

2015

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This article was originally published as:

Gare, D. (2015). Subversion and freedom in the teaching of history. *Studies in Western Australian History*, 29, 183-196.

Original article available here:

<https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=896250047469490;res=IELAPA>

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Subversion and Freedom in the Teaching of History

Deborah Gare

On a summer's evening in 1992, the year I commenced my undergraduate studies at the University of Western Australia, I gathered with hundreds of other nervous young students and their parents amongst the orange seats of Winthrop Hall. We had just received our offers for a place within the Faculty of Arts. Around the walls were clustered academics from the humanities and social sciences, and on that night we were to consider the various disciplines we could pursue in our degrees. This was the first time that I met Tom Stannage, and even now I remember it. He delivered a welcome address from the stage. He told us to be bold, do great things, have fun and change the world. He was inspiring, he was engaging and he was charismatic. The temptation to enrol in his first year history unit was understandably strong. 'But,' I said aghast to my mother, 'he teaches *Australian* history!'

My experience of Australian history to that moment, like that of so many other school children, had been depressing. Anna Clark has found multiple stories of woe in her reviews of history in schools. In Darwin, for example, a Year 12 student reported that she would prefer to learn any history but that of Australia: 'I remember doing it heaps in primary school and it was really boring, and it still is, and Australian history just makes me want to cry.'¹ In my case, I had last studied Australian history when I was in Year 4, where it was taught by the kindergarten teacher. It seemed to consist entirely of tedious Burke and Wills stories, those explorers lost on camels in the desert, and was so boring to all of us (including the teacher) that she interspersed the lessons with photographs of her family holiday to Disneyland. These were the days before a national curriculum, when the teaching of Australian history was not compulsory. Every other teacher I later had was so convinced of the tedium of Australia's history that they had the good sense to avoid it all together. And so did I, until that moment, and I continued to avoid it in my first, second and third years at university.

In the end, it was Stannage's visionary teaching, passion and relationship with students that convinced me to be brave enough to enrol in his Honours seminar on the making of Australian history. It was a transformative experience: suddenly, Australia's past was alive! It was dangerous. Its stories were evocative. Its politics were bitter and

1 Anna Clark, 'The History Question: Correspondence', *Quarterly Essay*, no. 24, 1 December 2006, p. 54.

divided. Its society was challenged by persistent inequality and its narrative infused by myth. This was a story worth reading.

Tom Stannage was, after all, a man with important things to say. It was as evident in his classroom as it was in his published works and public lectures. Difficult consequences occasionally erupted from those things that he said, affecting him personally and sometimes his family. Such fallout was most noticeable after the controversies of his 'Uncovering Poverty' paper in the 1970s and his 'Pioneer Myth' lecture in 1985.² But even in his later career Stannage was unafraid to say things that mattered and was prepared to damn the consequences for doing so.

Imagine, then, the experience of the undergraduates in his weekly classes. They were regularly treated to the Stannage vision. They were *entreated* to make a difference, and to rise above the ordinary. After all, that's what Stannage did himself: he made a difference and he rose above the ordinary. As a result he was honoured with the inaugural Prime Minister's award for University Teaching in 1997. Within a year he was promoted to full professor at UWA, made a Member of the Order of Australia (AM) and elected to the Academy of Social Sciences.³

In the wake of his national teaching award, Stannage delivered two addresses that he called 'The Freedom to Teach'.⁴ The first was to the Australian National University (ANU) in 1999, and the second, in 2000, was to Curtin University shortly after his appointment there as the Executive Dean of Humanities. His paper was a powerful stand against the political and bureaucratic pressures then building on university teachers. It was also a clarion call regarding the decline in confidence and morale that, Stannage believed, risked sapping the creative energy of teachers of the humanities and social sciences. He called upon academics to work subversively, to challenge the restrictions to freedom within learning, and to be 'hackers', intent on inventiveness. 'We will,' he cried, 'mock those who follow pre-ordained plans. We will struggle against the trolls who will deny us access to our students.'⁵

Two of his favourite poems surfaced in the address: Wallace Stevens' 'Man With the Blue Guitar', and Brian Patten's 'The Projectionist's Nightmare'. It was from the latter that Stannage drew inspiration for his thunderous response to the bureaucratisation of higher education. 'This is the projectionist's nightmare,' writes Patten: an audience has gathered, a movie has started, and a bird flies into the screen just as the scene of lovers in a garden is displayed. The bird's lifeless body slides down the screen, its blood and intestines dispelling the romantic moment. "This is no good,' screams the audience, / 'This is not what we came to see.'" Tom had first encountered the poem while a student at Cambridge, where he heard Patten himself read it. It remained a life-long muse for him.⁶ In this instance, he drew on its ideas to condemn what he called the 'master image'

2 C.T. Stannage, 'Uncovering Poverty in Australian History', *Early Days: Journal of the Royal Western Australian Historical Society*, vol. 7, 1976; reprinted as C.T. Stannage, 'Uncovering Poverty in Australian History' in Penny Russell and Richard White and Russell (eds), *Pastiche 1: Reflections on Nineteenth Century Australia*, Sydney, 1994; and C.T. Stannage, *Western Australia's Heritage: The Pioneer Myth*, Nedlands, 1985.

