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*Teaching history well: Characteristics of high-quality
secondary and middle level teachers of history*

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Abstract

This exploratory qualitative study serves as a beginning to the discussion of what teachers of history do well. This study involved the interviewing and reviewing of materials from secondary level teachers of history who have been identified by their peers as outstanding teachers of history. The study focused on the following three questions:

1. What are the methods employed by “good teachers of history?”
2. What are the core beliefs regarding the teaching of history possessed by “good teachers of history?”
3. Are the traits and characteristics of “good teachers of history” inherent or could they be learned and developed?

The findings of the study show these high quality teachers of history have their students explore the discipline of history, believe strongly in the lessons gleaned from historical study, and provide hope that these characteristics can be learned and encouraged in young teachers in the training and induction phase of teacher education.

Teaching history well: Characteristics of high-quality secondary and middle level
teachers of history

Introduction

In educational research today, there have been studies and research elucidating what should be done in teaching. Most of this literature proscribes strategies and methods to use in general classrooms. Very little of the research is designed to specifically address the teaching of history. Some methods textbooks provide some means of combining the aforementioned general education literature with social studies content, but little has been done to specifically look at what practitioners do in the classroom.

There have been some notable case studies and other research that has addressed teacher development and background (e.g. Johnston, 1990; Stearns, Sexias, & Wineburg, 2000; VanSledright, 1996a). These works have identified several unique aspects of the teaching of history and provided insight into what good history teachers do in their work. Interestingly enough, they tend not to identify characteristics of teachers who teach history well. If such a list were created, teacher-training programs would be directed to provide a more concise list of dispositions and behaviors desired in teachers of history. Additionally, this list would provide a direction for professional development and professional improvement in practicing teachers.

Steadily increasing lists of journal articles posit arguments for the implementation of methods coinciding with the discipline of history (Barton & Levstik 2003; Downey & Levstik, 1991; Hartzler-Miller, 2001; Pace 2004; VanSledright 2000, 2004; Mayer 2006). Yet, we realize that there are a large number of teachers who are content to utilize traditional methods of teaching history:

The all-too-common pattern of teacher-centered, textbook-driven instructional practice in which students are required merely to memorize and periodically regurgitate selected sets of factual information is wholly inconsistent with the nature of historical inquiry and understanding (Whelan, 1997, p 507).

While there is a growing cry for teachers in the classroom to utilize historical methodology in their teaching, the question remains as to what are those teachers, who are considered to be excellent in their field, doing that separates them from their peers. Are they engaging their students in the methods espoused in the growing body of literature calling for disciplinary history, or are they being recognized for other factors exclusive from pedagogy? Additionally, what are the characteristics and traits shared by teachers identified as being exceptional teachers of history?

A key part of this study was the identification of “good teachers” of history. While somewhat subjective in identifying these participants as is permissible in grounded theory, there were criteria for the initial selection of candidates. As described later, these criteria focused upon student performance in social studies at their school, and/or the position they hold in the community of social studies teachers through awards, recognition, and positions held in professional organizations. While not an ideal determiner of exceptional teaching, these criteria established a baseline for appropriate models of high-quality teaching of history.

Methods

Definition of Grounded Theory

Grounded theory, as developed by Glaser and Strauss, is the process where researchers generate or discover a theory by gathering information from the field or respondents, analyze the data, and then going back to the field to gather more information. The researcher gathers information and then codes are developed via that constant comparative method. The data is then coded, or organized in categories (Creswell, 1998).

Research Framework

This study was qualitative based study using the framework of grounded theory as described by Strauss & Corbin (1990; 1994). An initial interview protocol was developed and the data gleaned from this protocol was coded. After the initial coding, the protocol was refined and the data was recoded according to findings that prompted additional categories for the data. The data in its final reiteration was used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the methods employed by “good teachers of history?”
2. What are the core beliefs regarding the teaching of history possessed by “good teachers of history?”
3. Are the traits and characteristics of “good teachers of history” inherent or could they be learned and developed?

