

**Knowing History: A Study of the Construction and Implementation of Historical
Knowledge from Theory to Practice**

Sara Louise Evers

Dissertation submitted to the faculty of the Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University in
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

In

Curriculum and Instruction

David Hicks, Chair

Amy Allen

Peter Doolittle

Donna Fortune

April 1, 2025

Blacksburg, VA

Keywords: curriculum, history pedagogy, historical inquiry, pedagogical decision making

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ABSTRACT

Despite attempts throughout the 20th century to shift history curriculum towards disciplinary learning, the lack of lasting reform is an enduring problem in history education. My dissertation explores this problem in three studies which examine the construction and implementation of historical knowledge from theory to practice. By investigating how scholars, curriculum developers, and classroom educators define and enact historical knowledge, I trace how knowledge moves between the spheres of theory and practice. Manuscript One explores the development of conceptions of historical knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America. Discursive analysis highlights how academic, geographic, and historic contexts shape history education discourse through the push-and-pull relationship between scholarly ideas, public debate, and classroom curriculums. Educative curriculum materials are an influential, yet understudied, component of teaching practice heralded for the ability to instigate classroom reform. Manuscript Two reports on a content and discourse analysis of the representation of women in the Digital Inquiry Group's world history *Reading Like a Historian* educative curriculum. Finally, Manuscript Three investigates how preservice and novice teachers make instructional choices in their school contexts when using the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) to facilitate student-driven historical inquiry. By studying knowledge production at multiple levels, I shine a light on the agency of actors working in the field of history education to push against the structure of schooling, exposing avenues for change.

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GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

School history education has a powerful impact on how students understand themselves and their world. Despite attempts to throughout the 20th century to shift history curriculum towards disciplinary learning, history education continues as a rote learning exercise in U.S. classrooms. The lack of lasting reform is an enduring problem in history education. My dissertation research explores the problem of reform in history education through investigation of the construction and implementation of historical knowledge from theory to practice. I use three studies to analyze how historical knowledge is defined and enacted by scholars, curriculum designers, and classroom teachers. By studying historical knowledge in multiple spheres of history education, I shine a light on the push-and-pull relationship between scholarly ideas, public debate, and classroom curriculums.

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Acknowledgements

There are many people I would like to thank for their guidance and support throughout the process of completing my doctoral degree.

Firstly, I would like to thank each member of my committee. Dr. Donna Fortune, thank you for emphasizing the importance of researching teachers' perspectives. Dr. Amy Allen, your pragmatism and grounded advice were instrumental in guiding my dissertation to completion. Without your insights and gentle nudges, I might still be writing. Dr. Doolittle, I deeply appreciate the foundational knowledge about learning and cognition I developed through your courses. Without it, I would not have asked the questions which shaped this dissertation. Finally, to my dissertation chair, Dr. David Hicks—our discussions pushed me to read more deeply, reconsider my stances, revise my assumptions, and increase the cogency of my claims. Our arguments convinced me I was right. Thank you for guiding and supporting my development as a scholar.

I am incredibly grateful to Ann Canning, Barb Kirby, and Jana Kyle at the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources Eastern Region. Your support, both professionally and personally, helped me navigate a new career path with confidence. Your belief in my ability to contribute to the field of history education gave me a sense of belonging, and I am thankful for the warm and welcoming community you foster.

A heartfelt thank you to Dr. Analía Gómez Vidal for your invaluable mentorship throughout my doctoral journey. From preparing my application materials to workshopping my dissertation title, your advice helped guide my way. I treasure our friendship and look forward to many more long nights talking together.

Thank you to my network of friends and family, both near and far. Your creativity, generosity, and humor bring so much richness to my life. I will forever be grateful for your immediate and unwavering assistance after the fire. To my parents, Joe and Lisa, thank you for a lifetime of support. Your parenting meant I was never scared of hard work, a lesson that certainly came in handy while writing this dissertation. Finally, thank you to my partner in life, John Hobson. Your support and enthusiasm for my whole person is a light in my life.

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Attribution

Manuscript Two, entitled *Whose Historical Thinking? Representation of women in The Digital Inquiry Group's Reading Like a Historian world history curriculum*, was published on February 24, 2025, in *Theory and Research in Social Education* (DOI:10.1080/00933104.2025.2469495). The manuscript is reprinted in this dissertation in accordance with Virginia Tech Graduate School and Taylor and Francis copyright guidelines.