3 Tom Stannage, Interview with Mark Israel, transcript, 12 May 2011, p. 5. Maria Stannage.

4 C.T. Stannage, 'The Freedom to Teach' (1999), in Deborah Gare and Jenny Gregory (eds), *Tom Stannage: History from the Other Side, Studies in Western Australian History*, vol. 29, 2015.

5 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach'.

6 Maria Stannage, Correspondence to Deborah Gare, 9 September 2014.

prescribed in university education—as it affected ideology, pedagogy, mission, delivery, content and more. He drew from Bell Hooks' *Teaching to Transgress*⁷ and confessed that:

I am concerned that we teachers may be on the edge of succumbing to a set of master images about what is and what is not best practice in teaching. ... The master image is there in our mind's screen now. It is bureaucratic, and it may be ideological. In both elements it poses dangers to the freedom to teach.⁸

Fifteen years later, however, we could argue that the architects of the master image have won. The Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) was convened at about the time that Stannage, by then a Dean, was declaring 'I trust the teachers to teach'.⁹ It has since been replaced by the Tertiary Education Quality and Standards Agency (TEQSA); our universities' funding and accreditations are dependent on meeting its quality control agenda. Our History majors are—or ought to be—responsive to national standards delivered by the Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) before its demise. Our degrees, majors and units are shaped by approved learning outcomes which, in turn, are driven by what Stannage called the 'tactical response groups' of a university: its staff development and quality control offices.¹⁰ Academic research and administrative expectations—much of which is not accounted for in workload models—leave increasingly little time for teaching preparation or direct engagement with students. While universities, particularly in the 'Group of Eight', have sought to improve their international rankings, emphasis on research practice appears to have seen a commensurate decline in the quality of teaching. In 2014, the same year that UWA rose to a ranking of 81st amongst the top research universities in the world, the *Good Universities Guide* published a severe critique of the university's teaching quality—ranking it the lowest of all universities in the state in that category.¹¹ The controls which surround teaching and learning today make one thing abundantly clear: a master image is securely in place.

Yet Stannage remained an optimist. As an urban historian he argued that cities had already resisted a master plan. Universities could, too.¹² How might we, then, shed the master plan and teach masterfully? Good teaching matters; Stannage made that much clear. Further than that, good teaching is personal: it is achieved through relationship and it can transform lives.

Provocation and Inspiration

The boxes of Stannage's archives at his home in Chester Street are filled with his research and teaching papers. They are like torn remnants of his fire and passion—both as they appeared in print and in the classroom. There are the slides of those paintings he

7 Bell Hooks, *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the practice of freedom*, New York, 1994.

8 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach'.

9 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach'.

10 *ibid.*, p. 4.

11 Bethany Hiatt, 'UWA Gets Thumbs Down For Teaching', *West Australian*, 14 August 2014, <https://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/24710471/uwa-gets-thumbs-down-for-teaching>. [9 September 2014].

12 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach'.

displayed in class, like the slides which he persuaded the University Librarian in the 1970s, Leonard Jolley, to daringly purchase for the university at great cost.¹³ Stannage's love of artistic representations of the Australian landscape was made evident in *Embellishing the Landscape*,¹⁴ but that interest was already well known to his students. They had been treated to the visual richness of Streeton's 'Purple Noon's Transparent Light', Tom Roberts' 'The Breakaway' and other Australian treasures for years by this time.

There are boxes and boxes of teaching ephemera at Chester Street—unit outlines, copies of student essays, hastily scrawled lecture notes, taped lectures, and endless pages of reading lists. Indeed, one of my most enduring memories of studying with Tom is the two or three pages of recommended readings he offered up to students for weekly tutorials. It was a smorgasbord of influence from which an undergraduate might choose, a comprehensive list of history and literature that Stannage compiled in the hope that from within its diversity students might find something to fire their imagination and ignite their passion. Scattered among the ephemera are hundreds of images of historical events, landscapes and people (there are dozens of Margaret Thatcher—she ignited his furious passion perhaps more than any other figure) which Stannage copied and pasted the old fashioned way onto the student handouts he circulated in each lecture.

