Developing Students' Disciplinary Historical Thinking: The Role of Textual and Instructional Resources

Primary Author: Darin Stockdill, University of Michigan, 4003 SOE, 610 E. University, Ann Arbor, MI 48105
daristoc@umich.edu
Byeong-Young Cho, University of Maryland, 2311 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742,
choby@umd.edu
Avishag Reisman, Stanford University, 485 Lasuen Mall, Stanford, CA 94305,
areisman@stanford.edu
Amy Alexandra Wilson, University of Georgia, 309 Aderhold Hall, Athens, GA 30605,
aawilson@uga.edu
Discussant: Dr. Bruce VanSledright, University of Maryland, 2333 Benjamin Building, College Park, MD 20742, bvansled@umd.edu
Chair: Chana Shane-Sagiv, Hebrew University

Abstract: Recent reports on adolescent literacy state that students must develop domain-specific reading skills in order to comprehend the complex texts that pervade secondary and tertiary education. It has been argued that disciplinary historical thinking, in particular, because of its emphasis on evaluating and reconciling conflicting accounts, translates into the skills required for informed citizenship. However, the research on historical thinking is marked by a pronounced absence of (1) prolonged curricular interventions in real classrooms and that attempt to develop students' historical thinking; (2) transfer studies that examine the application of students' historical thinking to digital resources and other texts with which students feel personally invested; (3) the use of multimodal texts in fostering students' historical thinking. The four papers presented in this symposium address these gaps by examining the development of students' historical thinking across instructional contexts with various textual resources.

History education has been justified for over a century on the grounds that no subject is better suited to develop in students the capacity for judgment that is essential for democratic citizenship (Bradley Commission, 1988; Committee of Seven, 1899; National Council for the Social Studies, 2007). However, data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) raise the question of how well we are carrying out this important task. Only 32% of 12th graders scored proficient or advanced in school civics in the 2006 NAEP administration (Lutkus & Weiss, 2007), and only 14% scored at the proficient or advanced level in history on the NAEP (Lee & Weiss, 2007). In the wake of No Child Left Behind, the problem has been exacerbated as school districts have cut social studies classes in an effort to raise literacy and math scores (Center on Education Policy, 2007). This unfortunate curricular reshuffling flies in the face of a recent spate of national reports that insist reading instruction be tied to content and involve domain-specific reading skills (Biancarosa & Snow, 2006; Heller & Greenleaf, 2007; National Institute for Literacy, 2007; Shanahan & Shanahan, 2008). Moreover, the digital age demands that students possess the skills to evaluate the reliability of information sources and reconcile conflicting claims.

Research on disciplinary historical reading practices has identified certain domain-specific reading skills practiced by expert historians. This same body of research has suggested that novices—both high school and undergraduate students—do not spontaneously practice the same reading strategies that expert historians practice automatically and unconsciously (Holt, 1995; Rout et al. 1997; VanSledright & Kelly, 1998; Wineburg, 1991a, 1991b). Historians wend their way through the documentary record, scrutinizing the reliability of sources, corroborating information, and imagining the personal, social, political, and economic contexts of their historical actors. Novices struggle in their attempt to interpret historical texts and have difficulty evaluating the reliability of sources (Wineburg, 1991a). Far from the closed presentation of facts that students encounter in their textbooks, the discipline of history as historians practice it presents knowledge as open and dynamic and sees the past as ultimately elusive and irretrievable. Many students not only view history textbooks as an authoritative historical account, but they also find the texts themselves disconnected from their lives (Bain, 2006).

Having established the difference between experts and novices, the research on historical thinking has largely focused on prompting students to recognize the interpretive, constructed nature of history and to read multiple documents intertextually (Britt & Aglinskas, 2002; Paxton, 2002; Rouet, Britt, Mason, & Perfetti, 1996; Stahl, Hynd, Britton, McNish, & Bosquet, 1996; Wiley & Voss, 1999; Wolfe & Goldman, 2005). The findings from these studies suggest that students will respond to certain instructional manipulations that make apparent and

scaffold the epistemological structure and constructed nature of the discipline. For example, researchers found effects for writing prompts that ask for an argument (Wiley & Voss, 1999), for the insertion of an author's voice in an otherwise passive textbook (Paxton, 2002), for the explicit request for sourcing information (Britt & Aglinskas, 2002), and for the juxtaposition of two contrasting arguments about an historical event (Wolfe & Goldman, 2005).

