

Training Teachers to think Historically: Applying Recent Research to Professional Development

David Neumann

California State University, Long Beach

MANY AMERICANS participate in the time-honored tradition of lamenting the inadequacies of history education in the United States. Pundits and lawmakers offer various suggestions for improving this sorry state of affairs, sometimes by imposing inappropriate solutions. In 2006, concerned that too much ideology had been injected into K-12 history instruction, Florida's government signed into law a requirement that history be taught as "factual, not constructed."¹ This view of history as the simple presentation of facts and the rejection of interpretation seems widely shared by the public, though a fact-based approach to history is one of the chief reasons the public finds classroom history boring. In opposition to this view, however, a consensus has formed recently within the scholarly community centered on the assumption that students learn by constructing factual information into meaningful patterns—patterns that differ from one discipline to another because definitions of knowledge vary across disciplines. As University of Michigan scholars Robert B. Bain and Jeffrey Mirel succinctly state, "disciplines organize facts in ways that give them meaning, making these facts more memorable because they are more meaningful."² The so-called "inquiry approach" to learning history suggests that teachers have more success with their students when they frame course content around meaningful questions, employ disciplinary habits of mind, and take students' thinking seriously. Inquiry instruction

counters the typical fact-based approach to history that makes it one of students' least favorite subjects. Training in an inquiry approach to instruction may be best-suited to in-service teachers, as pre-service teacher candidates' lack of teaching experience often prevents them from fully understanding the implications of such an approach.³ On the other hand, experienced teachers typically have few opportunities to become familiar with this scholarship, or to modify their instruction to reflect inquiry approaches, particularly since inquiry as described in the literature is time-consuming and standards-driven classrooms seem to make such approaches impractical. In this paper, I argue that sustained, discipline-specific professional development provides the key to transferring this research knowledge base to the classroom, where it can lead to significant improvements in the quality of history instruction. To be successful, such professional development must—like good classroom instruction—begin with effective modeling of activities and, more importantly, with the thinking embedded in these activities.

This article falls into two main parts. First, I offer a suggestive survey of recent scholarship on teaching and learning in history that emphasizes three key conclusions: the constructed and discipline-based nature of history knowledge, the importance of substantive and procedural concepts in a discipline-based approach to teaching history, and the need for cognitive supports to enable students to understand a disciplinary approach to learning. I then reflect on the implications of this scholarship for teachers and for professional development providers. The second part of the paper offers one example of a professional development effort to model an inquiry-based approach to a lesson about the antebellum women's rights movement. This lesson takes seriously the time constraints of standards-based instruction and offers a modified inquiry approach that adjusts key elements of disciplinary learning to a typical classroom.

A Research Consensus: “Meaning” in History

Constructed, Discipline-Based Knowledge

This description of recent scholarship will be necessarily incomplete and suggestive, as the volume of scholarship makes a definitive survey nearly impossible. Without denying the existence of significant differences between history education scholars, one can draw some general conclusions about recent scholarship based on the large areas of agreement. As the title of a book by Peter Stearns indicates, best practices in history begin with an emphasis on “meaning over memory.”⁴ This title provides an implicit critique of traditional approaches to history, which have emphasized memorization of facts. An extensive study of Americans' interest in

the past revealed that their most frequent description of school history was “boring.” The research also indicated a strong racial and ethnic disparity, in which minority students were far more likely to be suspicious of mainstream narratives about the past.⁵ But the study also revealed that individuals’ lack of enthusiasm for learning about history stood in stark contrast to their widespread interest in a more broadly defined past experienced through family stories, popular media, museums, etc.⁶ The authors of the study concluded that Americans, including young people, were extremely interested in the past when they could find relevance in it or relate to it personally. Not only does student antipathy to school history contrast with interest in a personal past, it also contrasts sharply with the professional study of history, in which controversy and debates characterize the field.

The growing body of research-based work of the last two decades could be summarized as an attempt to explore the nature of meaning making, often by applying insights from the nature of professional inquiry to the K-12 classroom. Education scholars have used insights from cognitive psychology to explore critical thinking as a discipline-specific skill. Cognitive researchers emphasize the active, constructed nature of learning. Teachers, in contrast, often assume either a transmission model of learning in which they deliver “information” to students for future access or a stage theory of development in which younger students are incapable of higher-level thinking.⁷ Despite a range of concerns and approaches, scholars like Robert B. Bain, Bruce Barton, Peter Lee, Linda Levstik, Sam Wineburg, and others share several beliefs.⁸ They all accept some constructivist model of student learning. Equally important and closely related, “they believe that knowledge and skill are structurally organized and domain specific.”⁹

Education scholars’ conclusion that learning is discipline-specific seriously challenges the entrenched notion that critical thinking can be generalized across subject areas and categorized according to Bloom’s taxonomy. According to historian David Pace, a fellow in the Carnegie Academy on the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning,

In the last twenty years, the call...to focus on critical thinking has led to a laudable effort on the part of [teachers] to move the focus of courses to the higher levels of Bloom’s classification of learning behaviors. But efforts to help students learn at the levels of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation may be impeded by a mismatch between the kinds of thinking actually required in specific classes and generic formulas for encouraging higher-order thinking. In fact, the notion of a unified “critical thinking” runs counter to an important strand in current thinking about teaching that stresses the disciplinary nature of knowledge. In the last twenty years, a number of

major researchers have stressed the importance of shaping instruction to match the specific conditions of each academic field.¹⁰

Indeed, Sam Wineburg and Jack Schneider of Stanford go so far as to argue that Bloom's taxonomy completely inverts the real progression of thinking in the discipline of history since evaluating evidence culminates in the creation of knowledge.¹¹ In *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom*, cognitive researchers contrast the epistemology of experts with that of novices. These scholars point out that students bring well-formed, though potentially erroneous, epistemologies to the classroom. For example, a fifth grade student confronted with two different dates for the end of the Roman Empire assumes that one date must be wrong, rather than recognizing that the two dates may reflect different judgments about continuity, change, and periodization.¹² Educators need to uncover and then critically engage these epistemologies in their instruction, introducing students to more sophisticated disciplinary perspectives.

