

TEACHING HISTORY AS THE REENACTMENT OF PAST EXPERIENCE

Anthony Pattiz
Sandy Creek High School
Tyrone, Georgia

If the aim of historical instruction is to enable the child to appreciate the values of social life, to see in imagination the forces which favor and allow men's effective co-operation with one another, to understand the sorts of character that help on and that hold back, the essential thing in its presentation is to make it moving, dynamic. History must be presented, not as an accumulation of results or effects, a mere statement of what happened, but as a forceful, acting thing. The motives—that is, the motors—must stand out. To study history is not to amass information, but to use information in constructing a vivid picture of how, and why men did thus and so; achieved their successes and came to their failures.¹

—John Dewey

Introduction

Once again, historical education in our nation's public schools has come under fire. According to a recent survey released by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), history appears to be a mystery to most high-school seniors. Fifty-seven percent did not answer enough questions correctly to reach the "basic" knowledge category stipulated in the survey.² For history teachers, the stakes could not be higher. While struggling to motivate disinterested students, they must satisfy the demands of a wary public that equates success with rising test scores. Most parents have succumbed to the siren song of the accountability movement, which claims that only through the rigorous administration of standardized testing will we be able to keep score and make certain their children are not being left behind. Students, however, as they move into the upper grades, tend to lose interest in test-driven instruction and consequently reject the "skill and drill" approach to learning. Instead they seek greater relevance with the subject matter and become disengaged as they perceive no tangible rewards from learning. To answer this challenge, today's history teachers must find a way to breathe new life into an old discipline. Students need to remain engaged so they will desire to continue their education long after the last test has been taken. And teachers must accomplish this important task while cognizant of the tremendous burden

¹John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), 151.

²Cheryl Wetzstein, "Seniors' History Scores Abysmal; Fourth and Eighth Graders Outperformed 12th Graders in a National History Survey, with 57 Percent of Seniors Failing to Show Basic Knowledge of the Subject," *Insight on the News*, 18 (June 10, 2002), 32.

placed on them as a consequence of our national obsession with high-stakes testing. As Allen Bloom so aptly put it in *The Closing of the American Mind*, "Education in our times must try to find whatever there is in students that might yearn for completion, and to reconstruct the learning that would enable them to seek that completion."³

While the issue of student engagement largely has been ignored, an increasing body of scholarly research suggests that this is a growing problem that has only been exacerbated by the standardization of teaching and learning. Furthermore, it is a problem that threatens to undermine any efforts to reform our system of public education. Peter Sacks, an investigative journalist who has been nominated for the Pulitzer Prize, has written a powerful critique of standardized testing and an unsettling indictment of a society that continues to embrace these tests uncritically. He notes:

Most educators have rarely publicly acknowledged the engagement problem and the strong tendency of test-heavy environments to reinforce a certain disinterest among growing numbers of students in almost all things academic. Indeed, when you get to the subtextual strata where the real problems of American schools become exposed, one finds educators relatively unconcerned about the abilities of pupils of all races, classes, and ethnicities to excel in school. What they fear most is that too many kids hate school for all the reasons anybody would hate institutions that tend to be boring, un-engaging, regimented, and run by adults saturated with the fear engendered by accountability politics. The adults' test-driven classrooms exacerbate boredom, fear, and lethargy, promoting all manner of mechanical behaviors on the part of teachers, students, and schools, and bleed schoolchildren of their natural love of learning.⁴

It is therefore an opportune moment for us to consider how to make historical instruction intellectually rewarding for our students while fulfilling the basic mission of the school. Or, as Horace Mann prophetically stated in 1840, "[The teacher] should never forget that intellectual truths are naturally adapted to give intellectual pleasure; and that, by leading the minds of his pupils onward to such a position in relation to these truths that they themselves can discover them, he secures them the natural reward of new pleasure for every new discovery."⁵

³Allen Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind: How Higher Education Has Failed Democracy and Imperished the Souls of Today's Student* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 63.

⁴Peter Sacks, *Standardized Minds: The High Price of America's Testing Culture and What We Can Do to Change It* (Cambridge, MA: Perseus Publishing, 1999), 256-257.

⁵Horace Mann, *On the Art of Teaching* (New York: Applewood Books, Inc., 1989), 17.

