are most interested in teaching in DP History?
3. What do you think is the place of DP History in developing the Learner Profile attributes?
4. Do you plan to incorporate specific attributes in your history teaching?
5. What do you think are some of the confronting topics in DP History?
6. How do you go about teaching these topics?
7. What impact do you feel confronting topics have on students (and their learning in general, and their development of particular values/LP attributes)?

# APPENDIX II: STUDENT FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

## Confronting Histories and the Learner Profile

**Please note:** In both interviews and focus groups copies of the Learner Profile were provided to participants for ease of reference.

1. What is the most interesting thing you've learned in DP History so far?
2. What other histories would you like to learn more about?
3. What does history help you understand about the world?
4. Which Learner Profile attributes do you think learning about history has helped you to develop?

If needed, use more specific questions, including:

5. What kinds of historical knowledge might make you more open-minded? Why?
6. Which Learner Profile attributes would you link knowing about [confronting history topic they've studied recently] to? Why?
7. Which of the Learner Profile attributes is most important in studying history? Why?







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## FIND OUT MORE

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