



Mini Historiography in School: Encouraging Students to Become Young Historians

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Abstract:

History education has tended to focus on the transmission of a single narrative that is factual and chronological in nature, thus ignoring the critical and constructive dimensions of the historical thought process. This article proposes a *mini-historiography approach* as an innovative learning strategy that encourages students to not just memorize events, but to actively construct historical narratives based on data, sources, and interpretations. Through the practice of *mini* historiography, students are invited to trace traces of local history, conduct field observations, interviews, and document analysis, which are then constructed in the form of historical writings or presentations. This approach not only improves critical thinking skills, historical literacy, and empathy, but also provides space for students to play the role of knowledge producers, not just consumers. This study uses a qualitative study method with classroom observation and analysis of student documents in three high schools in South Sumatra. The results show that mini historiography is able to arouse students' enthusiasm, enrich their understanding of the local historical context, and strengthen cultural identity. In addition, this approach challenges the dominance of large national narratives that often marginalize community history. By involving students as young historians, history education becomes more democratic, contextual, and meaningful. This article recommends the integration of mini-historiography into the history curriculum as a strategic step in building a generation that is historically literate and reflective of the past.

Introduction

History education has a strategic role in shaping the historical awareness of the younger generation. In the Indonesian context, history learning in schools is often still dominated by a single narrative approach that prioritizes memorization of facts and chronology of events. Models like this risk diminishing students' interest in history, while dwarfing their understanding of the complexities of the past. History should not be positioned as a collection of dead events, but rather as a process of reconstructing meaning that is open to interpretation and reflection. As expressed by Seixas (2006), "meaningful history learning requires students to participate in the practice of historical thinking, not just remembering official narratives."

One of the main challenges in history education today is the distance between students and the material being studied. The big narratives in textbooks often feel foreign and far from the students' daily experience. In this situation, it is important to open up space for a more contextual and participatory approach, one of which is through what is called mini-historiography. This approach gives students the opportunity to craft their own historical work—based on local sources, community experiences, and a process of self-investigation—which ultimately places them as active subjects in history learning.

Mini historiography is not only a teaching method, but also a pedagogical strategy oriented towards the development of students' historical skills. Activities such as browsing family archives,

interviewing local figures, and documenting historical sites in the neighborhood allow students to experience history directly and critically. This is in line with the view of Barton and Levstik (2004) that "authentic learning of history is when students learn to think about history as historians think about it." Therefore, encouraging students to write history—even on a small scale—is the first step toward the formation of strong historical literacy.

In addition to developing critical thinking skills, the mini-historiography approach also facilitates the connection between national history and local history. In the context of a plural and diverse Indonesia, it is important for students to understand that the great narrative of the nation's history is formed from the mosaic of experiences of local communities. The history of their hometown, family traditions, or colonial footprints in their small towns are part of national history that is often overlooked in the formal curriculum. Thus, mini-historiography becomes a means to bridge the gap between the narrative of the state and the local identity of students.

On the other hand, this approach also contributes to the decolonization of historical knowledge in the classroom. In many cases, the history curriculum still reflects colonial legacies and hierarchical knowledge structures, where dominant narratives are reinforced and marginal voices are marginalized. When students are given the freedom to dig into the history of their own communities, they indirectly resist a single narrative and open up space for a diversity of perspectives. This supports efforts to democratize history education as initiated by Paulo Freire (1970), where the learning process must allow students to become conscious and independent subjects.

The implementation of mini historiography also requires a change in the role of history teachers from material presenters to learning facilitators. Teachers must be able to guide students in the process of simple research, source validation, and the preparation of historical narratives. This change is in line with the constructivist paradigm in education, which emphasizes that knowledge is built through active interaction between students and their learning environment (Vygotsky, 1978). Thus, this approach requires teachers to have adaptive and reflective pedagogical skills. Furthermore, mini-historiography allows for cross-disciplinary learning that enriches students' learning experiences. In the process of writing local history, students not only learn history, but also literacy, ethnography, geography, and even digital technology skills when the documentation process is carried out in multimedia. This makes mini historiography a bridge between traditional learning approaches and the demands of the 21st century that emphasizes creativity, collaboration, and high-level thinking skills.