Teaching History as The Reenactment of Past Experience

In *The Idea of History*, R.G. Collingwood proposes that history is understood best as a reenactment of past experience. While written as a way for historians to master their craft, Collingwood's idea offers those who teach history a compelling vision for reinventing this important discipline. This idea offers today's teachers the alluring prospect of an approach that is both relevant and challenging. Most importantly, however, it is an idea that, as this essay will explain, forms the basis for a curriculum that energizes and motivates an increasingly apathetic student population to work toward realizing their potential. This is because, underlying this conception, is a simple yet important notion that students are more likely to remember and understand the past if it is presented as a powerful shared experience in which they are active interpreters rather than merely as a laundry list of names, dates, and places to record, memorize, and then quietly forget when it is time to put down one's number-two pencil. Consequently, teaching history as the reenactment of past experience offers today's beleaguered teachers a way out of their current dilemma.

Moving from Theory to Practice

To transform the idea of reenacting past experience into concrete instructional activities, history teachers must move from a teacher-directed, textbook-based approach to a student-centered, multidimensional approach that shifts the primary responsibility for learning from the teacher to the learner. This requires a leap of faith because it entails building a curriculum around an engaging set of activities designed to promote higher-order thinking. Richard Paul, director of the Foundation for Critical Thinking, defines this approach as "learning through exploring the foundations, justification, implications, and value of a fact, principle, skill, or concept."⁶ This paradigm shift requires teachers to view their students, not as passive receptacles to be filled with a series of discrete and disconnected facts, but as practicing historians who are young apprentices learning the craft of history as would any novice.

Moving from theory to practice, I made that leap of faith by transforming my own classroom into a "time machine" to test the idea that history could be taught best through the reenactment of past experience. I began this process by instructing students on how to utilize the skills and dispositions typically associated with learning for deep understanding. Linda Darling-Hammond, co-director of the National Center for Restructuring Education, defines the type of instruction that promotes learning for deep understanding:

It requires the use of higher-order thought cognitive functions, taking students beyond recall, recognition, and reproduction of information to

⁶Richard Paul, *Critical Thinking: What Every Person Needs to Know to Survive in a Rapidly Changing World* (Santa Rosa, CA: Foundation for Critical Thinking, 1992), 649.

evaluation, analysis, synthesis, and production of arguments, ideas, and performances. It asks students to apply these skills and ideas in meaningful contexts, engaging them in activities they have real reason to want to undertake.⁷

The skills embodied within an instructional approach that cultivates learning for deep understanding are defined by J. Nichol as those dispositions necessary to develop a "thinking skills" perspective when approaching the study of any historical topic:

The development of historical thinking is a set of skills and processes [that] should run in an unbroken line from the earliest stages of formal education through to adult life. Skills and processes provide history's syntax: they give the discipline its shape, form and structure. Syntactically, history fosters the ability to question, to investigate, to process evidence, to hypothesize, to debate, to create an understanding, to explain and to justify. These procedural skills arise from children "doing history," working in the same way as historians with teacher guidance and support.⁸

Students in my four world history classes were assigned roles as participants in various historical simulations ranging from an archaeological expedition responsible for correctly reconstructing a hieroglyphic message to a mock trial of President Harry S. Truman that explored the correctness of his decision to use atomic bombs against the Japanese cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. The lessons and activities I used included those recommended by T.N. Turner whose research examines the efficacy of using historical reenactment as a standard tool of historical instruction at the secondary and post-secondary levels. Turner proposes the use of "explorations and discoveries, moments of invention, decision-making events, historic meetings and confrontations, debates and trials, signing of treaties and surrenders, cultural reflecting ceremonies, rituals and rites, and construction tasks."⁹ Applying this idea of history teaching as the reenactment of past experience, I hypothesized that, by immersing my students in a series of reenactments of major historical events—or historical turning points—that

⁷Linda Darling-Hammond, *The Right to Learn: A Blueprint for Creating Schools that Work* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1997), 109.

⁸J. Nichol, "Who Wants to Fight? Who Wants to Flee? Teaching History from a 'Thinking Skills' Perspective," *Teaching History* (May 1999), 6–13. Note: This is a British-based journal, not *Teaching History: A Journal of Methods*.

⁹T.N. Turner, "Historical Re-enactment—Can it Work as a Standard Tool of the Social Studies," *The Social Studies* (September/October 1985), 220–223.

essentially define human history itself, they would subsequently seek greater involvement with the subject matter and be transformed into willing participants in a search for historical truth while making extensive use of their higher-order thought processes.