Participants

The participants selected for the study were history teachers of grade 7-12 classrooms in Kansas who were considered by peers to be exceptional teachers of history. In addition to the analysis of their reputation as an outstanding teacher, the researcher looked at the candidate's backgrounds, awards they had received, professional activities they participated in, and evaluations of their social studies programs based upon their school's state assessment performance as to whether or not the school had achieved the "standard of excellence," the goal of student performance on the state assessment in Kansas. By weighing these factors, the researcher could qualify a participant as being a candidate for being interviewed in the study. The study began with one participant that met the minimum requirements and following guidelines of "purposive snowball sampling," additional candidates were added to the pool of candidates in this study. Of those candidates deemed credible and qualifying for this study, initial requests for participation were communicated for interest and those who responded favorably were accepted for the interview. A total of 18 candidates were screened for this study. Of those asked to participate, 12 teachers were selected and agreed to be interviewed to create a portrait of what makes up a good history teacher and to answer the various research questions the researcher wished to explore.

Table 1: Summary of Participants

Participant	Years	Primary Teaching	Brief Description of		
	Experience	Assignment	Setting	Diversity	SES
Amy	38	General H.S.	Rural	2.4%	43.4%
Betty	6	Middle School	Urban	26.5%	43.7%
Carl	32	General & AP H.S.	Urban	12.9%	2.9%
Denise	35	Middle School	Rural	2.1%	28.7%
Earl	10	General H.S.	Rural	2.4%	43.4%
Fred	26	AP H.S.	Suburban	12.1%	2.9%
George	22	Regular H.S.	Rural	1.0%	17.1%
Harvey	10	Regular H.S.	Urban	20%	19%
Ike	12	AP H.S.	Suburban	10.4%	18.2%
James	19	General H.S.	Suburban	7.8%	14.8%
Kevin	5	AP H.S.	Suburban	17.3%	8.0%
Louis	30	General & AP H.S.	Urban	54.1%	36.5%

Setting: Determined by population classification in the state of Kansas

Diverse: Percentage of students from a non-plurality ethnicity

Low SES: Percentage of students deemed “Economically Disadvantaged”

Names provided are pseudonyms of the participants.

(Kansas State Department of Education, 2006-2007 Building Report Cards)

Data Collection

Data was collected in a series of qualitative interviews using techniques described by Bogdan & Biklen (2003), and Creswell (1998). An interview protocol was developed asking a series of questions to elicit reflective responses upon the classroom teachers' repertoire of strategies utilized in instruction. This protocol explored their rationales for and evaluations of the learning experiences. The questions of this initial protocol explored the following topics: teacher training, descriptions of successful units of instructions, descriptions of preferred teaching methodology, descriptions of teacher utilization of historiography in instruction, and how the teacher utilizes inquiry in history instruction. The protocol offered the researcher latitude to probe these topics for further clarification and the protocol was revised as interview responses were transcribed and subjected to initial coding. After the initial two interviews, this protocol was amended to ask further probing questions and the final protocol is included in the appendix.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews and supplementary materials gathered throughout the course of data collection were put through an initial coding. This coding involved organizing significant pieces of data and labeling them in appropriate categories. The initial analysis resulted in the data being organized into the following codes:

1. Training—What has the teacher done in both pre-service and professional development to prepare and improve themselves as teachers?

2. Methods—What specific devices, activities, and techniques have they used in teaching their students?
3. Pedagogy/Theory—What educational theories have they incorporated into their repertoire as far as the field of research is concerned?
4. Technology—What is the role of technology in teaching?
5. Content—What specific topics do they explore? How has this impacted their teaching? What do they want their students to learn?
6. Historiography—What do they think the discipline is all about? How do they view history? To what extent do they teach the discipline of history?
7. Students—What do they say about their students? How do they perceive students in their teaching?
8. Standards & State Assessments—What does the teacher feel about the state administration of history education?