Stannage's passion and fury rise from the abundance of these papers. His voice, his smile, his gaze are conjured by the reading of a hand-written lecture, in holding a photographic slide up to the light, by shuffling through pictures. Powerful memories return as I stand in the middle of this extraordinary material: of Paul Kelly's 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' sounding through Arts Lecture Room 8, where his Ashes of Empire unit was taught; of the impenetrability of Tom's handwriting (it was worse than a doctor's scrawl), and of returning defeated to his office, requesting a verbal translation of the written feedback he had given to a recent essay.

Among these extraordinary remnants of the master craftsman lies a scrap of paper, a note he feverishly scrawled while preparing for a now-forgotten lecture or manuscript. It may have belonged to his first year Australian history class. Stannage once indicated that his poem about a Cambridge student, 'Ira', should be read 'furiously'.¹⁵ One can imagine him delivering the following passage with the same passionate intensity:

Our history began when William Blake blazed forth in anger against the iniquities and miseries of industrializing England. While England 'turned to pitch' (Herbert) a new Jerusalem was built in the Golden Lands of Australasia—built by the 'knotted hands' of the bitter outcasts of English society. But as we turn into the last quarter

13 Maria Stannage, email to Deborah Gare, 3 November 2014; UWA expanded its slide collection noticeably in the mid-1970s. See Emma Hawkes, 'History of the Collection of The University of Western Australia Library, 1913 – 1999', Centre for West Australian History, University of Western Australia, Nedlands, March 1999, p. 10, www.is.uwa.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/2131036/History-of-the-collections.pdf [9 September 2014].

14 C.T. Stannage, *Embellishing the Landscape: The images of Amy Heap and Fred Flood, 1920 – 1940*, Fremantle, 1990.

15 Tom Stannage, 'Ira', in Dorothy Hewett, *Sandgroppers : A Western Australian Anthology*, Nedlands, 1973, p. 145.

of the twentieth century, the children of Albion are repeating the Blakean sorrows, and the New Jerusalem spins crazily and uncontrollably into 1984.¹⁶

Jill Roe has called Stannage's history 'apocalyptic' at times.¹⁷ It was certainly often the impression experienced by his undergraduates. But therein lies the secret of Stannage as a master craftsman: the ability to excite and inflame and, through that, inspire a love of learning. Therein can be found the means for teachers to 'join with our wondrous students and their immense distrust of totalizing discourses'.¹⁸

Learning in the Quiet Spaces

Given the kind of influence they have—given the power to shape lives and minds—teachers have an enormous moral responsibility. Things sometimes go wrong. Stannage was once noticeably shaken when, at the end of a year in which he introduced first years to Australia's history, he received a card from a young student. On one side, he later recalled, she had drawn pictures of rainbows and sunshine; on the other she had sketched storm clouds. Before taking Stannage's unit, the student confessed, she had held positivist assumptions regarding Australia's history—like the picture of her rainbow. But, by the end of the year, she comprehended that it was the reverse. Her storm clouds evoked the darkness she now perceived in the nation's story. Stannage was shocked—had he really meant to impart such a narrative of despair? In response, he delivered a paper called 'Happiness in Australian History' to an Australian Historical Association conference in 1998. He argued, contentiously, that historians could sing 'All Things Bright and Beautiful' while wearing black armbands. Ironically, he had reached a position not unlike that of Geoffrey Blainey: that the 'balance' of history might be judged or, at least, that there was material to consider on both sides of the ledger.¹⁹

If there is one objective in teaching, Stannage declared, it is to 'release the creative energy of our students'.²⁰ No doubt good university teachers still have this aspiration at the core of their being. But it can be difficult to inspire learning and fire imagination when, as fatigued as many of us are, we labour under the sometimes crippling bureaucratic environment of today's higher education sector. Good teaching takes time—including the time to listen to students—and time is not always a commodity we are given in modern workload models. Instead, it is far easier to trend towards the package delivery of education (and by which I do not mean *learning*). It is far cheaper for universities to run large lectures than it is to offer small-group tuition such as the traditional tutorial. Online learning technologies enable us to provide masses of data to students from the

16 Tom Stannage, 'file note', personal archives, 1983-84. Maria Stannage.

17 Jill Roe, 'The Historian as Activist', in Gare and Gregory, *Tom Stannage: History from the Other Side*.

18 Tom Stannage, 'The Freedom to Teach'.

19 Tom Stannage, 'Happiness in Australian History', Australian Historical Association Conference, Adelaide, 1998; and Tom Stannage, 'Sport', in Deborah Gare et. al., *The Fuss that Never Ended: The life and work of Geoffrey Blainey*, Carlton, 2003, p. 125. See also Geoffrey Blainey, 'Drawing Up a Balance Sheet of our History', *Quadrant*, vol. 37, no. 7-8, July-August 1993, pp. 10-15.

