

INTRODUCTION

Our history, our children

On a visit to Gallipoli in 2000 Prime Minister John Howard expressed concern that history was not being taught as it should be in Australia's schools. There was, he said, 'perhaps a little too much of an emphasis on issues rather than on exactly what happened'.¹ Howard's comments marked a mounting argument over Australian history that had become particularly visible after his government's election in 1996. Countering what he felt had been a left-wing domination of Australia's story under the former Labor Government of Paul Keating, Howard loudly opposed the 'attempted rewriting of Australian political history by our political opponents'.² This contemporary political struggle to represent Australia through its heritage has provided much of the impetus for the so-called 'Black Armband' debate or 'History Wars', which have dominated and divided discussion of Australian history since the early 1990s. Howard's historical imperative to teach the 'facts' is embedded in this wider debate over Australian history; schoolchildren have been centrally cast as vital but vulnerable receptors of the national past.³

The Anzac commemoration aptly illustrated for Howard an apparent division of approaches to Australian history. A lively presence of young Australian backpackers touched a sentimental chord with the Prime Minister. Howard revelled in their 'simple, uncluttered pride'.⁴ If history teaching concentrated on the facts, he reasoned,

more Australians would be able to take part in the national sense of belonging he witnessed at Gallipoli. Too much emphasis on 'issues' had obscured Australia's heritage from its rightful heirs.

Important for Howard, however, was a sense that the education system was shifting in a promising direction. Referring to the recent strengthening of history across the New South Wales curriculum by the then Labor Premier Bob Carr, Howard was 'pleased to note that in spite of our political differences, the NSW Premier and I seem to have the same view on this subject'.⁵ Even when in opposition, Carr had been an active campaigner for a more consistent and rigorous approach to history education in schools. Like Howard, he was wary of issues-based history teaching. 'I am mindful that changes in society influence the way we view our history', he said, and 'I would not expect history today to be taught in the same way as it was at Matrville High School in the 1960s'. That emphasis had been 'weighted to the fates of ruling elites' and 'was certainly male-dominated. Women, Aboriginals and ordinary people were usually left out of that history.' Yet he remained concerned that the subject might end up 'being taught as a series of themes and not as a rigorous analysis of a narrative of unfolding major events'.⁶

In light of the strong political divisions in the broader debates over Australian history, this appeared at face value to be an unlikely coalition. It suggested a concern over history teaching beyond the overtly partisan political divide that has characterised the History Wars. To be sure, anxiety over how to teach 'our history' to 'our children' has preoccupied historians, educationists and politicians alike. The unifying imagery contained in their collective pronouns sharply contrasts the graphic divisions of the wider historiographical debate. A polarised frame (of mourning and celebration, left and right, guilt and pride and so on) has shaped the public contest over readings of Australian history. Although debates over history education encompass this wider concern over the past—what might be termed the 'politics of memory'—they also incorporate questions of historical and educational approach raised in syllabus development and in the classroom. These questions are similarly contentious, but do broaden the field of inquiry to include issues of teaching and learning, of historical and educational methodology. It is this convergence, what I have called the political and pedagogical concerns over history teaching, that frames this research and provides its title.

The politics of memory is a significant concept for understanding the powerful and contested nature of national narratives. Its origin can be located more broadly in memory studies, a body of scholarship that emerged in response to a boom in popular histories. Leading scholars such as Pierre Nora have described this historical interest as a contemporary impulse to create memory sites as the events themselves recede further into the past. (The growing popularity and awareness of the Gallipoli commemorations at Anzac Cove offer a noteworthy example here.) Others, such as David Lowenthal and Raphael Samuel, have sought to explain current interest in the past as individual and collective desires to reconnect with more intimate stories and identities found in unofficial histories, oral testimony and family narratives.⁷

These studies of personal and popular expressions of the past have been supplemented by the identification of public and official narratives as part of a 'collective', 'social' or 'public' memory. Such research demonstrates that the contested construction of collective memory is inherently political. As Patrick Hutton explained in his recent historiographical survey of how shared experiences and understandings powerfully form identity, 'collective memory is constructed', and 'the key to its influence is political power'.⁸ Jeffrey K. Olick has similarly noted 'the fundamental connection between memory and the nation'.⁹ In her analysis of the politics of memory, the French historian Dominique Schnapper described the political imperatives that constructing national narratives entail: 'Memory in political life obviously has a political function' and, as such, 'Collective memory inevitably becomes political'.¹⁰ Examining the anxieties generated by competing national memories in Australia, the historian Paula Hamilton analysed the 'tensions evident in the attempts to reconcile group memories into a single account of the national past'. There has been an increasing influence of memory in public historical understandings, she continued: 'the past, its meaning and relationship to the present, has been a central factor in the politics of memory played out in parliaments and the press'.¹¹

