

ACTIVE LEARNING IN HISTORY CLASSES

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Tell me, and I'll listen
Show me, and I'll understand
Involve me, and I'll learn.
--Lakota Indian

I believe that the great challenge confronting historians today is the challenge of the classroom. To meet it we shall have to give to teaching a higher place in our scale of values than we do today We shall ourselves have to be the best teachers that we know how to be, the most humane, the most sympathetic, the most dedicated.

--Dexter Perkins, AHA Presidential Address, December 1956

and thirty years later . . .

I am suggesting that unless we restore to the teaching of history at every level that humanistic aspect that sees history primarily as the story of people living in a distant time and in another place--unless we do that we lose the greatest strength that history has to offer Teaching history well is one of the best things a person can do.

--Gerda Lerner, OAH Address to Teachers, April 1986

Henry Adams had a problem. Actually, he had several, not least his incomplete education as he pursued thirteenth-century unity in the midst of twentieth-century multiplicity. Adams, moreover, was concerned with the moral collapse of American politics, which mirrored the decline of the Adams family itself. Descended from two former presidents and a distinguished diplomat father, Henry was "just" an historian. But the immediate problem he faced in 1870, as Charles Eliot called him to teach medieval history at Harvard, was how to do it.

Adams began his academic career in a way familiar to thousands of subsequent history professors: No one helped him learn how to teach. Worse yet, he did not know much about his field. Adams confessed later in *The Education of Henry Adams* that he had not given more than "an hour, more or less, to the Middle Ages," knowing only "enough to be ignorant." Although contemporary historians, unlike Adams, "know their field," many have little if any preparation in how to teach it. The highest challenge we face is to motivate our students to love history as we do by involving them more actively in its study.

Henry Adams tried several approaches to involve his students in class: discussions, lectures, and seminars. He decided that he wanted to get students "to talk," which meant "he had to devise schemes to find what they were thinking about, and induce them to risk criticism from their fellows." But Adams could not discover what was on his students' mind, he reported, in part because "their professor had nothing in his." Discouraged with discussions, Adams shifted to lectures, which he thought appropriate to a course on "the twelfth century." But lecturing "suited Adams not at all," he wrote, because he wanted "to teach his students something not

wholly useless." Only one in ten, he estimated, was stimulated by what he had to say.

Finally Adams resolved to "cultivate this tenth mind" by involving students in a seminar to instruct them in the use of the "historical method" as a way of finding out what he and they did not know. After a period of illusory pleasure with this system, Adams concluded that "his wonderful method led nowhere" and was "doomed to failure." He declared both himself and the educational system as "fallacious." After six years he "was content neither with what he had taught nor with the way he had taught it," and resigned. As Adams wrote in *The Education*, he "tried a great many experiments, and wholly succeeded in none."¹

History professors today, unlike Adams, do not have the luxury of an independent income and therefore must teach. And we do so "gladly," as Dexter Perkins said in his AHA presidential address in 1956. Nevertheless, like Henry Adams we, too, struggle with the challenge of getting students motivated and involved with the texts, themes, issues, and questions of history that excite us. Many of us have tried in vain to get students "to talk." Many, too, have encountered classes of students who confessed that they thought history was "boring," "a bunch of names and dates and facts." Although there are small signs of recent resurgence, history enrollments have plummeted overall in the past two decades. Cultural priorities partly explain the flight. A recent Gallup and National Geographic Society survey revealed that only 36% of the people surveyed said it was "absolutely necessary to know something" about history, compared to 83% for math and 64% for computer skills. Geography ranked higher than history by 1% and only the foreign languages, at 20%, ranked lower.

But history suffers from internal fragmentation as well as from external social attitudes. Like other disciplines, history has become "excessively compartmentalized and irrelevant except to our own diminishing numbers," as one representative historian complained in an OAH survey in 1986. David Thelen, who reported on the survey, expressed his surprise not that there was a gap between narrow scholarship and the "generalist" goals and needs of most historians, but rather with "the depth and breadth of dissatisfaction with 'overspecialization' of scholarship."²

"Our academic arrogance," Bernard Weisberger has written recently, has "allowed many professors to lose touch with their base in popular culture." The irony he points out, is that just as the study of history has expanded to include more and more social groups and public purposes, historians have widened the gap between themselves and others--including students. Although "history is not sick," Weisberger writes, "the *teaching* of history may be."³ Some critics, such as Theodore Hamerow, Gertrude Himmelfarb, and Bernard Bailyn, blame the new social history for the loss of a coherent narrative story of the past. Many others, such as Thomas

¹ Henry Adams, *The Education of Henry Adams* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1918), 300-304.

² David Thelen, "The Professor and the *Journal of American History*," *The Journal of American History*, 73 (June 1986), 9.

³ Bernard A. Weisberger, "American History is Falling Down," *American Heritage* (February/March 1987), 32. See also Diane Ravitch, "Decline and Fall of Teaching History," *New York Times Magazine*, November 17, 1985, 50-56, 101, 117.

Bender, Robert Kelley, and Carl Degler, call for incorporating social history into a new narrative synthesis. Multiculturalism adds to the challenge.

In 1988 in the *OAH Newsletter*, Deborah and Robert Kuhn McGregor summarized many current dissatisfactions: "We stand justly accused," they wrote, "of writing only for one another." But unlike other critics, the McGregors took action by conducting a summer institute for secondary history teachers on the new social history and in developing pedagogical materials to help students learn it. Their experience was not entirely a happy one. They concluded that "the chasm between history taught at the secondary level and history researched at the university level seems very wide and imposing."⁴ But surely, a similar gap exists in post-secondary history teaching as well.