Upon the completion of further interviews, two additional codes were added to the coding analysis. These two categories were:

9. The importance of history—Why do these teachers feel the discipline is so important? What aspects of history increase its relevance and significance?
10. Teaching Savvy—What do these teachers do as experienced teachers that cause them to be considered so good in the realm of teaching?

As additional categories were added, data were recoded. After the data had been coded, evaluated, and recoded, the data of pertinence to this article was separated and again reviewed for what it could illustrate about how these teachers used inquiry in their classroom and how it specifically plays a role in the teaching of history.

Findings

After analyzing and coding, the review of the findings produced three significant themes. These themes emerged from how the findings and codes emerged from the data. The three categories were characteristics of the teachers (training and ideas about students), beliefs about teaching (methods, pedagogy/theory, technology, standards and assessments, and teaching savvy), and beliefs about the discipline of history (historiographical understanding, content, and importance of history). In this section, the main findings of the coded data will be presented organized in the three categories.

Characteristics of the Teachers

In defining the characteristics of the teachers, the data was coded into the training of the respondents and their beliefs about students. In regards to their training, many were actively pursuing additional knowledge. Of the twelve participants in the study, nine either completed or were working on master's degrees in history, two were considering beginning a graduate program, and one stated they would not look into a master's degree. Nearly all of the participants stressed the importance of continuing to improve their content knowledge regardless of whether it was in a formal graduate program or on their own. Five of the participants cited being active students via travel through Fulbright grants or making it a point of their own lives to

explore the historical sites that were of interest to them. One of the participants mentioned that this desire to improve knowledge was necessary as they “had to learn more” to keep up with the growing knowledge of students. Louis went further in explaining the importance of training:

“You continue to grow in your subject matter, you never stop learning history yourself and that becomes the number one thing you have to do because I feel like I am pretty good teacher at this point, but I’ve been at it for a long time. But, I am still not where I want to be...I keep finding things to keep me engaged and I keep buying a few history books and every summer I say this is the summer I want to grow in blank and I find books and I read it and I look at some issues and come back with more knowledge...if nothing else I come back with a unit I am more knowledgeable on. But that keeps you alive and kicking and engaged and if you don’t keep that, kids pick that up...”

Overall, these teachers felt it a mandatory part of their teaching to be students of history themselves. While discussing why it was important to show professionalism in teaching history and demonstrating one’s knowledge of it, Carl commented:

“The biggest thing is modeling. If history is important, kids see me reading a book on history. There’s no sports figures up in my room at all. They’re all history, related to history, European history, especially the European, and a wall of some things of American history. You just have to send the message about being professional and how important this is and that way you can make believers out of them and then they will do what you ask them to do, otherwise they will fight you on it.”

In general the participants felt it was important to be models of students of history in addition to teachers. Modeling includes enhancing their knowledge of history and never being satisfied with their current knowledge base. By demonstrating that learning is a life-pursuit rather than a process that ends upon graduation, teachers have the opportunity to promote excitement and passion for historical study.

In addition to desiring more knowledge about their discipline, the participants had similar responses when talking about their students.

Amy commented when providing a discussion with students:

“Sometimes those discussions are wonderful, you know when you feel the kids are really involved and they are pursuing something and they are interested and on the end of their seats, that’s when you know you’ve had a really good day.”

Several of the participants talked about getting their students successfully involved in wrestling with the issues of historical inquiry. In exploring this, Fred stated:

“Students in general like to succeed and when they succeed and have an accomplishment that more than anything else encourages them to move on in their study of inquiry.”

James added:

“I want my kids to be involved...if they don’t process the information,

then you are not going to get it and that is the whole purpose for [what the teacher does] and it is the best thing for the 'lower kids'."

