

Incorporating Heritage Studies in Secondary School History Curriculum: A South African Perspective

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Abstract: *This paper explores the potential benefits of incorporating heritage studies into the secondary school history curriculum in South Africa. It argues that heritage studies can enhance the learners understanding of history, contribute to their intellectual development, and support the achievement of national policy objectives such as social cohesion and tolerance. The paper presents a theoretical, conceptual and practical case for this incorporation and draws on related literature and policy analysis.*

Keywords: History, Heritage Studies, Education, Tolerance, Empathy

1. Introduction

The analysis on incorporating heritage in the teaching of history at secondary school highlights a significant interplay between history, heritage and education. Writing on the topic of education as civilization in the late 1970s, Newman (1977, p.203) argued that “to most educational theorists it is intuitively obvious that one way in which education can be understood is as the civilizing process”. That is, Newman sought to explore to what extent education may be viewed as an instrument of civilization. Within this setting, the role of the educator as an agent of socialization is understood to be that of guiding learners to appreciate the merits of the basic principles, institutions and values underlying the particular society to which both the educator and learners belong. Since the notion of civilization is somewhat broad, general and dynamic, Newman’s notion of education as a vehicle of civilization highlights a role of education that is not restricted to economy, *i. e.* a career oriented education. Often referred to as general education because it is not focused on any specific career path, this form of education opens up a wide range of possibilities and varied career paths. Essentially, this paper argues that heritage studies can potentially contribute to the intellectual development of learners, improve their understanding of history by providing cultural, spiritual, political and environmental lenses of looking at and offer a more significant meaning to the teaching and learning of history than is currently and practically possible. In the South African context, incorporating heritage in the history curriculum seeks to enrich our analyses of history and provide a critical dimension as well as contribute to the realisation of national policy objectives, *viz.* nation building.

According to the Ministerial Task Team Report (2018), the Department of Basic Education has two main concerns. The first concern relates to lack and low levels of historical awareness among high school leavers and how that lack of awareness frustrates the country’s efforts of achieving the goals of national cohesion and tolerance for diversity. The

second concern relates to the exclusion of liberation struggle history and the failure of the curriculum to historically associate South Africa with the rest of the African continent as well as poor awareness about the historical relations of South Africa with the rest of the continent. From this perspective, the paper argues that heritage studies can contribute towards decolonising the curriculum and provide fresh lenses through which history can be analysed.

This paper builds on the recent policy announcement made by the minister of education to make history a compulsory subject in the South African secondary school curriculum. Typically, the paper seeks to present a theoretical, conceptual and practical case for the incorporation of heritage studies into the school history curriculum in order to achieve the national socio - political policy objectives of social cohesion that is premised on solid national values. Equally, the paper acknowledges the significance of acquiring knowledge of history among citizens and recognises the philosophical foundations of teaching history as an academic discipline.

2. Study Approach

The paper was undertaken through the review of literature on the pedagogy of history as an academic discipline with specific focus to secondary school. Consequently, we examine the theoretical literature on heritage and history. The insights acquired through the analyses of secondary sources are used to develop a policy rationale for incorporating heritage studies into the history curriculum.

The context for this literature review is what the South Africa’s Department of Basic Education seeks to achieve by making history a compulsory subject in the school curriculum. Our primary source of information concerning the primary objective of this paper was the Department of Basic Education’s Ministerial Task Team Report of February 2018 as well as minutes of a meeting between the department of Basic Education (represented by Deputy

Minister Surty) and the portfolio committee on Basic Education (minutes dated 21 August 2018). Further, to guide the analyses, the paper examines the following three questions:

Q1: *Is there an objective and value-free school history that can be taught to achieve social cohesion?*

Q2: *Without being informed by a specific theory to analyse past events, what shall inform learners' interpretation of historical events?*

Q3: *In what manner can the incorporation of heritage studies compliment history to achieve the national goal of social cohesion?*

3. Some Normative and Contextual Realities of Teaching History at Secondary School in South Africa

It is clear that the current African National Congress - led government administration is aware of how school history was designed by the apartheid government to achieve political objectives. The minutes of a meeting between the Department of Basic Education and the Portfolio Committee on Basic Education (in February 2018) provide two broad expectations from relooking at the current history curriculum and making it compulsory in the school curriculum. The first expectation is to teach history in order to 'create a platform for a better understanding of the past and its difficulties, and celebrating the achievements of the present and working hard towards a better future'. The second expectation concerns making school history as objective as possible and free of political bias. It is unclear whether the suggested inclusion of archaeology and social anthropology are meant to achieve the notion of objectivity. What is clear is that the inclusion of archaeology is specifically set to provide a scientific basis for the analysis of the past.

