



# Clubbing Together: Engaging Students and Teachers Through History Clubs

**Teachers from two schools describe the energy and achievements of their History Clubs, including extracurricular opportunities such as the National History Challenge and the Kids' Conference.**

## **Years 7–9 at Auburn High School**

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As History educators, we always want to encourage our students to think historically, appreciating the journey that they undertake when exploring the past. One way to do this beyond the curriculum is through the creation of a History Club. By creating a safe, interactive and social space for students outside the classroom, we can begin to shape a passion for questioning the world and inspire a lifelong interest in the study of History.

Our school, Auburn High School, is a co-curricular government school in Hawthorn. We are in our fifth year of operation with a growing student population, currently at over 400 students. The school aims to provide a teaching and learning environment that promotes curiosity, cooperation and critical thinking. As new teachers at Auburn High School, we created our History Club for several reasons.

Firstly, we noticed that a core group of students (particularly in the junior years) were excited about

History but had few opportunities to express this passion outside class. Secondly, we felt that it was a fantastic opportunity to share our expertise with students beyond our classrooms, increasing the visibility of History at our school. Thirdly, as History teachers we simply could not pass up the opportunity of travelling into the past with students who were excited by the various events and actors of history. Finally, we were aware that extracurricular programs can create a 'socially recognised and valued group' within the school community and, if organised appropriately, they can provide diverse opportunities for students to enhance their social and intellectual skills.<sup>1</sup>

We wanted to make the club a safe and fluid space that students could attend at a lunchtime of their choice. Initially the club was run once a week but when the students wanted to present at the 2017 Kids' Conference, meetings increased to two or three a week, including a filming day after school. The club

OPPOSITE: *The School of Athens* by Raphael.

RIGHT: Auburn High History Club.

itself has a core group of eight students from Years 7 to 9, although at times it has swelled to fifteen students depending on the focus of the session.

What is fantastic about our club is that it is student-driven. The students choose their topics for each meeting, as well as deciding their digital submission for the Kids' Conference. Our role as teachers of the club is simply to facilitate and narrow down the scope of the projects the students choose to ensure that they are viable.

Because student choice is the driver, the links to the curriculum are not visible to the students but they are to us as their teachers. Students engage with the 'Big Six' historical thinking concepts in every session, so even if they are not learning the chosen periods or historical concepts of the Victorian Curriculum, these skills are always present.<sup>2</sup> They analyse sources, think about continuity and change and reflect on the various historical perspectives of the past. To the students each session is seen as a fun activity that is driven by their passion for history, not by the curriculum. This is integral to the positive culture and continuation of our club. Without student agency and enthusiasm, the club would begin to feel more like a classroom but as educators we know that maintaining this enthusiasm in the classroom is a difficult task. Within the club we encourage collaboration, working under time constraints and learning how to use new and unfamiliar programs as different ways to keep up students' enthusiasm and engagement.

The central project for our History Club was the student submission to the Kids' Conference, for which they decided to create a 'Choose your own adventure' YouTube-style project that explored a historical mystery. This idea originated from one of the students suggesting a 'Doctor Who' adventure time travel video with students actively trying to solve a historical mystery. The students eventually decided that a 'choose your own adventure' story would be more entertaining. It would also enable us to explore the concept of historical reliability through an interactive format that students use every day. As a group, we spent several months writing and fine-tuning a branching narrative with a cast of different historical and non-historical characters. Viewers are



presented with choices (in the form of prompts for our student actors and links embedded in the videos) that allow them to demonstrate historical thinking skills. Breaking the project down into short, discrete parts also made it easier to film the project. We had access to cameras and a green screen thanks to our media department.

There was one thing in particular that we had a limited supply of: *time*. To help address this, we organised a filming night after school where members of the club could come in and record their scenes. Students took turns organising sets, directing the action and filming different scenes. They displayed an amazing level of adaptability considering the time constraints that they worked under, and most of the project was shot in under three hours. Over the following weeks, the students taught themselves how to edit the footage as well as how to insert backgrounds into green screen footage. This process continued right up until the night before the Kids' Conference, when students were excited by the prospect of presenting but worried the links might not work. It was incredibly rewarding to see our students' work at the conference. Their passion for History and their enjoyment in the process was obvious.