20 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach', p. 10.

first day of their enrolment, including lecture recordings and readings. The provocation of student enquiry is at risk in this environment.

Good learning also takes time, though pressures of the modern economy can make this difficult. The Australian Council for Educational Research found that, in 2011, more than 70 per cent of Australian students earned wages off campus, and that most first years worked for up to 20 hours per week. It also found that about a third of students spent between just one and five hours a week in study.²¹ Stannage, in 1998, already estimated that students had 25 per cent less time for study than they had a decade earlier.²² Yet universities have also robbed students of time. A Bachelor of Arts at UWA in the early 1990s required for completion the equivalent of 18 units of study; at ANU it was then 20. These degree models allowed for greater time to learn, read and reflect as a student progressed from first to third year: while a full-time first year enrolment was then four units of study, it fell to just two in a student's third year (or three at ANU). By the time the Australasian Council of Deans of the Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) reviewed the sector's Bachelors of Arts in 2008, all Australian universities had moved to a 24-unit model.²³ My graduating students are now expected to undertake twice as much class time, reading and assessment than I did in my final year, despite the likelihood that they can afford less time to engage with their studies.

How, in such circumstances, can we find it within ourselves to inspire and provoke thought? As good teachers we must sometimes speak less, for it is in the quiet spaces that learning happens and ideas are formed. The writer Aldous Huxley was a member of the Bloomsbury set and best known for his novel *Brave New World* (1932). In a provocative essay he called 'The Dangers of Good Teaching' (1927), Huxley wrote of the tension which exists between teaching and learning. The 'more accomplished a teacher is in the art of lecturing or coaching,' wrote Huxley paradoxically, 'the worse he is as an educator'. Students might be entertained, even engaged, by a great lecturer, Huxley conceded. But the mere delivery of information—however skilful—eliminates students from the learning process by making it unnecessary for them to seek knowledge and form conclusions. The good teacher, Huxley determined, might know how to fill students with 'ready-made knowledge', but information acquired in that form will be inevitably forgotten.²⁴

It is possible that Tom, so engaged with the works of the Bloomsbury set, was influenced by Huxley's ideas regarding teaching. But I think not. In an interview with Mark Israel in 2011, he conceded that for much of his professional career he had barely reflected on an approach to teaching history.²⁵ Indeed, his greatest influence as a teacher was probably his wife, Maria, who was a highly respected secondary school teacher of

21 'Research Briefing', *Australian Survey of Student Engagement*, vol. 8, March 2011, p. 1, www.acer.edu.au/files/AUSSE_Research_Briefing_vol8.pdf [9 September 2014]; and 'The Average Uni Student: How do you compare?', University of Western Sydney, www.uws.edu.au/nuws/cl/past_stories/september_to_november_2011/the_average_uni_student_how_do_you_compare. [24 October 2014].

22 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach'.

23 Deanne Gannaway and Karen Sheppard, 'Benchmarking the Australian Bachelor of Arts: A summary of trends across the Bachelor of Arts degree programs', report commissioned by the Australasian Council of the Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH), Teaching and Educational Development Institute, University of Queensland, 2012, p. 12.

24 Aldous Huxley, 'The Dangers of Good Teaching' (1927), in *The Complete Essays of Aldous Huxley: Volume II, 1926 – 1929*, Chicago, 2000, p. 205.

25 Tom Stannage, Interview with Mark Israel, transcript, 12 May 2011, p. 2. Maria Stannage.

English Literature.²⁶ Nonetheless, Stannage's own ideas came uncannily close to those of 'The Dangers of Good Teaching', particularly his perception that learning takes place 'even in the silence'.²⁷ Teachers must listen to students, he argued, though it is not always easy to do so:

Listening is an act of commitment, not 'mock listening', but genuinely listening to the words. Listening is also an act of courage, making ourselves, as teachers, intellectually vulnerable but seriously considering the idea of the students even if they might be outside our comfort zones.

Listening is an act of generosity, a gift of acceptance of a person's ideas, not an agreement necessarily, hearing the student's point of view, giving time to listen, giving the sense that we are listening for that student. And listening requires patience.²⁸

Thinking with History

The learning process which Stannage described as taking place while listening is, arguably, what Harvard University's Project Zero has more recently called 'visible thinking'. In its broadest sense, the Harvard scholars argue that visible thinking externalises the process of thought. Learners are thereby enabled to better understand their knowledge, synthesise evidence and, through reason, form their own conclusions. Its mission, they claim, is 'not only learning to think but thinking to learn'.²⁹ Mark Church calls it 'minds-on', rather than hands-on, learning.³⁰ By listening to students—by providing them opportunity to voice their ideas and process a rational argument—teachers are enablers, rather than providers, of education.

