

Effective Ways of Teaching History

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Abstract

There is normally a complaint against the teaching of history that the past events had to be narrated and as a result teaching becomes very dry and insipid. Dates are mentioned frequently and the past events are described by the teacher of history. But this is partially true. History educators also can create more effective ways to teach history to students. They can incorporate primary sources into classroom discussions. They can also make use of local issues to connect students with the past. The teacher had to stimulate the interests of his students to make his teaching lively and interactive. Historians could devise and share the techniques they have found to be most effective in their teaching careers.

Keywords: Teaching, History, Effective

The term history is derived from the Greek word *historia* which meant information or an enquiry designed to elicit truth. There is no universally agreed definition of history. It has been defined differently by different scholars. Burckhardt says, 'History is the record of what one age find worthy of note in another.' ¹ H.G.Wells thinks, 'Human history is in essence a history of ideas.'² It is a pleasure to teach and learn History. It is why history, 'is often said to be the queen or mother of the social sciences. It outdates the other social sciences, having appeared in schools long before the others.'³

Periodicals, Journals and Newspapers

They are an important source of knowledge. They provide the latest information regarding the searches and researches in the field of history. They develop awareness regarding the developments in the ideologies of great personalities, growth of various institutions, the transformation of political parties, and their programmes, social and economic developments etc. They tell us about history in the making. The newspaper advertisements also suggest the culture and trends. The teachers can make use of such things as well. Sometimes students may encounter unexpected results. For example, when students of a university in America were asked to notice the changes in the outlook of the early 1920s, they noticed that newspapers seemed to target men, while the ones in the late 1920s tended to target women. So this suggested about changes in advertising and in culture.

Local and regional newspapers can throw light on any issue in a variety of ways, for example, how local people dealt with World War II on the home front. Teachers can find out what values were important in the 1940s compared to the 1920s. Teachers might have them locate the issue of the local paper for the day they were born or the day their parents were born. Teachers should focus on the new trends by looking at media like publicity material such as advertising, local historical anecdotes. They can provide a brief history and the ways in which the events took shape.

Knowledge of ICT

The teachers of history should become expert in ICT. They should learn about the ways in which the Internet can enrich their teaching. They should sign up for a listserv in their field. There are listserv for history teachers, for American history, world history, and every imaginable branch of the field. They should find out the best web sites for the topics they are teaching and pass them on to their students and then discuss what they are learning on those sites. Just as teachers teach them how to discriminate between useful and poor historical printed sources, they must teach them to use the same discrimination with electronic sources. Students have to be taught that just because something is printed in a

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book does not make it true. Teachers have to make very clear that just because something is on the Internet does not make it true. Teachers have to ensure the authenticity of the source of the information. This determines reliability of the material. Such a practice will enable students to have a better understanding of the past. Students will learn a skill that they can use in other aspects of their lives. When teachers make history exciting for their students, they are motivated to learn more and thus develop a deeper understanding of the meaning of the past. Henry Johnson rightly highlighted the quality of a good teacher of history, 'To make the past real is to imagine material conditions and events and to reproduce in ourselves some resemblance of the mental states that determine these conditions or events or were determined by them.'⁴ ICT can be helpful in inventing such kind of a situation.

Abundant Use of local history

'Teachers should make use of local history.'⁵ Some historical development may make a lot more sense to a student if he or she can see a local manifestation of it. For example, teaching the history of Indian Independence, students can get bored if not taught psychologically. If a teacher is teaching in Sardarshahr or Kishangarh, he can try to cite the name of the local freedom fighter and can relate the events of the local freedom fighter. This exercise does several things: it demonstrates a primary source; it shows what Indian freedom struggle meant to ordinary people and it gets the students to interact with the past. These historical figures are real flesh and blood heroes right there in the county in which they teach. It is most likely that students will remember freedom struggle a lot better than if they had just read about it in the textbook. Alternatively, the teachers can ask students to read local newspaper accounts of the freedom struggle. Teachers can even use local history in teaching world history.