These colleagues exhort us, as did Dexter Perkins and Gerda Lerner, thirty years apart, to devote more energy and creativity to bridging the chasm between scholarly specialization and our responsibilities to both the public and our students to teach history well. A recurring theme in Joan Hoff-Wilson's annual reports to OAH on the various crises besetting the historical profession, as she wrote in 1986, is that the crisis "involving better teaching of history in secondary and higher educational institutions (especially the survey classes) remains very much with us."⁵

This article seeks to support the need to achieve "better teaching of history" by suggesting several practical strategies for involving students more actively in the history classroom, thus revitalizing their--and our--enthusiasm for learning history in colleges and universities. Nowhere is this challenge more important than in survey courses. The suggestions made here, though applicable to history courses at any level, are focused on building active learning into the survey. These strategies are appropriate for any size class--40 or 400--and for any kind of room, even a conventionally-tiered lecture hall with students in chairs bolted to the floor in rows facing a lone professor standing behind a lectern.

Every study of effective educational practices in recent years, including even medical education, cites active and small group cooperative learning, high expectations, and the giving of caring, constructive, and frequent feedback to students, as the most crucial elements for learning.⁶ Despite the consistency of these recommendations, most college and university professors, historians among them, in most classes most of the time, continue to lecture to mostly passive and increasingly inattentive, unmotivated audiences. We lecture for many compelling reasons, as we have all said: "I'd like to do less lecturing, but there's too much to cover." Or, "I teach the survey and I've got to get from the fall of Rome to the French Revolution." Or, "I'd like to try some new methods, but I can't--I have 300 students in the class, you know." Or, "Student interaction is impossible in my

⁴ Deborah Kuhn McGregor and Robert Kuhn McGregor, "Strange Brew: 'New' History and Old Methods," *OAH Newsletter* (May 1988), 10-11.

⁵ Joan Hoff-Wilson, "Report of the Executive Secretary," *OAH Newsletter* (May 1986), 1.

⁶ See especially, Arthur W. Chickering and Zelda F. Gamson, "Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education," *AAHE Bulletin* (March 1987); *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education*, National Institute of Education (October 1984); Ernest L. Boyer, *College: The Undergraduate Experience in America*, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (New York: Harper & Row, 1987); and *A New Vitality in General Education*, Assn. of American Colleges, 1988.

classroom--the chairs are in rows bolted to the floor--all I can do is lecture." Or, "With all the recent criticisms of how little college students know about American history and geography, I'd better lecture to make sure they know the important facts."

There are valid reasons for lecturing, and it is not my intention to repudiate the use of lectures to achieve such legitimate learning goals. It is wrong to assume that students listening to a lecture are necessarily inactive. Lectures are necessary to impart new information and to structure an important topic or series of events, or to explain, clarify, and organize difficult concepts, or to analyze and compare relationships among two cultures or two different eras, or to tell a compellingly interesting story, such as the course and significance of the defeat of the Spanish Armada, or the Seneca Falls convention, or the election of 1912. Lectures, most importantly, can inspire student enthusiasm for further learning and informed right actions, in Emerson's words, "to set the hearts of youth on flame."

Unfortunately, not all lectures meet the Emersonian standard. Even when they do there is substantial evidence of diminishing attention and retention after about 20 minutes. The point, however, is not to quit lecturing but rather to vary our lectures with active learning strategies. The lecture is but one instructional method among many, all intended to increase ways of involving students actively in large impersonal history classes. Our choice of strategy depends on our goals. When "covering" or synthesizing new material, no doubt we can lecture. But for teaching students to decipher documents, to detect historical interpretations and develop their own, to distinguish underlying and proximate causes of events, and to appreciate the complexity of human motivation, much less to learn how to write and speak well, students need to be more active learners.

Three pervasive principles are important for active learning. First, given the fact that students have diverse learning styles, teachers should use a variety of different strategies in order to reach these diverse students. We need to vary our methods not only on different days but also within any single class period. Energy shifts about every 20 minutes, in which both the activity and the voices that speak are changed, continually reenergize student attention and aid their learning. For example, after 15-20 minutes of a lecture how Puritan theology gave energy to Massachusetts Bay, students will need a few minutes to absorb and integrate what they have learned. They need to reflect, ask questions, and repeat their understanding of covenant theology (no easy task) or how one knows one is saved. After hearing several students struggle to explain, in Edmund Morgan's terms, how one seeks to purify a flawed institution by leaving it, students may need the teacher's clarification. Within a 50-minute period, the energy shifts twice as students listen to a concept explained, work with it themselves, and then get feedback on their understanding of the concept.

Students also need visual reinforcements, a second crucial pervasive principle for learning. Like it or not, we compete not just with TV but with MTV. The larger the class the more need for the visual support of chalkboards, handouts, and overhead transparencies. In our class on Puritanism it would help to have the essential points of Calvinism and of Winthrop's "city on a hill" speech on the *Arabella* listed somewhere, as well as to see on a map the geographical relationship between Old and New England. Personalizing an issue is also a way of visualizing it. Pick a student, John, for example, in the third row, who like a good Puritan is

concerned with the question of whether or not he is saved and how knowing that might make a difference in the kind of life he leads. Focusing on John is a way of activating the involvement of the entire class and making abstract issues concrete and personal.