A number of historians have also commented on less overt aspects of collective memory's power and agency. Concomitant with the struggle to define official narratives is the capacity for official forgetting, as Chris Healy has astutely described. The longstanding

exclusion of Aboriginal experience in Australian history writing, for instance, could only be attributed to a 'whiting out' or 'silencing' of their history, an active, 'violent task of memory-work'.¹² The Canadian historian Jenéa Tallentire explains this capacity in similar terms. 'How events are remembered, what commemorations are made, by whom, and for whom is an important inquiry for the study of any community,' she writes. 'The concurrent processes of forgetting or silencing are also present whenever such publicly authorised social memory is made material, in monuments, museums and textbooks.'¹³

Attempts to define national history and identity create considerable anxiety and unease around the world. Indeed, the historian James Wertsch has suggested that these commemorations constitute 'sites' of collective memory, where contrasting national narratives are proposed and contested. Debates over Germany and Japan's remembrance of World War II have offered such scholars as Ian Buruma significant comparative material for analysing how communities come to terms with their histories. Their divergent memorialisation of war experience frames his investigation into commemorative impulses and the construction of national narratives. Such studies of war experience and commemoration form a critical body of work on collective memory. Jay Winter has explored languages of bereavement and remembrance in sites of memory and mourning following World War I. The power of museums and war memorials as sites of contested collective memory have also produced important studies of remembrance, nation building and the construction of national memory. Other scholars reveal that commemorative moments, such as national days or anniversaries, are similarly compelling catalysts for debate. These 'outbreaks' of historical dispute reveal how national narratives are contested in the historical domains of museums, history texts and school syllabuses. It is here, in this struggle to define national histories and narratives, that the politics of collective memory can provide a critical analysis of the nation itself.¹⁴

As purveyors of the past, schools are an important site of convergence in memory politics. History syllabuses and textbooks, with their capacity to define the nation's past, are central to the development of national narratives—and it is the capacity of history education to construct collective memory that makes it so contested and fraught. But beyond this expectation that it should to teach 'the

nation', school history is very much bound by educational processes for which studies of collective memory provide little explanation. Although history education is undoubtedly an important arena of debate over the nation's past, the so-called History Wars or critical memory studies cannot account for changing educational approaches to that past. Importantly, then, the starting point for this study is to expand the dimensions of collective memory in a pedagogical context. For the school subject of history, so bound in national memory, is also explicitly about teaching and learning.

There have been a number of key debates among historians and educators that point to this convergence of memory politics and pedagogical method, and they provide critical material for my research. In 1999 the historian Alan Ryan published an article in the *Bulletin* of the Australian Historical Association titled 'Developing a strategy to "save" history', in which he outlined the reasons behind the subject's apparent decline in schools. The piece generated considerable interest, and a number of historians, teachers and educationists responded to Ryan's concerns. Although several agreed that history was indeed threatened by declining standards and was being squeezed out of an increasingly crowded curriculum, others felt that the discipline had in fact never been stronger. Some teachers felt that the problem with history in schools was being compounded by academics 'presuming to tell teachers how to teach', while others called for increased collaboration between academic and school education systems. Despite their diversity, responses such as these reveal a professional anxiety over the state of the subject in schools that reaches beyond the public contest over the politics of memory. Teachers and academics consequently play an important and prominent role in the debates I examine.¹⁵

Meanwhile, a number of conservative educationists have maintained that the subject's apparent decline is rooted in a retreat of academic standards and concerns. According to the Australian historian of education, Alan Barcan, progressive pedagogies have diminished historical knowledge and understanding. Such educationists as Kevin Donnelly and Geoffrey Partington see a growing historical 'illiteracy' compounded by the influence of critical history. They maintain that child-centred education and integrated approaches to the discipline combined with 'Black Armband' content in history syllabuses account

for a drop in standards, educational rigour and national pride. Their views echo criticisms from such commentators in the USA as Diane Ravitch and E. D. Hirsh, who considered falling educational standards and national knowledge to be the culmination of a brand of 'political correctness' in historical and educational approach. This conflation of declining standards with critical history and radical politics surely compounds the growing sense of anxiety over history education, but does little to explain how this anxiety has become so pronounced.¹⁶

Educational sources have assisted the expansion of this research into the pedagogical domain. Christine Halse's 1997 report into history in New South Wales secondary schools revealed significant concern by teachers over the subject in that state. Tony Taylor's 2000 publication of the National Inquiry into School History demonstrated similarly the complex intersection between historical and educational debates. History syllabuses also provided critical source material for my study. As texts, syllabus documents present an account of the nation. I critically evaluate a number of syllabuses and analyse their development and reception in order to distil their historical and educational approach: their capacity to define the nation means that they are a powerful site of memory politics; their capacity to define the discipline itself makes them an equally compelling source for analysing history method and pedagogical approach.¹⁷