3.1 History for social cohesion, tolerance, empathy, leadership and self-conscious reflexivity

Writing in the first decade of the 21st century on the epistemological battle between disciplinary history and curricula heritage, Slekar (2001) argues that the discipline of history had, shortly before the turn of the century, undergone major shifts in its epistemology – i. e. its theory of knowledge or how knowledge is arrived at within a discipline of enquiry. While early historians prior to the 1960s had advocated for an objectivist epistemology emphasising neutrality both in conducting research and synthesising historical accounts, the post 1960s saw a wide spread acceptance of interpretive epistemology, a shift which according to Lowenthal (1996) suggested that a goal of objectivity in history has never been and shall never be realised. While the school history curriculum is expected to instil social values of tolerance, empathy, leadership and self-conscious reflexivity (see department of education and portfolio committee minutes, (August 2018), the teaching of history to achieve these objectives as argued by mainstream historians is contrary to the pedagogy of history as an academic discipline. That is, this purpose of teaching history is not consistent with the normative objectives of teaching history - how history should be taught. In reality, the

interpretation of history cannot solely be left to learners. If the interpretation of history is left to the learners as is the expectation in teaching history, we then have to address the real challenge of incompatibility between the cognitive demands of history and the psychological mental age of learners. We examine this challenge in the next section.

3.2 History, historical thinking and school learners' attitudes towards history

In his paper analysing of the epistemological battle between the discipline of history and the heritage curriculum, Slekar (2001) precludes his discussion with a quote from James Loewen's (1995) a quote highlighting a rather ambivalent state of affairs between the learners' willingness to know about their past and their observable behaviour in history classrooms. In his words, James Loewen (1995) says the following:

American audiences, even young ones, need and want to know about their national past. Yet they sleep in the classes that present it. What has gone wrong?

Assuming that this is a general observation and that it is inherent in the teaching of history, we can infer that the teaching of history either underwhelms or overwhelms learners resulting in their lack of interest. The sleeping in class becomes an observable behaviour. It can be argued that the problem may not be the history subject but how it is presented and who is presenting it. In a paper investigating the development of historical thinking among school learners Zaccaria (1978) applied Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development to compare the cognitive structure required for engaging with language-based problem solving disciplines on the one hand and mathematics - and science-based disciplines on the other hand. His review of empirical studies led to the conclusion that children learn to meaningfully think about historical content at the formal operational level considerably later than they are able to think at that level in science and mathematics disciplines. He concludes by saying that many learners graduate in high school without reaching a stage of formal operational thought to understand complex issues dealt with in history. That is, most learners graduate from high school still unable to utilise abstract historical reasoning and not competent enough to understand complexities of history and the relationships between different factors which together contribute to the construction of a total view or an intelligent complete learner. Similarly - tolerance, empathy and self-conscious reflexivity as expected to be achieved through making history compulsory at secondary school - can come about as a result of learners being able to achieve cognitive and intellectual level that are necessary to engage and discern the complex interrelationships among historical events. These complex interrelationships span the socio-political structure, economic relations, cultural and religious beliefs, events preceding, for example, the outbreak of conflict, etc. Empathy remains a complex social and human skill that is difficult to apply even in the present and this challenge should increase when it must be evoked to deal with a distant past (Spoehr and Spoehr, 1994). A closer examination of these factors suggests that history is way too complex than may at first appear and requires a more sophisticated thinking ability. Typically, this analysis raises

an important question concerning the complex nature of the relationship between historical thinking and the pedagogy of history. Indeed, the teaching of history tends to require an inter - disciplinary form of pedagogy which can mediate the construction of historical meanings and bridge the gap between the abstract and distant past and the current realities. It must also be acknowledged that the policy decision to make history compulsory at secondary school is taken during the time when there is evidence of worsening class and racial tensions and difficult economic conditions.