Over the course of the year, we have had to overcome several challenges. Club attendance fluctuated as it competed with the school production, sports days and periodic assessment tasks. Eventually we established our core group of eight students, all of whom attended the Kids' Conference. Each and every one of them contributed

- 1 Jacquelynne S. Eccles, Bonnie L. Barber, Margaret Stone and James Hunt, 'Extracurricular Activities and Adolescent Development,' *Journal of Social Issues* 59, no. 4 (2003): 865-89.
- 2 Peter Seixas and Tom Morton, *The Big Six: Historical Thinking Concepts* (Toronto: Nelson Education, 2012). VCAA 'Rationale and Aims: Victorian Curriculum Foundation-10, History,' Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority, <http://victoriancurriculum.vcaa.vic.edu.au/the-humanities/history/introduction/rationale-and-aims>.



a significant amount of time and effort to the final product. School funding was limited so students created their own costumes by using basic materials procured by their teachers or repurposing costumes from the school production. Despite the challenges, by the end of the year the students were still showing their passion for History. As they discussed what they would learn next year, many mentioned that they were going to do some research 'over the holidays for fun.' Such a response is more than we could have hoped for and we are excited about seeing how this club evolves.

Overall, we have had a phenomenal year with our History Club students. We have gained a new appreciation of historical periods outside our academic expertise because we have followed the particular passions of our students. The club has provided us with a respite from our busy schedules, giving us an opportunity to get to know our students outside the classroom setting. We highly recommend that teachers create a History Club for their school because the rewards far outweigh any concerns you may have.

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### Years 5–8 at Xavier College, Burke Hall

*Josh Judson, Xavier College, Burke Hall*

The greatest sign of success for a teacher is to be able to say, 'The children are now working as if I did not exist.' (Maria Montessori)<sup>1</sup>

Embracing a child's natural curiosity and spontaneity is a crucial foundation for effective teaching and learning. Our vision for History Club was to create a dedicated open space where all students were free to inquire, collaborate, investigate and experiment with their own big ideas in History. Although students require guidance and care, especially in their early learning lives, we as editors must ensure that students build strong self-efficacy as they also learn the skills to be individual life-long learners. At Xavier College, we strive to provide excellence in education. The History Club at our K–8 Burke Hall campus promotes a student-led thinking and learning experience. Students from a variety of ages collaborate with one another to expand their historical knowledge and understanding of theories, concepts and ideas into innovative, worthwhile and creative modes of learning.

History Club was established in 2016 under the guidance of Humanities Coordinator Alessia Schirru and myself. We were inspired by various pedagogies including Ritchart's *Making Thinking Visible* (2011), Bloom's *Taxonomy* (1956) and Puentedura's SAMR Model (2014) that emphasise the importance of using technology throughout learning experiences.<sup>2</sup>

Students were invited to attend an information lunch where the competition and the new History Club were explained in detail. The club was aimed at Years 5–8 and started by sparking students' interest about participating in the upcoming National History Challenge. I had previously served as a regional judge for the competition and had witnessed the exceptional learning and innovation it prompted from an extensive range of students from across Australia, so I knew it would provide great inspiration for our new History Club.

History Club met each week in the library on a Tuesday lunchtime. Students directed the group's thinking and research, which were related to the theme 'Triumph or Tragedy' for the 2016 National History Challenge. Opening up the discussion and encouraging student voice are paramount throughout student inquiry. Students became more engaged and willing to delve deeper into historical figures and events when teachers facilitate discussion rather than teach a formal lesson. History Club gained momentum from some passionate Humanities students and it became evident that the students' approach to their chosen topics led to a natural development of skills that were strongly connected to the Victorian Humanities Curriculum. Peer conversations sparked the consideration of different perspectives, and members began reasoning with historical