My entrance to this topic of history education came through previous research on public debates over Australian history, which in turn revealed other arenas of discussion. Museums, such as the controversial *Enola Gay* exhibit at the Smithsonian Museum in 1995 and the National Museum of Australia (which was the subject of an inquiry in 2003), were frequently cited in public debate. Anxiety over such national anniversaries as the Bicentenary in 1988 aroused similar levels of discord and debate. 'Our history' generates significant collective anxiety; teaching it to 'our children' has intensified the wider concern over the past.¹⁸

Analysing this historical debate in the schools arena in turn opened a whole new set of questions and concerns. In particular, I have struggled to incorporate pedagogical theory into what is essentially a historical study. The challenges of interdisciplinary scholarship are obvious, but it was imperative to contextualise educational movements and methodology in order to understand history

education over the last forty or fifty years. In time, the pedagogical research critically informed my approach to the subject, allowing me to see history as a discipline, as an approach to the past as much as any account of it. As such, my research into what teachers know as history method was combined with more traditional historical scholarship that included textual analysis of syllabuses and curriculum documents, oral histories from teachers, curriculum designers and education advisers, as well as archival research of newspapers, syllabus reviews and history teachers' associations.

While the expansion of this research has pushed the field of history education beyond public debates over the past, it has led to another set of interpretive limitations: much of the education-based scholarship into history pedagogy has been cognitive and psychological in its disciplinary orientation. Such approaches return interpretations of 'the past' to the student and to processes of learning, but the dominance of quantitative methodology and a preoccupation with levels of cognition can obscure the public and political contest over national narratives. Sam Wineburg, a professor of education and history at Washington University, has commented that most of the research in history education 'has been conducted, for better or worse (and it often *is* for worse), by psychologists'.¹⁹ His comments might be deliberately provocative, but they point to the difficulty faced by historians when attempting to understand the methodology of their subject once it is embedded in empirical cognitive studies. Wineburg's own research, which is grounded implicitly in both disciplines, highlights the value of including method in any critical analysis of history education. As there has been no such study in Australia, my research draws on his important work, and seeks to expand the politics of memory with pedagogical questions. It draws also on the work of Peter Seixas and Peter Stearns, who have conducted significant interdisciplinary scholarship with Wineburg. Their research on this topic is diverse, but at its core is an argument for the inseparability of content and pedagogy in debates over history education. There is 'a great deal of content embedded in the form', they contend.²⁰

The book investigates a number of moments when the political and pedagogical strands of debate intersect to reveal a growing anxiety about history education in Australia and abroad. I have a lot of these 'moments', for want of a better word. They include a dispute in

Queensland in the late 1970s over the adoption of *Man: A Course of Study*, or MACOS, a social studies program developed by the American psychologist and educational theorist Jerome Bruner. MACOS came under attack from religious fundamentalists in the USA and Australia for comparing human and animal behaviour and was eventually banned from Queensland schools by Premier Joh Bjelke-Peterson's cabinet during a parliamentary recess.²¹ The moments also include the Japanese dispute, over how Japan's imperial history and role in World War II should be represented in textbooks. And they conclude with a history syllabus review conducted in Victoria in 2003.

Although I trace changing syllabuses from the 1950s, through the 'New History' movements in the 1960s and 1970s up to the present, the book concentrates on debates over teaching Australian history since the late 1980s. In particular, it examines disputes surrounding the Australian Bicentennial celebrations in 1988, as well as the growing contest during the 1990s over the inclusion of the word 'invasion' to describe European colonisation in Australian history syllabuses and in teaching resources.

This is not an exhaustive study of primary or secondary history education in a particular state. I move between educational levels and jurisdictions because my interest is in how these various moments, taken together, reveal the politics and pedagogy of Australian history education. Although the book focuses on secondary Australian history in the three eastern states of Victoria, New South Wales and Queensland, it also includes other primary and secondary syllabuses and discussions from the other states and territories in Australia, as well as comparisons with countries such as Canada, the USA, New Zealand and Japan.

This story is at once historical, political and pedagogical. Broadly, it traces the ideological and political shifts from the new history and pedagogy in the 1960s and 1970s and the backlash they generated. The emergence of more inclusive national narratives and child-centred learning practices has been under attack since the late 1970s by a 'Back to Basics' movement that dismissed their progressive ideals as politically biased and educationally unsound. The politics that made up this challenge still dominate conservative and neo-conservative discourse on history education, but the progressive movements they rejected left an impressive legacy: educational aims such as 'learning

how to learn', the 'development of critical thinking' and encouragement of skills such as 'empathy' remain prominent in history syllabuses and teaching documents around Australia. Moreover, the persistence of these child-centred pedagogies despite mounting criticism tends to subvert the simple narrative of progressive idealism followed by conservative reaction that is implied by this conventional periodisation.²²