The lessons I designed had to meet three important criteria. First, these lessons had to introduce students to the techniques of historical analysis by providing each student with opportunities to distinguish point of view and assess the evidence on which the different historical perspectives presented in my classroom were based. Central to this idea of teaching history as the reenactment of past experience is the notion that historical thought is multi-dimensional and therefore students must be able to embrace and defend divergent points of view. Richard Paul underscores the importance of lessons that promote divergent thinking. He uses the American Revolution to illustrate this idea: "Thus, when considering a question, the class brings all relevant subjects to bear and considers the perspectives of groups whose views are not canvassed in their texts—for example, what did King George think of the Declaration of Independence, the Revolutionary War, the Continental Congress, Jefferson and Washington, etc."¹⁰

Second, students needed to engage in individual and group research activities affording them opportunities to wrestle with questions of historical significance. These questions are defined as those that a historian, attempting to understand the significance of a given issue, individual, event, or idea would address. Through these investigative processes, students place themselves in the frame of mind of the person(s) making history. For example, students would research and present historical narratives on famous battles from the vantage point of the strategist responsible for initiating the battle. One student would become Napoleon Bonaparte defending his substandard performance at Waterloo while another would portray Robert E. Lee explaining his unshakeable belief that George Pickett could breach the Union strongpoint at Gettysburg. In this way, I theorized that students would gain a unique understanding of what happened and why. I theorized that such an understanding, while traditionally confined to the realm of historians, would transform a dull curriculum into a vibrant one, while simultaneously developing within students the ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the material under study.

Third, the lessons should provide students with numerous opportunities to rethink the past for themselves as participants through a series of historical decision-making simulations. Harold Guetzkow defines a simulation as referring to "the construction and manipulation of an operating model, that model being a physical or symbolic representation of all or some aspects of a social or psychological process. In education,

¹⁰Paul, *Critical Thinking*, 645.

simulation entails abstracting certain elements of social or physical reality in such a way that the student can interact with and become a part of that simulated reality."¹¹

Using research cited earlier, I developed an instructional approach to teaching history as the reenactment of past experience based on a four-part model. To begin, students were introduced to the techniques of historical analysis and assigned exercises requiring them to distinguish point of view and assess the strength of the views presented based on the evidence introduced.

Secondly, students engaged in individual and group research activities that included examining specific individuals, events, issues, and/or ideas. The objective was to assess the historical significance of these topics and relate it to the present. For example, as stated earlier, students asked to research a battle would do so from the vantage point of one of its participants and in doing so give their peers a unique understanding into how that battle changed the outcome of the war and of history itself.

Then students were assigned roles in a series of historical decision-making simulations. These roles required participants to rethink the past for themselves in order to defend the point of view embraced by the persons being portrayed. As T.J. Butler reports, "Simulation allows presentation on three levels: facts about the issue being presented in scenario, the processes and skills in which the participant must be engaged, and the development of alternative strategies of decision making."¹²

Finally, students prepared debriefing exercises in which they synthesized their newfound understanding of the issues, individuals, ideas, and events under examination. These exercises gave students opportunities to record the insights they acquired based on whether in fact their insights had withstood the dialectical process embodied within the simulation itself.¹³

The curriculum comprising my experimental study spanned a period of two semesters or eight months. High-school sophomores enrolled in a world history course were pre-tested in August and post-tested in May. In between, I introduced a series of student-centered lessons consistent with the four-part model. Informal assessments, consisting of classroom discussions and teacher observations of students' oral and written responses to critical thinking questions, were used to evaluate how students performed within this learning environment. Formal assessments of student abilities

¹¹Harold Geutzkow, *Simulation in the Social Science* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1961), 2.

¹²T.J. Butler, "Games and Simulations: Creative Educational Alternatives," *Tech Trends*, 33 (1988), 20-23.

¹³Charles Petranek, whose research on writing and simulations supports the work of earlier studies in this area, concludes that the written debriefing exercise is an opportunity for learners to distinguish between multiple perspectives and assess the validity of these perspectives in a reflective format. Charles F. Petranek, "Written Debriefing: The Next Vital Step in Learning Simulations," *Simulation and Gaming*, 31 (March 2000), 108-118.

were conducted during the fourth month and eighth month and at the conclusion of the study. Informal assessments were conducted weekly.¹⁴

At the outset of the study, 93 student participants in my four heterogeneous world history classes¹⁵ were administered the Ennis-Weir Essay Test of Critical Thinking. The tests were scored and a stratified, random sample¹⁶ of thirty students was selected. While the curriculum was administered to all 93 students, the performance of the thirty students comprising the stratified, random-sample group was closely monitored to determine if the major outcomes of the study were being met (see the next section).

During the first two weeks, students were trained to think like archaeologists. They did an archaeological exercise as a group to examine an artifact and draw conclusions about the people who produced it. During this exercise, I observed students trying to formulate hypotheses based on what they thought they knew, but having difficulties separating that which could be inferred, based on evidence suggested by the artifact itself, from beliefs and opinions uncorroborated by any evidence whatsoever. Students were struggling with separating fact from opinion. I had to explain the difference between conclusions based on facts from those based solely on unsubstantiated conjecture.