The contributions of authors are as follows:

- Sara Evers: I conceptualized the study and developed the central research idea. As lead author, I was responsible for research design, including constructing research questions, developing a framework for analysis, and determining methodological approaches. I led collection and analysis of study data. I was the primary author responsible for writing reports of the research and completing final revisions of the study prior to publication.
- David Hicks: My dissertation advisor, Dr. Hicks, contributed to the study by providing expert guidance on literature, research design, and methodology. His direction influenced the study's emphasis on the educative nature of the Digital Inquiry Group's world history lessons. Dr. Hicks assisted in preparing the manuscript for publication and responding to editor revisions. He contributed practical implications based upon study findings.
- Suzanne Shelburne: Dr. Shelburne assisted with initial study design, data collection, and analysis. She also played a key role in drafting early versions of the manuscript.

Introduction

What is history? In respect to the anthropologically universal function of orientating human life by culture the answer is very simple: history is time which has gained sense and meaning. History is meaningful and sense-bearing time. It combines past, present and future in a way that human beings can live in the tense intersection of remembered past and expected future. History is a process of reflecting the time order of human life, grounded in experience and moved by outlooks on the future. (Rüsen, 2005, p.2)

As Rüsen (2005) highlighted, knowledge of the past has a powerful impact on how we understand ourselves and our world. This dissertation asks, “what does it mean to know history?” to examine the discourse surrounding the nature and purpose of historical knowledge in schools. Students experience history in classrooms, developing awareness of themselves and their social institutions as situated in time. School history education formally and intentionally structures this classroom experience. Historically, progressive reformers advocated for pedagogies that prioritize inquiry and disciplinary thinking (Evans, 2011). However, their vision contrasts with the reality of schools which remain structured around rote learning of national political narratives— an approach criticized for reinforcing historical master narratives and the mis/underrepresentation of marginalized groups (Chick & Corle, 2016; King, 2017; Salinas et al. 2012; Woyshner et al., 2004). Scholars have attempted to shift history instruction towards disciplinary learning through the construction of historical thinking pedagogies and classroom resources, but the lack of lasting reform is an enduring problem (Evans, 2006). My dissertation research responds to the problem of reform in history education through investigation of the construction and implementation of historical knowledge from theory to practice.


This dissertation engages in critical questioning about knowledge, power, and agency in different contexts: theory, policy, curriculum design, and classroom practice. In three studies I investigate who constructs historical knowledge, how it is disseminated through curriculum, and

how it is enacted in classrooms. Utilizing the theory of discourse as a qualitative paradigm, I examine the perspectives and values that inform foundational claims about the nature of historical knowledge, the design of a widely used history curriculum, and the pedagogical choices of history teachers. By integrating theory, policy, curriculum, and pedagogical practice my goal is to map the social ecosystem of history education, tracing how power shapes the flow of knowledge between theory and practice. A manuscript style dissertation affords me the ability to examine the relationship between theory and practice at different scales and in different contexts, shedding light on the factors which shape how historical knowledge is conceptualized and enacted.

As shown in Figure 1, each study in this dissertation engages in a distinct level of analysis, starting with academic theory and genealogy and moving through curriculum design to pedagogical implementation. Taking a macro-lens, I first examine the historic development of research and theory about historical knowledge in three geographic regions central to the academic field. Theory is situated in the geopolitical context of its creation through examination of curriculum policy and initiatives. Next, I investigate the intermediary space between theory and practice by analyzing how pedagogical theory is translated for classroom use through curriculum products. Finally, my investigation takes a micro-level focus, exploring the day-to-day experience of new history teachers as they make instructional decisions. At each stage I examine how knowledge production in history education challenges or reinforces dominant historical narratives and normative practices. By analyzing how historical knowledge is constructed and implemented in different spheres and on different scales within the history education ecosystem, the role of power in mediating which knowledge moves through the system and is taken up in classroom is highlighted.