Or consider the evocative power of slides, not just in a slide-lecture, but as a way of involving every student actively in the interpretation of a single visual image. For example, show a slide (or overhead transparency) of a Thomas Nast or Herblock cartoon, or a photograph of a family or famous scene (Pearl Harbor or Kent State), or a presidential campaign poster, or a powerful painting or lithograph of an historical scene. Ask students first to describe what they see and then to analyze what it means, perhaps even to suggest a title or caption. My favorite is John Gast's "Westward-Ho," also known as "American Progress," which shows Indians, buffalo, and a bear fleeing westward as Miss Liberty, carrying a schoolbook and stringing telegraph wire, brings light and "civilization" as she leads miners, farmers, ranchers, stage coaches, wagon trains, and railroads across the country. There are lots of details to describe. The analysis includes noting the various stages of westward "development" as well as a lively debate on whether to title the painting from the perspective of the settlers from the east or those fleeing off the edge to the west.

The third pervasive principle is that students will retain their learning when they are able to claim ownership of it. This will happen more often to the extent that we can hook their experiences to our teaching goals, which is partly achieved by the examples we choose. If we provide spaces, or holes, in the content we are presenting, students will fill in the spaces with their own insights, reading, analysis, or experience.

The Puritan dilemma, for example, which is usually discussed early in a U.S. survey when students are still adjusting to their housing assignment, is more easily comprehended when they are invited to connect their understanding of the dilemma to their own situation, in this case living with others in a dorm or sorority or fraternity house. Assuming students have some ideal of social relationships, how do *they* handle the imperfections of their current living arrangement, and what options do they have in trying to achieve better human interactions, in an imperfect situation? As they explore various options, they might begin to understand John Winthrop's dilemma whether or not to leave the Church of England in seeking to purify it.

These three principles of learning--diverse methods and energy shifts, visual reinforcements, and ownership--permeate the active learning strategies described in this article. The strategies, or teaching ideas, are grouped into six sections: interactive lectures; questioning; using small groups in large classes; critical-thinking and problem-solving exercises; large class debates and role-playing; and affective learning through the use of media.

1. INTERACTIVE LECTURES

The interactive lecture involves various forms of student participation in the process of ordering a topic into a coherent pattern. In one form, students are invited to help create a lecture by brainstorming. When beginning a new topic, start by asking students to call out "everything you know or think you know about World War I" (or Darwinism, China, slavery, the Renaissance, the Constitutional

Convention, or whatever). As recorded on an overhead transparency or blackboard, a list will unfold of a mixture of specific names, dates, and events; descriptions of natural phenomena and human experience; feelings and prejudices; and possibly even interpretive judgments. Students bring to most courses both a degree of familiarity and considerable misinformation. Brainstorming provides teachers with a quick sense of the class, including its interpretive point of view. To ask students to call out what they know about slavery, for example, as an introduction to that topic elicits many images about the politics of the Civil War and the physical horrors of slavery but very little about slave culture and community. Another use of brainstorming is to invite students to suggest everything that comes to mind in defining a key term: "romanticism," for example, or "progressivism," or "imperialism," or "feminism."

Since "anything goes," brainstorming provides an opportunity for many students to participate as well as for faculty to find out what students already know and don't know. The only rule of brainstorming is to acknowledge every comment by writing it down, thus both providing visual reinforcements and honoring the student contributions. As ideas are proposed, clever teachers might arrange the ideas in rough groupings, perhaps political, economic, social, and cultural. Alternatively, one might ask students to suggest appropriate categories and to comment on the accuracy and relative importance of the array of events, experiences, and interpretations. Refinements can be dealt with by erasures, a luxury not allowed in the formal lecture. Thus begins the jointly-created coherent understanding of the topic.

In an interactive, participatory lecture it is necessary, as in any lecture, for the professor to have a clear idea what should be revealed and discovered in the process. Some key points about slavery, or World War I, or feminism, surely must be made. At the same time, however, it is imperative that teachers guard against excessive manipulation and be free and flexible enough to depart from their preconceived ideas. The final creation should legitimately reflect both student and teacher conceptions of what is important about a topic. When the class is over, the teacher and students will have created an organized configuration of salient points and concepts. In this interactive process, students spend more time thinking than recording as they concentrate on contributing to the evolving "lecture" before them.

Obviously, the participatory lecture can be done badly. When students have not brought to the class the knowledge provided by their prior experience or reading, or when the professor manipulates student statements to a rigidly preconceived schema, the experience can be dreary. But when the mutual participation is free and open, students are actively engaged and teachers might even learn new insights about how to view historical material. Although obviously less efficient than a traditional lecture, the participatory lecture involves many students actively and can be done in any size auditorium.

A variation of the interactive lecture is to ask students at the beginning of class to call out one concrete visual image that stands out from a particular reading, event, cultural object, or period of time. "From your reading about the Constitutional Convention (or Frederick Douglass's life, or the Pullman Strike, or Mary Fish's experiences in the American Revolution, or the 1920s, etc.), what one specific scene, event, or moment stands out in your mind?" The recall of concrete scenes prompts further recollections, and a flood of images flows from the students.

As students report their images, list them on an overhead transparency or blackboard, thus providing a visual backdrop to the lecture or discussion that follows. After a few minutes, ask the class: "What themes seem to emerge from these items?" "What connects these images?" "Is there a pattern to our recollected events?" "What is missing?"

In this inductive approach, facts precede analysis, the learning moves from lower order "what happened" questions to higher order "why" and "what do you think and feel about it?" questions. A few minutes hearing concrete descriptive images at the beginning of a traditional lecture (or in the middle) activates student energy, enhances the vividness of the content for the day, and helps students visualize the professor's analysis of the meaning of that content. Moreover, many students get to say something early in class and every contribution gets written down to aid the collective memory and provide a visual backdrop and reinforcement to learning.

Another way to introduce a new topic--or to check on learning halfway through one--is to ask students to make statements they think are true about some particular issue. "It is true about the Vietnam War that . . ." "We have agreed that it is true about the New Deal . . ." "It is true about Reconstruction that . . ." And so on. I have found this strategy useful for dealing with a topic--slavery or the American Indians, for example--where demythologizing may be necessary. This exercise reveals the complexity and ambiguity of knowledge as students present their truth statements and other students raise questions about or refute them. It also generates a list of questions and issues demanding further study.