So the structure is both thematic and chronological, encompassing changing ideas about history and about history teaching, as well as tracking these moments that can be specifically tied to a time and place. My research was not envisaged as 'a history of history teaching'; it set out to explore one arena of collective memory: the representation of a nation's past in its history syllabuses. In so doing it had to incorporate discussions of history method and education beyond the established political and public debates over the past, and it had to acknowledge a series of fundamental paradoxes that have both obstructed and shaped my thinking on this topic. They too are integral to the structure of this work, shedding some light on the debate over history education as well as some of its inconsistencies. I have wondered why Australian history is consistently slighted as repetitive and uninteresting as a school subject, for instance, yet anxiety about the state of the discipline arouses unprecedented levels of public discussion. A contrast between the divisiveness of the 'History Wars' discourse and the dominance of collective imagery in debates over school history also frames this discussion. It is further notable that this contest over the past has been increasingly realised through a symbol of the future, 'the child'—a paradox the book grapples with throughout.

Ultimately, I have kept returning to the question of 'what we teach our children', attempting to tease out the politics and symbolism of such explicitly collective imagery. The question also points to an acute anxiety about national histories and how they ought to be represented and passed on. In this sense, concerns over historical content begin to merge with methodological debates; the politics of memory become infused with educational discussions. Together, they shape the persistent and problematic urge to 'teach the nation'.

The nation's story

In 1998 Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen published *The Presence of the Past*, a book about the results of a survey they conducted across the USA. Eight hundred people were interviewed to produce a revealing account of how Americans understood history, including their school memories. The results registered the variety of experiences that people remembered about their history education, but on a scale from 1 to 10, interest in studying history at school rated a mere 5.7, a lower score than gathering with family (7.9), visiting a historic site or museum (7.3), celebrating a holiday (7.0), reading a history book (6.5), or watching a movie or television program about history (6.0). Although a number of people mentioned wonderful teachers they had had, 'boring' was the single most common word that respondents associated with history in school.²³

These findings were mirrored in a recent survey conducted by the Centre for Public History at the University of Technology, Sydney, which was based on the American study. The *Australians and the Past* project researched public ideas about history from interviews with hundreds of people from all over Australia. Respondents gave only moderate status to history teachers, for instance, in terms of their 'trustworthiness' and as 'people who feature in historical narratives and sensibilities', and they felt least connected with the past when studying history at school. These results echo the popular opinion that learning history in schools, and Australian history in particular, is repetitive and uninteresting.²⁴

Anecdotes stretching over thirty years repeat this perception. In 1975 a student commented in a Victorian survey: 'We wasted too much time learning Australian history, about which there is very little of interest to learn. It is time we faced this fact instead of trying to pretend that Australia has had a very interesting history.'²⁵ Twenty years later, responses to Christine Halse's research into the state of history in New South Wales secondary schools seemed to match this sentiment. One student lamented: '... we have done Australian history every year since Year 4. It gets pretty boring after a while.' 'We did Australian history in Years 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9,' responded another. 'It was boring. I would rather watch paint dry.' Others complained of being 'continually forced to be interested in studying Australian history over and over and over again'.²⁶ The National Inquiry into

School History conducted by Tony Taylor in 1999 supported some of these more despondent student feelings: 'Australian history in schools is characterised by lack of continuity, topic repetition and lack of coherence,' he concluded. 'It seems generally unpopular with students.'²⁷

For a subject that seems so tedious, however, teaching Australian history arouses considerable public attention and unease. In an article for the *Australian* newspaper headed 'Big Brother writes syllabus', the journalist Paddy McGuinness reproduced a list of 'politically correct buzzwords' he found in the 1991 New South Wales history syllabus, such as 'invasion' and 'genocide'. The vocabulary, he concluded, was 'not about understanding the past in order not to repeat it, but about controlling the future through indoctrinating our children'.²⁸ This concern is not restricted to polemicists. In 2000 Robin Saville, a history teacher in Goulburn, complained to the Sydney *Daily Telegraph* that Premier Carr's mandatory Australian history syllabus was politically biased and educationally unsound.

I have taught the history syllabus for Year 10 students this year. It is a politically correct shambles as we have had to deal with content such as feminism, Aboriginal land rights and the stolen generation (yes, that is what the textbooks call it).

... Students are not interested in the politically correct agenda of the course designers.

I became a history teacher because of a love of the subject.

I could not get enthusiastic about this course and nor could my students.²⁹

In 2002 Tim Highland wrote to the Melbourne *Herald Sun*:

Vocal minorities have hijacked the young and impressionable, using the Australian history curriculum being taught in our schools as a vehicle to spread their socialist propaganda.

By imposing today's values on the events and personalities of the past, they are effectively rewriting history.