Figure 1

Dimensions of Dissertation Manuscripts



Level of Analysis	Theory and Genealogy <i>Concepts, and skills, and consciousness-oh my! Conceptualizing Historical Knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America, 1970-2020</i>	Curriculum Design <i>Whose Historical Thinking? Representation of women in The Digital Inquiry Group's Reading Like a Historian world history curriculum</i>	Pedagogical Implementation <i>"It made me look at history teaching in a different way" Preservice and Novice Teachers' experiences using the Question Formulation Technique for Historical Inquiry</i>
Research Questions	<p>How have scholars in the field of history education researched and conceptualized historical knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America from 1970 to 2020?</p> <p>How have notable public debates about history education intersected with the construction and implementation of historical knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America?</p> <p>What perspectives inform definitions of historical knowledge used in history education?</p>	<p>How are women and their experiences represented in the content and discourse of <i>RLH</i> world history lesson materials?</p> <p>How do <i>RLH</i> world history lesson materials challenge or reinforce existing cultural assumptions about women/gender in history?</p>	<p>How do preservice and novice history teachers integrate the QFT into their instructional decision-making, and what factors shape this process?</p> <p>How do preservice and novice teachers explain the use of the QFT in relation to their conception of teaching history?</p>
Contexts/Scale	<i>England; Germany; the Netherlands; the United States; Canada</i> academia; governmental policy/initiatives;	<i>The United States</i> academia; professional organizations	<i>The United States; Mid-Atlantic, Southern Appalachia</i> higher and secondary education classrooms;

	professional organizations		professional organizations
Theoretical framework	Discourse	Women's history scholarship	Curriculum in use
Research Methods	<i>Bricolage approach using historical methods and discourse analysis</i> Data sources: academic publications; policy documents; curriculum materials	<i>Content and discourse analysis</i> Data source: The Digital Inquiry Group's <i>Reading Like a Historian</i> world history lessons	<i>Qualitative analysis</i> Data sources: preservice teacher work samples; classroom curricular materials; student work samples; observation field notes; semi-structured interview transcripts
Power/ knowledge, Agency, and Historical Knowledge	How power shapes what it means to know history	How power shapes who history curriculum is for	How power shapes history teachers' pedagogical decision making

In Manuscript One, I trace the genealogy of definitions of historical knowledge grounded in two schools of thought: an Anglo-American school which emphasizes student development of historical thinking concepts and a school of historical consciousness which emphasizes students' awareness of themselves in time. This investigation is divided into three geographic regions—England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America— which represents major hubs of research during the development of the field of history education. Utilizing discourse theory as a qualitative paradigm and historical methods to establish a chronology, I chronicle how the research and theory of the 1970s and 1980s informed the conceptualizations of historical knowledge that emerged in publications during the 1990s and 2000s. I discuss interactions between scholarly ideas and geographic divisions in theoretical and academic perspectives. This genealogy is set against the backdrop of major controversies about history education in the public discourse of each nation studied. History education initiatives sparked by these controversies push against prevailing notions of historical knowledge in the academic sphere,

presenting a complicated picture of how theoretical definitions of historical knowledge constructed in universities are taken up in classrooms. Manuscript One historically and geographically contextualizes my exploration of curriculum materials (Manuscript Two) and classroom practice (Manuscript Three).

I next examine a curriculum product resulting from influential research and theory developed in my professional context, the United States. Manuscript Two reports on a content and discourse analysis of the representation of women in the Digital Inquiry Group's *Reading Like a Historian* world history curriculum. The *Reading Like a Historian* educative curriculum was developed from Sam Wineburg's research investigating the cognitions of historians. Educative curriculums have powerful potential to instigate reform through their close connection to classroom practice. *RLH* lessons apply Wineburg's conception of "historical thinking" to help students interpret primary source documents in response to a central inquiry question. I conducted my analysis through the theoretical frames utilized by historians of women and gender to examine how DIG's historical thinking pedagogy—intended to engage students in the work of historians—impacted the representation of women and gender in the world history curriculum. I examine the alignment between conceptions of historical thinking from *RLH* curriculum designers and women's and gender historians, critically examining how power determines whose perspectives are used to define historical knowledge in curricular materials. Manuscript Two is situated in the space between theory and practice and acts as a bridge between theoretical exploration in Manuscript One and the investigation of classroom practice in Manuscript Three.

Manuscript Three explores the pedagogical decision making of preservice and novice teachers as they learn to use and use an instructional strategy for student-driven historical inquiry. I extend my analysis of history education discourse into the sphere of practice by

exploring the conceptions and experiences of teachers navigating their school context when making choices about what and how to teach. This study illuminates teacher beliefs about inquiry and history education, influences on their pedagogical choices, and the role of teacher education in equipping educators to teach history as an inferential and inquiry-based discipline. This practically minded study places a hallmark pedagogy in history education discourse, historical inquiry, in the context of classroom use to analyze how historical knowledge is implemented by teachers in schools.