Positive Attitude & Enthusiasm

Enthusiasm can change the whole atmosphere in the class. It is the first and most important way to bring life to any classroom. Teachers' enthusiasm for the topic and teaching is the key to success. The lack of enthusiasm is injustice to the students.

Teachers of history have to remain inspired so that they can inspire their students. To be inspired, they must love what they teach. They need to know their subject and learn something more about it each day. And they must make what they teach a part of them. Nehru has mentioned in his book, 'a study of history should teach us how the world has slowly but surely progressed.'⁶ When their students see and understand these qualities, they should be inspired and enthusiastic about learning history.

Well prepared secondary sources

Secondary sources are significant for contextualizing and

making sense of those rich firsthand sources. Although the teachers may or may not assign these works, it is their job to prepare their students by giving them the background they need to fully understand the primary sources. And secondary sources provide that framework or context.

Presentation from the viewpoint of Today

Teachers should stop thinking of history as battles and wars, kings and presidents and start thinking in terms of race, class, and gender. Today, these things matter very much in students' lives. Sexuality and geography or local situations are equally crucial. This is how the students identify themselves. If teachers are going to teach secularism, they have to teach respect for different races, classes, genders, and sexualities. With senior students, they may even be able to introduce the idea of how they construct these categories.

Use of Audio and Visuals

Teachers of history should make use of music and film to appeal to those senses not necessarily stimulated by reading. Music can touch the students' emotions in a unique way. Many a time the teachers struggle to break ice but initiating a discussion with a song can break the ice very easily. They can help the students develop their listening skills by printing out the lyrics of the songs for them. It shows how important those words are to teachers and it especially helps them to understand songs sung in a different dialect. Teachers should not hesitate to play different versions of a song to illustrate how people can take a song from one context and reshape it for another purpose. A good example of that is the Freedom movement song, "Vandematram?" which was regarded an important song of the Indian freedom movement.

Songs are able to express very different feelings if they are performed for an audience at a concert as opposed to being captured on tape as part of a mass meeting. Films, too, are able to a powerful way to invite students' attention. But teachers should be careful not to use films to replace teaching. Instead, teachers should tell their students what to look for in the film. The film should be paused at critical points and the feedback from them should be solicited. Teachers should not feel compelled to show the film in its entirety. Instead the film should be used as any other source. Teachers should remember that the film is a tool to help him convey a deeper understanding of the historical period in a better way that he is teaching.

Less Reliance on textbooks

Too many history textbooks tend to be dull, boring, and insipid. They cannot really eliminate the textbook entirely, but they should not make it their sole authority. Let the textbook guide the outline for the course, but teach

from other sources, especially primary sources, as well. They should get hold of the best historical sources that are a pleasure to read. For example, when they study pre-Independence era of India, have the students read Narratives of Indian writers, dramatists, poets who have described the lives of Indians at that time. These are all primary sources and there are plenty of other great examples they can use. They should choose sources that have had the greatest impact on the fellow Indians. Not only will they inspire the students, but they can also teach them with passion. Preparation is the key to making the most of these sources. Teachers should give students questions that will get them to look for important ideas and points while they read. They should provide an opportunity to students to dramatize the situations. Such an exercise will make students active and seek their active participation 'It is sometimes assumed that children are born actors and have a dramatic instinct, their attempts to dramatize stories must naturally be successful and have an educational value. But a child's dramatic instinct is essentially imitative. A very young child will often do something quite spontaneously in imitation of another's action.'⁷

Conclusion

Teachers of history have to be innovative. They should always think of novel ideas. They should incorporate Current Issues, Local History, Music and Film, Enthusiasm, Primary Sources, well-written Secondary Sources, and the New Technology into their teaching of history. Such a teaching style will stimulate their students to learn more about history and they will enjoy history instead of regarding it a dry and insipid subject.

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