Substantive and Procedural Concepts in the Teaching of History

So what characterizes sophisticated disciplinary thinking in history? Much of the initial research into student thinking was conducted in the United Kingdom in association with the Schools History Project in the 1980s. Out of this work, scholars like Peter Lee developed a taxonomy of historical thinking consisting of two major categories of concepts: substantive and procedural (or "second-order" as Lee typically labels them).¹³ In *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century*, Stéphane Lévesque synthesizes the work on "concepts" that began with Lee and his colleagues, providing helpful definitions of both substantial and procedural knowledge. Substantive knowledge "is what historical knowledge is *about*—the 'content' of history. Typically, this type of knowledge focuses on certain historical themes or actors... In curricular language, this form of historical knowledge is typically found in expectations of students' learning, such as the students' understanding of certain terms, events, phenomena, or personages."¹⁴ Procedural knowledge "concentrates on the concepts and vocabulary that provide 'the structural basis for the discipline.' These concepts... are not what history is about—the substance. They are, rather, the conceptual tools needed for the study of the past as a discipline and the construction of the content of historical knowledge. Without these concepts, it would be impossible to make sense of the substance of the past, as 'they shape the way we go about doing history.'"¹⁵

Substantive concepts, such as "revolution," are generic ideal types of phenomena. Proper nouns like "American Revolution" and "French Revolution" represent specific cases of the larger historical construct.

Substantive concepts provide the categories for the “stuff” of history. Jannet van Drie and Carla van Boxtel demonstrate how explicitly teaching both overarching concepts like “communism” and subsidiary concepts such as “class struggle,” “proletariat,” and “capitalism” can aid students’ organization of historical content and their ability to process it in more sophisticated ways.¹⁶ While research on substantive concepts has not received nearly as much attention as research on procedural concepts, attention to substantive concepts holds great promise for improving instruction by helping teachers to create more coherent teaching units, focus on major patterns, make comparisons, and connect learning to present circumstances. The use of these concepts assists students’ thinking without being enormously time-consuming to implement—a boon to time-conscious, standards-driven teachers.

Much more frequently, research on historical thinking has concentrated on procedural concepts. Procedural concepts are the tools—sometimes implicit or ad hoc—that historians use to make meaning of historical content. Rather than simply defining “revolutions,” for example, historians ask how such events transpired (that is, they consider issues of “change”); they try to understand the actions of revolutionaries in their own terms, rather than by the standards of today (they engage in acts of “empathy”); and they consider why revolutions mattered (they pose questions of “significance”).¹⁷

Researchers have explored students’ reading of primary sources more than any other procedural knowledge. It is not hard to see why: interpreting primary sources is the *sine qua non* of historical work and the discipline-specific activity that most distinguishes history from other fields. Furthermore, interpreting primary sources offers the possibility of making history exciting for both students and their teachers. Since primary sources are often textual, working with sources also focuses on the core academic skill of the careful reading of text. As studies like those of Sam Wineburg have demonstrated, however, even knowledgeable students often read primary sources in an epistemologically naïve manner, importing their own historical context into their interpretation of a document. Wineburg describes how seventeen-year-old Advanced Placement U.S. History student Derek did this when he ranked the trustworthiness of documents about the Battle of Lexington using presentist assumptions about appropriate military strategy.¹⁸

Some research has also been conducted on students’ understanding of other procedural concepts. For example, Peter Seixas explores the understandings of historical “significance” that children bring to the classroom. Seixas attempts to answer the following questions: Are there differences in the ways high school students approach the question of

historical significance? Are some explanations better than others? If so, by what criteria? What implications might such differences have for instruction?¹⁹ In the same journal issue, British researchers, including Peter Lee, report their findings on the progression in students' thinking about the second-order—or procedural—concepts of “explanation” and “evidence.”²⁰ Their article offers a sequence of the development of student explanation that begins with simpler descriptions based on intentional actions and proceeds to more multi-faceted conceptualizations. The sequence of evidentiary explanations begins with younger students' failure to distinguish between information and evidence and culminates with more complex descriptions. In another study, this same group of scholars investigates a range of students from elementary school (third grade) through high school (ninth grade) and concludes that students' explanations of the past progress in discernible ways based on their deepening understandings of human thought and behavior, of appropriate sources of information for explanations, and of the criteria for acceptable explanations.²¹

Scaffolding Disciplinary Learning in History

The final crucial component of the scholarship on history education addresses the challenging gap between novice and expert thinking. History education scholars have used sociocultural theory, either implicitly or explicitly, to advocate a mediated process for engaging students in discipline-based work. Some evidence suggests that even elementary students can do this kind of work. While earlier educational theorists dismissed the possibility that younger students possessed the kinds of higher-order thinking skills associated with reading primary sources critically, more recent studies like those of Keith Barton, Linda Levstik, and Bruce VanSledright have demonstrated that students in elementary grades can engage in disciplinary thinking. After reviewing recent research on history education in the elementary grades, Barton concludes that “from a young age, students know a great deal about the past and have begun to develop an understanding of historical time.” Likewise, elementary age students can be taught to engage historical sources critically and to employ “common-sense notions of evidence and reliability.”²²