Rethinking the skills and knowledge we hope history students acquire could transform the way the discipline is taught at university. We have been given a head start. In 2010 and 2011 the ALTC convened a national standards project in preparation for the introduction of TEQSA. Discipline scholars were appointed to lead the sector's discussion regarding minimum graduate standards. Those disciplines which operate under professional accrediting bodies had little to do beyond affirming their courses met established standards. Few templates, however, existed for disciplines of the liberal arts to follow. History was anointed by the ALTC as one of two 'demonstration disciplines', and it slowly worked towards an agreed set of Threshold Learning Outcomes (TLOs). The process required extensive national discussions between universities, government, employers, students and such peak bodies as the AHA to articulate an agreed set of outcomes that History graduates should achieve. A quick glance indicates that the TLOs require outcomes in knowledge, research, analysis, communication and reflection; when

26 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach'.

27 Stannage, Interview with Israel, p.2.

28 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach'.

29 David Parker, 'Foreword', in Ron Ritchhart et.al., *Making Thinking Visible: How to promote engagement, understanding, and independence for all learners*, San Francisco, 2011, p.xiv; see also 'Visible Thinking', official project website, www.visiblethinkingpz.org [4 September 2014].

30 Mark Church, quoted in Ritchhart, *Making Thinking Visible*, p. 9.

wielded unthinkingly by bureaucrats and curriculum planners the standards could come frighteningly close to the 'master image' which Stannage warns against. Yet in themselves the TLOs are a form of subversion and resistance: rather than allowing federal policy to shape the teaching of history, the ALTC project was an attempt by the discipline itself to define its essential character. The list was forged collaboratively and framed in a way that enabled flexibility and freedom within.³¹ The TLOs therefore have a deeper value that we may be able to make use of. When looking below the surface, it is clear that they aspire to deep student engagement with evidence, problem solving, synthesis of knowledge and argument, interrogation of source materials, and a reflective and rational approach to argument. They may enable us to train students to think *with*, in addition to think *about*, history.

Thinking with history is an outcome that the Pulitzer Prize-winning historian, Carl E. Schorske, has also explored. Thinking with history, he argues, allows the past to be used in the 'cultural construction of the present and future'.³² In simple terms, history can help analyse and frame the problems of today. In nineteenth-century Europe, Schorske claims, history—even more so than religion—was the principal means used to understand both individual and societal experiences. Europeans and Americans of the modern age, however, have forgotten the past, or, rather, have 'come to do their thinking without history'.³³ Such disciplines as art, architecture, politics, geography, science and music once understood themselves within the contexts of their own histories. Now, however, they 'have defined themselves not so much *out* of the past, indeed scarcely *against* the past, but detached from it in a new, autonomous cultural space'.³⁴

Here, potentially, is both a failing and opportunity in university teaching: to think with history. It is also, arguably, a critical aspiration of the History TLOs. We must shift, therefore, from the delivery of education to the enabling of learning. The prime minister has recently argued that the arrival of Britain's first fleet in Sydney in 1788 is the 'most defining' moment of the nation's history.³⁵ I want my students to have knowledge of that event, certainly. But I would prefer them to think *with* it: to assess why it mattered that settlements in Western Australia and South Australia were established without convicts, for example; to consider how other experiences of frontier wars might be understood, by comparison; or to interpret the European Enlightenment, scientific revolution and global expansion of the age with reference to the role of Australia's early colonies.

It remains important for teachers to understand, too, that there are different types of thinking processes, each of which can be of use in the classroom. These are functions that we should strive to provoke in those quiet spaces, in the times when we are not talking at but listening to our students. The Visible Thinking project team have developed

31 The ALTC-funded 'After Standards' project was further evidence of the discipline's own empowerment to define those values most important to it, as well as its attempt to take ownership of curriculum renewal. See Sean Brawley (et.al), *After Standards: Engaging and embedding history standards using international best practice to inform curriculum renewal*, Office for Learning and Teaching, Commonwealth of Australia, Sydney, 2001.

32 Carl E. Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism*, Princeton, 1998, p.3. See also John E. Toews, 'Review of Carl E. Schorske, *Thinking with History: Explorations in the Passage to Modernism*', *Central European History*, vol. 34, no. 1, 2001, pp. 101-112.