Resonating with the participants was the importance of having passion for the content and relaying that to the students. In order to get the appropriate 'buy-in' from the student, Carl commented:

"You have to have a passion about what you teach. If you don't have that passion there the kids are going to know it right away and they will tell you every single time the teachers that are my best teachers are ones that are passionate about what they teach. They really care about it and relate that to their students..."

An even more powerful comment was made by Ike:

"From the first day, I ask 'How many of you hate history?' Most of them raise their hand...and my challenge to them is that by the end of the year, you will all love history. You will all learn to appreciate a subject more and more as you get older."

The participants possess a passion for the discipline and teaching students about the discipline of history. To do this well, the participants were in near unanimous agreement that it is required for teachers to continue studying the content. The vast amount of knowledge required to be a successful teacher should be a never-ending quest. This quest is important because it provides the opportunity to show students how important and interesting history can be.

Generally speaking, these teachers have a connection and rapport with their students this allows them to make a connection beyond just the teacher (Danielson, 2007). While there are varying degrees of relationships, the end result is the teachers care about the students learning of history and how they can make an impact upon learning an important discipline.

Beliefs About Teaching

In this general category, the data was organized in the following categories: methods, pedagogy/theory, technology, standards and assessments, and teaching savvy. In exploring the methods in the classroom, respondents focused upon active learning and inquiry. Additionally, reported methods focused upon getting students to be interested in the content. Denise stated:

“Anytime I can bring any artifact, or picture, or anything that I can put in their hands...that hopefully sparks a bit of interest.”

In a similar vein, Fred cited the use of multiple active learning strategies:

“Activities, a variety of activities, a variety of forms of assessment are really helpful.”

Kevin saw the classroom as an opportunity for students to demonstrate what they had learned:

“Anytime I get a chance for my kids to be upfront in front of the classroom and lead them on a particular feature about the subject matter I really try to do that as much as I can because I feel they learn it much better when they do that.”

In general, the participants wanted their students to actively explore the discipline and provided numerous ways of doing so. Ike illustrated an activity when studying the 1950's in American history:

“I do a lot of primary source comparisons, comparing advertising from the 1950's to today. I tie the consumer culture to the prevailing Cold War culture of the time and show a lot of allegorical clips, anything from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* to *Dr. Strangelove* to *The Giant Ant* movies...combining music and film and literature and comparing them to today really draws kids in.

Invariably, respondents commented positively about their students and usually called them ‘my kids’ denoting a sense of pride in their accomplishments and wanting to create a feeling in the teacher’s classroom of intimacy and mutual respect.

This attitude was further documented in the comments provided regarding the pedagogy employed. The responding teachers built their classrooms on models of student ownership of learning and material. But not ownership solely in terms of content. Harvey wanted students to become skilled critical thinkers:

“I am much more focused on skill development than factual development...I think it is just understanding from a broader perspective what my role is as a teacher, not just of content but of skills that will help them in other areas of their life.”

Ike saw his classroom as a place for discussion and the synthesizing of ideas by describing:

“I’m very Socratic in my teaching...I have my desks facing each other with a big giant path and I can get them going on a Socratic discussion and just kind of back out, slowly but surely. I can sit on my stool and these kids aren’t talking to me, they’re now talking to each other...I know that my class has reached that dynamic when they are engaged in history and it’s a gratifying feeling.”

A final commentary on pedagogy came from Fred. In the analysis of classroom activity, this participant saw the resources available to achieve the type of teaching generally desired in this study as being very limited.

“The books out there, the textbooks are crap, they are absolute crap. There are a lot of bells and whistles, but the writing and the richness is completely lacking, they are so superficial and the kids know it too...we get books from our Community College...a pleasantly written college level narrative...and hand them to the regular kids...if it’s direct language and the vocabulary isn’t too challenging, they need a real direct style of narratives, they love it, they like it a lot. They’re fascinated by it.”

In conjunction with this idea, many of the respondents saw technology as a means of improving their instruction. As noted by Denise:

“We need to bring a lot of things outside of the textbook and of course technology is opening up a whole new world.”