Yet, we believe this body of research has considered historical thinking on relatively narrow terms. With two classroom interventions standing as exceptions (Nokes et al., 2007; De La Paz, 2005), each approximately two weeks long, the research on historical thinking lacks the ecological validity of the classroom. In most cases, researchers designed laboratory conditions and students individually worked their way through computer-based prompts or document packets. Second, most of the studies were conducted with undergraduate students or high school students who were already proficient readers, not with struggling readers who represent many of the students in our nation's schools. Third, given researchers' claims that historical thinking should be widely transferable to online resources, the materials used in the research on historical thinking have been surprisingly limited to primary or secondary historical sources. Similarly, because this body of research has largely grown out of the findings of expert reading of written texts, the field has by and large ignored the other textual resources and multimodal forms through which the discipline is represented in the classroom.

The four papers in this symposium seek to broaden the foundation upon which historical thinking research has developed to date. In particular, the papers in this symposium address on or more of the following questions:

1. What does an extensive historical thinking curriculum look like in real classrooms, with many students reading below grade-level? What are the effects of such a curriculum intervention?
2. What does historical thinking look like when students work with digital resources and other texts with which they feel personally connected?
3. In what instances can we broaden our definitions of historical texts to include multimodal forms of disciplinary representation?

We believe the four studies we will present make a significant contribution to the field by broadening the resources and contexts that have typically been considered in research on historical thinking. Our panel includes a mixed-methods, experimental study comparing five treatment classrooms and five control classrooms involving over 200 11th grade students. This study looks at the effects of a documents-based curriculum, featuring modified historical documents, on student reading comprehension and historical thinking. The second study asks how students use processes of historical thinking in their engagement with online texts, using verbal reading protocol data, recorded reader-computer interactions, and content analysis of students' graphic representations. We will also present a design study looking to integrate disciplinary practices from history into a community action project after school in an urban community. This effort explores the application of historical thinking, research, and reading to the engagement of youth in developing solutions to issues of concern in their community, using an iterative process of design study to test and develop the model. Finally, the panel includes a case study of three middle school teachers' conceptualizations and uses of historical texts and representations in their classrooms. This study asks how teachers represent historical ideas and texts in their classrooms and relies upon qualitative data and constant comparative analysis as well as video data analyzed through semiotic and multimodal analyses.

This symposium will examine different applications of disciplinary practices in and around schools—from middle school classrooms to high school classrooms to digital environments to after-school programs. We combined our diverse research settings and methodologies to demonstrate the wide range of practices that can inform our thinking and pedagogy in this area. By drawing from these studies of disciplinary practices across multiple settings, we hope not only to expand the conversation around what it means to learn history, but we also hope to add to conversations about collaborating across methodologies to study this important topic in education.

Individual Presentations

The Teen Empowerment through Reading, Research, and Action (TERRA) Project

Darin Stockdill, University of Michigan

The Teen Empowerment through Reading, Research, and Action (TERRA) Project involved a design study on the implementation of an after-school historical reading and action research program for students in an urban school. As a design study, the project was carried out with the goal of studying the initial effectiveness of the model and refining its design as an intervention model for future research. Twelve students were initially recruited to meet

once a week during the school year to take part in this effort in an urban school located in a primarily Latino community.