Sociocultural theorists have argued that the keys to student success are social (rather than individual) learning environments and mediated processes where teachers create cognitive tools to assist student learning. The concept of “thinking tools” or “cultural tools” comes from the work of constructivist educational psychologist Lev Vygotsky, for whom tools include language itself, mnemonic techniques, and a range of

schematic and symbolic illustrations.²³ Robert B. Bain, for example, discusses his classroom adaptation of Annemarie Palinscar's reciprocal teaching strategy as a tool for assisting students in reading primary source documents in discipline-specific ways.²⁴

Because words shape understanding in powerful ways, sociocultural researchers have often considered language itself to be one of the most important cognitive tools in the classroom. Consequently, they have given substantial attention to the ways students understand historical texts—both primary and secondary. A number of studies examine the rhetorical and structural architecture of historical discourse, revealing why such texts are difficult for students to comprehend and suggesting ways to make them more accessible. Linguist Caroline Coffin notes the sociocultural basis of such research when she states that “learning to mean like a historian is a process of socialization whereby a particular subject position is constructed.”²⁵

Implications of a Disciplinary Approach

In short, sociocultural theory emphasizes open-ended inquiry and constructivist conceptions of knowledge. These instructional practices present a direct challenge to history as rote memorization. Indeed, the inquiry model fundamentally emphasizes “meaning over memory,” and, in so doing, reflects the thinking and activity of practicing historians. In that sense, argues Peter Seixas, effective history teachers “occupy a key position between two communities organized around history knowledge and learning,” communicating historical knowledge from the academic community to the classroom community.

The central professional task they face is the construction of historical presentations for students. Sufficient contact with the historians' community (through seminars, journal reading, and conferences) and sufficient opportunity to work with each other would constitute the foundations of their own community of inquiry as a basis for a specialized historical knowledge...What differentiates this historical knowledge from that of historians is its more central concern with the problems of presentation to members of a community beyond itself. These concerns might, if addressed by teachers well-versed in the new historical scholarship, be of great interest, in turn, to historians hoping to extend their reach beyond their own community.²⁶

While Seixas is undoubtedly right that history teachers who take disciplinary approaches to learning seriously function as a bridge between the world of historians and that of students, his optimistic conclusion points out an area of need highlighted by this review of the literature. An individual teacher who attempts to hold this bridging position on his or

her own will often feel very alone. Teachers need to find collaborative communities to support discipline-based changes to history curriculum. Some teachers find that support within their own department, but others have to look further to find such communities. Such communities are sometimes found in professional development opportunities for teachers, through organizations such as The California History-Social Science Project. In what follows, I describe one professional development effort designed to assist teachers in adopting a disciplinary approach to learning through modeling a lesson.

A Model for Teachers: Professional Development and the Antebellum Women's Movement

As I argued in the introduction, an inquiry approach to learning will probably have the most impact in professional development settings with in-service teachers, rather than with pre-service teacher candidates. While pre-service teachers can certainly be introduced to this model, their lack of classroom experience may preclude them from fully understanding inquiry instruction. For example, one element of inquiry instruction involves anticipating the prior knowledge students bring to a particular subject, and planning instruction to build on this foundation or confronting mistaken student pre-understanding when necessary. Pre-service teachers typically lack knowledge about student preconceptions that practiced teachers have acquired through experience.

Professional development for in-service teachers provides the best target for training. Licensed history teachers need training in the thinking skills of the discipline in part because many credentialed teachers lack adequate backgrounds in history. As Diane Ravitch points out, most secondary history teachers have neither a major nor a minor in history. It is "unlikely that teachers who are themselves unfamiliar with historical knowledge and controversies will be able to engage their students in high levels of historical thinking."²⁷ But without the support of a professional development community, experienced teachers are not likely to embrace the inquiry model either, as teachers often find it difficult to make time for reading about education, or find the literature daunting when they do.²⁸ More importantly, many struggle to apply the principles described in the literature to their own classroom instruction. An ongoing professional development experience provides the best opportunity for teachers to learn about some of the relevant scholarship and to have adequate time to consider appropriate classroom applications. Modeling provides the crucial component of any successful professional development training in inquiry.

Introduction: The Context

I presented the following model lesson to eighth and eleventh grade teachers as part of professional development activities they were receiving through a Teaching American History grant. While a few teachers were new to the training and had only received two previous release days of instruction, most had participated in more than thirty hours of training during a summer institute and some had received a year of training before that. Throughout this training, participants had interacted with historians who presented talks on specific historical moments and had engaged in pedagogical training that emphasized inquiry-based classroom strategies. This was not, therefore, most participants' first exposure to the ideas of inquiry-based approaches to historical thinking. As I present this lesson model, I will first discuss materials that I used with teachers, and then I will comment on those materials as I explain my thinking and my impression of teachers' reactions.