Students moved from this discussion to participating in an archaeological expedition in which each class was divided into six smaller groups. These groups had to use their knowledge of Egyptian civilization to decipher a hieroglyphic message.

¹⁴For extended documentation of the complete eight-month implementation, see Anthony E. Pattiz, *An Assessment of the Impact of Dialogical Instruction on Critical Thinking Skills in Secondary Social Studies Education at a Medium-Sized Public High School* (North Miami Beach, FL: Nova Southeastern University, 2002).

¹⁵For purposes of this study, the concept of heterogeneity is defined as students who approximate the overall school population in terms of racial, gender, and ability-level characteristics. While there was variation from one class to another, the overall student population in the four classes closely approximated the school's population with regard to the aforementioned characteristics.

¹⁶The thirty participants in the sample group were selected from three subgroups based on the variables of gender, race, and ability level. For the gender variable, two groups (male and female) were designated. For the race variable, four groups were initially identified: (1) Caucasian, (2) African-Americans, (3) Hispanic, and (4) Asian-Americans. Since two of these groups represented less than five percent of the total student population, I made the decision that no meaningful data could be derived from these two groups. I therefore omitted Asian-Americans and Hispanics from the sample group. For the ability-level variable, three groups were designated: (1) high ability, (2) medium ability, and (3) low ability. I used pretest data from the Ennis-Weir Essay Test of Critical Thinking to make assignments regarding each group. To ensure that each subgroup's population was reflective of the larger student population among the four participating classes, I assigned each student an identification number and a code. This was used to determine student selection. Students were included from each subgroup in comparable percentages to their representation within the larger student population. For instance, if African-American students represented a third of the overall population, they also represented approximately a third of the population in the sample group.

The groups competed against each other to be the first to decipher this message. I observed students making generalizations during this activity supported by specific facts. While still struggling with differentiating fact from opinion, the competitive atmosphere of the simulation compelled my students to move toward more logical thought processes or risk being outmaneuvered by their fellow archaeologists.

By the end of this activity, students were administered a written debriefing exercise requiring them to make generalizations regarding Egyptian civilization based on their knowledge and understanding of its contributions to human history. I closely examined the responses of the thirty students from the stratified, random-sample group. Their responses reflected the dynamic tension between fact and opinion. One student reported that he was hesitant to draw any conclusions that were not documented by the historical record because he realized such conclusions could be challenged as unwarranted. While most students realized that they should draw inferences based solely on the information presented to them, they had demonstrable difficulties in doing so. I theorized that such difficulties stemmed, in part, from the fact that students tended to be dependent on others to formulate conclusions rather than do the hard thinking involved in formulating conclusions of their own. Paul corroborates this finding when he concludes:

Students leave school with much inert knowledge and even more activated ignorance. Therefore, students do not understand how to write, think, or speak in ways that organize and express what they believe, or read or listen in ways that allow them to understand and assess the thought of another. Students do not know how they respond to the mass media and to what extent it reinforces their subconscious egocentric or sociocentric vies. They do not grasp how to read a newspaper or a book critically or how to listen to a lecture critically.¹⁷

During the third week, students researched other civilizations of the ancient Middle East, applying the same thought process to these civilizations that they had used earlier in examining the Egyptians. Learners had to examine how these civilizations influenced their region and subsequent historical events. The objective was for students to draw connections between historical ideas, issues, events, and individuals across time, thereby demonstrating their ability to analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the information they researched. During the oral presentations, however, students tended to reproduce the information they gathered as it was stated. They still experienced difficulties moving beyond the knowledge and comprehension levels. I theorized that these difficulties were due, in part, to the fact that the students were not being questioned aggressively by their peers. I further theorized that, in a dialogical

¹⁷Paul corroborates this finding. Paul, *Critical Thinking*, 283.

environment, students would have to defend their ideas and therefore might move beyond the lowest levels of Bloom's Taxonomy.¹⁸ This element was missing during the presentations, but my theory would be tested in the final week of the first month.

In the final week of the first month, students prepared for and participated in a Greek Symposium. In this activity, they recreated eight interviews involving Greek figures, including Socrates, Herodotus, Pericles, and Archimedes. The purpose of this exercise was to have one student interview each figure who was portrayed by a different student. Other students questioned and challenged statements made during the interview. All 93 students completed this activity by writing an analysis. This analysis consisted of a position paper in which they addressed three questions of historical significance: (1) What, in your opinion, were this individual's strengths and weaknesses? (2) How did this individual change world history? And (3) what lessons can we learn today from the individual in question? Students were free to select any one of the eight individuals interviewed for their written analysis.