2. USING QUESTIONS FOR INVOLVEMENT

The generation and appropriate use of questions is at the heart of learning and is an obvious way to shift energy back and forth in large classes. Teachers ask rhetorical questions all the time in lectures. But we can also ask real ones, and expect responses. There are several approaches.

From "Paper Chase" we all have an indelibly stereotyped view of one method of asking questions in large classes. One student is singled out and interrogated unmercifully in order to tease out the significance of a particular legal case. When I watch John Houseman at work I always think of Socrates, who was a mixture of a great teacher genuinely guiding others to their own self-discoveries and a skillfully manipulative intellectual hustler steering others to his desired answers. Having admitted that, we can do variations of the same approach, presumably more mercifully than either Houseman or Socrates.

One approach is to address a somewhat open-ended question to the class: "What were the causes of the Civil War?" Or, "What major constitutional questions have persisted throughout American history?" Or, "What is the meaning of the green light at the end of Daisy's dock?" Or, "What was the Renaissance?" Or even, "Why was Socrates condemned to death?" A student answer is met with a follow-up question directed at the class generally. We need not put one person on the spot, for the primary point is to convey substantive content and raise further questions through a participatory question and answer format. In the end, as in brainstorming, a number of points and arguments are articulated, and probably should be listed on the board. A further question can invite students to begin to analyze critically the

various arguments. "Which of these points, or arguments, or definitions makes the most sense to you, and why?"

A second approach to questioning, perhaps the next step, is to put a question to the class and ask three students sitting next to one another to explore it for five minutes. "How would you, as a nineteenth-century married woman, assert your autonomy?" "Do you think Truman had the authority to send troops into Korea?" "Would you have voted for Socrates' death? Why or why not?" The best kinds of questions are not those simply seeking information but those requiring students to make judgments and choices among compelling alternatives. After only five minutes in the trios, enormous energy is generated by putting questions to the class: "How would you assert your autonomy?" Or, "How many would have voted to put Socrates to death?" "How many not?" "Why?" A lecture could indeed have presented both the pertinent information and alternatives more efficiently but without the interaction, dispersal of energy, and multiplicity of voices, points of view, and controversy. The students own more of their learning.

So far we have looked at questions we ask. But students have their own questions, and even in large classes we can provide ways for them to ask those questions and learn how to formulate better ones. Being able to ask questions about a particular text or issue is essential in coming to terms with it. There are many ways of generating student questions. Ask students ahead of time (on Wednesday for Friday's class) to prepare one or two questions about their reading or a topic and bring them to class. One way to put the assignment to them is as follows: "A question I still have about the immigrant experience (or Puritanism, the New Deal, the sexuality of slavery, or whatever) but have been afraid to ask, is . . ." Students can either walk into Friday's class with their questions or be invited to put them on cards and submit them ahead of time, a technique that helps reticent students' questions to be heard.

Another variation is to ask students as they enter the classroom to call out questions about the text or topic they hope will be answered that day. At the end of the hour ask them to write down one or two still unresolved questions they want explored at the next class (as well as the one or two most significant things they learned that day). Or, at some point halfway through a period divide the class into pairs or small groups of three or four and ask them to "take five minutes and agree on one question that you think is crucial to explore further." This will sort out fewer, more thoughtful questions. In addition, and importantly, this task leads to some peer teaching and learning as one member of a group answers another's query in the course of the search for a consensus question. Hearing student questions is an excellent way, in addition to brief, one-minute written reports, for a professor to get feedback on how well students are learning. The quality and substance of their questions indicates both areas of strength and gaps in understanding.

A "press conference" questioning variation is a good way to conclude a unit. Students are invited, as investigative reporters, to ask questions of their teacher about the topic they have been studying. They may seek to clarify confusing material, or to find out new information or, like a budding Socrates or Mike Wallace, to press their professor's interpretation of an issue to a point of contradiction or inadequate evidence. The teacher's responses might be crisp and short, or could constitute mini-lectures. Professors can structure questioning sessions in any number of imaginative ways to facilitate and humanize the learning process.

In any event, this lecture hall variation is feasible in any size class, succeeds in providing interaction, energy shifts, and different voices, and underlines the importance of student responsibility for their own learning.

3. SMALL GROUPS IN LARGE CLASSES

The strategies mentioned thus far suggest that active learning is enhanced by breaking large classes into small groups. No matter the size of a class, it can always be broken down into groups of two, five, eight, or whatever, thus serving many purposes. The first is to provide energy shifts and interaction, enabling more students to think during class, to write or say something, and to generate more ideas about a text or topic. Groups also lend themselves to a healthy, competitive spirit, whether asked to or not, as students in one group are inevitably interested in "what they're doing over there." Moreover, there is potentially more intimacy in the class when broken into groups. Not only do students get to know each other but also the teacher has an opportunity to establish personal contact with more students as she or he moves around listening to a sampling of the small group discussions. Furthermore, reticent students find it easier to express themselves in the smaller groups and can gain some confidence in speaking up not possible in the larger setting.

There are three crucial points to consider in helping small groups to work and learn efficiently. First, the instructions should be clear, simple, and task-oriented. Examples: "What do you think is the crucial turning point in Malcolm X's life?" "Which person in *The Iliad* best represents the qualities of a Greek hero?" "Which example of imperialism defines it best, and why?" "What options did slaves have to seek their freedom or assert their self-worth?" "Look at the map and explain Iran's strategic importance to both the United States and the Soviet Union." "Identify three positive and three negative features of Lyndon Johnson's administration." "Generate a list of restrictions on women's freedom in the 1850s." "If you were Lincoln, what would you do about Fort Sumter?"