Teaching that Anglo-Saxon settlement was at best an invasion, that explorers raped and pillaged their way across the country and that there was a conspiracy to cull the indigenous population is not an accurate depiction of events of the past.³⁰

Such concern reveals how disputes over national histories have become increasingly widespread. School history is a critical ground for this debate and points to a compelling contest over the past that spans national education systems. In 1995 the American historian James Loewen published *Lies My Teacher Told Me: Everything Your American History Textbook Got Wrong*, a critical exposé of twelve common US history schoolbooks. Loewen railed against the 'story of America' outlined in the texts, especially their depictions of Native Americans. The textbooks routinely presented stories as facts and were overwhelmingly Eurocentric and inaccurate. The term 'frontier' was used unproblematically, and although many Native American societies practised agriculture, Loewen continued, stereotypes of them as nomadic dominated the works, thereby helping to legitimise a narrative of dispossession. He suggested that the textbooks presented 'distorted and indefensibly incomplete accounts of our past' that ignored the violence of European colonisation: 'Our history is full of wars with Native American nations. But not our history textbooks.'³¹

Similar critiques emerged in Australia. The publication in 1998 of the historian Henry Reynolds' autobiography, *Why Weren't We Told?*, demanded answers to a historical legacy of silence and misinformation. Reynolds recalled how in his study of Australian history there was a virtual absence of Aboriginal history, and he asked, 'Why didn't we know? Why were we never told? How did Australia itself forget the truth about pioneering around the vast frontiers?'³² Such questions about the nation's past unsettled the possibility of a fixed national narrative that might be taught in history classes. They represented a culmination of changing historical approaches since the 1960s and 1970s that challenged the traditional hero of Australia as enshrined in the Australian Legend: the Digger and the Anzac, once the everyman, became more questionable; his masculinity was deconstructed, the White Australia Policy that he flagged was demolished and his once-lauded pioneering heritage was reappraised as a destructive 'invasion'.

Yet this growing critical re-evaluation of Australian history and Australian history writing eventually aroused considerable criticism of its own. A number of historians and commentators dismissed these new readings of the past for being too 'negative' and for representing the nation's story unfairly. A historiographical paradigm of 'black' and 'white' emerged and persists to this day. The historian John Hirst reacted against assertions in the 1970s and 1980s of a pervasive racism in Australia's history, and he described such approaches as the 'black school' of Australian history writing. They ignored aspects of Australia's heritage that Australians should be proud of. The mining executive Hugh Morgan described critical histories being written on the eve of Australia's bicentennial celebrations in 1988 as a 'Guilt Industry', a 'campaign which has been designed above all to delegitimise the settlement of this country'.³³

It was the historian Geoffrey Blainey who coined a phrase in 1993 to illustrate the apparent emotional darkness of such histories. Using a vivid mark of bereavement, Blainey labelled this history 'Black Armband': it reacted against the Australian Achievement with a dark mourning of the nation. With this image, Blainey gave the historiographical discussion a persuasive metaphor and new impetus. Since his original 1993 usage, the Black Armband debate has ranged widely, and it has been played out in various sites of Australian history: in the courts over native title and forced child removal, in the media, in politics and in the education system. While emphasising that the main culprits of the 'Black Armband' view were the historians themselves, and that some recent books by historians were propounding a bleak interpretation of history, Blainey added that 'even schoolchildren are often the target for these views'.³⁴

A number of educationists have adopted Blainey's imagery, and criticised teachers for emphasising the darkness of Australian history. Kevin Donnelly was the prominent director of the consulting group Education Strategies, which had strong links with Jeff Kennett's conservative Coalition Government in Victoria. In 1997 Donnelly's speech to a Melbourne University seminar on Black Armband history was published in *Agora*, the journal of the History Teachers' Association of Victoria. Repudiating current historical trends in Australia, Donnelly argued that the 'national curriculum document describes early European settlement as "invasion" and belittles Australia's Anglo/

Celtic [*sic*] history and traditions'. He went on: '... it is wrong to simplify the situation by making today's students feel guilty about something over which they had no control.'³⁵ The historian Patrick O'Farrell also strongly criticised what he called the guilt school of Australian history teaching. History education, he felt, had 'fallen on evil times, both in schools and universities'.³⁶ Such remarks indicated a pervasive fear that Australian history was being savaged or destroyed by overcritical readings.

In this way, concern over school history has become an arena of the Black Armband debate or History Wars, with similarly stark choices about approaches to the nation's past. Nowhere is this more evident than in the continuing public discussion over the use of the word 'invasion' in history syllabuses. The debate has garnered significant media attention and first became prominent in Queensland in 1995 when a teacher sourcebook suggested that 'settlement', 'explorer' and 'discover' were value-laden terms because most parts of Australia had been 'discovered' and 'explored' long before Europeans arrived.