I observed that the give and take of the interview session compelled students to analyze and evaluate the major contributions of each historical figure. Initially, students were content to answer prepared questions asked by the interviewer, but the audience, comprised of their own peers, enthusiastically questioned and challenged many of the underlying assumptions on which these answers were based. Students, who portrayed these historical figures, then were compelled to reevaluate their character's contributions to history. They began to analyze each figure's primary importance and actually respond from the perspective of the person being portrayed. At this point, students began to move beyond mere reproduction of information to deeper levels of understanding that included analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In the debriefing exercise itself, I observed a deeper level of understanding and a greater awareness of different historical possibilities.

Of the thirty students in the stratified, random-sample group, seventeen demonstrated thinking at or above the level of analysis. This meant that these students were able to make meaningful generalizations based on the evidence and the arguments they made subsequently went beyond the mere replication of information that had been disseminated previously. My hypothesis, that the dialogical nature of the activity would

¹⁸Benjamin Bloom is associated widely with "Bloom's taxonomy" of educational objectives: (1) knowledge, (2) comprehension, (3) application, (4) analysis, (5) synthesis, and (6) evaluation. The first three skills identified by Bloom and are classified as lower-order thinking skills because they require students to take information in its existing form and apply it as it is stated or written. Analysis, synthesis, and evaluation are classified as higher-order thinking skills because they require students to dissect information into its component parts, summarize the utility of the information based on its relevance to a specific issue and/or problem, or evaluate the validity of the information based on its logical foundations. These skills require students to demonstrate a critical understanding of the material that is stated or written beyond its mere replication. See Benjamin S. Bloom, "Taxonomy of Educational Objectives, Handbook I: Cognitive Domain," in Fred Schultz, editor, *Sources: Notable Selections in Education* (Akron, OH: University of Akron, 1995), 261-269.

move students beyond lower-order thought processes (i.e., knowledge, comprehension) was initially confirmed. The question remaining was whether, in fact, my students could replicate work at or above the level of analysis on subsequent activities.

Students spent the next seven months engaged in a range of activities that involved learning history through the reenactment of past experience. These activities included a variety of different types of role-playing exercise (e.g., debates, trials, documentaries, oral presentations). In the final month of the study, for example, each student researched one of the military leaders of World War II. Their task was to examine how history is written on the battlefield by analyzing each individual's contributions and the impact of these contributions to the war itself. Learners were required to portray each person as a strategist who would explain the art of war to the class as if he were addressing a group of cadets from his nation's premier military academy. A written analysis of each figure's contributions was also submitted in which students had to summarize the historical legacy of the person each portrayed.

I observed a high level of creativity from some of the student participants. Several came dressed in uniforms and used charts, diagrams, and other visual aids to illustrate the concepts associated with their military leader. These results, however, were uneven. In two classes, students demonstrated a higher level of preparation and understanding than their peers in the other two classes. Within the sample group, nineteen of the thirty students provided oral responses at or above the level of analysis. In the written debriefing exercise, twenty of the thirty students in this group provided responses at or above the level of analysis. I noted that some individuals were clearly more comfortable with the creative nature of this exercise than others.

I had planned two lessons for weeks two and three of this final month focusing on President Truman's decision to use atomic bombs against targets in Japan and on General Douglas MacArthur's leadership during the Korean War. In both lessons, each student would have the opportunity to "think that problem out for himself, [to] see what possible solutions of it might be offered, and [to] see why this particular [decision-maker] chose that solution instead of another."¹⁹ I decided, instead, to focus solely on Truman's decision to usher in the nuclear age. Students were given more time to prepare for the fictitious historical trial of Harry S. Truman for alleged "crimes against humanity." I made this decision based on my realization of the time necessary to prepare adequately for lessons that place a premium on higher-order thinking without placing too heavy a burden on the students involved in these lessons. What I learned is that this type of learning environment, while stimulating for students and conducive to promoting higher-order thought processes, tends to demand much of its participants and make it important that students have the opportunity to process what they learn without feeling overwhelmed.

¹⁹Collingwood, *The Idea of History*, 283.