It can be argued that making history a compulsory school subject can increase historical awareness among the country's youth. In a paper reviewing the sensitivities in history teaching across Europe and Israel and focusing on countries with recent events of conflict like Northern Ireland, Israel and Serbia, Savenije, Brauch and Wagner (2019) suggest that "critical engagement with the past may threaten group esteem, arousing aversive emotions such as collective guilt and shame, which may lead to evasion or rejection of difficult knowledge" (p.3). Since history is an analytic subject that seeks to explain causes of historical events, and since those causal links are drawn in the context of social cognitive influences of the current context due care should be taken to make sure that travelling into the traumatic historical past does not worsen the current political climate. In our context, the legacies of colonialism and apartheid are associated with socio - economic hardships of the African population and make race an important factor in the explanation of current realities of poverty. Therefore, due care should be taken in terms of the analytic lenses chosen to look at and make sense of historical events. Likewise, the Ministerial Task Team proposes African Nationalism as a theme that should be promoted as an analytical lens since African Nationalism promotes and is predicated upon human solidarity. Similarly, rich political heritage, the turning point to democracy and the current democratic values may be used to provide a comparative analysis of history while instilling the desired values of tolerance and social cohesion.

4. Towards Incorporating Heritage Studies into the History Curriculum

This section highlights some of the bases for teaching history as well as the significant nexus between heritage and history.

4.1 Teaching of history

The teaching of history to achieve specific outcomes of, for example, national cohesion, tolerance and empathy,

necessitates some form of change in the philosophy that informs it as an academic discipline. This approach to teaching history, however, has led some researchers questioning whether teaching history in this manner is consistent with central ethos of history as an academic discipline; and whether such a pedagogical approach and outcomes may still be called history teaching. It must be recognised, however, that the teaching of history often occurs in a particular socio - economic context and that policy decisions are often made within a constrained and contested environment.

The South African History Organization (SAHO) provides an interesting summary of the current South African school history curriculum from grade four to grade twelve. According to SAHO, the history curriculum covers broad areas spanning world wars and other conflicts, history of medicine, apartheid, South Africa's democratization process, to mention but a few. Under the umbrella called Social Sciences, although the Ministerial Task Team has raised a number of concerns about the merits and quality of this integration, history is taught and assessed alongside Geography. At grade 5, the subject has a section on South African heritage, titled the 'heritage trail' but the Ministerial Task Team Report decries the excision of archaeology from the history curriculum and highlights the implication that has on how South Africa is then presented as having been pre - historical before it was colonised. The Ministerial Task Team is also concerned about the poor sequencing of history topics, where more complex and important topics are introduced in early grades resulting in them not being ordered depth analysis especially given the learners' low levels of cognitive maturity and historical thinking at this stage. Poor sequencing is particularly problematic given our discussion on the complex nature of history as an academic discipline.

A close analysis of possible causes and implications of poor sequencing of key topics in the school history curriculum suggests deeper underlying problems regarding seriousness placed on conceptualising the desired outcomes within each grade as well as at the exit point, which is grade 12. The potential implications on learners are a history that portrays an incoherent story that is detached from its context, thus making little or no meaning to them. Guided by the specific behavioural indicators of what learners should know when they exit grade 12, topics and themes for each grade should be conceptualised as a coherent build - up towards the desired end result, see Figure 1 highlighting a significant relationship between heritage, history, national values and aspired social outcomes.

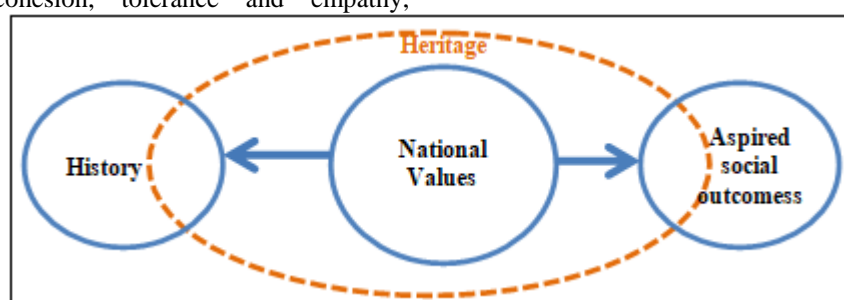


Figure 1: Nexus between Heritage, History, National Values and Aspired Social Outcomes

Social cohesion and tolerance are social values that do not occur automatically. They are negotiated values that are related to and are achieved through social cognitive processes, and are influenced by contextual factors. For a social value system to be embraced, those who embrace it must, as a necessary condition, believe in its importance, and provide a basis for its preservation and/or advancement. For example, our national constitution is informed by insights drawn on the socio - economic and political consequences of injustice of previous regimes; and seeks to chart an ideal future that is premised on values that are completely different to those that informed relations under apartheid and colonialism. Most importantly, for history to make sense people must be able to personally relate to their history.