The Queensland sourcebook was published to replace discriminatory readings of Aboriginal people in an older text, and insisted that 'invasion' might be used alongside 'settlement' (rather than replacing it). Yet the media campaign initiated by the *Courier Mail* and taken up by other Queensland and national papers gave the impression that such terms as 'invasion' were now being imposed as part of a rewriting of Queensland history education. Headlines run by a number of newspapers reinforced the perception that teaching Australian history demanded a choice between mutually exclusive versions of the past. 'Explorers axed in "correct" syllabus', read the *Courier Mail*. The *Cairns Post* ran with: 'Minister denies nation's history being rewritten'. Other papers continued the theme: 'Lies, lies and damned politically correct text-books' (*North West Star*); 'Invasion a distortion of history' (*Daily Telegraph-Mirror*); 'Conquered or settled?' (*Age*).³⁷

The multiple historical viewpoints advocated in the replacement sourcebook were simplified in the press as a contest between 'invasion' and 'settlement'. Such media analysts as Jennifer Craik describe this simplification as a form of 'headlines', in which complex ideas are reduced to basic terms of division. There is a distinct

tendency for the media to divide its space into opposing camps in order to 'set the agenda of public debate' and to 'reproduce the sensation, conflict-driven framework of newsworthiness; construct moral panics; and reiterate common stereotypes'.³⁸ The media has become a critical channel for the History Wars, reinforcing and exacerbating its polarised frame.

We have seen debates over such anniversaries as the Bicentenary, over such public institutions as the National Museum and in other public arenas. History education is similarly disputed: in the press, in parliament, on talkback radio, as well as in syllabus development committees and education departments. Embedded within contrasting approaches to teaching 'our history', then, are the national-political emblems and ideologies of a much wider debate. While many students regard school history as the dullest period in the history of their lives, the subject seems more public and contested than ever.

The future of the past

School history is not simply one arena of the contest over 'our history'; it also raises several questions of changing educational approaches to the past. The pedagogical element of these debates is critical to research into history teaching, but is frequently overlooked in more public discussions about what history, or whose history to teach. As Wineburg reminds us, contest 'over which history to teach [has] so dominated the debate (falling out along predictable political lines) that the more important question of why teach history in the first place was lost'.³⁹

By expanding the politics of memory with a pedagogical dimension this study moves beyond an analysis of contested national narratives to include questions about 'teaching our children'. For it is apparent that this contest over the past is being fought over a representation of the future, contained within the image of 'the child'. Its political symbolism is obvious: the child-citizen is at once the nation and its future. Overwhelmingly, the child forms part of an anonymous, vulnerable collective that comes in all forms: youth, young people, Australia's citizens of tomorrow—they are all 'our children'. In the context of such divisive imagery associated with the 'Black Armband' debate or 'History Wars', this united future is indeed compelling. 'It's always amazed me how much educated Australians want

to believe their country was and is evil', the Melbourne journalist Andrew Bolt wrote in his *Herald Sun* column in June 2003:

And we hear too how 'generations' of Aboriginal children were 'stolen'.

But if anything has been stolen, it's our children's pride in their country.

... So let me say it here. The 'stolen generations' is a myth. And it's an evil one, which not only libels our past, but betrays our future.⁴⁰

Lamenting the history being taught to his granddaughter after a visit to James Cook's cottage in Fitzroy Gardens in 2001, Howard Hutchins wrote to the *Age*: 'Surely Australian heritage-destroying political correctness has gone too far? Our children—thus all our futures—are suffering from the non-teaching of our very recent history, and distortion of our early history.'⁴¹ It is an image oft repeated in public discussion, and must be located as part of a wider conservative polemic. The campaign to teach a more positive 'Australian story' sits firmly alongside a similar political campaign against Aboriginal land rights and native title, against the Stolen Generations, refugees and so forth.

It should also be noted that while a politically conservative argument against 'political correctness' has animated much of the debate over school history in recent years, anxiety over the past straddles the political spectrum. As James Loewen and Henry Reynolds clearly set out, 'our history' has been misrepresented, and 'our children' need to know the truth.⁴² Eve Fesl, an associate professor of education at Griffith University in Queensland, also used this collective invocation to describe the impact of the 'invasion' debate on Indigenous students: 'Our (Koori) children do not like school because they know what happened, and what they are taught doesn't match what they know.'⁴³ The radical American educationists Michael Apple and Linda Christian-Smith likewise oriented contrasting approaches to history teaching towards the future: 'The issues involve profoundly different definitions of the common good,' they wrote. They involve 'different views about society and where it should be heading, about cultural visions, and about our children's future.'⁴⁴ The pronouns here are

critical. As such education historians as Linda Levstik and Peter Seixas have asked, ‘Who are “we”, and what is “ours”?’⁴⁵

‘The child’ also invites further consideration. Education, by its very nature, is focused on this discourse of the child—and the ‘future of the past’ is the outstanding paradox of history pedagogy. Meanwhile, theoretical interpretations of the imaginary child also importantly deconstruct its powerful association with the nation.⁴⁶ Histories of childhood, such as Philippe Ariès’ famous study, have explored the emerging conception of the family, and the child in particular. Jan Kociumbas has provided a comprehensive political and social history of childhood in Australia. More symbolic, perhaps, is Peter Pierce’s research into the image of the lost child in Australian folklore and cultural history. ‘Australia is the place where the innocent young are most especially in jeopardy,’ he writes. ‘Symbolically, the lost child represents the anxieties of European settlers.’⁴⁷

Unlike Pierce’s children, the children in my study are not lost—in fact they are very present—but they are in danger, and the vulnerability that he notes is a useful comparison. Alongside a tangible pedagogical context, therefore, the overt symbolism of teaching ‘our children’ suggests that the national demands on education have become increasingly significant. I analyse how these dimensions of ‘the child’ have come together in recent years in order to explain the educational and national imperatives to teach Australia’s past.