During weeks two and three, classes prepared for and participated in the trial of Harry S. Truman. Students served as attorneys, witnesses, or the defendant. Witnesses included Winston S. Churchill, Josef Stalin, George Marshall, Dwight D. Eisenhower, and other influential decision-makers. The students prepared oral and written arguments otherwise consistent with their activities and thoughts in the summer of 1945. A written debriefing exercise was assigned to each learner based on the role each had played. For instance, the student who portrayed Winston Churchill submitted a written defense of his recommendation to President Truman to use the atomic bombs in the form of a speech to his political opponents in parliament.²⁰

Preparation for this trial included the administration of the second teacher-generated test of critical thinking. This test consisted of a reading from Peter Stearns's *World in History Documents*. The objective of this exercise was to determine if students could analyze, synthesize, and evaluate the material they researched using the criteria provided by Stearns: "First, to challenge the reader to interpret primary sources and build historical arguments from them; second, to emphasize comparisons, by which key features—both contrasts and commonalities—can be established and assessed; third, to deal with change over time."²¹

I informed my students that this would be the final lesson of the year. Many expressed their gratitude for a curriculum that provided them with a challenging, student-centered environment conducive to their understanding of issues in greater depth. From one grateful participant, I received the following note:

You have been the teacher who single-handedly inspired me to think freely without feeling intellectually suppressed. I have been challenged and pressed to think and argue like never before. By having the honor to be a student in your class, I have not been judged for choosing to remain silent, for I cannot always find the right words to express my thoughts. I have not been criticized and my creativity stifled or trampled on, but have instead been encouraged and treated fairly. You have brought history to life for me; the philosophies, the struggles of the class opposition, not the words on the pages of the history book, but the minds of the great leaders and the ones less known as well. You have allowed me to become an historian, to place myself inside the head of the people who made history, have encouraged me to analyze a step further (what if?), and have allowed history to unfold before my eyes as both a spectator and an active

²⁰While Churchill was removed from office during the Potsdam Conference, this student's debriefing exercise was structured to reflect the reality that he was still the leader of the loyal opposition in Parliament and therefore accountable to the British Government for the actions he took while serving as England's wartime Prime Minister.

²¹Peter Stearns, *World History in Documents* (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 1.

participant. By being both, you have given me a wider perspective thus allowing me to immerse myself even more into history and, most importantly, you have prepared me for the challenges that life will pose.

From the parent of another student, I received the following letter:

I do not generally write to the teachers of my children, but in this case I feel that I must at least comment on your history course. My son has enjoyed your course immensely. He has entertained us at the dinner table on many occasions with stories of his time with you. At the beginning of the school year, he was apprehensive about your teaching technique and unsure of how to succeed in this type of academic setting. Your class has given him confidence in his thinking and reasoning skills, and has also taught him a great deal about getting along with others and communicating his ideas. I have never seen him so involved and excited about history before and I would like to thank you for the time and energy that you put into this course.

As a small child, my son had a love for knowledge and challenge and he was on fire to learn anything and everything. That passion has waned over the years of rote learning. This year, I witnessed a reawakening of that fire that I loved so much. Congratulations on finding a teaching technique that truly challenges. Your class has provided our family with the pleasure and excitement of our son's lively discussion, and has provided a great avenue of conversation for a teenage boy who normally speaks in monosyllables. Thank you again and keep up the good work. Teachers like you are rare.

In the trial itself, 23 of the thirty students in the stratified, random-sample group gave oral responses that were at or above the level of analysis. On the written debriefing exercise, 22 of the thirty students in this group responded at or above the level of analysis. My students had succeeded in preserving the gains they recorded at the end of the first month.

Student Learning Outcomes

The projected outcomes for the study were several in number: (1) a stratified, random sample of thirty tenth-grade world history students would experience a fifty percent gain on the Ennis-Weir Essay Test of Critical Thinking, (2) eighteen of thirty tenth-grade world history students from the stratified, random-sample would increase their average score by fifty percent on a teacher-generated test of critical thinking administered in the fourth and eighth months, (3) twenty of thirty tenth-grade world history students selected from this group would respond in writing to critical thinking questions at the analysis level or higher, and (4) twenty of thirty tenth-grade world

history students selected from this group would respond orally to critical thinking questions at the analysis level or higher. The first two outcomes were evaluated statistically while the last two were based on teacher observations. All four projected outcomes of the study were met or exceeded.²²

At the conclusion of the eight-month study, I debriefed my students. When asked why they initially experienced difficulties in responding to critical thinking questions at or above the analysis level, a majority of the respondents cited the fact that some academic courses did not demand, other than its mere replication, that anything actually be done with the information they acquired. This response supports Alfie Kohn's conclusion. Kohn, a prominent writer, lecturer, and leader in the movement to bring about an end to America's obsession with standardized tests, concludes that: "Because there is a premium placed on remembering facts, children may come to think that this is what really matters—and they may even come to develop a 'quiz show' view of intelligence that confuses being smart with knowing a lot of stuff."²³

Participants in my four classes enthusiastically embraced the more demanding curriculum with a majority stating that the innovative approach held their interest and therefore increased their desire to do the work required of them despite the level of difficulty they often experienced. When engaged by a curriculum that moves beyond the minimalist requirements imposed by standardized tests, students appear both eager and willing to work to achieve their potential. These results suggest that politicians and bureaucrats should be less concerned with leaving no child behind and more concerned with leaving no potential unfulfilled.