33 Schorske, *Thinking with History*, dustjacket.

34 Schorske, *Thinking with History*, p. 4.

35 Mitchell Nadin, 'First Fleet: Australia's 'defining moment'', says Tony Abbott', *The Australian*, 29 August 2014.

an ‘understanding map’—eight thinking moves that build a rational development of knowledge and comprehension. The objectives of this list look uncannily like those of the eight History TLOs, meaning that the map might provide lecturers with the tools to realise the discipline’s aspirations in their classrooms. Students should visibly engage, writes Ron Ritchhart, in different forms of thinking:

1. Observing closely and describing what’s there
2. Building explanations and interpretations
3. Reasoning with evidence
4. Making connections
5. Considering different viewpoints and perspectives
6. Capturing the heart and forming conclusions
7. Wondering and asking questions
8. Uncovering complexity and going below the surface of things.³⁶

If we aspire that our students will think ‘with’ history, then it is essential they are provoked to think for themselves. Students must, therefore, become an active part of the classroom learning functions. We can no longer accept the teaching philosophy articulated by some colleagues, ‘If I said it, that means they learned it!’. Nor can we leave unchallenged the idea that ‘I may be [teaching] wrong ... but I am doing it in the proper and customary way.’³⁷ Though many of us are increasingly attempting diverse approaches in the classroom, at least one student described her university history courses as ‘First you listen to a lecture, then you read a textbook, then you take a test.’³⁸ It sounds suspiciously as though a master image has been in place for decades, does it not? At least in terms of tuition models. Thus ‘historians flirt with calamity,’ concludes Lendol Calder, who complains of ‘worn-out pedagogy’ evident in American university history courses.³⁹ Clark warns similarly. Students, she says,

don’t just want the message, they want to think it themselves, too. History isn’t just something you get taught, it’s a process whereby the student becomes the historian. It’s surprising that, despite all the efforts to make history teaching more engaging and connected for students, many of them describe it as a traditional, staid sort of experience.⁴⁰

36 Ritchhart, *Making Thinking Visible*, pp. 11-13.

37 Lendol Calder, ‘Uncoverage: Toward a signature pedagogy for the History Survey’, *Textbooks and Teaching: Journal of American History*, 2006, www.journalofamericanhistory.org/textbooks/2006/calder.html [9 September 2014].

38 *ibid.*; also, Lendol Calder, conference paper, After Standards Workshop, University of Adelaide, July 2012.

39 Calder, ‘Uncoverage’; and Calder, conference paper.

40 Richard Guillatt, ‘Why Kids Hate Australian History’, *The Australian*, 23 February 2008, www.theaustralian.com.au/news/features/why-kids-hate-australian-history/story-e6frg8h6-1111115620926. [9 September 2014].

Doing History

Reflecting at the end of his career on those lessons learned in teaching, Stannage concluded that if 'students are encouraged to think, they can contribute to the sum of human knowledge from the day they walk into the uni'.⁴¹ Put simply, students can also be *doing* history, just as they are learning it. The History TLOs propel us towards this goal. So do scholars. In a conversation with Inga Clendinnen in *The Quarterly Essay*, Clark argues that:

we need students who can read the past, who can evaluate historical sources, distinguish difference voices, and interrogate its stories. And then they need to be able to write the past. The task extends beyond simply transmitting 'what happened' to teaching students to engage critically with the subject. ...

In other words, we need to teach students to *do* history: to constantly reconcile judging the past from our own present values and empathising with people from another age; to understand how historical interpretations change over time; and to consider different points of view.⁴²

Modern technologies allow us to subvert the master image and creatively engage students to do history. In fact, the doing of history is perhaps easier than it has ever been, as scholars themselves have found, and not just because of the infinite volume of source material now so readily available online. New media allows us to widely disseminate our own research and engage with that of others. It also provides valuable opportunities in the teaching of history. Stannage himself foresaw the transformation which technology would bring to education and confessed that his own style was already superseded by the demands of the digital age. Where he emphasised the value of one-to-one teaching and individual learning plans, he noted, others were teaching classes of 900 students or more.⁴³

Digital technologies have enabled the mass delivery of education and have therefore pleased the university administrators whose responsibility it is to move academics from the classroom to research. There is therefore a dark side that such media brings to education. The ALTC-funded 'Net Generation' project highlighted the tense relationship which can exist between technology and education.⁴⁴ Yet there are many benefits of digital technologies, also, that teachers may take advantage of. By doing so, we might remind architects of the master plan that computers are 'a meeting place, a holder of memory' and, therefore, a tool of humanity.⁴⁵

If academics were slow to appreciate the advantages in learning which new media might bring with it, they are making up for it now. A number of major research projects in Australia and abroad have recently considered how technology might

41 Stannage, Interview with Israel, p. 15.

42 Clark, 'The History Question', pp. 55-56.

43 Stannage, Interview with Israel, p. 12.

44 Gregor Kennedy et.al., *Educating the Net Generation: A handbook of findings for practice and policy*, Australian Learning and Teaching Council, Sydney, 2009.