It is an irresistible urge. In 1984, Prime Minister Hawke maintained that ‘it is on the quality and reach of our education system that our future rests’.⁴⁸ The prominent education theorist Alan Rowe explained that the goal of outcomes-based education is to ‘Equip and empower students with the skills and understandings they will need for tomorrow and the rest of the world’.⁴⁹ The collective image of the future is a powerful one that incorporates questions of pedagogy, implicitly asking how history should be taught. How can we learn ‘the great lessons of the past, and pass our knowledge on to the next generation’, asked Andrew Roberts in the English *Daily Mail* in 1995, ‘if modern educationists misinterpret history to our children?’⁵⁰ In an editorial for *Agora*, John Cantwell argued for a stronger history presence in the school curriculum: ‘After all, without history we are cheating our children of their heritage.’⁵¹

So a professional anxiety over the state of the subject in schools has intensified and augmented this wider, public concern over the past. The discourse of history education reveals a convergence between the politics of collective memory and questions of method and approach. More than simply a contested site of national memory, debate over history teaching is paradoxically just as much about next generations as it is about the representation of previous ones. Here, the discussion moves beyond a debate over the past to an educational context, which is no less political, but encompasses wider issues of pedagogy. This claim for the future does not reflect simply the parallel debates of politics and pedagogy but also their intersection. The moments of controversy that I explore in this book support the idea of a convergence between anxiety over what history to teach and how to teach it.

Teaching the nation

With this expansion of research and analytical focus beyond the politics of memory to include issues of teaching and learning, I return to my initial question: what are the political and pedagogical dimensions of 'teaching the nation'? Tracing the intersection of these two discussions is my objective here, and I use an interdisciplinary approach to tease out the complex and pervasive anxiety over teaching national history in schools.

Chapter 1 introduces history education as a site of contested collective memory and suggests that concern over teaching the subject has manifested alongside a growing public anxiety and debate about national histories more broadly. It points also to an educational context, signposting discussions and debates that are considered later in the book. Yet the chapter remains primarily historiographical—it applies the politics of collective memory to suggest that debates over syllabus content reflect a wider struggle over Australian history. It notes how changing approaches to Australian history have been played out in schools, and how this educational context has in turn intensified the collective anxiety over the past.

Chapter 2 introduces an international dimension. It situates the schools arena of the so-called Black Armband debate within a much wider context, exploring the recurrence of this anxiety over history education and national narratives around the world. Mirroring the

contest over 'invasion' in Australian syllabuses, for instance, New Zealand debates over the language of colonisation have caused considerable disquiet and alarm. There, the adoption of the word 'holocaust' to describe Maori experience since European contact challenged how indigenous experience was registered in national histories.

The schools context also warrants comparison. Political interventions in history syllabuses and textbooks have been both public and widespread. In England, the establishment of a national curriculum in the early 1990s was initiated in response to government concern that teachers had too much curriculum control, and that students were not given sufficiently positive images about their nation's history. This international appraisal also includes discussions on Japan, the USA and Canada to place Australian debates within a comparative framework. It does so to suggest that the Australian experience is not isolated. Although the study returns to concentrate on Australia, this international context acts as a reminder of the breadth and force of these debates.

The book then shifts to questions of pedagogy and begins to analyse practices of teaching and learning history. The first two chapters analyse history education as a site of contested collective memory, especially the public and political discourse it generates. Yet its pedagogical dimension has an equally critical influence on the subject. Chapter 3 examines how syllabuses are continuously re-evaluated and considers how syllabus documents come to define the nation and how it should be taught. It uses the 2003 Victorian History Syllabus Review as a case study to explore the process of syllabus development. The chapter notes how the nation's story is powerfully conceived in the syllabus, and seeks also to explore the methodologies behind this national conception. It thus opens up discussions of 'the nation' to related questions about how to teach it.

Chapter 4 continues the consideration of pedagogy to explore two leading approaches to history teaching in Australia over the last forty years. Since the 1960s history has been taught either as a discipline in its own right or as part of an integrated subject, such as social studies. The chapter provides a historical and thematic discussion of these contrasting methods. It examines the New History and Social Studies that were introduced from the 1960s and 1970s and demonstrates how such approaches influenced changing models of history

teaching in Australia. In particular, it tracks the increasing rationalisation of history education in terms of its 'relevance', and suggests that this preoccupation shifted education values towards more tangible aims. It is also clear that ideological motivations behind the 'new pedagogy' generated a significant response from those who felt its progressive approach served a radical political agenda that surrendered educational standards and abandoned historical knowledge.