Modeling the Lesson

I began by refreshing teachers' memories about the components of an inquiry model of learning and by linking various activities that had taken place throughout the training to inquiry learning:

Inquiry model

- In-depth understanding
- Building on students' prior knowledge
- Discipline-based learning
- Constructive assessment
- Essential questions and enduring understanding
- Student misconceptions
- First- and Second-order concepts

When teachers demonstrated that they clearly understood each of these components, I asked them to discuss with a partner why they should bother with an inquiry approach, as it clearly demands more planning and instructional time than more traditional lecture or textbook reading approaches. The teacher pairs shared their answers with the larger group. Many of them shared the kinds of answers I had anticipated in a slide I prepared: increased motivation for students, enhanced retention of historical information, and a more rigorous course. The only bullet point that did not match teachers' comments was my first, where I attempted to underscore the research-based consensus on the effectiveness of this approach. Participants' failure to address this point should not have been surprising, however, as Mary M. Kennedy has concluded that teachers are often skeptical of the claims of research, because they typically perceive research to be insufficiently persuasive, irrelevant, or inaccessible.²⁹

Document 1: *A Treatise on Domestic Economy* (1841)

The tendencies of democratic institutions, in reference to the rights and interests of the female sex, have been fully developed in the United States; and it is in this aspect, that the subject is one of peculiar interest to American women. In this Country, it is established, both by opinion and by practice, that women have an equal interest in all social and civil concerns; and that no domestic, civil, or political, institution, is right, that sacrifices her interest to promote that of the other sex. But in order to secure her the more firmly in all these privileges, it is decided, that, in the domestic relation, she take a subordinate station, and that, in civil and political concerns, her interests be entrusted to the other sex, without her taking any part in voting, or in making and administering laws. The result of this order of things has been fairly tested...

The success of democratic institutions, as is conceded by all, depends upon the intellectual and moral character of the mass of the people. If they are intelligent and virtuous, democracy is a blessing; but if they are ignorant and wicked, it is only a curse, and as much more dreadful than other form of civil government, as a thousand tyrants are more to be dreaded than one. It is equally conceded, that the formation of the moral and intellectual character of the young is committed mainly to the female hand. The mother writes the character of the future man; the sister bends the fibres that hereafter are the forest tree; the wife sways the heart, whose energies may turn for good or for evil the destinies of a nation. Let the women of a country be made virtuous and intelligent, and the men will certainly be the same. The proper education of a man decides the welfare of an individual; but educate a woman, and the interests of a whole family are secured.

Source: *Catherine E. Beecher, A Treatise on Domestic Economy (1841). Beecher, the eldest daughter of famed revival preacher and reformer Lyman Beecher, was a teacher and advocate for women. She helped to found several women's colleges and seminaries, and organized a number of professional organizations for women teachers.*

Figure 1: Catherine Beecher's *Treatise on Domestic Economy*

Having reminded teachers of the rationale for engaging in a more demanding approach to teaching, I was ready to move on to a discussion of a lesson framed around brief primary source excerpts I intentionally selected to reflect diverse points of view. In reading sources—especially two sources that are in tension with each other—students learn about rules of evidence. As students attempt to understand the voices of people from long ago in their own terms, they also develop the skill of empathy. They come to recognize that beliefs may change over time.

In the historical presentations for the professional development, teachers were learning about the role of women in antebellum American

Document 2: “Declaration of Rights and Sentiments” (1841)

The history of mankind is a history of repeated injuries and usurpations on the part of man toward woman, having in direct object the establishment of an absolute tyranny over her. To prove this, let facts be submitted to a candid world.

He has never permitted her to exercise her inalienable right to the elective franchise.

He has compelled her to submit to laws, in the formation of which she had no voice.

He has withheld from her rights which are given to the most ignorant and degraded men—both natives and foreigners.

Having deprived her of this first right of a citizen, the elective franchise, thereby leaving her without representation in the halls of legislations, he has oppressed her on all sides.

He has made her, if married, in the eye of the law, civilly dead.

He has taken from her all right in property, even to the wages she earns...

He has so framed the laws of divorce, as to what shall be the proper causes, and in case of separation, to whom the guardianship of the children shall be given, as to be wholly regardless of the happiness of women—the law, in all cases, going upon a false supposition of the supremacy of man, and giving all power into his hands.

After depriving her of all rights as a married woman, if single, and the owner of property, he has taxed her to support a government which recognizes her only when her property can be made profitable to it.

He has monopolized nearly all the profitable employments, and from those she is permitted to follow, she receives but a scanty remuneration. He closes against her all the avenues to wealth and distinction which he considers most honorable to himself. As a teacher of theology, medicine, or law, she is not known.

He has denied her the facilities for obtaining a thorough education, all colleges being closed against her.

Source: Elizabeth Cady Stanton drafted the “Declaration of Rights and Sentiments” for the first Women’s rights convention, held in Seneca Falls, New York in 1848. Stanton, a lifelong advocate of women’s equal rights, planned the convention with other women’s rights leaders. It was attended by roughly 300 men and women, a third of whom signed the Declaration.

Figure 2: The Seneca Falls “Declaration of Sentiments”

life, so I drew the documents from Catherine Beecher’s *Treatise on Domestic Economy* (Figure 1) and the Seneca Falls “Declaration of Sentiments.” (Figure 2) I chose these documents based on several criteria that I developed as I reflected on implicit principles I had developed in my own previous high school teaching. I indicated these criteria to teachers on a slide:

Find two documents on the same narrow topic

Topic should be

- 1) significant within the era of study
- 2) of enduring significance

Documents should be in tension with each other

Source information should reflect the complexity/difficulty of

- 1) the question/problem
- 2) reading the document

Documents should challenge the preconceptions students bring to the subject

Background information should be provided that

- 1) sets the context
- 2) suggests significant historical questions

By making these principles explicit, I offer teachers guidelines for the implementation of similar lessons in their own classrooms. Further guidelines included suggestions on adapting sources for classroom use:

Adapting primary sources for the classroom

- Excerpt and/or edit documents as necessary
- Introduce documents in the context of unit and lesson questions/problems
- Pose an explicit overarching question
- Use a thinking tool to help students focus on key elements of each document
- Ask specific questions to help students see what you want them to see about the document

In most history classrooms, teachers work with excerpts or selections of primary sources, rather than the entire text. They may struggle to determine which portions to select and how lengthy those selections should be. By telling participants to “excerpt and/or edit documents as necessary,” I suggested that they consider practical considerations, like student literacy and the amount of instructional time available, as well as larger disciplinary concerns about editing the document in a way that retains the tenor and argument of the original. Given the importance of historical context for an appropriate understanding of primary sources, I instructed teachers to introduce documents to students once they had already learned important information about the era, rather than having students read the documents “cold” as teachers sometimes do. I created a brief summary of the era for students to read before they began to read the primary sources:

During the antebellum period, everyone was talking about democracy. The question of what position women should be allowed in a democratic society led to many debates. Women were very involved in evangelical churches and in reform movements of the time, including temperance and

abolitionism. Married women were also important in the home. But should women share domestic, economic, political, or any other kind of equality with men? There was much disagreement in the ways people answered this question.