The instructional approach used was based upon disciplinary practices in history which entail the identification of an historical problem, the selection and analysis of historical evidence, and the production of new historical accounts based upon this process (Bain, 2000). Students engaged in group brainstorming and discussion and chose to focus their study on environmental and infrastructure problems in their community. With the researcher as instructor and co-participant, the group then began the ongoing process of using disciplinary practices and reading heuristics from history to explore the roots of particular manifestations of these problems. In particular, as they learned about the history and economics of the physical deterioration of their community, the participants were provided disciplinary reading instruction as they analyzed historical evidence through the processes of sourcing, contextualizing, and corroborating evidence (Wineburg, 2001). Through this type of critical reflection, students engaged in the production of their own historical accounts of environmental decay in their community and used this to initiate a process of participant action research in which their historical study is guiding informed action (Cammarota, 2007; Morrell, 2006). In this context, students began to see that historical reading and research can be tools for community development and can take on important uses beyond their school classrooms.

Data collection and analysis for this research focused on the process of developing and implementing this instructional intervention. Decisions made by the researcher, who was also the instructor, were carefully recorded and analyzed. Data was also collected in order to describe how students thinking and reading about historical topics developed over the course of the program, with a focus on how the immediate context of the problem of study played a role in setting purpose for their reading and learning. In addition, the study also looked at the role played by their prior knowledge of the community in this process.

Initial analyses of field notes, discussion transcripts, and interview data demonstrated that students were very excited about the project and wanted to learn about the problem. For example, when asked what was different about learning in this fashion, one young man stated that it seemed more important because, "It's about me, it's about my city." Nevertheless, as in many after-school programs, consistent attendance of participants became a concern in some cases despite student expressions of interest. Also, some participants initially resisted the focus on reading when it appeared too much like typical schooling. However, when program adjustments were made to include more discussion and active research such as surveying classmates and documenting the environment with photography, students showed more motivation to engage in readings which they viewed as connected to these experiences. Over the course of the program, four participants in particular committed themselves to this learning process and began to take on the role of researchers. Their prior knowledge of the community helped to set the purpose for their reading and research, but it was actually quite limited in an historical sense. Nevertheless, after being in the program for several months, they began to incorporate evidence from their research into their evolving accounts of urban decay in their community. As the program ended, they used their accounts to develop an educational presentation on solving the problem for other students and community members.

This preliminary evidence suggests that after-school learning may be more effective when it incorporates disciplinary approaches to learning with learning experiences less typical to conventional classrooms. In addition, the initial evidence suggests that disciplinary approaches to historical learning can be effectively linked to the solution of real world problems and thus engage young people in meaningful, active learning.

Historical reasoning on the Internet: How do students read and learn about socially controversial issues in new literacy environments?

Byeong-Young Cho, University of Maryland, College Park

This study describes reading strategies that students used to identify, comprehend, and evaluate Internet texts, and explores promises and challenges in applying heuristics for historical reading into a conceptualization of reading for learning with Internet texts. Twelve 11th-grade participants with established reading abilities individually located and read websites deemed useful to learn about a self-selected socially controversial issue that required historical reasoning. Data collection and analysis used multi-methods aimed at triangulating participants' verbal reports, recorded reader-computer interactions, and graphic representations of their understanding in order to infer their Internet reading strategy use (Afflerbach, 2000)

A preliminary data analysis indicates that historical reasoning strategies may play an important role in critical reading on the Internet while students often have difficulties using these strategies. Internet reading requires readers' constructive strategy use (e.g., constructing potential texts to read, learning text content, monitoring one's reading processes, and evaluating different aspects of reading) in which historical thinking processes are broadly

involved (Afflerbach & Cho, 2009). Internet reading demands intertextual modeling of text content, interrogation of hidden meanings, and critical source evaluation (Rouet, Favart, Britt, & Perfetti, 1997; VanSledright & Kelly, 1998; Wineburg, 1991b) through which active readers learn about the world by responding to the new literacy environments (Bruce, 2000; Kress, 2003; Kuiper, Volman, & Terwel, 2005; Landow, 1992; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). The analysis of students' strategy data will eventually inform a role of historical reasoning strategies in reading multiple, digital texts and what knowledge, epistemology, and skills and strategies should count in history instruction that fosters both students' domain expertise and literacy development.