4.2 Heritage and history

History and heritage are both products of their contexts and tend to reflect their political and socio - economic contexts. For example, before the 1964 Venice Charter, ecologists, biologists, and natural geographers have been concerned with concepts of biodiversity and ecological sustainability (Harrison, 2018). Similarly, until the mid - 1960s the scope of heritage focused on physical heritage like monuments, buildings and gardens and excluded intangible heritage like social factors and intangible values (Ahmad, 2006).

Writing on the topic of *Heritage Ontologies*, Harrison (2018, p.3) argues that heritage studies as a discipline does not emerge from a single academic field but “... is a broad and heterogeneous academic domain, covering research into what we choose to conserve and why, the politics of the past, the processes of heritage management and how it is articulated across unequal relations of expertise and power, and the relationship between commemorative acts and public and private memory, with links to policy making and some of the most pressing political, ecological, economic, and social issues of our time”. A remarkable feature of heritage studies is the notion of choice or selectivity. This notion of selectivity in heritage education (Boxtel, Grever and Klein, 2017) has been criticised by Lowenthal (1995) as being an obsession with uncritical and patriotic aims. Contrary to Lowenthal, Smith (2006) does not view the approach to studying and understanding heritage as uncritical; but describes it as a discursive process and used to construct, reconstruct and negotiate a range of identities and social and cultural values. Likewise, South Africa has a rich tangible and intangible heritage that may be utilised discursively, as Smith suggests, in a school learning environment alongside history to negotiate the social values that the Department of Basic Education proposes. However, this requires case studies which can be used as learning support material.

The state of national tolerance and social cohesion are inter - related and remain outcomes of the cognitive evaluative processes. The consequences of such processes often determine the adoption or rejection of national values. While history may be taught in order to instil a sense of historical awareness and consciousness regarding our past as a nation, it must be acknowledged that indeed history provides necessary albeit insufficient preconditions for social cohesion. Theoretically, if these two variables (i. e.

awareness and consciousness) were to be used in a statistical modelling to predict social cohesion, there is no doubt that their predictive power would be very little. Statistical modelling can be referred to as a simplified, mathematically formalised way of approximating reality and making predictions from the approximation. It also concerns the use of statistics to build a representation of the data and then conduct analysis to infer relationships between variables and discover insights. It is against this backdrop that this paper argues for an inclusion of more relevant variables in the form of heritage in order to strengthen the possibility of strong awareness between history and social cohesion as an outcome of school history. Using the examples of Constitution Hill (the location of the Constitutional Court of SA), the Robben Island and the key figures associated with it (e. g. political leaders who were once incarcerated there) learners may be able to discuss the nature and importance of values such as selflessness, sacrifice, perseverance, justice, fairness, solidarity, forgiveness, etc.; and how such values were central in ushering in the democratic South Africa. Learners can then be able to discuss possible alternative socio - political scenarios if these values never existed. Such activities connect the tangible heritage in the form of heritage sites, intangible values associated history, historical processes, historical actors, and heritage. This value adoption can be modelled as shown in Figure 2.

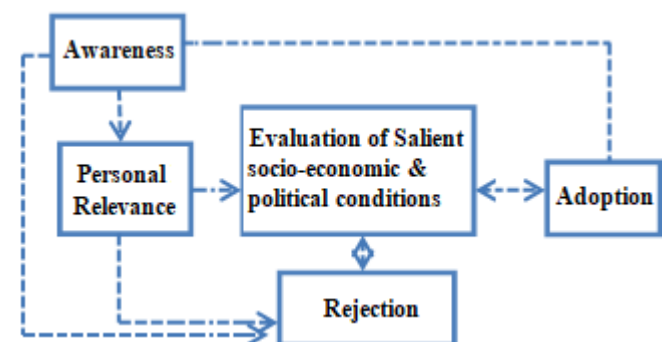


Figure 2: A simplified model of value adoption

It can be restated that heritage is about significant natural or man - made things, persons or events that appear or have appeared as unique in space and time (Lehnes, 2016) and; regardless of whether it is tangible or intangible, its essence is the performance and negotiation of identity, values and a sense of place (Smith and Waterton, 2009).