These manuscripts challenge dominant assumptions in history education by critiquing how the production of knowledge within history education discourse excludes diverse perspectives and narratives—providing student with an incomplete and dishonest vision of the past disconnected from their lives as members of a multi-cultural world. Each manuscript contributes to a broader conversation about how power mediates the construction and implementation of historical knowledge at different levels in the education system. Taken together, they follow the flow of ideas about the nature and purpose of history education from abstract theorizing, to ambitious curriculum design, to the pragmatic choices made in teaching practice. I center historical knowledge as a historic and social construction to illuminate the agency and decision making of actors in the field of history education. By examining knowledge production at multiple levels, I shine a light on how social actors working in the field of history education can push against the structure of schooling, exposing avenues for change.

Theoretical Framing

At the center of this research is an examination of power and ideology in history curriculum. I study “knowing history” through a critical sociocultural lens to interrogate how the social re/production of knowledge creates and sustains networks of power. The critical

sociocultural approach is valuable to the study of history education because as Epstein and Peck contended, “historical narratives [are]...embedded in complex webs of power relations that influence whose and which historical narratives are legitimated, as well as how and why historical narratives are constructed, appropriated, contested and otherwise taken up in schools and societies” (2018, p.7). Historical narratives are communicated through curricula; when designing and enacting curriculum educational actors pull from foundational knowledge about what it means to know history, how history is learned, and how it should be taught. The contexts through which conceptualizations about historical knowing and constructed and implemented influence the normative ideas which structure the curriculum and pedagogy of history education.

In following pages, I discuss how I unite the theory of power/knowledge, social cognitive theory, and postmodern history under a critical sociocultural approach to the study of historical knowledge. The theory of power/knowledge highlights how knowledge claims create and sustain societal norms. Understanding how students learn is essential to examining how historical knowledge is defined and enacted. I base my perspective on learning and cognition in social cognitive theory. This dissertation illuminates how different educational actors conceptualize the nature of history. As part of my theoretical framework, I define history through a postmodern lens and discuss the implications of this definition for history education. These theories inform the critical questions I ask when investigating the discourse surrounding historical knowledge from theory to practice.

Theory of Power/Knowledge

In *Discipline and Punish* Foucault (1975, 1995) argued that the self is socially constructed and technologies of power, or the techniques by which the body is controlled through compelled habits and behaviors, perform social control. He explored these ideas through the lens

of historical changes in criminal justice, which he used to explain power-knowledge relations. He asserted that power and knowledge exist in a cyclical relationship and claims of knowledge are imbued with power for their ability to shape the discourse. Discourse refers to social communications which define normative social constructions and characterize deviance as infractions against society. In his example, criminal acts violate social norms, people who engage in criminal acts are prescribed the “criminal” label, and thus crime becomes a rebellion against society itself. Through this discourse around crime, technologies of power (i.e., the penal system) generalizes punishment in such a way that controls people’s behavior. The “criminal’s soul” is born out of and controlled by technologies of power.

In the context of education, material manifestations of discourse like the school curricula are embedded with knowledge and act as a “technologies of power.” I define curriculum using Bernstein’s notion of curriculum as the organization of time as expressed in the relative status of educational content. He stated that “any curriculum entails a principle or principles whereby, of all the possible contents of time, some contents are accorded differential status” (1973, p.365). Bernstein emphasized that the principles by which educational time is organized are not intrinsic; they are the result of social communications. Power and social control are realized in the communication of educational knowledge as expressed in the curriculum. For example, the concept of “framing” is used by Bernstein to indicate the amount of control teachers and students have in the “selection, organization, and pacing of the knowledge transmitted and received in the pedagogical relationship” (1973, p.366). This degree of control is the result of institutional discourse, maintained by hierarchical social networks, which impact how educational time is spent. Bernstein’s definition of curriculum is useful to my research because it makes visible how

the social structure of schooling, as expressed in curriculum, perpetuates educational norms. In the terminology of Foucault, this definition understands curriculum as a “technology of power.”