With this idea of using the Internet, Fred cautioned:

“I think there is too much dependence on the Internet right now...right now, our students are very, very naïve when it comes to Internet sources and in general research skills are absolutely horrible.”

In addition to using the Internet as a learning tool, respondents utilized various forms of technology to supplement their instruction. Harvey was rather clever in the ability to teach with technology and commented:

“I use it quite a bit, not as much as I want, whether it be utilizing my data projector to show a Power Point. I link to a newspaper blogs and have my own website which I put up audio pod-casts of related information and reviews [of course content].”

When discussing the ability of technology to enhance teaching and learning, participants generally noted the great potential of technology to positively affect student learning. In explaining some of the activities done in the classroom, Louis commented:

“I’ve been putting in some images and ideas in Powerpoints and in many ways it becomes an artistic creation and amazing power you can put to the message by making them artistic creations.”

Respondent's attitudes towards state standards and assessments were generally negative.

Frustration stemmed from what respondents perceived as the imposition of curriculum and the lack of consideration of the content test in today's educational climate. A comment made by George summarized the best attitude of the respondents:

“I think [standardized tests are] good, but at the same time, I think those tests are pretty subjective...the indicators are purely a reflection of what those people thinks important...at least we look at what we teach now.”

One of the interesting aspects of the study was identifying elements of the respondents that was categorized as “teaching savvy,” defined in this study as the practical knowledge of teaching social studies. As a representative example of this practical knowledge, Amy when talking about students and historical thinking responded:

“Historical thinking per se is a new things for them...You've got to make it come alive. You've got to get them involved enough that they not only understand it, they want to know more, they are curious, they've got questions about it. All of those things are primary. Today with all those resources we don't have to open their heads and cram all this knowledge in. What we have to do is teach them the method how-to. Here is what is more important, the questions you ask, you know, look at your sources, and that kind of thing.”

This knowledge can be found throughout all of the other categories and the volume of data that was coded in this content would be rather large and could be analyzed in a study by itself.

In looking at the responses provided by the participants, the teachers that were interviewed provided a glimpse of great teaching ability. In addition to being able to use interesting strategies to promote student engagement, these teachers in general were able to use the knowledge gained through being able to work with students to help maximize their relationships with students. The methods and strategies were employed were rooted in differentiation and tailoring to individual students. By promoting engaging strategies tailored to the abilities of students, the participants are able to make history an engaging and meaningful subject.

Beliefs About the Discipline of History

The third broad category the data was organized in was the respondent's beliefs and attitudes about the discipline of history and its relative importance. The first specific coding was the teacher's understanding of historiography. A note to be said about this topic is the lack of understanding of historiography by those participants who had not advanced in their study of history or were relative young in their career. While this may propose concern about the qualifications of these teachers as being "good teachers" of history, the general finding was a lack of understanding of this advanced concept of historical study.

Those who were well versed in their knowledge of historiography were adamant in their importance of the topic, especially by those who taught in Advanced Placement courses. Betty, when queried about her understanding of historiography, remarked:

“I think [history] is the study of interpretations and it’s going to depend on who you talk to and whose interpretation you are reading to get what happened, because...I wasn’t there and even if I was there I would write down things on how I saw them and how I believed them to have happened and so what we have is a reference from people like that and we have to take those different sources and put them together and try to come up with what we think is the most accurate story based on these different people’s writings and I try to talk to the kids about that.”

When discussing how historiography was used in their classes, Harvey observed:

“We try to hit them with different types of literature and sometimes much more like a historiography approach to some of the subjects which will provoke some discussions about the various issues...depending on the genre we are in or the subject matter, I will find experts that will give them a viewpoint on a particular topic...we’ll talk about specific historians and things like that and schools of thought...I give them some handouts that have four or five or six different rationales for why slavery was started whether it be, Winthrop Jordan or other various historians that would say part of it would be class control. Others explore pre-embedded racial ideas, things like that and as a result of all that, then I would, after three or four of those, let them make their own decision as to which would be most correct and have them come up with a rationale as to why.”