The second necessity in giving instructions is to give the groups a sense of how much time they have to do their work. "Take ten minutes to define your group's position, or decision." And third, be sure to ask each group to select a recorder and to provide ways of reporting back and debriefing the process. In smaller classes one way is to invite each group briefly to state their conclusion(s) orally in turn, with the teacher recording them on the board. Another is to ask the recorder from each group to write its conclusions on a transparency or on newsprint posted around the room. Still another is to ask the groups to write their ideas down, to be collected, collated, and reported by the professor at the next class. A variation writing strategy is to ask students first to write for a couple of minutes on the question before getting into groups. Both the writing and the group discussion provide space for the student to explore, or "own," his or her thoughts before the general discussion.

In very large lecture classes with 200-400 students, writing and breaking up into pairs or trios will provide that space. At an appropriate point, interrupt your lecture to ask two or three students sitting next to each other to discuss an issue or question together for a few minutes, perhaps preceded by writing. "What's the most important point I've been making for the past ten minutes?" "Which explanation of the causes of the Civil War makes the most sense to you?" "Who is the real hero

here?" "What's the major constitutional concern in this case?" "Which aspect of Puritan theology bothers you the most and why?" After as little as three or four minutes, invite volunteers to call out their conclusions and concerns. Obviously, one needs only to hear a sampling of the trios to get a sense of the class.

This process provides public affirmation of the thinking of a room full of students, thus giving feedback both to other students and to the teacher on how well they understand a particular topic. Even "wrong feedback is instructive and can dictate the next appropriate mini-lecture and reading assignment. Without this brief energy shift into small groups, the professor might not have known the gaps in student knowledge and gone ahead into the next unit, at the cost of losing a good portion of the class. Moreover, the break not only gives students an opportunity to hear a variety of other voices but also reenergizes them (wakes them up, perhaps), making it more likely they will listen more attentively to the teacher's next 20 minutes of lecturing.

4. PROBLEM-SOLVING AND CRITICAL THINKING

These suggestions have been predicated upon shifts of energy and voice in about twenty-minute blocks of time, thus supporting the conclusions of various attention span studies. A typical fifty-minute class period, therefore, should usually involve three segments in various orders: a mini-lecture, a small group active student experience, and some general interaction and feedback. Other activities are perhaps even more appropriate to this alternating approach, especially in helping students develop critical thinking and problem-solving skills.

The problem-solving lecture begins with a question, or an enigma, or a compellingly unfinished human story that ends with an unresolved problem that hooks student interest. "What will happen to the confident Athenians in Sicily?" "What brought Captain Parker's men to Lexington Green that cold April morning?" "Why did the handsome Crown Prince Rudolf, heir to the throne of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, kill Mary Vetsera and himself?" "What will Lincoln do?" "Will the freedmen on the Allston plantations achieve their goals in those chaotic months of 1865?" "What will happen to this young immigrant woman as she arrives in New York?" As these examples suggest, it is best to tell a story that focuses clearly on a human decision or fate. The answer, no doubt a complex one involving historical narrative, unfolds during the class hour; if skillfully developed, the unfolding will be completed with only a few minutes left in the period.

Resolving historical human dilemmas is an effective way to break a class period into alternating chunks of time and dispersed energy. The problem, or question, is woven throughout the lecture, inviting students to fill in spaces in the story with their own unfolding outcomes as they listen. Or, to break the narrative after 15-20 minutes, the resolution could be an interactive process in which the teacher elicits the students' proposed completions of a story, lists them on the board or an overhead, and discusses them. "What do you think will happen?" "Which outcome to this story makes the most sense to you?" If no consensus, the teacher lectures a little more, invites a new set of student responses, and asks the question again. Ideally, when the narrative is finally resolved, most students will have figured it out for themselves as the class ends.

The most important skill our students need is how to read, and the large class lecture setting also provides an opportunity to practice an old-fashioned but

woefully ignored technique: *explication du texte*. We can teach our students how to read, even in large lecture classes, by going directly to a text and reading and analyzing passages together out loud. At first, the professor models how to read and interpret a passage. The students, following along in their books (or on handouts or an overhead projection), observe the professor working through a selection from a speech, sermon, essay, poem, or fictional passage. In the survey courses one can also spend important class time early in the term showing how to read and highlight a survey textbook.

Then it is their turn: how better for students to develop their reading skills, and to think like historians, than to see close textual analysis modeled, followed by an opportunity to practice analyzing a text themselves. There are many ways to select appropriate passages and structure such a class. Invite students, either ahead of time (preferably) or at the start of class, to "find one or two quotations from the text you find particularly significant." Or, "Find one quotation you especially liked and one you disliked." Or, "Identify a passage that you think best illustrates the major thesis of the chapter."

Students are then ready to read these passages out loud and discuss them. "Jennifer, would you please read the top paragraph on page 144?" Be sure to pause long enough for everyone to find the right spot in their book: "Top of page 144--is everyone with us?" Lively and illuminating engagement is guaranteed because not all students select the same quotations nor do they all interpret passages the same way. Upon reaching a particularly ambiguous passage, small groups of three or four students could be asked to struggle with the meaning. "Three of you sitting next to each other: Put your heads together and in your own words state what you think is the main point of the passage: What's it mean?" Or, "What's happening here?" Invite a few groups to report their reflections, giving the teacher an opportunity to react to the substance of their interpretation, comparing it to his or her own thoughts. Breaking into small groups disperses the energy and provides practice and feedback for students before returning again to the professor's voice and analysis. After having struggled with a passage themselves for a few minutes, hearing the teacher's interpretation has more lasting learning value.