Reading Like a Historian: A Document-Based History Curriculum Intervention with Adolescent Struggling Readers

Avishag Reisman, Stanford University

In this mixed-methods study, five history teachers' urban classrooms implemented a seven-month documents-based history curriculum with eleventh-grade struggling readers. The study asks whether the findings on expert historical reading can be brought to bear in urban public school classrooms, where students read well below grade level. With five treatment and five control classrooms, and over 200 eleventh grade students, this study was the first of its kind in any major U.S. school district.

The curriculum features modified historical documents, vetted reading instruction methods, and innovative activity structures that provide the necessary supports for disciplined historical inquiry. The curriculum rests on three theoretical assumptions. First, the approach views historical reading as fundamentally intertextual. The intervention shifts the grammar of the history classroom, from one where a single document—the textbook—embodies all historical knowledge, to one where historical knowledge results from the interpretation and evaluation of multiple documents. The second theoretical assumption is that students must *see* cognitive strategies explicitly modeled before they understand how to use and practice them. Third, the curriculum radically modifies documents, both lexically and syntactically. Though originals were available to all students, these adaptations were the only way struggling readers could be exposed to the voices of historical figures.

This study uses mixed methods to capture the effects of the proposed curriculum on student historical reading and general reading comprehension. Four measures were administered to students before and after the intervention: 1) A 30-question multiple choice and constructed-response test of historical thinking that was developed, piloted and validated by the researcher; 2) A nationally-normed reading comprehension test (Gates-MacGinitie); 3) A content test comprised of released multiple-choice items from California's state history assessment; 4) A 20-question transfer test that asked students to apply historical thinking skills to contemporary issues and problems. Because students were not randomly assigned to condition, pretests were used as covariates. A MANCOVA analysis found statistically significant gains for treatment students on all four measures.

Though the quasi-experimental nature of the study precludes causal conclusions, the fact that results were consistent for the treatment condition across a wide range of school and teacher contexts, suggests that the curriculum may have contributed to student gains in reading comprehension and historical thinking. This paper will discuss the features of the curriculum and contrast them with the textual resources and instruction in traditional history classrooms.

Constructing History in Middle Schools: A Social Semiotic Analysis of Texts Used in Three History Classrooms

Amy Alexandra Wilson, University of Georgia

This ten-month multicase study (Stake, 2006) documents the forms of representation used by three middle school history teachers as part of their daily instruction. This study is framed in theories of social semiotics (Halliday, 1978; Hodge & Kress, 1988; van Leeuwen, 2005), which posit that texts *realize* any given social system by "not merely expressing it, but actively creating and maintaining it" (Halliday, 1978, p. 172). A semiotic conceptualization of texts includes communication in any mode or combination of modes, including spoken words, gestures, written words, music, images, and more (Kress, 2003). According to this theoretical framework, multimodal texts used within history classrooms *realize* the discipline of history by instantiating common disciplinary practices, norms, problems, and epistemologies (cf. Brophy, 1996; McDiarmid, Ball, & Anderson, 1989).

To study how the discipline of history was realized in three middle school classrooms, this study undertook a close analysis of the types of texts that three middle school teachers used, the ways in which they combined them,

and the goals toward which they employed them. Four types of data were collected over the course of ten months: field notes from three to five hours of classroom observations per week; artifacts and photographs collected during these observations (e.g., photographs of PowerPoint presentations); monthly interviews with the teachers regarding their evaluation of the instructional materials they used; and three videotaped lessons from each teacher, which enabled a fine-tuned analysis of how different modes were integrated.

The written data are currently being coded in accordance with a modified constant comparative method (Smagorinsky, 2008), whose codes are designed to indicate discipline-specific patterns in the types of representation that are used and the ways in which they are combined, while the video data are being transcribed and coded in the form of a multimodal concordance chart (Baldry & Thibeault, 2006), which records how different modes (images, gestures, written words, spoken words) are integrated and used for different purposes within any given stretch of communication. Preliminary data analysis indicates that teachers often used photographs, maps, video, and other iconic images to refer to observable events or phenomena, but they used written or spoken words to emphasize intangible themes, such as power, governance, changes, or people's thoughts on events.

