

Critical Thinking Skills for Students: Curriculum and Practice in Higher Education

Author: Heather Goode

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Reviewed by

Franklin A. Lewis

University of South Africa

franklinaLewis@gmail.com

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In *Critical Thinking Skills for Students: Curriculum and Practice in Higher Education*, Heather Goode provides a practice-oriented study of how critical thinking is conceptualised and enacted in South African higher education. Grounded in her doctoral research, Goode uses a qualitative case study to examine the interplay between curriculum design, assessment and professional teaching practices in higher education institutions. Her focus is placed on first-year students entering higher education in a context where unequal pre-university education increasingly demands for greater academic support for students and transformation of the curriculum.

Goode does not analyse critical thinking as a decontextualised skill or universal cognitive outcome; however, her analysis is situated within the lived experiences of South African university lecturers. Through in-depth interviews, Goode highlights how lecturers from diverse disciplinary backgrounds interpret and implement critical thinking outcomes in their classrooms. Their reflections, often shaped by collaborative communities of practice, reveal both the opportunities and constraints presented by institutional imperatives, such as standardised learning management systems and policy-aligned assessment frameworks.

A significant portion of Goode's book addresses how tools like Bloom's Taxonomy are used to design assessments and structure cognitive demands. While Goode recognises the value of such frameworks, the author also cautions that their application is neither uniform nor straightforward. Instead, she reveals how contextual factors such as disciplinary norms, institutional cultures and student demographics mediate the interpretation and efficacy of these standardised frameworks and systems. Particularly valuable is the book's focus on the first-year curriculum as a transformative space. Goode argues that early exposure to critical thinking, when scaffolded effectively, can set the foundation for long-term academic engagement. The author makes a strong case for professional development that is not merely compliance-driven, but transformative and embedded within institutional culture.

For history teachers and teacher education lecturers, particularly those concerned with democratic citizenship, epistemic justice and curriculum decolonisation, this book offers both theoretical and practical insights. A limitation of the book is that the case study is drawn from a private higher education institution. However, the findings succeed to resonate more broadly and suggest fruitful areas for further research. These studies may include comparative analyses across public and private institutions and a deeper engagement with indigenous knowledge systems.

In summary, Goode's book is a valuable and timely contribution to the scholarship on teaching and learning in higher education. It will be of particular interest to researchers, curriculum designers, lecturers and teachers who are committed to fostering critical thinking and inclusive pedagogical practices. While rooted in the South African post-apartheid context, the book's insights resonate broadly in a global educational landscape which is increasingly challenged by a resurgence of conservative ideologies. Goode's work, thus, offers both a locally grounded and globally relevant framework for advancing critical and transformative teaching in higher education.

Teachers and the Epistemology of History

Editors: Henrik Åström Elmersjö and Paul Zazanian

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Reviewed by

Natasha Robinson

University of Oxford

natasha.robinson@education.ox.ac.uk

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This edited volume, *Teachers and the Epistemology of History*, begins with a striking observation: that understanding how we know what we know—the epistemology—is often seen as harder in history than in other school subjects. This challenge, argue the editors, is exacerbated by the multiple and often contradictory aims of history education—like promoting national cohesion and the ability to engage critically with historical evidence—each with different assumptions about what history is and for. The nineteen chapters of this book explore how history teachers respond to this tension, in ways both intentional and unintentional.

The book is divided into three parts, admittedly with significant overlap. Part 1 ‘Epistemology and Context’ reflects on how different contexts might have implications for teachers’ epistemologies. Part 2 ‘Professional Development and Reflections on Applied Epistemologies’ looks at how various interventions might influence teachers’ epistemological beliefs. Part 3 ‘Reflections on Measurements and Instruments’ is an overview of research regarding how epistemological beliefs and epistemic cognition are measured. A range of contexts are discussed, including Sweden, South Africa, the Netherlands, Canada, Turkey, Czech Republic, Taiwan and Norway.

Many, if not most of the chapters in this edited volume refer to the three-level-model of copier, borrower, criterialist epistemic stances developed by Maggioni (2010), and which Maggioni herself reflects on in Chapter 13. Within this model, a person taking a copier stance believes that history provides a copy of the past and that history is, therefore, fixed. A person taking the borrower stance would consider history to be subjective and borrow sources that fit their own view of a valid narrative. Lastly, a person holding a criterialist stance would see history as interpretative and would use disciplinary criteria to establish