

How to Teach History Philosophically

SHARON KAY STOLL

University of Idaho

History, by definition, is a chronological record of significant events, usually including an explanation of their causes. Unfortunately, most history classes are just as boring as this definition. Even sport history classes are taught primarily through descriptive methods, especially in undergraduate classes. Students receive a broad historical background highlighting major sport or physical education leaders, sporting events, scientific discoveries, and changes in profession direction and focus. The history is basic and seemingly uneventful since events and people are studied separately, exclusive of philosophic analysis.

Although descriptive histories may discuss the times, places and events of sport, the true influencing factors – the philosophies of the time and people – causing these directions are not discussed.

Analytical or interpretative histories are better than descriptive histories since they tell why events happen. The historian/teacher explains the underlying reasons why certain events happened and relationships occurred. Interpretive histories can be psychologically based to explain the behavior of certain individuals in sport.

I contend that descriptive and interpretative methodologies are not the answer to how to teach history. Rather, true history can only be known by a philosophical understanding of the historical period. As Merleau-Ponty said, the historian cannot be the common, disinterested, dispassionate, historical observer in the grandstand, complacently viewing the spectacle. The historian must become a philosopher to understand, to teach, and to live the time. The historian/philosopher must act to develop student intellectual skills and enlarge their understanding.

A true understanding of the history of a people cannot be limited to descriptive or interpretative historical classes. Hence, the purpose of this paper is to discuss: 1) Why students believe history to be boring, 2) Why students dislike learning history and philosophy, and 3) Why philosophic methodology could be the answer to an exciting teaching methodology.

The paper also reviews the current demise of teaching positions in sport history, peer group acceptance of history and philosophy in sport, as well as student perceptions of history and philosophy.