While a focus on intangible heritage gained traction after the Venice Charter of 1964, evidence suggests a continued bias that is skewed in favour of tangible heritage. This is evident in the manner in which heritage remains strongly associated with and promoted through places (sites) as opposed to meanings (see Ivanovic and Ramoshaba, 2018). While this is understandable from the perspective of tourism, as tourists are mainly interested in visiting places (sites), this tourism bias diminishes the potential of political heritage to drive intellectual engagement among the learners. Indeed, the tourism appeal of heritage through heritage sites emphasises remembrance of the past and this is also evident in the manner in which heritage is introduced in the grade five history curriculum through the theme on the South African heritage trail.

The incorporation of heritage studies into the history curriculum can provide a unique angle from which learners are introduced to history by addressing the question of 'who are we' as a nation and what shaped this identity. Using this envisaged curiosity from learners, heritage symbols such as the flag and national anthem and icons can be utilised in the analyses of history while emphasising why such heritage should be preserved. This analysis can be extended to the teaching of heritage conservation, heritage preservation, heritage management, and to highlight some universal values that occur within our heritage and history. With this background, learners can go on (post - school) and study tourism, conservation, heritage, history, etc.

South Africa recognises the significance of heritage with 24th of September as a national holiday. During the Heritage Day, South Africans from different cultural backgrounds showcase their cultures through dress, music, dance and food. These are significant expressions of identity and a proud sense belonging. However, a disturbing trend has developed recently where people have reduced the Heritage Day to a 'braai day'. This disturbing trend suggests that Heritage is merely viewed as an event but fails in its high value purpose. Similarly, this problem highlights the failure of policy making processes to utilise heritage to address issues of national importance. Equally, the reliance on heritage symbols and artefacts, without an emphasis on meanings, diminishes the potential role of heritage to drive higher level social objectives. Indeed, when tangible aspects of heritage take precedence over the associated meanings, its efficacy to contribute towards achieving national policy objectives gets diminished, the discursive paradigm towards a more meaningful interpretation of heritage gets frustrated, and presenting tangible heritage without providing a deeper meaning hinders the objective of potentially connecting the present with the past and arousing a commitment to preserve heritage for the future. Our analysis emphasizes that the incorporation of heritage into the teaching of history can expand our analyses of history and can contribute towards the achievement of national policy objectives of social cohesion.

5. Towards Enriching History and Historical Understanding

The values people hold shape the heritage they engage with (Howard, 2003) and the exploration of those values would contribute to the theorization of heritage (Marmion, Calver and Wilkes, 2015). Heritage and history are interlinked but differ in the disciplinary manner in which they are taught; with history emphasizing factual information while the discipline of heritage studies is not necessarily concerned with the objective representation of the past but with how the contemporary socio - cultural and individual processes shape our understanding of the past. In other words, while history purports to be as value - free as possible, heritage on the contrary relies on values to look into the past.

Teaching history for the objective of achieving social tolerance and national cohesion raises serious pedagogical questions about how the subject should be taught to realise these objectives. It has been highlighted in this paper that history is a language - based analytical and problem solving

discipline dealing with understanding of the past and abstract concepts. Equally, one of the reasons learners perceive history as an uninteresting subject arises out of their inability to personally relate with content and how it is engage with. This gets compounded by limited historical thinking abilities of learners which at the very least are a function of the relationship between the learner's grade and the historical concepts that must be engaged with. Unless the experience of learning history is made more personally relevant, the objectives of social tolerance and social cohesion shall be difficult to realise. Incorporating heritage in the teaching of history with a particular focus on national values can address the limitations inherent in teaching and learning history and the challenges of achieving the goals of social cohesion. Equally, the incorporation of heritage in the teaching of history shall help develop the necessary vocabulary among students to engage with history topics (the values themselves immersed in heritage); and shall also spark a personal interest to ask more deeper questions regarding the genesis of events, a skill that is both critical and necessary in engaging with history as an academic discipline.

