

History in Schools

Annotated Bibliography

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Introduction

A good deal of the discussion around history in schools relates to the political contexts in which such education occurs. As such, one must possess an awareness and understanding of the society in which history education is undertaken. There is not, then, a readily accessible single historiography of 'History in Schools' which covers the many variations on this theme, although there are many useful analyses of the ways in which history education has changed and shifted over time in particular countries. In addition, while this is a topic that can readily be subjected to historical analysis, it is also often something of a live political issue, and our work thus can stray from historical analysis into the realms of political science and international relations, sociology and, unfortunately, conflict studies.

History and the nation

Barbara Taylor, Peter Mandler and Ed Webb, 'History, the Nation and the Schools', *History Workshop* [Digital Magazine], 19 March 2011, <https://www.historyworkshop.org.uk/education/history-the-nation-and-the-schools/>.

This piece provides an excellent overview and reflection upon the controversy surrounding the role of history in UK schools following Michael Gove's proposed reforms and calls for a return to 'our island story'. The contributions come from two professional historians and a London history teacher.

Mary Catherine Woolley, 'Experiencing the History National Curriculum, 1991–2011: Voices of Veteran Teachers', *History of Education*, 48:2 (2019), pp. 212–32.

This article reflects on the experiences of the National Curriculum change in teaching history in England schools after 1991 and looks to foreground the perspective of teachers who were asked to implement these changes. The article is based on interviews with history teachers, and this approach will help students to think about the methodology and techniques of oral history as well as exploring the complicated relationship between devising policy and delivering curriculum changes in the classroom.

Rachel D. Hutchins, *Nationalism and History Education: Curricula and Textbooks in the United States and France* (New York and London: Routledge, 2016).

This volume examines in detail the manner by which the state looks to transmit its agreed version of history to schools, and ultimately to its citizens, through the production of school textbooks. The examination of social, demographic and cultural shifts in the United States and France since the 1960s is a key context for the volume's discussion, as it charts how these two countries grappled with representing an 'unstable past' to young children via classroom texts. It makes close connections between the state, university academics and the production of history in the classroom.

History teaching in different national contexts

David Cannadine, Jenny Keating and Nicola Sheldon, *The Right Kind of History: Teaching the Past in Twentieth-Century England* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2011).

This book was published shortly after the controversy surrounding the government review of history's place in England's national curriculum. The work is a survey of the history of history teaching in English state schools and is based on a wealth of archival material as well as an impressive collection of oral histories giving first-hand testimonials of teaching history, and the experience of being taught history, during the twentieth century. Some of this primary source material can be found at the 'History in Education' website: <https://archives.history.ac.uk/history-in-education/about.html>. The volume shows how English schoolchildren were comparatively poorly and meagrely taught about their national history until relatively recently (unless one was destined for academic achievement and perhaps a role in local or central government); although the controversy over what subjects should be taught and how is clearly a longstanding one.

Karina Korostelina, 'War of Textbooks: History Education in Russia and Ukraine', *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, 43:2 (2010), pp. 129–37.

In the light of Russia's ongoing invasion of Ukraine, Karina Korostelina's excavation of the ways in which the two countries struggled over the teaching of their respective pasts is both prescient and urgent. The author, who worked for the Institute of Conflict Analysis and Resolution at George Mason University, describes the 'unpredictability' of the countries' pasts by examining three generations of history textbooks since the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, and describing the generational shifts that occurred in the prescribed history curricula of their schools. The manner in which the same events – such as the famine of 1932–3 or the Second World War – are presented differently in the school textbooks of these countries gives an object lesson in the ways in which contemporary contexts help to shape the historian's view of the past, and how this past is presented in state schools.

Donnalie Jamnah and Jonathan Zimmerman, 'Policy Dialogue: The War over How History Is Taught', *History of Education Quarterly*, 62:2 (2022), pp. 231–9.

This is an informative transcript of a discussion between the journal editors about the 'History Wars' which have characterized the American education system, particularly in light of Trump's weaponization of history as part of the 'culture wars' in that country. The discussion provides an excellent context for the discussion of the clash between the 1619 Project and the 1776 Commission with which the chapter on 'History and Schools' in *A Practical Guide to Studying History* (second edition) opens. The conversation is an informative exploration of some of the points at issue from a onetime teacher and the president of the History Education Society, and the text also offers links to further reading.

Stefan Berger, Mark Donovan and Kevin Passmore (eds), *Writing National Histories: Western Europe Since 1800* (London: Routledge, 1999).

Although this volume is not explicitly about the teaching of history in schools, it provides an excellent introduction to a variety of contexts in which national histories were conceptualized and written, and how these histories were broadcast and perpetuated. In chapters which cover France, Germany and Italy, the manner in which the state and historians collaborated and sometimes clashed over the production of national narratives provides some excellent parallels for the disputes over history teaching in schools.

'The 1619 Project': <https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html> (accessed on 19 January 2025).

This is the website of the *New York Times Magazine*-supported project that was a deliberate provocation to the established view of America's national narrative. The project sets out to suggest that history education

should acknowledge the advent of slavery in North America in 1619 as an alternative moment of ‘foundation’ for the nation, rather than the usual date of 1776. As part of this project, the initiative developed educational resources and even a curriculum designed to support its position and challenge the established verities of US history education. The governor of Florida, Ron DeSantis, banned the 1619 Project from being taught in the state’s public schools in 2022.

Conclusion

The decision about what and how to teach is always political. The works discussed here demonstrate what has been at stake in history teaching in schools at particular contexts at different moments in time. These examples could have been multiplied, and they will continue to multiply as time goes on. To bring this annotated bibliography up to date then, perhaps the best way to conclude is to encourage you to reflect on your own history education to date, both at school and at university. Looking back, what political or institutional decisions shaped what you were taught? If you are still a student, how are those factors at work in what you are learning about now? You might also think about the potential difference between how educational content is described on paper and what happens in the classroom. Have your own teachers or tutors always agreed with what was in the textbook or in the secondary reading? Did they encourage you to challenge what you read? Thinking about these questions in relation to your own education might also encourage you to think differently about what you have read about history in schools.