This process of modeling how to read analytically can be done for other than just verbal texts. Art historians, musicologists, economists, and anthropologists have traditionally used lectures to demonstrate how to "read" an abstract painting, or sonata allegro form, or a supply and demand curve, or artifact. Historians can use the lecture period for "history labs" to train students in other critical skills: how to do quantitative analysis of graphs, charts, and tables, how to interpret census data, and how to read maps. Many of us hand out short historical documents in class--a tax record, a household inventory, a diary entry, a folk tale, a will, a ship's manifest, an old tool, a family photograph--and ask: "What do you see? What does the document say?" After teasing as much descriptive content out of a document, then ask the higher order questions of significance: "What does it mean? What implications can you draw from the document on how people lived?" To summarize: make sure students have a copy of the source in question in front of them (or visual access through slides and overhead transparencies), and then follow three steps: modeling by the professor, practice by the students, and feedback.

5. LARGE CLASS DEBATES AND ROLE-PLAYING

Although assigning specific tasks to small groups of students disperses the energy in large classes, not all instructors are comfortable with the uncertainty and potential lack of control implicit in the decentralized large class. Let me suggest, therefore, some ways of achieving more student participation and engagement in large history classes without changing the professor's central controlling role in the classroom.

The debate, formal or otherwise, is an energizing way of involving students actively in the classroom. Although neither one of two polar sides of an issue obviously contains the whole truth, it is pedagogically desirable to force students to choose one or the other side of a dichotomous question and to defend their choice. Consider, even in a large lecture setting, a debate on such questions as the following: "Was Burke or Paine more right about the French Revolution?" "Was Nat Turner's revolt justified?" "If you are a black sharecropper in 1905, does Booker T. Washington or W. E. B. Du Bois have the better strategy for your progress?" "Should the United States annex the Philippines or not in 1898?" "The United States: Melting Pot or Preserver of Cultural Identity?" "Vietnam: Hawks or Doves?" Some of the old "Amherst series" problems in American civilization might still make excellent debates: "John D. Rockefeller--Robber Baron or Industrial Statesman?" Or "The New Deal--Revolution or Evolution?"

The logistics are not as difficult as one might imagine. One obvious strategy is to take advantage of the central aisle dividing large lecture halls in order to structure debates. Students can either support the side of an issue assigned to the half of the hall where they happen to be sitting. Or, as prearranged in conjunction with the stimulation of a film or reading assignment, they could come to class prepared to take a seat on one side or another. When I have taught in a large auditorium with two doors, I have put up signs over the doors directing students to the two sides: "Burke" and "Paine." Once students have physically, as it were, put their bodies on the line, they are more receptive to answering a simple question: "Why have you chosen to sit where you are?" That is usually enough to spark a rather lively debate.

In a large class, more structure is necessary. The following process permits the professor to maintain rigorous control from the podium in leading the debate: "From the right side of the hall we will hear five statements on behalf of the 'Hawk' side of U.S. involvement in Vietnam (or Burke's position), after which we will hear five statements from the left on behalf of the 'Dove' side (or Paine's position)." The process can be repeated, including rebuttals, before concluding by asking for two or three volunteers to make summary arguments for each side, and perhaps a final vote. Sometimes though the class ends, the argument continues all day long.

Most important questions, however, do not divide into halves. Our good students would never settle for forced dichotomous choices. When some students (quite rightly) refuse to choose one side or the other, create a middle ground and space and invite their reasons for choosing it. Some large lecture halls have two central aisles, which makes legitimizing a third position both intellectually defensible and logistically possible. "Those who repudiate both the Hawks and the Doves (or Burke and Paine) for what you think is a more reasonable position, sit in the middle." Now three groups are invited to state their positions. The dimensions of

learning increase. Students in the middle, for example, might learn how difficult it is to try to remain neutral on heated emotional issues during revolutionary times.

Role-playing is another strategy with powerful potential for learning by injecting energy, emotions, and interactions in a large classroom. One form is for the professor to enter the class in the role of an historical figure (including dress and props) to give a speech or sermon and invite questions. Another is to give several students (or groups) time to research several historical characters and bring them together on stage for some variation of a panel, press conference, debate, or dinner party. The figures are usually well-known people: Benjamin Franklin, Sojourner Truth, Horace Mann, Teddy Roosevelt, Emma Goldman, or Malcolm X. The intellectual convictions, controversies, and contradictions of real people are brought out by this kind of role-playing.

But the strategy can also be used to illuminate the experiences and difficult choices of anonymous ordinary people in social groups. There are many simulation games on contemporary issues and social conflict in history and the social sciences, but most are too expensive, complex, and time-consuming to use in our large classes. Therefore, one can create less elaborate situations in which historical groups struggle with conflicting interests and roles.

The process is not as complicated as one might think. First, a mini-lecture establishes the context and setting for the role-playing. Second, the class is divided into a number of small groups (of varying sizes and including collective roles depending on class size), each group assigned a clearly delineated role, usually of a group. Third, each group is given a specific, concrete task--usually to propose a position and course of action. And fourth, the proposals emanating from different groups will inevitably conflict with each other in some way--racially, regionally, ideologically, tactically, or over scarce funds, land, jobs, power, or resources. Given these conflicts, closure is as difficult to achieve in a role-play as in history itself.