Discourse theory uses power/knowledge to describe how dominant forces in society ascribe roles to individual actors through institutional and interpersonal interactions. However, by emphasizing the social construction of the subject, the theory of power/knowledge centers the impact of culture and society on the individual, perhaps at the expense of individual agency. What are the implications for educators? If learning is merely the reproduction of dominant discourses, why teach at all? I turn to social cognitive theory to make sense of the dynamics between structure and agency in the sphere of education.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive theory suggests that we are not automatons controlled by society; while learning is a social process the individual exerts agency when they learn. Vygotsky's theories of cognitive development explain how cognitive processes intersect with the social world in learning. He theorized that cognitive processes occur in relation to social interaction and conceptualized the “Zone of Proximal Development” to explain how children create a sense of self as they learn the practices of more experienced members of a social group (Vygotsky, 1978). Through “semiotic mediation” individuals learn to control their response to stimuli, developing higher mental functions like reasoning, problem-solving, and making inferences. To achieve this practice, individuals use mediating symbols and tools (like language) that are collectively produced. Vygotsky’s concepts of semiotic mediation and the Zone of Proximal Development describe the social nature of learning.

Holland et al. (1998) examined the social construction of reality when understanding “identity” as a way to track agency in “socially produced, culturally constructed activities” (p.40), which they call figured worlds. They wrote from a sociocultural lens, acknowledging individuals as actors situated in networks of power, but attempted to move away from cultural determinism to acknowledge the dynamism of identity formation and the agency experienced by the individual. They build from the ideas of Mikhail Bakhtin, Lev Vygotsky, and Pierre Bourdieu, in addition to synthesizing the works of numerous scholars of sociocultural theory, to tackle the structure/agency problem felt by educational sociologists and psychologists.

Identity formation is a process occurring within social and cultural activities. Holland et al. (1998) described this process, “by “figured world,” then, we mean a socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). They concluded, “‘figured world’ provides a means to conceptualize *historical* [emphasis added] subjectivities, consciousnesses and agency, persons (and collective agents) forming in practice. It also provides the terms for answering a conundrum of personal agency” (1998, p. 41-42). Figured worlds are an expression of the dynamic location in which meaningful social practices are taken up by actors as they “figure” their identity in relation to others.

The theory of figured worlds is a useful frame to my research because it attends not only to power/knowledge as a mechanism for social control, but also to the agency involved in the identity formation of social actors. While Holland et al. wrote in terms of identity development their use of social cognitive theory aids in exploring the relationship between structure and agency in the experience of learners. Crucially for this dissertation, the theory of figured worlds

recognizes the historically situated nature of meaning making. This tenant is part of my understanding of the nature and purpose of historical knowledge.

Postmodern History

Rüsen (2005) defined history as “time which has gained sense and meaning” (p. 2). He argued that we interpret (“gain sense and meaning”) the past— as distinguished from the present and the future (“time”)— and in doing so create history. Accordingly, history is separate from the past. Schools of historical thought differ in their judgment over whether the historian can make the past knowable, and the subjective or objective nature of the historian’s craft (Lévesque, 2008). Postmodern thought, part of the linguistic turn in philosophy, shifts away from an objective view of knowledge and instead understands knowledge as the subjective construction of individuals and societies (Cherryholmes, 2010). I use Jenkins (1991) postmodern definition of history, which aligns with my understanding of power/knowledge and social cognitive theory, to define history.

Jenkins (1991) asserted that the past existed and that it is ontological in nature (therefore unknowable in the big “T” truth sense), while history is an epistemological construction and is subjective in nature (but knowable in a little “t” truth sense). He defined history as “a shifting discourse constructed by historians and that from the existence of the past no one reading is entailed: change the gaze, shift the perspective and new readings appear” (1991, p.16). He used this definition to advance an argument that there is not one history which gives an account of the past, but rather multiple histories deriving from differing inquiries into the past. Jenkins replaced the question, “what is history?” with “who is history for?” to highlight the subjective and ideologically based nature of history.

The post-modern definition of history sparks questions for the educator; if history classes teach young people that history is subjective and there exists no one historical truth, what is purpose of learning history at all? After all, is not every answer given by a student correct because it is their historical interpretation, according to their perspective? Should we not respect everyone's truth? This vision of history education is particularly troublesome in the context of a 21st century media ecosystem dominated by echo chambers and epistemic bubbles (Nguyen, 2020). What, then, is the purpose of history education? I turn to the work of scholars of history education to answer these questions.