Toward a New Conception of Historical Thinking

To introduce a curriculum that transforms students into practicing historians by providing them with the necessary practice to move beyond the knowledge and comprehension levels on Bloom's Taxonomy, it is necessary to change the way one thinks about teaching history. First and foremost, teachers must ask themselves what major themes and ideas need to be conveyed so their students will grasp the importance of the curriculum. In other words, the first step is to determine what is required for students to truly understand what history is and why history matters. It is therefore important to keep in mind the admonition of Grant Wiggins:

The inescapable dilemma at the heart of curriculum and instruction must, once and for all be made clear: either teaching everything of importance

²²For a complete description of the research methodology used in this study including a detailed statistical analysis see Pattiz, *An Assessment of the Impact of Dialogical Instruction on Critical Thinking Skills*.

²³Alfie Kohn, *The Case Against Standardized Testing: Raising the Scores, Ruining the Schools* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000), 18.

reduces it to trivial, forgettable verbalisms or lists; or schooling is a necessarily inadequate apprenticeship, where "preparation" means something quite humble: learning to know and do a few important things well and leaving out much of importance. The negotiation of the dilemma hinges on enabling students to learn about their ignorance, to gain control over the resources available for making modest dents in it, and to take pleasure in learning that the quest is lifelong.²⁴

Teachers must be willing to make choices in their teaching of history. Just as historians make choices regarding what is to be included versus what is to be excluded, teachers must learn to do likewise. The tradeoff is ultimately one that hinges on the issue of teaching it all versus teaching it well. By teaching students the skills and dispositions associated with critical thought, teachers must trust in their students' ability to take what they have learned and apply this knowledge in a variety of contexts including standardized tests. As Monty Neill, who has conducted extensive research into the adverse effects of tying education exclusively to standardized testing, concludes, rather than chasing the illusion that test-driven change will significantly improve learning, policy makers need to shift attention to practices and models that emphasize serious thinking and teaching.²⁵ This recommendation applies to teachers as well.

The second step is to determine what issues, events, and individuals should be used as role-playing devices that would enable students to research, discuss, and experience the important ideas under consideration. Teachers of history need to ask themselves, "What are the historical turning points that have shaped the human experience?" And "How can these turning points form the basis for a unique set of experiences that will enable my students to gain insights into why the past is both interesting and relevant?" As Parker J. Palmer, a highly respected writer and traveling teacher who works independently on issues in education, spirituality, community, and social change, notes:

In every period of history, there is an event that when deeply understood, reveals not only how historians do their work but also illumines the general dynamics of that epoch. In the work of every philosopher, there

²⁴Grant Wiggins, "The Futility of Trying to Teach Everything of Importance," *Educational Leadership*, 47 (1993), 44-48. Over the past fifteen years, Wiggins has participated in some of the most influential reform initiatives in the country, including Vermont's portfolio system and the Coalition of Essential Schools. He has established a statewide Consortium devoted to assessment reform, and designed a performance-based and teacher-run portfolio assessment prototype for the states of North Carolina and New Jersey.

²⁵Monty Neill, "The Dangers of Testing," *Educational Leadership*, 60 (2003), 43-46.

is a pivotal idea that when deeply understood, reveals the foundation of his or her system or nonsystem of thought. By teaching this way, we do not abandon the ethic that drives us to cover the field—we honor it more deeply. Teaching from the microcosm, we exercise responsibility toward both the subject and our students by refusing merely to send data “bites” down the intellectual food chain but by helping our students understand where the information comes from and what it means. We honor both the discipline and our students by teaching them how to think like historians or biologists or literary critics rather than merely how to lip-sync the conclusions others have reached.²⁶

The third step is to identify what materials already exist that will help to achieve the goals and objectives associated with teaching history as the reenactment of past experience. Companies have already produced many materials making it possible for teachers to reenact the past. All that remains is to determine which materials can be of use to any given teacher. It is important, however, to adapt rather than to adopt. Historians teach a subject, not a text. The subject matter, therefore, should drive the choice of which materials to use and why rather than vice versa.