45 Stannage, 'Freedom to Teach'.

be useful in a university classroom.⁴⁶ Amongst them is in an international project in Science Communication led by William Rifkin at the University of New South Wales.⁴⁷ Their task was to consider whether science students might acquire content knowledge more effectively and better ‘express science content’ by using popular communications technologies of the modern age. Hence science academics in Australia and New Zealand have been evaluating the benefits of using podcasts, website, blogs, videos and other forms of digital technology in their classrooms and assessments.⁴⁸ The results have been striking. According to Rifkin,

The web now allows for cost-effective publication, which can enable student publication to become a mass learning activity, one that can be integrated into coursework. Many more students can now be challenged with learning how to understand and cater for target audiences as well as weighing up the advantages of employing video, audio, images, social networking, and hyperlinked text to enhance their communication. There is also the potential that, through the process of explanation and communication, students can increase their understanding of conceptually difficult content.⁴⁹

Nancy Longnecker has reported on her findings, also. Her science communication students have used podcasts to both learn and communicate an argument to others—another form of visible thinking, you might say—since 2009.⁵⁰

History might learn much, in this context, from science. By publishing student work online through exhibitions, podcasts, short films and other such media, we might extend our act of listening by accepting that students have something worth saying to us and, indeed, to others. There are good practical outcomes of this. In approaching a task that is meant for others (and not just an examiner) to read, students have reported that they engage in a project more seriously: they take more care in researching the subject and in the articulation of an argument. More importantly, however, students can engaged in project work which makes a meaningful contribution to their discipline and their communities.⁵¹ In other words, they can be doing history.

My own experiences have certainly confirmed this. Since 2010 I have included podcast, blogs, exhibitions and short films as assessment activities within my history units at the University of Notre Dame Australia. First year students are regularly set a small group project in which they must record a three minute podcast or short film regarding issues and controversies in Australian history. By linking the podcast questions to key themes

46 See for example, such papers regarding History and new media as Daisy Martin et.al., ‘Historicalthinkingmatters.org: Using the web to teach historical thinking’, *Social Education*, vol. 72, no. 3, April 2008, pp. 140-143; T. Mills Kelly, ‘Using New Media to Teach East European History’, *Nationalities Papers*, vol. 29, no. 3, September 2001, pp. 499-507.

47 William Rifkin et. al., ‘Students Publishing in New Media: Eight hypotheses—A house of cards?’, *International Journal of Innovation in Science and Mathematics Education*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2010, pp. 43-54.

48 *ibid.*, p. 44-45.

49 *ibid.*, p. 45.

50 Nancy Longnecker, ‘Student Publication by New Media: Upending the teaching and learning experiences of undergraduate assessment’, conference paper, Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities annual conference, Magnetic Island, September 2011.

51 University of Notre Dame Australia, ‘HY3018 Australians and the World Wars’, student feedback, Fremantle, 2014.

of the unit, student projects can be played, defended and then debated in class each week—meaningfully extending the relevance of their project throughout the semester. The publication of the best examples each semester encourages students to strive for excellence and provides them with material that can be added to professional portfolios.⁵² Feedback provides conclusive evidence: students were delighted to engage in a project that was ‘not another essay’, found it thoroughly deepened their comprehension, encouraged creativity and equipped them with new skills. Astonishingly, especially for the liberal arts, students claimed that the most significant advantage of the project was that they undertook a group project, appreciating both its collegiality as well as the team building skills it encouraged. Group work was also a disadvantage, they noted, as the real-world experience of scheduling group time was not always convenient.⁵³

Exhibitions can further extend the student challenge and enable them to publish a project of worth. Teaching budgets rarely extend to the provision of professionally designed websites for this purpose, but collaboration with industry or government can often raise necessary funds and add to a project’s value. In 2012, for example, Notre Dame launched a partnership with its own local government, the City of Fremantle, to create an online space in which student research regarding Fremantle history is published.⁵⁴ Projects are now launched each year within the Fremantle Heritage Festival, an event at which up to 70 public guests join us on each occasion. The 2012 project, ‘Fremantle and War’, has now evolved into a significant new book.⁵⁵ In 2013 a project was published regarding the archaeology of Fremantle’s historic west end. Its launch was accompanied by a public tour led by the students themselves. A week later I watched, delighted, as one of our guests walked her own group through the same tour.

Students are just as conscious of the value of their exhibition projects. At the completion of a recent project students considered that the learning experience had been valuable to ‘a huge extent’; had provided them with professional skills; engaged them in meaningful research; and connected them with the community. Specifically, students reported that:

It was compelling and interesting and engaged not only myself in solitary research, but family members, friends and museum and heritage staff. I will keep it always as opposed to an essay. It also inspired me to research further;

It was unique and, I thought, stimulated more research on the topic. Also, it was nice to be able to see your work as a part of something larger—a broader examination of the issues; and

52 ‘History Projects’, University of Notre Dame Australia, www.nd.edu.au/fremantle/schools/arts_sciences/history.shtml/history-projects. [16 September 2014].