Such an introduction need not be long to be useful—in fact, with middle school students, too long an introduction would be counterproductive. The six-sentence summary I created would help students to interpret documents, as well as to consider a larger question that the documents would help them answer.

In editing the documents, I tried to include wording and/or ideas from each that would relate the documents both to the major questions of the era and to each other. I purposely selected a less familiar portion of the “Declaration of Sentiments,” as this text often becomes cliché to students. Teachers routinely point out that it is modeled on the Declaration of Independence, but never probe further to examine the specific grievances of the authors. Note also that I provided a clear indication of the source of the document that was brief, yet with enough biographical information to allow students to make some inferences about the author. While most teachers who use primary sources require students to answer questions about authors, they often provide little information about them. The absence of source information virtually guarantees that students will not assess the significance of authorship to the meaning of the document.

Because historians read primary sources in the course of research, they always use sources to answer a particular question. From disciplinary and pedagogical perspectives, it makes sense to frame instruction around a large historical question or problem, and to use sources in an effort to address that problem. Unlike historians, however, teachers typically pose questions that have already been largely determined for them by curriculum objectives. So history teachers “must play a form of instructional *Jeopardy* by inventing the big questions to fit the curricular answers. Like historians working backward from given events to questions that precipitated them, history teachers work backward from given objectives to the big historical questions.”³⁰

With those guidelines in mind about the selection, editing, and framing of primary sources, I modeled an abbreviated lesson for an eighth grade class. As much as possible, I modeled student-friendly language, while regularly pointing out to teachers what pedagogical move informed seemingly informal comments. I began by setting the stage for the individual lesson by placing it in the context of the larger year-long question: “How free are we as Americans?” While the question is posed in the present tense to encourage student interest, I reminded participants that by using the question throughout the year, students would come to

see how it was historically grounded and contextualized, evoking different answers—for different people—in different eras. Then I proceeded to a review of key ideas thus far in the unit:

“We’ve connected the ideas of ‘*civic republicanism*’ and ‘*democracy*’ to this era, the *antebellum* era or the *Age of Jackson*. What are some of the ways that we’ve seen that democracy grew in the era?” This brief discussion would activate students’ prior knowledge and prepare them to consider new material within the same framework of democracy in the antebellum era. In modeling this comment for teachers, I italicized important substantive concepts I would strategically teach during this unit.

Next, I began to transition from the larger unit to that day’s lesson: the role of women in an era that frequently employed language about democracy and equality. I reminded my fictitious eighth grade students that women had been treated differently from men in the colonial period and during the early republic:

So now we’re going to examine the role of women in this era. We know that up until now, they haven’t had all the same *rights* or *power* as men. Can you remember any examples?...Good. So it’s an interesting question. Women are half of the population, they contribute to society in important ways, but they have typically been treated differently, to protect them or because they were seen as physically weaker or for other reasons. Remember, we want to avoid *presentism*, so we have to be careful not to rush to judge people at the time by the standards we have today. We have to try to understand them in their own terms first.

As a middle school teacher, I would have to walk a fine line at this point. Knowing that, as twenty-first-century young people, students would likely be outraged by a society that talked about equality while treating one part of the population differently from another, I would want to shamelessly manipulate that outrage to pique their interest in the lesson. But I would also want to remind students of the second-order historical skill of empathy—the importance of judging the past on its own terms. So I attempted to do both by stirring up students’ desire to judge and then by explicitly cautioning them about judging. Then, I posed the question of the day: “To what extent did the growth of democracy in this era create more freedom for women?” This question is open-ended, allows for a qualitative response (“to what extent”), and fits with the year-long question by addressing “freedom.”

At this point in the model lesson, I would give students copies of the primary source excerpts and introduce the activity for the class period. As I explained to teachers in the course of modeling this lesson, they must narrate their activities to make visible to students the invisible thinking that shapes their lesson planning:

