

INTRODUCTION TO A SPECIAL SECTION OF *TEACHING HISTORY*

Teaching History: A Journal of Methods was first published in 1976. The purpose of the journal has been to provide history teachers at all levels with the best and most relevant ideas for their classrooms. In recognition of the journal's recent 40th anniversary and Larry Cuban's timely book, *Teaching History Then and Now: A Story of Change and Stability in America's Schools* (2016), we created a special section for the Fall 2017 and Spring 2018 issues of the journal.

In the Fall 2017 issue of *Teaching History*, Richard Hughes offered a review of Cuban's book. Next, Hughes provided an analysis of the early years of the journal, focusing on the journal's founding in the context of teaching movements in the 1970s. Finally, we asked history educators across the K-16 continuum to draw upon their personal experiences and assess the evolution of history teaching. Specifically, we asked: To what extent has the teaching of history changed or remained the same in your career? That issue consisted of contributions of individuals who focused on teaching history largely in the context of secondary schools. Our Spring 2018 issue features commentary that pertains to teaching history with an emphasis on the university context.

—SDB

REFLECTIONS FROM THE FIELD TEACHING HISTORY NOW: THE UNIVERSITY CONTEXT

Sarah Drake Brown

Contributors:

Todd Beach, Eastview High School, Apple Valley, MN
Kristy Brugar, University of Oklahoma
Lendol Calder, Augustana College
Karen Carroll Cave, National Humanities Center
Frederick D. Drake, Illinois State University
Stephen Kneeshaw, College of the Ozarks
Bruce Lesh, Maryland State Department of Education
Jodie Mader, Thomas More College
Donn Neal, National Archives and Records Administration
Pamela Riney-Kehrberg, Iowa State University
Raymond Screws, Arkansas National Guard Museum
Wilson J. Warren, Western Michigan University

In a majority of the personal reflections submitted by historians asked to consider change and continuity in history teaching, contributors emphasized technology in the classroom. Focusing on both the advantages offered through the use of YouTube and camera-ready cell phones in the classroom and the challenges that accompany distracted students, historians wondered about technology's potential to "derail us from 'real' teaching." Writers also called attention to their concern with undergraduates' understanding of the work of doing history, "widespread ignorance," and "self-inflicted blindness to demonstrable facts." In general, their worries reaffirmed their commitment to the importance of history as a way of thinking and a way of knowing.

In the three essays that follow, each author emphasizes the importance of embracing change while recognizing that fidelity to the discipline serves as the driving force animating historians as scholarly teachers.

Lendol Calder

It was my first year of teaching. I was grouching about dull undergraduates when a colleague interrupted to say: "Lendol, you need to learn to love your students." She was right. And she brilliantly linked the emotive side of teaching, which calls for passion and care, to teaching's intellectual complexion: i.e., something to be *learned*. For me, this was new country. Previously, I thought teaching was a natural gift to be improved by haphazardly acquired tips. I had no formal pedagogical training. As teachers go, I was raised by wolves.

So I set out to learn how to teach. The first thing I had to learn was a paradoxical paradigm shift: Teachers get better when they focus less on teaching and more on learning. The second thing I learned was that scholarship on learning has produced a literature that is community property to be studied and acted on. The third thing was that the improvement of learning is discipline-specific. It isn't enough to learn to think like a teacher; one needs to think like a *history* teacher.

It's been twenty years since my colleague's advice. A lot has changed. I no longer walk to class thinking: "What will I say today?" Instead, I'm thinking: "What will they do today?" The wonderful thing is I am not alone in this. Teaching practice in the profession has been altered by waves of new history teaching scholarship, initiatives such as the AHA Tuning Project, and public pressure for accountability. The shift from teaching to learning is uneven, halting, and thinly rooted. But evidence it is happening is easy to find. A society has been formed: the International Society for the Scholarship of History Teaching and Learning. "Backwards design" syllabi abound. SoTL is in. Lectures are out. Articles on history teaching are increasingly footnoted and data-driven so that knowledge rests on evidence, not just anecdotes.