The following examples will suggest others. One of my favorites is to set up a New England town meeting in 1779, in which a variety of groups (landed elite, yeoman farmers, Tory loyalists, militiamen and soldiers of the continental army, lawyers, ministers, and tradesmen, etc.) are charged with drafting instructions for delegates to a state constitutional convention. Another is to challenge several groups in the summer of 1865--defeated Confederates, southern Unionists, victorious northern Republicans, moderate northerners, and the freedmen--to develop lists of their goals and the strategies for accomplishing them. Still another is to put a whole class (working in small groups) into the same situation, say, emancipated slaves on a Texas plantation in 1865, or unskilled and skilled immigrant steelworkers facing a lockout in Pennsylvania in 1892, or female abolitionists in the 1830s, or civil rights activists in the 1960s and ask them to decide in each case what to do to enhance their freedom. A political history variation is to make yourself a national leader facing a serious crisis, say, Napoleon in 1799, or Lincoln in 1861, or FDR in 1933, and create "brain trust" groups on different issues to advise you.

Given careful planning, clear directions, assertive leadership, and a lot of luck, the format of group role-playing can fulfill many objectives. One could hear the proposals of different groups and immediately incorporate them into a lecture on how what really happened reflected many of these same conflicts. Or, one could carry out the role-playing process longer by structuring a meeting or convention to consider the differing groups' proposals. The student groups could be instructed to

prepare speeches, to caucus to develop strategies, coalitions, and tactics for achieving their goals, and to see the deliberations through to some conclusion. Neat, simple, clear closures are not easy (short of the class-ending buzzer), but this variation for large lecture classes has tremendous potential for experiential learning, and of course involves enormous energy and interaction.

In all these role-playing situations the professor should play an active role, as moderator of the meetings or as the President, organizing and carefully monitoring the interactions. Because role-playing in conflicting groups can get heated, emotional, and potentially out of control, it is necessary to wield a vigorous gavel and forcefully direct the process. This in itself models another point about leadership in history. Whenever teachers wish to restore order they can terminate the role-playing and shift to debriefing what was learned from the experience about the realities of the historical experience. This is, of course, crucial, and a rule of thumb of role-playing is to spend as much time debriefing in order to clarify what was learned as in doing the exercise in the first place. After debriefing, the professor makes the transition to the next topic and pedagogical approach, which, after role-playing, would probably be a synthetic summary lecture.

6. AFFECTIVE LEARNING WITH AUDIO-VISUAL MEDIA

No account of engaging students in the active learning of history is complete without acknowledging the power of media for inspiring student motivation. Much has been written on the use of films and other audio-visual techniques. This section will focus on the role of slides and music in evoking students' emotional learning. This is a seriously neglected but crucial area of teaching and learning, for we need to teach to both sides of students' brains. Emotion has surely played an enormous role in history; therefore, it belongs in the classroom, not just because the use of media "hooks" the student and is motivating but also because evoking emotions can set the tone of a topic, raise questions, deepen analysis, and compel review and rethinking. In short, emotional experience leads to cognitive insights.

Here are some examples. As students enter the classroom, it is an opportune time to establish a mood to ready them for the content for a particular class period. At the beginning of class show some slides, say, of war scenes, or of farm life in the Great Plains, or of men and women performing gender-distinct roles, or of material culture objects. Or, as they walk in, they hear an inspiring speech--FDR, or Churchill, or Malcolm X. Or, music is playing, say, Civil War, labor movement, or civil rights songs. Or, put several powerful short quotations on a transparency or place several objects around the lecture hall. Each of these openings makes clear the tone and content of the day, and hook student interest, or at least their curiosity, right away.

Even more engaging is to combine a piece of music with some slides. Imagine, for example, walking into the first class of the first half of the United States history survey hearing Dvorak's "New World Symphony" while looking at slides of American Indians. Although few students these days know Dvorak's music, the dissonance of the classical tones with images of Indians arouses immediate interest and raises questions before a word has been spoken. The first words of the class invite students to suggest all the things wrong with the sentence, "Columbus discovered America in 1492." Within the hour shift to Neil Diamond singing "America," as students view slides of immigrants, "boat people," streaming to the

United States from all over the world. His refrain, "we come to America," leads to a discussion of who "Americans" are and where they came from and how and why. The earlier discussion of Native Americans becomes unavoidably a part of the explorations.

The combination of slides and songs can be used again later in the term to illustrate slavery (with spirituals and blues) and the Civil War. Imagine looking at battlefield scenes while listening to "We are Coming, Father Abraham" or George Frederick Root's "Battle Cry of Freedom." Or, more poignantly, imagine the combination of slides of gutted, demolished, southern cities while listening to "Dixie" and "Marching Through Georgia." Or consider the evocative power of showing scenes of young Civil War soldiers, North and South, alive, dying, and dead, while listening to "Just Before the Battle, Mother," "The Drummer Boy of Shiloh," and "Johnny Comes Marching Home."

Even more powerful is to synchronize one or two slides with each lyrical line of a song. For "Tenting on the Old Camp Ground," for example, show slides of tent camps and tired but hopeful soldiers to accompany such lines as "We're tenting tonight on the old Camp ground / Give us a song to cheer / Our weary hearts, a song of home / And friends we love so dear. / Tenting tonight / Tenting tonight / Tenting on the old Camp ground."

Rather than lecturing on the overall battle strategies of the North and South during the Civil War, which are usually covered well in textbooks, I prefer to make a slide and music presentation and then deal in some detail with only one strategically-crucial battle, say, Chickamauga, where 34,000 died in two days. Students understand the unbelievable human and physical devastation of the Civil War with their hearts and emotions as well as with their heads and reason.