For example, one eighth-grade history teacher (T1) showed video footage of fire fighters approaching the Twin Towers and clips from the Disney movie *Johnny Tremain* to teach about tangible events that preceded a war: the destruction of the Twin Towers and the Boston Tea Party. However, to raise questions of ethics surrounding when it is appropriate to go to war, he held a classroom discussion that culminated in the students writing an essay addressing when soldiers should be honored as heroes, drawing evidence from multiple instances when America had been at war. As another example, a sixth-grade teacher (T2) showed photographs of the effects of air pollution and acid rain in Mexico City, including statues whose faces had been eroded, along with pointing to maps including the geographical features of Mexico City that trapped the pollution. In talking about intangible themes such as governance and power, however, T2's students held discussions comparing governmental structures across South and Central America and the Caribbean. A third example, drawn from the final teacher who participated in this study (T3), included using drawings of Cortez's landing in the New World to introduce the event of the landing; students later wrote paragraphs evaluating whether or not the Colombian Exchange was ultimately beneficial or harmful.

The three history teachers also drew heavily from embodied representations, or representations in which the students' or teachers' bodies represented a historical figure or object. For example, T3 asked one student to wear a blindfold and walk to the edge of a table to demonstrate what Columbus may have felt like in venturing into relatively unchartered territory, whileT1's class involved students who dressed up as Civil War soldiers and explained what life was like during their time period. In T2's classroom, students studied the histories of sports in different Latin American countries and dressed in jerseys to indicate those countries' affinity for soccer. T3, in teaching an enrichment lesson on reading maps, dressed as a pirate and asked her students to search historical maps to begin a "treasure hunt," while T1 and his students acted in plays that required them to take the place of immigrants to America in the 1800s. Because one goal of history is to encourage students to read both empathetically and critically (Levesque, 2008), while recognizing that all texts convey a perspective shaped by the author's context and group affiliations, these representations enabled teachers and students to embody history as though they were actually living in that time and thinking from that perspective.

In all, however, the teachers valued written words as being the primary source of information in history, regardless of whether those written words were from primary source documents, textbooks, or self-created power point presentations. Though the teachers viewed other representations as vital to their disciplinary goals, they emphasized that history was characterized by a heavy reliance on written and spoken words as key mediators of students' historical understandings and as primary purveyors of content. Written and spoken words enabled them to discuss intangible themes, such as power or justifications for war, in ways that could not be conveyed through iconic representations (or representations such as photographs that bear a physical resemblance to the item they represent). These themes and ideas were more important to the teachers than the actual tangible and observable historical events themselves.

Implications

Taken together, these four papers broaden the resources and contexts that have heretofore been considered in the study of historical thinking. We see two direct implications for the development of historical thinking in students. The first emerges from the scholarship on adolescent literacy that argues that reading instruction must be embedded in the content areas and integrate domain-specific ways for reading if students are to be prepared to comprehend the complex texts they encounter in their upper-level classrooms. According to Massey & Heafner (2004), many

teachers "do not know how to help students develop the skills and strategies necessary for reading comprehension in history classes" (p. 26). Several of the papers on this panel suggest new instructional approaches and alternative resources that could be used to teach disciplinary reading in history classes. The second implication emerges from the earliest arguments for the inclusion of history education in high schools that emerged at the end of the 19th century: the study of history has the potential to develop the capacity for reason and judgment. All the more so in 2009, as the deluge of data in the information age demands an unprecedented degree of discernment and judgment. In the face of increasingly sophisticated marketing of products and ideas towards our youth, it is more important than ever that young people think and learn critically from and about multiple forms of texts, that they can consider opposing points of view and conflicting accounts, and make informed judgments about the world. In the words of Wineburg and Martin (2004), "in our age of new technologies, every crackpot has become a publisher. The ability to judge the quality of information can no longer be considered 'extra credit'" (p. 42). We believe that the papers in this symposium, by broadening both the resources and contexts associated with historical thinking, increase the likelihood that youth will encounter opportunities to 'judge the quality of information' and use their analyses in productive ways.

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