Finally, Fred commented:

“Historiography is a really important component but I think that in general, whether it is an AP course or a regular history course, I think it’s imperative to introduce, and most good history teachers I know, coming from very different backgrounds do something about historiography in the beginning.”

As many of the participants noted, content worked hand-in-hand with their student’s understanding of history. Many of the respondents noted that it was sometimes the “odd material” that got student’s attention. Carl commented:

“Weird stuff that gets their attention...we were talking about Persia and what they did to the serfs that would run away in the 17th century and they’d nail their ear to a post and then give them a knife to cut it off...the boys think it’s kind of cool and the girls are shrieking and that kind of thing.”

Overall, however, each of the participants stressed the importance of growing in content and for the instructor to be the catalyst for excitement regarding the richness of content. Louis noted the importance of content in explaining one’s professional growth:

“I work on a unit each summer to grow in it. I find books and I read...and kids pick that up and say ‘where did you learn that.’ If you become engaged and active and show that you love the content, the kids pick it up and if you don’t have that, you might as well forget it.”

The final coding category was the “importance of history” and was very illuminating as to why these teachers do what they do. Carl cited the importance of history:

“I tell them it’s the most important course that they have...we talk about what good is history, why is it really important... it prepares you for judgment, for making judgments not only when you’re just talking about history but about anything in life it prepares you to do critical thinking skills, it prepares you to analyze information, I mean we live in the age of information. It’s not that we don’t have enough, it’s that we might have too much. We have to determine what is good information and what is bad... Where better to be trained than in history?”

Harvey saw a more practical reason for the importance of history:

“I think it is imperative for kids to know where they are going and where we are going as a country. They have to have a good foundation and basis for where we have been in the past. Especially not just American history but from a world history perspective as we become more global in our interactions around the world. Even if it is just a basic rudimentary understanding of different cultures and different peoples...”

While an interesting exploration of the importance of history, the researcher was struck in particular by a simple summation provided by Fred. While paraphrasing a discussion between Charles Land and Arthur Slasenger, the teacher argued that history is “sufficiently important and exciting and entertaining.”

Summary

The three guiding questions to this study are found below:

1. What are the methods employed by “good teachers of history?”
2. What are the core beliefs regarding the teaching of history possessed by “good teachers of history?”
3. Are the traits and characteristics of “good teachers of history” inherent or could they be learned and developed?

Answers to these questions will now be summarized based upon the data presented earlier.

The first question asks what are the methods employed by good teachers of history. Typically the teachers involved in the study focus on utilizing hands-on and interactive methods and strategies that rely on the integration of reading and writing. As one teacher noted, these teachers try to “avoid being the conveyor belt of information” in the classroom. These teachers rely heavily upon access-instruction where students are responsible for the impetus of learning. Throughout the interviews, it became evident that these teachers typically went for depth of understanding as opposed to the large breadth of content covered in a typical course, the exception to this was those teachers responsible for AP classes.

The second question analyzed what core beliefs regarding the teaching of history are possessed by “good teachers of history.” In short, the participants of this study can almost be universally described as feeling history is inherently important to develop critical thinkers, is a discipline whose content can inspire and motivate learners in ways other disciplines cannot, and is a vehicle from which they can have the greatest impact upon the lives of students not only in content, but beyond the walls of the classroom as well. These universal opinions can be

extrapolated to produce a further set of assumptions about what these individuals believe about the teaching of history. Their methods break from the norm of traditional classroom teaching in order to best illustrate the content and guide student's search for understanding. In conversing with these participants, it became evident that they were creative and exceptional intelligent individuals who had not only a passion for teaching students, but a vibrant passion for history as well.