History requires people and events that happened in the past to be thought about in their own terms without being judged by the current standards (Van Drie and Van Boxtel) but learners often struggle to empathise with the past or to imagine themselves in situations that they are not likely to experience (Spoehr and Spoehr, 1994). To be able to empathise, however, one must first have a high level of awareness of:

- a) **Self:** *who am I? what values influence my thoughts and attitudes? What biases and prejudices influence my thoughts and interfere with my objectivity?*
- b) **Context:** *How is the current context different to the past that is being thought about? What are the salient factors that make the two contexts different? How might the current context influence how the past is viewed?*

Learning about heritage in a more theory - based manner (emphasising how various concept converge to explain phenomena) can encourage learners to discuss and appreciate how heritage influences the emergence of values starting from a family as unit of analysis up to national and international levels. In the process, learners can be able to locate themselves within a particular value system and with a better recognition of past and contemporary influences. By understanding the contextual issues that influence human and social action in the current context, learners can acquire the necessary skills to ask historical questions as they travel backwards into both the not - so - distant and very distant histories. By utilising heritage to study local and more contemporary history whose context is more closer to learners, a necessary level of enthusiasm may be sparked which should in turn fascinate curiosity into the past.

Still on the question of contextualization and historical distance, Boxtel *et al.* (2017) argue that tangible heritage

may be used as a history teaching resource to stimulate curiosity and to formulate historical questions. Commenting on the significance of heritage sites in bringing people closer to the past Boxtel *et. al* (2017, p.13) conclude their discussion on the appeal of heritage education by saying that “..... if we do not acknowledge that people apparently have a need to experience the ‘real’ material traces of the past and a longing to be on the spot ‘where it all happened’, then we ignore a fascinating and important source of historical interest, which is the starting - point for any kind of historical understanding and consciousness”. This analysis highlights that heritage should not be treated as appendices to history and its teaching but a necessary part of it.

The Ministerial Task Team on the history curriculum raised concern about the sequencing of history topics in the current curriculum, a sequencing that likely results in more important topics covered in lower grades and thus rendering them less important. Consistent with Ministerial Task Team on the history curriculum and Boxtel *et. al*'s (2017) recommendation on using heritage to bring people closer to the past, this paper recommends a simplified space - and - time theme combination where the most local and most recent history is taught at lower grades. Figure 3 highlights a graphical representation of this analysis.

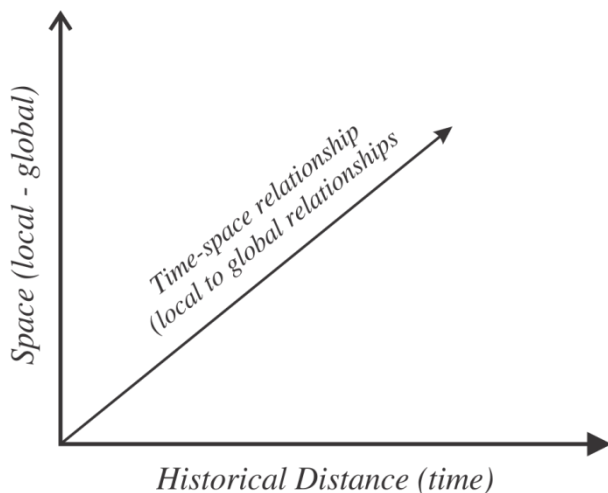


Figure 3

Within this context and with heritage resources used as key learning materials, lower grade learners may be introduced to a more interesting and more personally relevant history. The notion of personally relevant content is particularly important at lower grades and is consistent with Riviere *et al* (1998) research finding that personal factors are better recalled at lower level grades. As learners progress up the grades, and as their historical reasoning and history - related vocabularies increase, they may then be introduced to more complex relationships both in terms of space, time and other important contextual variables. This analysis can also have a significant impact on changing the perceptions of learners about history as an uninteresting subject.

6. Conclusions

In conclusion, this paper presents a compelling case for the incorporation of heritage studies into the secondary school curriculum in South Africa. By doing so, it can enhance

learners understanding of history, contribute to their intellectual development and support the achievement of national policy objectives such as social cohesion and tolerance. Future research should focus on the practical implementation of this approach and its impact on learners' historical awareness and understanding.

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