The possibilities for the twentieth century are obviously much more extensive. For example, imagine the effect of listening to Elton John's "All Quiet on the Western Front" while looking at scenes of World War I trenches, or Billy Joel's "Goodnight Saigon" while viewing slides of American soldiers and Vietnamese peasants. There are many effective combinations of labor songs and struggle, or of civil rights songs with scenes of the movement and the resistance against it. Or use speeches, again with visual slide images. To show the shift in the mood of the black liberation struggle in the mid-1960s, compare Malcolm X's "Message to the Grass Roots," delivered in November 1963, with Dr. Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" speech three months earlier. Even more powerfully, put some slides together synchronized with the visual images suggested during the last five minutes of Dr. King's Memphis speech in the evening of April 3, 1968, "I See the Promised Land . . . I've Been to the Mountaintop," concluding with images of King's assassination and funeral.

The singer, Harry Chapin, who also died tragically too young a few years ago, wrote and performed songs that told poignantly human stories of ordinary people's everyday struggles and tragedies. He also sang of the changes from the 1960s to the 1970s. "She Is Always Seventeen" presents a metaphoric story of broken and persisting dreams while moving historically through the period from 1961 ("when we went to Washington . . . And said, 'Camelot's begun'") to 1975 ("when the crooked king was gone . . . [we were] sayin, 'the dream must go on.'"). After listening to a slide-tape of this song, ask students, "Which visual image or lyrical line moved you

the most?," and then, perhaps in pairs, to consider the question of "the meaning of the chorus and title."

After exploring students' immediate emotional responses to Chapin's, or any other song, it is helpful to go back through the piece again slowly, slide by slide, discussing the historical context and meaning of each line of lyrics and how it is further illuminated by the visual image that accompanies it.

The use of music and slides, though presentational, is an intensely active experience for students. But the use of powerful emotion in class raises significant questions of power and freedom in the classroom. The emotions that are evoked are overwhelming as we hear Dr. King conclude his "Mountaintop" speech with the words, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord," and the visual image shifts from King at a lectern to lying on the balcony of the Memphis motel. The intensity of emotion is palpable and I am aware that, after an excruciatingly long moment of silence to let the image sink in, whatever I choose to say next, if anything at all, has enormous power to be deeply heard and retained. It is a humbling responsibility, suggesting the need to make quiet and gently understated comments about justice and the meaning of Dr. King's life. Or better yet, ask students to write for a minute or two, and then talk with the person next to them before we intrude with thoughts or questions.

Emotions are a powerfully affective learning strategy and we need to learn how to deal with student feelings as well as their intellect in responding to music and slides (and films). We do not abuse our responsibility if we respect the students' need for personal space to absorb the experience. Quiet writing time and talking in pairs can provide this space. Sometimes it is best to let the music and slides make the whole point, without our comment, and just simply conclude the class. Let the students leave with whatever each individual carries away in his or her heart and head from the experience. This guarantees that they will entirely own their feelings and insights.

The last point has been the pervasive theme of this article. The key to effective learning, the kind that is both lasting and transforming, is in empowering students through various strategies of active involvement to own their own learning. Emerson wrote once in his journal that a wise person "must feel and teach that the best wisdom cannot be communicated [but] must be acquired by every soul for itself." In each of the teaching strategies suggested here, I have sought to show that large impersonal lecture hall classes need not be barriers to providing the kind of interactive, investigative, and even intimate experiences that enhance student learning.

What is more difficult to show is how to balance the time it takes for active learning activities from the imperative to "cover" as much material as possible in each class. It is inherent in being an historian to make choices about what to select, or cover. In our writing we are always selecting themes and events to emphasize, thus leaving out something else. As teachers, too, we choose whether to spend a given 10-15 minute block of class time for a writing exercise, or to analyze a document or painting, or to create small groups to decide an historical question, or to lecture on, say, mercantilism, or the party battles of the 1830s, or money policy in the 1870s, or men's responses to feminism. Our choices depend on our goals as teachers, on what kinds of students we want to turn out, on how we have resolved what we think are the essential questions and irreducibly significant facts and

concepts of our field, and to some extent on institutional mission. As economists would say, "It's a trade-off," and we all make our own difficult choices.

I have chosen to give up "covering" mercantilism, the Specie Circular, the Dingley Tariff, and many other events, for example, in return for more interaction among students, more writing and close analysis of primary documents in class, including the crucial documents of American history, and more use of visuals and music to evoke emotions. And I spend twice as long as I used to on the experiences of women and minorities. I also give map questions on every test. These choices are made clear to me by my goals, which begin fundamentally with structuring ways of empowering students to discover, and own, historical knowledge, skills, and attitudes for themselves and to feel good about themselves as learners. To bolster student self-esteem in a history class makes it more likely that their knowledge of history will be increased and their motivation for further learning will be intensified. Who knows, with more options for actively involving students in the learning of history, Henry Adams might have stayed in teaching.

HISTORY AND GEOGRAPHY

History and geography are inseparable. The first two paragraphs show how... in the school curriculum, the two are most closely related. Classically, history has been the study of humanity's past and has asked the questions "What?" and "How important?" Why? Geography has been defined as the study of humanity's interaction with the physical environment and has asked the questions "What?" and "How important?" Why? The two actually merge in historical geography, the geography of the past. A landmark work of study for both is the third statement above by a former director general of the Royal Geographical Society, indicating history and geography also come together in their reliance on maps for the investigation and presentation of data. Consequently, it is almost impossible to study or teach history without considering the geographic dimension. This is true especially with regard to the teaching of history where the infusion of relevant geography into the process... D.C.: National Education Association, 1990.

¹ See Dennis Reiskant, "Teaching History with Maps: A Geographic Dimension," in *Essays on Water, Forest, Wind, and the Teaching of History*, ed. Dennis Reiskant and Stephen E. Mackin (College Station, Texas: Gulf Publishing, 1987), pp. 107-110.