53 Deborah Gare, ‘New media opportunities for the ASSH disciplines: A case study in History’, conference paper, Deans of Arts, Social Sciences and Humanities (DASSH) annual conference, Magnetic Island, September 2011.

54 ‘Fremantle History’, University of Notre Dame Australia and the City of Fremantle, www.fremantlehistory.com.au.

55 Deborah Gare and Madison Lloyd-Jones, *When War Came to Fremantle, 1899-1945*, Fremantle, 2014.

It allowed for us to use, to the fullest extent, our research skills but at the same time allowed us to give our own interpretation without the confines of a strict essay style question. These are both crucial in our development as historians.⁵⁶

Technology has, therefore, provided us with the means to be ‘wondrously anarchic’; it has enabled us to fulfil Stannage’s own prophecy that:

there will be a sudden discovery that we teachers, we hackers, are assets to society after all ... while the restoration of the freedom to teach becomes the freedom to learn!⁵⁷

Legacy

How can we evaluate the legacy of a great teacher? Many have tried. Stannage confessed that the coach at Swan Districts Football Club in the 1980s (while he was chairman of selectors), John Todd, was amongst his most powerful teaching influences. Todd taught his players to believe that the best day of the week was game day—the day on which their skill would be on show to the world. Stannage analogised this to the classroom, encouraging students to believe that ‘tutorial day’ was the highlight of the week (and for the same reason). He borrowed from Todd and entreated his students to ‘be bold’.⁵⁸

If good teaching, as I said earlier, is forged through relationship, then Stannage was a great teacher. Many of his former students now value their memories of that relationship. We speak of his legacy and share in its future. Carolyn Wadley-Dowley, for instance, reflected upon his death that ‘Tom was someone who believed that I could do what I was dreaming of doing, where other people had said a blunt no’.⁵⁹ Bobbie Oliver recognised that the gentle mentoring she now offers to undergraduates was learned from Stannage. Kate Hislop recalled his generosity and infectious passion for history, confessing that his influence ‘ripples through my teaching and research’.⁶⁰ Jaime Phillips, director of Palea Projects,⁶¹ claimed that he fostered her interest in social justice ‘and a desire to change the inequality in Australian society’.⁶² Joanna Sassoon remembered Stannage’s sense of humour:

On one occasion I asked him whether there was a standard citation style for theses—an important point if you anticipate a pedant examiner. He just looked at me, his eyes sparkled, and he drew a deep breath and I waited a few moments before his gentle roar, ‘Joanna, you are in an Arts Faculty, and the most important thing is that your page looks beautiful!’⁶³

56 ‘HY3018 Australians and the World Wars’.

57 Stannage, ‘Freedom to Teach’.

58 Stannage, Interview with Israel, p. 4.

59 Carolyn Wadley Dowley, email to Deborah Gare, January 2013.

60 Kate Hislop, email to Deborah Gare, January 2013.

61 Stannage, ‘Freedom to Teach’.

62 Jaime Phillips, email to Deborah Gare, January 2013.

63 Joanna Sassoon, email to Deborah Gare, January 2013.

There comes a time in the teaching cycle of each year that I pause in my lecture and relive a memory from my third year at university. In my mind's eye I see Stannage crossing the platform of Arts Lecture Room 8 to press play on a clunky tape recorder. The sounds of Paul Kelly's 'From Little Things Big Things Grow' fill the room. It followed Stannage's story of Vincent Lingiari, a Gurindji man whose protest led to the restoration of traditional land at Wave Hill by Gough Whitlam in 1975. Returning to the present day I usually share the story with my students, share with them also my own memory of Stannage's classroom, and play the same song. In the weeks after Stannage's death a letter from a student arrived. He had read obituaries in the local papers which had described Stannage's use of art, literature, poetry and music in the classroom. The student wrote that, having read of Stannage the teacher, he now understood why I teach as I do. His words were meant as a condolence, but they were really a tribute to the enduring influence of Stannage.

In that moment it was clear to me. Stannage's own work lives on in the lives of those he influenced. This is the legacy of a great teacher. Students of UWA and of other universities and of other disciplines will experience his influence through the teaching of those who were his former students. Equally, the writing of history in Australia, and especially in Western Australia, will be shaped by the example that he set and the questions he inspired. Other sectors and communities—sport, literature, journalism, museums, architecture, indigenous Australia and others—will be shaped, just as certainly, by the work of those who knew him.