Finally, I explore some of these longstanding debates over history's place in a contemporary context by synthesising the themes of politics and pedagogy using a number of recent case studies. Chapter 5 examines the current status of history in the context of changing educational policies and methods. In particular, it analyses the increasing inclusion of history within studies of society and environment in state and national curriculum documents, and the various responses this has generated. It follows growing calls for a national curriculum, and notes how they once more appeal to educational 'relevance' and student-centred learning.

In turn, chapter 6 analyses the shifting place of Australian history within the curriculum and the contemporary debates about the state of the discipline, especially concern over 'falling standards' and a national illiteracy. The chapter examines a number of surveys into the historical and political knowledge of Australian school students and notes again a pervasive anxiety about core national knowledge. It further examines the National Inquiry into the state of the subject and a growing civic concern that Australian schoolchildren are ignorant of the very history and institutions that provide them with citizenship and nationality. Thus, 'the child' emerges as tomorrow's citizen; the future of the nation rests on a knowledge of its past; and a 'relevant' education demands accountability not only to the education system but also to the nation itself.

So the study comes full circle and returns to the initial question of what history and how to teach it. History has become the future, the child a conduit for the nation. But this discourse requires explication and analysis. The conflict over Australia's past has been intensified by pedagogical imperatives, ideology and rhetoric. Likewise, educational trends, theories and approaches have become inseparable from the public and political debate over historical knowledge and standards. I trace the convergence of these discussions to explain

how history education has become such a powerful and complex site of public anxiety.

Notes

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- ³ Geoffrey Blainey, 'Drawing up a balance sheet of our history', *Quadrant*, vol. 37, nos 7–8 (1993): 10–15. Blainey's Latham Lecture, delivered for *Quadrant* in April 1993, introduced the term 'Black Armband' to describe revisionist Australian history: 'To some extent the Black Armband view of history might well represent the swing of the pendulum from a position that had been too favourable, too self-congratulatory, to an opposite extreme that is even more unreal and decidedly jaundiced.'
- ⁴ Shanahan, 'PM's timely history lesson'.
- ⁵ *ibid.*
- ⁶ Bob Carr, 'Carr on history', *Teaching History*, vol. 29, no. 4 (1995): 18; Editorial, 'The Carr way of history studies', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 25 July 1994.
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- ⁸ Patrick Hutton, 'Recent scholarship on memory and history', *History Teacher* (UK), vol. 33, no. 4 (2000): 537.
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- ¹⁰ Dominique Schnapper, 'Memory in politics', *Partisan Review*, vol. 67, no. 3 (2000): 427.
- ¹¹ Paula Hamilton, 'Sale of the century? Memory and historical consciousness in Australia', in *Contested Pasts: The Politics of Memory*, eds Katharine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone (London: Routledge, 2003), 136–7.
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- ¹³ Jenéa Tallentire, 'Strategies of memory: History, social memory, and the community', *Histoire Sociale/Social History*, vol. 34, no. 67 (2001): 199–200.
- ¹⁴ James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Ian Buruma, *The Wages of Guilt: Memories of War in Germany and Japan* (London: Vintage, 1995); Laura Hein and Mark Seldon (eds), *Censoring History: Citizenship and Memory in Japan, Germany and the United States* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2000); Jay

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- ¹⁵ Alan Ryan, 'Developing a strategy to "save" history', *AHA Bulletin*, no. 87 (1998): 39–50; Alan Ryan, 'In defence of "disciplinism" ', *AHA Bulletin*, no. 89: 11–14; Louise Finch, 'Historian heal thyself?' *AHA Bulletin*, no. 88 (1999): 26–9; Max Quanchi, 'Teaching history—Comments from QLD', *AHA Bulletin*, no. 89 (1999): 4–10; Kate Cameron, 'School history in NSW: A response to Alan Ryan', *AHA Bulletin*, no. 88 (1999): 21; Don Garden, 'On saving history', *AHA Bulletin*, no. 88 (1999): 12–13; Judith Robison, 'Response to Alan Ryan', *AHA Bulletin*, no. 88 (1999): 43–5; Carmel Young, 'Historical revivalism', *AHA Bulletin*, no. 88 (1999): 23–5.
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- ¹⁹ Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001), 28.
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- ²² For example, *History Study Design* (Carlton, Vic.: Board of Studies, 1999), 9.
- ²³ Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), 20; Roy Rosenzweig, 'How Americans use and think about the past', in *Knowing, Teaching and Learning History*, 273.
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- ³⁴ Blainey, 'Drawing up a balance sheet': 11.
- ³⁵ Kevin Donnelly, 'The Black Armband view of Australian history': 14–17.
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