The final question examined if the traits and characteristics of "good teachers of history" were inherent or if they could possibly be learned and developed. By qualifying the characteristics of a good teacher of history, generalizations can be made about these teachers and identifies what is desired in young teachers. In looking at the three broad categories found in the data coding--teacher characteristics, teaching skills, and history understanding—each of these categories have characteristics that can possibly be learned. Each has characteristics that are inherent or at least the degree the participants possess this characteristic is inherent. Improving teacher's understanding of content and skills of teaching are behaviors that can be enhanced through training. However what teachers believe about students, although it can be modified and encouraged, to an extent it must be an inherent part of a person's makeup. The final consideration of a teacher's skill-set is the natural intelligence and understanding of historical concepts of the individual teacher. In summary, a teacher can be offered opportunities to be adequately trained and prepared to be an excellent teacher, but how the teacher uses their preparation is left entirely up to the teacher's preparation.

Discussion

“Historical inquiry can be viewed as an instructional approach which brings together new understandings about the discipline of history as well as recent developments in cognitive research, especially in regard to children’s historical thinking” (Hartzler-Miller, 2001).

In Hartzler-Miller’s article on the teaching of history, it becomes evident teacher’s have a tremendous impact upon student’s understandings and conceptions of history. A plethora of research studies and illuminated ideas exist illustrating how historical thinking and disciplinary history can have a tremendous impact upon student learning (e.g. Fehn & Koeppen, 1998; Johnston, 2006; Kobrin, Abbott, Ellinwood, & Horton, 1993; Komblath & Lasser, 2003; Newman, 2004; Roberts, 2005; Thornton, 1997). The key is to encourage and challenge those who train and develop teachers to stimulate teaching that goes beyond the current norm found in traditional classrooms and utilize the pedagogy and passion found in the participants of this study. In short, engagement is the key to motivating students to succeed in their study of history. What is the best means to promote this engagement? The responses from the participants in this study and those cited above that this engagement stems from students wrestling with the material as well as providing the minutiae and trivia to grab students attention. By providing students with this information, it serves as a catalyst for interest and excitement in finding out about those people who populate the pages of textbooks that create a malaise of faceless figures that are discussed.

Along these lines, J. F. Voss (1998) reminds us that the focus of history instruction should be on the “ideas of historical significance,” “concepts of causation in history, and other

aspects of history's conceptual structure." Whereas this statement seems to be in paradox to the idea above, it is genuinely compatible with this assertion. Good history instruction is focused beyond factual recall. It should focus on the application of knowledge rather than the recitation of factual information. Thus, while there is a need for the teacher to utilize information to promote and pique student interest, the heart of the instruction should focus on using the mechanisms and aspects of history to truly ignite the critical thinking and interpretation skills that the discipline of history offers. To place this argument in another perspective, by having students wrestle with ideas that they find interesting creates an environment of thought, cognition, and engagement. Grappling with the issues presented by sources presents a meaningful and viable option for the teacher to generate stimulating thinking. As noted by Charles Rosenberg, "there is an aesthetic of complexity in history; in history, at least, less in not more, but less" (1997).

The synthesis of these two disparate ideas can be seen in the ideas of Bruce VanSledright (1996b). In exploring the purposes of learning history, and by extrapolation of the participants' responses from this study "doing history," VanSledright provides a greater reason for the utilization of the higher level thinking involved in source analysis and study.

"How students view the purpose of engaging in topical or disciplinary study appears deeply connected to what they eventually learn and understand. The purposes they bring to bear on their efforts to learn about something, and the role their peer, parents, and especially play in the process, are associated with how they construct meaning and link it to their own lives" (VanSledright, 1996b).

This understanding of the importance of history focuses upon the perception that history is important for students to learn. In a sense, the specific content in which it occurs is not as important as it is for students to learn the skills and thought processes. This point of view can be seen as a very complex issue, but there is some merit to it, especially given the confrontations and debates facing the writers of current curriculums at the national and state level (Evans, 2004; McKinley, 2010; Nash, 2004). To present this idea of focusing on skills is not realistic in the world of high stakes testing and accountability however. There is a corpus of ideas and facts that students should be familiar with in order to meet the aims of history education, namely, citizenship and the cultural foundations of this nation and humanity as a whole.