The use of mini historiography can also strengthen the relationship between school and community. When students conduct research about local figures or historical sites in their area, the process relives the collective memory of the community and strengthens intergenerational interactions. Schools are no longer closed institutions that only distribute state curriculum, but rather become a space for dialogue between the past and the present involving all levels of society. However, the successful implementation of this approach is highly dependent on education policy support, teacher training, and curriculum flexibility. An education system that is too standardized and oriented towards exam achievement will find it difficult to make room for pedagogical experiments such as mini historiography. Therefore, advocacy efforts and policy reflection are needed so that history education can be more open to innovative approaches rooted in students' realities.

Through this article, the author wants to explore the potential of mini historiography as a pedagogical strategy in history education at the secondary school level. The main focus is on how this approach can encourage students to think and act like young historians—critical of sources, reflective of narratives, and engaged in the creation of historical meaning. This research is expected to

contribute to the development of a more inclusive, participatory, and grounded history learning model.

Historiography is not merely about recounting the past but involves the selection, interpretation, and construction of meaning. Tosh (2015) describes it as a study of both the content and the context of historical writing, including the biases and narrative choices embedded within. Introducing historiography at an early stage—such as through mini-historiography projects—is therefore crucial for fostering students' critical historical consciousness. Mini-historiography is rooted in constructivist learning theory, where students actively build knowledge through social interaction and engagement with their environment. Vygotsky (1978) emphasized the role of educators in guiding learners toward higher-order thinking, including historical reasoning. Within this framework, mini-historiography serves as a medium for project-based and inquiry-driven learning. Seixas and Morton (2013) define historical literacy as the ability to think like a historian—analyzing primary sources, recognizing multiple perspectives, and constructing evidence-based arguments. Mini-historiography enables students to develop these skills through interviews, source evaluation, and writing historical narratives grounded in field research.

This approach also aligns with inquiry-based learning, where students actively interpret rather than passively consume historical knowledge. Levstik and Barton (2001) argue that learners should experience history as a reasoned interpretation grounded in available evidence. Mini-historiography positions students as producers of historical knowledge. By writing local histories, they not only engage with the past but also challenge centralized grand narratives and contribute to the decolonization of historical understanding (Clark, 2001). Echoing Paulo Freire's emancipatory pedagogy (1970), mini-historiography empowers students to reflect on their social-historical realities. It is not merely an exercise in writing but an act of constructing historical agency. Mini-historiography is also a practical form of project-based learning (Thomas, 2000), proven to enhance motivation, collaboration, and higher-order thinking. Local history projects integrate cognitive, affective, and psychomotor domains through research, reporting, and presentation. Teachers play a critical role as facilitators in this process. Wineburg (2001) asserts that history educators should guide students to engage with the past as a contested, interpretive space rather than a set of fixed facts. Thus, training in historical pedagogy is essential.

By researching local figures, traditions, and sites, students build bridges between school and community. This supports community-based learning principles and enriches collective memory. In the digital era, mini-historiography can take new forms—blogs, short documentaries, and virtual exhibitions. Mills and Levido (2011) highlight how digital literacy enhances participation and broadens the representation of history. Challenges such as limited time, access to local sources, and teacher preparedness must be addressed through supportive educational policies, flexible curricula, and resource allocation. In the long term, this approach nurtures a generation capable of not only understanding but also authoring history. Mini-historiography in schools is more than a method—it is a cultural practice that fosters identity formation, collective memory, and critical reflection. In a rapidly changing world, students must be equipped not only to understand the past but to interpret and re-narrate it in meaningful ways.

This study uses a qualitative approach with a case study design, which aims to explore in depth the practice of *mini* historiography in history learning in secondary schools. The case study was chosen because it effectively captured the complexity of the educational context, encompassing the interactions among students, teachers, and learning materials. Yin (2014) states that "case studies are preferred strategy when 'how' or 'why' questions are being posed, when the investigator has little

control over events, and when the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context." This research was conducted in one of the junior high schools in Palembang, involving one class as the main subject. Data collection techniques include classroom observations, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and documentation of *mini* historiography works produced by students during the learning process.