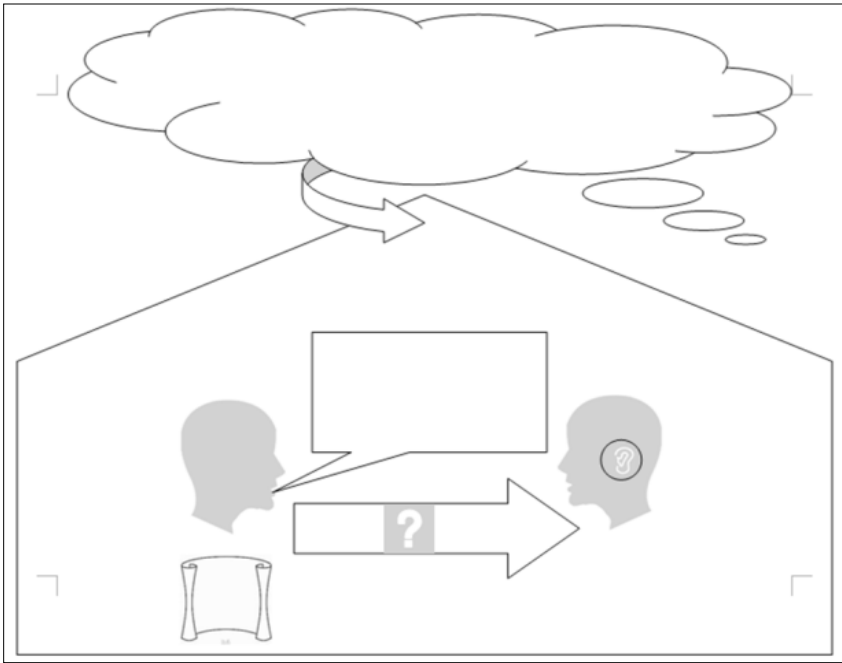


Figure 3: Graphic organizer based on the work of Paul Ricoeur

We’re going to read this handout and analyze two different primary sources to see different perspectives on the appropriate roles for women at the time. We’ll use the explanations the authors give as evidence to help us answer our question. What’s our question again?...Good. So let’s see how the authors use ideas about democracy, equality, and citizenship to explain what roles they think women should have in society.

When students understand the purpose and focus of a lesson, they are better prepared to engage the activity meaningfully.³¹ Thus, in the model lesson, I told students why they were reading primary sources at all (to understand views on the roles of women), why they were reading two sources (to see different perspectives), and how to read the source to answer the essential question (by paying attention to ways the authors use key substantive concepts like democracy and equality).

Alongside a copy of the primary source excerpts, I would provide students with a copy of a graphic representation that I developed as a “thinking tool” to help students work with primary sources, based on the work of philosopher Paul Ricoeur (Figure 3).³² It shows two silhouettes facing each other (speaker and hearer) surrounded by the outline of a house

(representing their shared historical context—one that does not include the contemporary reader) with an arrow going from one to the other to indicate purpose of the message. At the top of the page is a thought bubble to provide students with a place to brainstorm in an open-ended way before attempting to determine what historical context would help them to interpret the document. The illustration reminds students that documents began as dynamic “conversations,” written approximations of speech, and that making sense of a document requires students to attempt to identify these elements as best they can. Helping students see how text is different from speech enables them to see the challenges inherent in reading primary sources.

I explained to teachers that after my imaginary eighth grade students had had a chance to read through the two document excerpts in pairs or groups, depending on the class environment, I would bring the class back together for a discussion:

Ok, let’s come back together and see what you came up with. What does the author of each document say about the role women should play in American life?

What surprised you or puzzled you, or what couldn’t you agree about?

Judging by what we’ve learned so far in this unit and what you saw in the documents, which author’s view do you think was more prominent—more popular—at the time? What makes you think so?

This would allow me to assess student thinking, provide feedback to students on the ways they used the two excerpts to corroborate each other, and help them to synthesize their conclusions in response to the essential question. If time permitted, this could be a longer discussion or an essay response. With less time, a teacher could simply ask students to reflect on their response to the essential question in a short quickwrite.

Reflections

I have attempted to narrate the content of one professional development seminar designed to model for teachers an inquiry approach to history learning. This seminar offered an example of teaching that implemented the three components of inquiry described above. First, students would be asked to construct meaning in the classroom. They would wrestle with placing the competing claims of document authors in the context of the antebellum era as they answered a legitimate, open-ended question using evidence. This question reflects historiographical debates regarding the relative freedom of women in antebellum America with the dawn of the market revolution and evangelical reform movements.³³ Second, the students would have been introduced to a range of substantive and

procedural concepts in this lesson and the larger unit in which it was imbedded. While practicing the procedural skills of using evidence and practicing empathy, they were also using the conceptual language of the discipline for that era—concepts like antebellum, democracy, republic, and rights. Finally, because this task would be cognitively demanding for eighth grade students, they were offered scaffolding in terms of the framing of the question or problem as well as the primary source analysis tool.

Inquiry purists would probably point out that this model lesson does not truly implement an inquiry approach, as it is highly structured by the teacher rather than by students, and the focus of inquiry has already been determined before class begins. But teachers rarely adopt inquiry learning wholesale, for a variety of reasons. Larry Cuban's historical study of a century of educational reform in the United States suggests that reform-minded teachers embrace a hybrid between more traditional instruction and inquiry approaches.³⁴ The lesson modeled here was just such a hybrid. The contemporary standards-based classroom demands a structure and pacing that make a strict inquiry approach unrealistic in most cases, but students benefit from a hybrid that a teacher has systematically implemented. Teachers receiving professional development are also much more likely to adopt an approach that allows them to move piecemeal toward a restructured classroom, rather than one that requires a thorough revision of their teaching.

Conclusion

The first half of this article offered a brief survey of some of the major conclusions of scholarship on teaching and learning history that emphasize the importance of disciplinary approaches to learning, the use of substantive and procedural concepts, and the necessity of scaffolding instruction for student success in cognitively demanding tasks. The remainder of the article provided one effort to model such instruction for teachers. This model, while hopefully useful, is limited in that it represents a hypothetical classroom, rather than an example of actual instruction. This points to two major areas of need in this continually developing field of disciplinary teaching. First, while researchers are now aware of both the typical conceptual understanding of students as they enter the classroom and their capacity for sophisticated historical reasoning, there is much less understanding of the particular strategies that will address this Vygotskian gap. In his comprehensive, technical survey of the last two decades of history education research, Keith C. Barton notes that this "body of research provides educators with an understanding of the potential disparities between students' ideas and the content of the curriculum and it reassures

them that these can be addressed through classroom instruction.” However, it has yet to “provide much insight into exactly how that transformation can be accomplished.” Barton concludes that the “greatest need in the area of research on students’ ideas about history is for long-term classroom studies of how students’ ideas change as a result of instruction.”³⁵