Waves of teaching reform have come and gone before. All failed. Will this one endure? It has to. College degrees are too expensive for students to learn just a little. Inequities in the United States are too severe for historians to continue being part of the

problem—by teaching in ways that penalize minority, first-generation, and low-income students—instead of using solutions that help all students succeed. The days when a professor could talk for 55 minutes and then go off to do their “real work” are over. Or else the history degree is over.

Pamela Riney-Kehrberg

My comments on the evolution of the college classroom will probably out me as an old fuddy-duddy, but that’s a risk I’m willing to take. I earned my doctorate at the University of Wisconsin-Madison in 1991, so my teaching career has included six years as a teaching assistant and graduate lecturer at Wisconsin, followed by nine years as a faculty member at Illinois State University, and seventeen at Iowa State University. Since 1985, I have taught in just about every kind of classroom: introductory surveys, intermediate and upper level undergraduate courses, and graduate courses. My students have included the exceptionally well-qualified as well as the woefully under prepared, but with most tending toward a middling level of preparation for college.

A growing concern of mine that has evolved from a low hum to a loud shriek has been my concern about student use of the internet. On the one hand, I have greatly enjoyed having access to the kind of visual materials for the classroom that I only dreamed of twenty or thirty years ago. I love being able to introduce my students to websites such as Yale’s Photogrammar, which maps the FSA/OWI photographs both spatially and chronologically. This is useful and helpful. What is far more discouraging, however, is trying to assign research papers in the age of the internet. While students can now find some sources that they never would have before, they have also forsaken the library and books for whatever stuff they can find online. They lack the tools to separate the scholarly resource from the fluff piece and the hoax, and use them all indiscriminately. All information, apparently, is now equal, and it is extremely difficult to convince students otherwise, even with the threat of lowered grades. If material is not available instantly, at the stroke of a key, it is no longer useful. I was dismayed to find that the same was true for middle and high school students when I judged the state National History Day competition. If research at the undergraduate level is to survive, it is going to require a great deal more effort on our part. It is probably too much to expect that all students will come to love the thrill of ferreting out information, but I am very concerned about the havoc the internet has wreaked on students’ willingness to engage in the hunt.

Stephen Kneeshaw

In 1971, as a young college professor, I modeled my teaching style after the stand-up lecturers who turned me on to history, and it worked—or, at least, it appeared

to work. Students paid attention in class and they performed well on tests. But at some point, I began to ask myself if other approaches might work as well or even better. As we all know from history, times change, and I changed, too. In the mid-1970s and early 80s, I grabbed hold of some opportunities that promised to add to my store of knowledge and skill set and opened my eyes to new possibilities. Philip Rulon and Loren Pennington invited me to join them in the creation of a new history journal that would provide teachers at all levels new ideas for their classrooms. As the editor of *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*, as I read more and more contributions from teachers and professors from across the country, my views of history teaching widened, and occasionally I decided to try out some new teaching methods, at least new for me.

As I look back now, I know that changing my methods of teaching marked my personal evolution as a teacher, seeing new possibilities and seizing new opportunities. History teaching changed for me when I rethought the scope and style of my lectures and Q-and-A sessions and then again when I added new materials to class content. Here I do not mean just keeping up to date with new research and bringing the story closer to the present. Rather I began to bring new topics into class in response to changing student interests and my effort to stay connected to new generations of students. I was responding to a changing audience.

I taught American history at the college level for forty-five years and watched one-after-another generation of students walk into my classrooms. Times change, and students change, too. But one thing should never change—our commitment to give our best to our students every day. The stakes are high, and today knowing history might be more important than ever before in the life of our country. I would encourage teachers everywhere to think about this question every day: What do teachers do? Our response, yes, our mantra should be “We make a difference!” If we are willing to make changes, we will make that difference.