Data analysis was carried out using an interactive model from Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) which includes three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion/verification. The validity of the data is strengthened through triangulation techniques of sources and methods, as well as member checking to ensure the correctness of the researcher's interpretation of findings in the field. This research also pays attention to ethical aspects by ensuring informed consent from all participants, and upholding the confidentiality of the identities of students and teachers. In this context, the qualitative approach allows researchers to explore the meaning and dynamics of students' experiences in the role of young historians in a more in-depth and reflective manner, in accordance with the main objectives of the practice of *mini* historiography oriented towards the contextual and participatory construction of historical knowledge.

Results & Discussions

The results of the study show that the application of *mini* historiography in history classes encourages students' active involvement in the learning process. Students not only become recipients of information, but also play the role of young researchers who dig, interpret, and write their own historical narratives. This process provides space for students to experience history as a constructive process, not just memorizing facts. Many students feel more motivated when given the opportunity to trace traces of local history that are close to their daily lives.

The next finding was the increase in students' critical thinking skills and historical literacy. When writing a mini-historiography, students are trained to evaluate sources, compare different versions of the story, and craft evidence-based arguments. As stated by Seixas and Morton (2013), historical literacy includes the ability to assess historical significance, verify evidence, and understand continuity and change. The mini-historiography activity puts students right in that practice.

In the process of compiling a mini-history work, students demonstrate the ability to identify primary sources from the surrounding environment, such as interviews with parents, community leaders, or family photo archives. Some students even explore family heirlooms or local sites as a narrative foothold. This proves that this approach not only strengthens historical skills, but also strengthens inter-generational relationships and increases awareness of community history.

The application of *mini* historiography also triggered the emergence of alternative historical voices that are often overlooked in the big narratives of textbooks. For example, one of the students wrote a story about refugees from the 1997 social conflict who settled in their village, while the other explored the role of her grandmother as a songket knitter during the colonial era. These narratives enrich historical discourse by presenting local and personal perspectives.

This activity also shows how students form historical identities through the writing process. By tracing their family or community origins, students feel more emotionally and intellectually connected to the past. As Barton and Levstik (2004) say, a meaningful understanding of history must involve "a personal connection to the past and an understanding of its relevance to the present." Mini historiography is a bridge to build these connections.

Teachers play an important role as facilitators in this process. They help students structure research questions, search for sources, and direct narratives to stay accurate and relevant. Teachers also become ethical guardians, especially when students conduct interviews or use family documents. This active and reflective role of teachers is the key to the success of the mini historiography approach in history learning.

Students also show improved written and oral communication skills. When presenting the results of their research, students learn to convey information with a logical and argumentative narrative structure. This strengthens literacy competencies in general, which is very important in the academic world and daily life. Writing history is an exercise in the skill of systematically arranging ideas.

The collaborative aspect of *mini* historiography also emerged significantly. Many students work in small groups to share resources, discuss narratives, and craft a history project together. This collaboration creates a dialogical and egalitarian learning space, as emphasized in Freirean pedagogy (Freire, 1970), that education should be a meeting space between subjects to build collective understanding.

The students' works show the diversity of forms of historical representation. In addition to writing, some students express their research results in the form of visuals such as posters, infographics, and even short documentary videos. This media helps students who have different learning styles to express their understanding of history in a creative and meaningful way. This is in line with the idea of multimodal literacy in 21st century learning (Mills & Levido, 2011).

Finally, the mini-historiography process provides students with a fun, meaningful, and contextual history learning experience. They not only learn about history, but learn to become *young historians*—capable of constructing the narrative of the past from their own point of view with scientific responsibility. This is a small but significant step towards more democratic and participatory learning of history.