Second, researchers do not know nearly enough about the role of professional development in changing the nature of classroom history instruction. A recent survey of social studies research indicates that little research in the field examines the connection between professional development and student learning and indicates that future studies ought to focus on how professional development affects student learning over time.³⁶ In the coming years, those who use these resources may in turn contribute to a growing database that documents teachers’ experiences working with discipline-specific, inquiry-based history instruction and how that work shapes student learning. Such explicit, replicable models will allow students in classrooms throughout the nation to obtain the richest, most rigorous history education available. Motivated history teachers must be joined by education faculty in teacher preparation programs, history professional development providers, and history faculty who partner with professional development organizations—or who want to improve their own instruction—in a collaborative exploration of research on the disciplinary approach to teaching history.

Notes

1. Bruce Craig, “History Defined in Florida Legislature,” *Perspectives*, September 2006, <<http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2006/0609/0609nch1.cfm>>.

2. Robert B. Bain and Jeffrey Mirel, “Setting Up Camp at the Great Instructional Divide: Educating Beginning History Teachers,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 57, no. 3 (May/June 2006), 213.

3. Regardless of the effectiveness of pre-service teacher programs, teachers regularly require more training, particularly in literacy strategies. As Carnegie Council for Advancing Adolescent Literacy, *Time To Act: An Agenda for Advancing Adolescent Literacy for College and Career Success* (New York: Carnegie Corporation of New York, 2009), p. 24, puts it: “The importance of the topics outlined in the ‘core knowledge base for teachers’ often does not become readily apparent to teachers until they are fully immersed in teaching. So, it is crucial that teacher education in adolescent literacy continue after pre-service education via induction, mentoring and ongoing professional development educational opportunities.”

4. Peter Stearns, *Meaning Over Memory: Recasting the Teaching of Culture and History* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1994).

5. Separate studies have reinforced the conclusion that both African Americans and Mexican Americans are critical of mainstream history curriculum and its lack of relevance. On African Americans, see Gregory Dimitriadis, "'Making History Go' at a Local Community Center: Popular Media and the Construction of Historical Knowledge among African American Youth," *Theory and Research in Social Education*, 28, no. 1 (Winter 2000): 40-64. For Mexican Americans, see Dario Almarza, "Contexts Shaping Minority Language Students' Perceptions of American History," *Journal of Social Studies Research* 25, no. 2 (2001), 4-22.
6. Roy Rosenzweig and David Thelen, *The Presence of the Past: Popular Uses of History in American Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998).
7. For a description and critique of the former view, see David K. Cohen and Heather C. Hill, *Learning Policy: When State Education Reform Works* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2001), 67; for the latter, see S. G. Grant, *History Lessons: Teaching, Learning, and Testing in U.S. High Schools* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2003).
8. This is not to minimize the real differences between the approaches of, for example, Piagetian and Vygotskian theorists, as pointed out by Mark Windschitl, "Framing Constructivism in Practice as the Negotiation of Dilemmas: An Analysis of the Conceptual, Pedagogical, Cultural, and Political Challenges Facing Teachers," *Review of Educational Research* 72, no. 2 (Summer 2002): 131-175. This can be seen in part through the wide range of labels they use that includes "problem-based," "inquiry," "disciplinary," "constructivist," and "sociocultural." Windschitl distinguishes between "social constructivism," "sociocultural" perspectives, and "sociohistorical" perspectives. He notes, however, that "their implications for the design of learning environments are similar" (p. 165).
9. William D. Rohwer, Jr. and Kathryn Sloane, "Psychological Perspectives," in *Bloom's Taxonomy: A Forty-Year Retrospective*, ed. Lorin W. Anderson and Lauren A. Sosniak (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1994), 60.
10. David Pace, introduction to *Decoding the Disciplines: Helping Students Learn Disciplinary Ways of Thinking* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2004), 1.
11. Sam Wineburg and Jack Schneider, "Inverting Bloom's Taxonomy," *Education Week*, October 7, 2009. Wineburg presented a paper by the same title at the annual meeting of the American Historical Association, New York, January 3, 2009.
12. Committee on How People Learn: A Targeted Report for Teachers, *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2004), 38-39.
13. Peter Lee, "History Teaching and Philosophy of History," *History and Theory* 22, no. 4 (October 1983): 19-49.
14. Stéphane Lévesque, *Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2008), 29-30.
15. *Ibid.*, 30.
16. Jannet Van Drie and Carla van Boxtel, "Developing Conceptual Understanding Through Talk and Mapping," *Teaching History* 110 (2003): 27-32.
17. See, for example, O. L. Davis, Jr., Elizabeth Anne Yeager, and Stuart J. Foster, *Historical Empathy and Perspective Taking in the Social Sciences* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2001), a collection of essays that explores the nature of empathy in philosophical and historical scholarship and its implications for history education.
18. Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), 7-12.
19. Peter Seixas, "Mapping the Terrain of Historical Significance," *Social Education* 61, no. 1 (January 1997): 22-27.

20. Rosalyn Ashby, Peter Lee, and Alaric Dickinson, "How Children Explain the 'Why' of History: The Chata Research Project on Teaching History," *Social Education* 61, no. 1 (January 1997): 17-21.

21. Peter Lee, Alaric Dickinson, and Rosalyn Ashby, "'Just Another Emperor': Understanding Action in the Past," *International Journal of Educational Research* 27 (1997) 233-244.