If those preparing future teachers and guiding the professional development of those already in the field are truly concerned about the performance of students in studying history, it must be asserted that the primary influence upon student conceptions of history is the teacher (VanSledright, 1996b). Thus, if we are to make genuine impact upon improving student conceptions and understanding of history, a concerted effort to utilize the techniques of high-quality teachers must be undertaken. These techniques include moving instruction beyond factual recall and towards application, specifically the ideas of historical significance, concepts of causation, and the practice of constructing interpretations (Voss, 1998).

Another consideration that must be evaluated though is the type of history instruction that occurs. While teachers should be looking at their pedagogical repertoire and adding research based strategies proven to increase student achievement, the style of the teacher must also be considered. Brophy and VanSledright considered this question and determined teachers could be categorized within four different styles: storytelling, scientific, reform, and eclectic (Brophy & VanSledright, 1997). The storyteller has the ability to ‘spin a yarn’ or relate an historical event

in a compelling narrative so that students are able to relate to the content of in a narrative form. The scientific teacher follows the 'lab orientation' of history and has students dig deep into the primary sources to develop an interpretation of historical phenomena. The reformer looks for a means to glean lessons from the material being studied, almost adopting the classical view of education to show wrongs and promote the values of the more meritorious figures of history. Finally, the eclectic teacher moves from one style to another in a seamless manner and can effectively use all three of the aforementioned styles pending the content to be covered or the learning styles of the student. Most of the participants of the study fall into the eclectic style. This mere fact demonstrates the need for the teacher, in setting the context for learning, must be able to view history from more than one point of view and present it to students in various ways so that the full benefit of history instruction can be acquired.

A final note to be considered when preparing educators to be great practitioners of history is that teachers of history are not bound to the same requirements as historians (Husbands, 1996). Historians write to collect their data, to organize their data, to present their data, and to comment upon other historian's work. While this is how academic historians perform their tasks, it is not the lone requirement for classroom history. In fact, how historians conduct quality research by creating interpretations meeting the following criteria: accurate, comprehensive, consistent, open to examination, progressive, and fruitful (Bevir, 1994). These criteria, while desirable for professional historians, are not what is hoped for by students in the classroom. It can be desired for teacher's to cause their students to create historical interpretations that are accurate, comprehensive, consistent with the sources, and open to examination by their peers. This denotes a greater understanding of history and what makes it possible for students to wrestle with the sources and makes best use of the historical research that exists today.

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Appendix

Final Interview Protocol

Date: _____ Time: _____ Interview #: _____

Setting: _____

“The purpose of this study is to find what high quality teachers of history do in their classes that separate themselves from other teachers of history. You have come recommended to me from a peer who feels that you are a very capable teacher. You have the right to end this interview at any time or not answer any question at any time without penalty as noted on your consent form. Please feel free to answer freely as your identifying information will be stricken from any record of this interview. With that in mind...”

1. Tell me about your educational and teaching background.
2. Can you explain how you implement some of your more effective lessons and/or units that you teach?
3. What materials would you use to teach..... (see responses in #2)
4. How do you do to engage students in the study of history?
5. What do you do to reach the “hard to reach student” in your classes?
6. What is your most effective unit or most effective types of lessons in terms of methodology and strategies?
7. What is the role of history in the curriculum?
8. What is your opinion of the standards and state assessment?
9. Is there a place for historiography in secondary history instruction?
10. How does your approach to AP classes and general survey classes differ?
11. How do you use technology in your instruction?
12. Who else do you know that you would consider an outstanding teacher of history?
13. Based on the questions I have asked, do you have any questions or further comments that would be useful for me to know or take into consideration.