Discussion

The results of this study reinforce the importance of transforming the approach in history education from a transmissive model to a constructive and participatory model. When students are given the space to write *mini* historiographies, they enter into a reflective process that is actually at the heart of historical work itself. In this context, learning history is a process of building meaning, not just absorbing official narratives.

The improvement of critical thinking skills and historical literacy seen in this project demonstrates the effectiveness of this approach in fostering 21st century competence. In accordance with the opinion of Wineburg (2001), history learning should teach students "to think historically" by understanding the context, questioning sources, and constructing a balanced narrative. Mini historiography is a vehicle to internalize all these skills.

The local history aspect that emerges strongly in this project proves that students' daily contexts can be a rich and authentic source of history learning. Clark (2001) states that local history is able to "connect the past with personal experience, making history more alive and relevant." In this case, students not only learn history, but participate in reliving forgotten history.

The practice of mini historiography also helps in decolonizing the history curriculum which has tended to be centralistic and elitist. By giving space to fringe narratives, students are invited to understand that history does not belong to a few elites, but belongs to everyone. This is an important step in realizing a more democratic and inclusive history education.

The students' experience in compiling *mini* historiographies forms a critical historical agency. They not only write, but also negotiate the meaning of history from their own perspective. As stated by Rüsen (2004), historical agency is the ability of individuals to understand and give meaning to time in relation to present and future actions. This project helps students put that into practice in real life.

The involvement of teachers as facilitators not only supports, but also reconstructs power relations in the classroom. In this approach, the teacher is no longer the sole authority on historical truth, but rather a learning partner who guides students in the process of searching for meaning. This is in line with a critical education model that places all parties as active subjects.

The affective dimension in learning is also very strong. When students write about their ancestors, village traditions, or local struggle stories, they develop a sense of empathy, pride, and a personal connection to history. This expands the role of history from just science to a space for the formation of human identity and values.

The use of various media and forms of historical representation shows that the mini-historiography approach is also compatible with digital literacy practices. When students write a history blog or make a documentary video, they not only learn about the past, but also develop 21st century technical and communication skills. This is a form of adaptation of historical education that is relevant in the digital age.

Collaboration between students enriches the learning experience and opens up space for meaningful social learning. This process reflects that historical writing is not a purely individual work, but a social action that requires dialogue, negotiation, and solidarity. This is an important lesson for the younger generation in shaping a culture of collective thinking.

Overall, mini-historiography-based learning has been proven to encourage students to become active, reflective, and critical history subjects. This practice can be a strategic alternative to revive history lessons in schools that have been considered boring and irrelevant. By becoming young historians, students not only learn about the past, but also learn to shape the future.

Conclusion

The application of a mini-historiography approach in history learning in schools shows great potential in transforming the way students understand and experience history. Through these activities, students are no longer positioned as passive recipients of historical narratives from textbooks, but as active subjects who research, reflect, and re-narrate history from their own perspectives. The mini-historiography project opens up space for more contextual, personal, and meaningful learning experiences. In the process, students not only understand past events, but also form an emotional connection with their family history and community, which ultimately strengthens their cultural and historical identity as part of society.

In addition to strengthening identity, mini-historiography activities also equip students with an important set of historical skills, such as the ability to evaluate sources, think critically, formulate arguments, and convey evidence-based narratives. This experience of being a "young historian" encourages students to develop a deep historical literacy as well as an awareness of the plurality of history. Through the exploration of local history, students not only expand their understanding of the past, but also bring to life stories that are often marginalized. Thus, this approach indirectly helps educate students to become citizens who are aware of history and are able to interpret the present and future more wisely.

From the pedagogical side, the role of teachers as facilitators is the key in accompanying students through this mini history research process. The active involvement of teachers in guiding,

providing space for reflection, and directing projects with ethical sensitivity makes history classes a space for dialogue and collaboration. With the support of diverse media and an inclusive learning environment, mini historiography has proven itself to be a progressive and relevant history learning strategy in the digital age. Therefore, this approach is worthy of being used as an alternative model in the history curriculum to form a generation of history learners who are active, critical, and aware of the richness of the narratives of the past.

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