22. Keith C. Barton, "Research on Students' Ideas about History," *The Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education*, ed. Linda S. Levstik and Cynthia A. Tyson (New York: Routledge, 2008).

23. James Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

24. Robert B. Bain, "Into the Breach: Using Research and Theory to Shape History Instruction," in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 345-346.

25. Caroline Coffin, "Constructing and Giving Value to the Past: An Investigation into Secondary School History," in *Genre and Institutions: Social Processes in the Workplace and School*, ed. Frances Christie and J. R. Martin (London, U.K.: Cassell, 1997), 197.

26. Peter Seixas, "The Community of Inquiry as a Basis for Knowledge and Learning: The Case of History," *American Educational Research Journal* 30, no. 2 (Summer 1993): 319-320.

27. Diane Ravitch, "The Educational Backgrounds of History Teachers," in *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives*, ed. Peter Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 143. This general conclusion is supported by examples from states like California, where a history credential candidate's B.A. does not have to be in a field related to history-social science, let alone specifically in history. Instead, many candidates take the CSET exam, which consists of multiple-choice subtests and very brief essays. My own anecdotal experience working with dozens of secondary teachers from various secondary schools in Southern California confirms that many lack developed discipline-based thinking skills in history.

28. Though I have not read literature to support this, my experience as a teacher for over a decade, my work with teachers for the last few years, and many conversations with colleagues provide anecdotal evidence for this conclusion.

29. Mary Kennedy, "The Connection Between Research and Practice," *Educational Researcher* 26, no. 7 (October 1997): 4-12. Windschitl, "Framing Constructivism, discusses the need to reshape teachers' epistemologies in order to change their practice to reflect inquiry approaches.

30. Robert B. Bain, "'They Thought the World Was Flat?' Applying the Principles of How People Learn in Teaching High School History," in *How Students Learn: History in the Classroom* (Washington, D.C.: National Academies Press, 2004), 182.

31. Bain, "Into the Breach," 331-352.

32. The concept of "thinking tools" or "cultural tools" comes from the work of constructivist educational psychologist Lev Vygotsky, for whom tools included language itself, mnemonic techniques, and a range of schematic and symbolic illustrations. James Wertsch, *Voices of the Mind: A Sociocultural Approach to Mediated Action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991). Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), offers a brief, systematic, relatively readable synthesis of many of Ricoeur's arguments about discourse analysis.

33. Jill Lepore, "Vast Designs," *The New Yorker*, October 29, 2007, reviews Daniel Walker Howe's synthesis of the antebellum era, *What Hath God Wrought? The Transformation of America, 1815-1848* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007) by contrasting it with Charles Sellers' *Market Revolution: Jacksonian America, 1815-1846* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). Lepore summarizes the authors' different views of the role of women in this era: "Sellers acknowledges that the 'radical redefinition of gender' associated with these developments eventually led to a powerful movement for women's rights, but his grim conclusion is that 'female power was won at the cost of female as well as male libido.' The market needs workers who don't think about sex all day long; the market produces them. Not so fast, Howe counters: 'What we think of as Victorian prudery can also be seen as a clumsy effort to make men regard women as something other than sexual objects.' The first half of the nineteenth century witnessed a wholesale transformation of manners, a politeness revolution... In short, 'ladies first' wasn't all bad. 'Although polite culture put women on a pedestal to avoid challenging the prerogatives of men,' Howe writes, 'it represented in important respects an advance over the subjugation of women common in premodern society.'"

34. Larry Cuban, *How Teachers Taught: Constancy and Change in American Classrooms 1890-1990* (New York: Teachers College Press, 1993).

35. Barton, 248.

36. Stephanie van Hover, "The Professional Development of Social Studies Teachers," in *The Handbook of Research in Social Studies Education*, ed. Linda S. Levstik and Cynthia A. Tyson (New York: Routledge, 2008), 366.

Become a Member of the OAH Today!

Join the Organization of American Historians, the largest learned society devoted to all aspects of American history. The OAH promotes responsible and sound historical research, analysis, and presentation through its many programs and activities, while striving to make the history of the United States more accessible to the general public. Not only will membership provide you with a range of important publications and services, it also places you in the center of the conversation where the American past is remembered, discussed, and valued.

Membership Highlights

Choose to receive four print issues of the *JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY* or the *OAH MAGAZINE OF HISTORY* and have online access to both.

As the leading scholarly publication on American history, the **JOURNAL OF AMERICAN HISTORY** is recognized as the journal of record in the field. Published quarterly since 1914, the *JAH* includes cutting-edge scholarship in all areas of U.S. history as well as reviews of books, films, Web sites, and exhibits. Access Teaching the *JAH*—a tool that bridges the gap between scholarly publishing and classroom instruction—through the OAH Web site.

THE OAH MAGAZINE OF HISTORY is one of the best tools currently available to teachers of American history. This quarterly thematic publication is written by prominent historians and includes innovative teaching materials.

Add a \$15 subscription to JSTOR—exclusive to OAH members—and access full-text PDF files of the *Journal of American History*, the *Mississippi Valley Historical Review* (the predecessor of the *JAH*), and the *OAH Magazine of History*. Search, browse, download, and print all but the most recent five years of these OAH publications.

Attend the OAH Annual Meeting at a reduced rate. Experience the best new work in U.S. history research and practice, meet and exchange ideas with other historians, attend special sessions and workshops geared toward the needs of history teachers, and explore the latest U.S. history books and offerings in the OAH Exhibit Hall.

Access Recent Scholarship Online, a searchable, cumulative database of citations for new books, dissertations, electronic resources, and articles drawn from more than 1,100 journals. Sign up to receive monthly e-mail updates of the latest scholarship, customized according to your areas of interest.



www.oah.org