The fourth step is to reconcile that which is to be taught with those to whom one plans to teach it. Whether the goal is preparing students for standardized assessments or life beyond the classroom, the ultimate goal is to equip tomorrow's leaders with the skills and dispositions typically associated with critical thought. In the information age, workers must “think” for a living, and a curriculum enabling them to do so will uniquely prepare the next generation for whatever challenges life poses. As Kohn concludes, it is not only the ability to raise and answer questions that matters, but also the disposition to do so. To be well educated is to have the desire as well as the means to make sure that learning never ends.²⁷

The fifth step is to assign students roles in historical reenactments based on an understanding that each student has different strengths and weaknesses. For example, students possessing natural leadership skills should be assigned leadership roles while other students, who are analytical and introspective in nature, should be assigned roles enabling them to maximize their success as well. This process of assigning roles, based on each of the participants' respective strengths and weaknesses, creates an environment in which each will likely succeed as opposed to a random assignment of roles and responsibilities that ultimately might result in frustration, disappointment, and failure.

²⁶Parker J. Palmer, *The Courage to Teach: Exploring the Inner Landscape of a Teacher's Life* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), 123.

²⁷Alfie Kohn, *What Does It Mean to be Well Educated?* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 9–10.

The sixth step is to change the way teachers think about historical instruction. If students are to become practicing historians and learn history through a process of reenacting past experiences, then teachers must allow history to unfold in the classroom. While this new conception of historical thinking does not negate the central role of teachers, it recognizes that they are no longer the source of all knowledge. At the heart of this approach lays the understanding that successful learning takes place only when students are empowered to make decisions and reap the rewards or suffer the consequences of their decisions. Or, as historian Tom Holt explains, to “do” history is not to memorize, but to question and to imagine. Historical thinking requires curiosity and a search for the paths of access, not just getting things by heart.²⁸

The seventh and final step involves the distribution of a debriefing exercise. Historians are writers. Students must adopt this practice too. The debriefing exercise is essential for apprentice historians to make sense of what they have experienced just as professional historians would. It is the point at which generalizations and symbolic meanings are generated out of students’ concrete experiences. The teacher’s role in eliciting “learner-discovered” principles, in assisting students in their attempts to organize their ideas and experiences into higher-order generalizations, and in providing the discussion and assignments that will relate the experiences of the past to students’ real world experiences, must form the core of this debriefing exercise.²⁹

As Sam Wineburg, a distinguished professor of education who has done extensive research and published an authoritative text on the concept of historical thinking, suggests, although most of us think of history—and learn it—as a conglomeration of facts, dates, and key figures, for professional historians it is a way of knowing, a method for developing an understanding about the relationships of peoples and events in the past.³⁰ If we are to imbue in our students a similar understanding, it is incumbent on those of us who teach history to move toward a new

²⁸Tom Holt, *Thinking Historically: Narrative, Imagination, and Understanding* (New York: College Board, 1995), xii.

²⁹The teacher has some latitude in how he considers a debriefing exercise. What is important is that students, in some way, shape, or form, address the twin questions of “What does this all mean?” and “Why is this relevant today?” There are different approaches a teacher can take. One approach would be to link past to present by having student participants analyze the historical ramifications of the decisions made in terms of how those decisions might have impacted the modern world. Another approach would be to have students shift advocacy by adopting positions contrary to the positions they embraced during the historical reenactment. Both approaches require students to organize their ideas and experiences into higher-order generalizations and, in doing so, their knowledge and understanding is given new meaning and is more likely to be retained long after the lesson has concluded.

³⁰Sam Wineburg, *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts: Charting the Future of Teaching the Past* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2001).

conception of historical thinking and instruction. As this essay suggests, one way to accomplish this task is through teaching history as the reenactment of past experience.

History should be studied because it is an absolutely necessary enlargement of human experience, a way of getting out of the boundaries of one's own life and culture and of seeing more of what human experience has been.³¹ Such a conception is rooted in the notion of the "idealist" historian who seeks to understand the past by getting imaginatively inside the minds of individuals in the past. By studying the mental world of the past, today's students of history should seek to inhabit the minds of their subjects, knowing that this requires imagination inspired by evidence. The historian could then reenact past actions in the way those who actually performed them were thought to act.³²

It is time for those of us who teach history to think differently about how we teach history. We have arrived at the proverbial fork in the road. One option is to forge a partnership with our students as fellow historians, and, in doing so, assist them along the way in acquiring the skills and dispositions associated with higher-order thought while instilling in their young hearts and minds a love of learning that will last them a lifetime. Another option is to continue doing business as usual, rendering our discipline largely irrelevant in the lives of those whom we purport to teach. In the words of Thomas Paine: We have it in our power to begin the world over again.³³ The choice is ours.

³¹Bernard Bailyn, *On the Teaching & Writing of History* (Lebanon, NH: University Press of New England, 1994), 12.

³²Robert C. Williams, *The Historian's Toolbox: A Student's Guide to the Theory and Craft of History* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2003), 16.

³³Thomas Paine, *Common Sense*, quoted in Eric Foner and John A. Garraty, *The Reader's Companion to American History* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1991), 208.