- 1 Maria Montessori, cited in Gerald Lee Gutek, *The Montessori Method: The Origins of an Educational Innovation; Including an Abridged and Annotated Edition of Maria Montessori's The Montessori Method* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004), 294.
- 2 Ron Ritchhart, Mark Church and Karin Morrison, *Making Thinking Visible: How to Promote Engagement, Understanding, and Independence for All Learners* (San Francisco, Jossey-Bass, 2011) Benjamin Bloom, *Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, vol. 1 (New York: McKay, 1956); Ruben R. Puentedura, 'Building Transformation: An Introduction to the SAMR Model,' Hippasus, [http://www.hippasus.com/rrpweblog/archives/2014/08/22/BuildingTransformation\\_AnIntroductionToSAMR.pdf](http://www.hippasus.com/rrpweblog/archives/2014/08/22/BuildingTransformation_AnIntroductionToSAMR.pdf). (SAMR: Substitution Augmentation Modification Redefinition)

RIGHT: Excursion with the Xavier Burke Hall History Club



evidence and building explanations for arguments.

Our goal must be to make the big ideas of the curriculum accessible and engaging while honouring the complexity, beauty and power in the process.<sup>3</sup>

On 11 November 2016, History Club members were fortunate to attend the Victorian Remembrance Day Service at Melbourne's Shrine of Remembrance. The students thoroughly enjoyed the activities, which featured addresses from Melbourne's Lord Mayor Robert Doyle, the Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews and Governor Linda Dessau. Highlights included the flypast from RAAF museum aircraft and the Drum Corps March conducted by Caulfield South Primary students. This immersive excursion was extremely valued by the History Club members and it was a pleasure to attend and share the experience with such a passionate group of young historians.

The following year, students were even more enthusiastic about establishing a History Club and entering submissions for the National History Competition. At the lunchtime sessions of History Club, the mammoth roles of facilitators and organisers were shared between the new Humanities Coordinator, Jacinta Stephens, and myself. We found that more teachers had gained interest in this extracurricular opportunity and realised the value of an established community which catered for a diverse

range of students and learning needs. The library staff were extremely supportive of the club and served as a vital resource to students' research for the 2017 History Challenge theme, 'Making the world a better place.' Students used their History Club time to inquire further about their topic and seek feedback on their presentation mode.

With the learner at the centre of the educational enterprise, rather than the end, our role as teachers shifts from the delivery of information to fostering student engagement with ideas.<sup>4</sup>

Students within the History Club were completely engaged, committed, passionate and inspired to present their learning using innovative methods. I was consistently impressed with the calibre of student work as well as the methods they chose to present their information and findings, including:

- a group of Year 7 students carrying out a project on the history of aviation that included real clips they had filmed at Tullamarine Airport
- a Year 8 student creating a thorough and detailed model about Cathy Freeman's contribution to sport
- a Year 7 group developing a Minecraft animation clip on World War II
- a Year 6 student presenting the life and times of Nelson Mandela in a series of artistic vignettes of his life with Bob

<sup>3</sup> Ritchart et al., 26

<sup>4</sup> Ritchart et al.



LEFT: Flip-clock student project that was also presented at the ACU Kids' Conference.

Dylan's 'Blowin in the Wind' music accompanying it in the background.

A Year 6 student, who designed a clock highlighting the roles of women during World War II, has this to say about History Club:

I had set a goal this year to join new clubs and do a lot of different things, so when History Club was announced I thought 'Why not?' I am passionate about history and was up for a challenge so I joined. I decided to do my project on Women in Wartime, as I think women don't get enough recognition for their efforts in war. I was going to do something with a normal clock but then I found a flip clock, and knew it was better. On one side of the clock are quotes and

thoughts of my own on women in combat, and on the other side are pictures, dates and descriptions of women in combat that create a picture timeline on Women in Wartime. In the end, the National History Challenge was a great and valuable experience and I am extremely glad and grateful I had the opportunity to do it.

Having a supportive school community has been absolutely vital for the ever-growing success of History Club. I count myself privileged to be a part of a club and group of people who show dedication, passion, diligence and enthusiasm in a discipline area that is so vital in shaping our future. I am most excited to see what's next in store for the Xavier College, Burke Hall, History Club.