

Beyond 'Bias', 'Opinion' and 'Perspective': Developing Students' Understandings of Historical Interpretations and Accounts

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Abstract: There is widespread agreement amongst history educators that history education should aim to help students understand and explore multiple perspectives on the past. However, as an important body of international research and theorizing indicates, understanding historical interpretations and accounts can present significant challenges for history students and, indeed, for adults. This paper draws on empirical, theoretical and pedagogic work and, in particular, on two data sets developed through two online discussion exercises involving two academic historians, one history education academic and 15 and 73 English 16-19 year old students in discussion and argument about historical interpretations. The paper explores empirical questions about how these students appeared to conceptualize historical interpretations over the course of these discussion exercises and about the extent to which student thinking appeared to change, if at all, during the discussions. The paper will also explore what the data can tell us about effective pedagogic strategies for moving students' thinking on.