Peter Lee (1991) offered a standard for little “t” historical truth grounded in the disciplinary methods of historians. He stated,

The discipline of history offers a rational past, not merely a practical one designed to suit the interests of particular groups or kinds of activity. It is rational because it incorporates public criteria and operates through open procedures. These do not guarantee the truth, but they do make the discipline a serious attempt to produce the best account we can, given the state of our questioning and the evidence available. In this sense objectivity (as opposed to partiality or vicious relativism) is built into the discipline of history (1991, p. 43).

While Lee and postmodern history parted ways at two points in this passage, 1) his notion that history does not serve a practical purpose and 2) the idea that objectivity is built into the discipline of history, he presented a convincing case for the importance of developing in young people a disciplinary conceptual apparatus through which they can interpret the past.¹

Instruction in the discipline of history can develop in young people a theory of knowledge, including an understanding that knowledge is historically and socially constructed. Additionally, akin to Dewey's (1916) connection between education and democracy as a “mode of associated

¹ Lee explores the relationship between historical narrative, dispositions toward history, and history education in his concept of historical literacy (see: Lee, 2006; 2011).

living”, constructed knowledge does not operate as a free for all of subjective positions holding even weight– through democratic deliberation and consensus we can make assertions, grounded in evidence, that bear the weight of “truth.” The standard for little “t” truth offered by instruction in disciplinary concepts defines a purpose for history education in formal schooling and brings my conception of historical knowledge out of theoretical post-modernism and into the practical realm of teacher education.

Sociocultural learning theory helps bridge the gap between postmodern history and disciplinary history. Scholars such as Linda Levstik, Terrie Epstein, Carla Peck, Jannet van Drei, and Carala van Boxtel use sociocultural learning theory to frame their understanding of historical knowledge (Barton and Levstik, 2004; Epstein & Peck, 2018; van Drei and van Boxtel, 2008). They describe historical knowing as an active process whereby people use cultural tools (like narrative tropes) to construct historical understandings. While historians use a disciplinary apparatus to construct historical accounts, the inner process of the historian is mediated by cultural tools available to them. Like Jenkins’ definition of history, the sociocultural approach to historical learning describes the process of constructing a historical understanding as subjective. Pedagogical models for historical learning like critical historical inquiry and historical reasoning place instruction in disciplinary thinking in the context of sociocultural learning theory to develop students’ ability to critically analyze the construction of historical knowledge in society (Salinas & Blevins, 2014; van Boxtel & van Drei, 2018). Knowledge of historical concepts is important to young people’s ability to analyze the structure and purpose of historical narratives and deliberate on what constitutes a significant and “truthful” historical account.

The theory of power/knowledge, social cognitive theory, and post-modern history inform the critical sociocultural lens through which I approach my dissertation research by providing me

with a tool for analyzing the construction of historical knowledge. When conducting this investigation in the contexts of scholarship, curriculum design, and classroom practice I ask critical questions about how teaching and learning history is embedded in networks of power relations. The topics which I explore— academic discourse surrounding historical knowledge, the representation of women in educative curriculum, and the experiences of teachers learning to use an instructional strategy for student-driven inquiry— address the underlying structures which perpetuate norms in history education.

Critical Questioning

In 1851 Sojourner Truth issued a speech at the Women’s Right Convention which criticized how White epistemology shaped the construction of gender in nineteenth century political discourse about women’s rights. Truth deconstructed perceptions of women as dainty and helpless and juxtaposed this definition of womanhood with her experiences as a Black woman (Truth, 1851). Collective memory knows her speech by the title, “Ain’t I a Woman?” While this title is apocryphal (Podell, n.d.)², the question became an epitaph of Truth’s work as an abolitionist and proto-feminist. It evokes Truth’s cogent rhetoric and illustrates the power of a critical question to reframe a movement so that it includes those falling outside normative definitions of womanhood.

“Ain’t I a Woman?” is an important question for the twenty-first century world.

Discriminatory tropes continue to define womanhood and place sanctions on people falling

² The popular version of the speech raises questions about the representation of Black leaders in historical accounts. Writing for *The New York Independent* in 1863, Frances Gage published a version of the speech which applied the dialect of a Southern enslaved person to Truth’s words. The original transcription, published in *The Anti-Slavery Bugle* in 1851, was printed by Marius Robinson, a friend of Truth, and likely had her approval prior to publication. The story of Truth’s speech illustrates the intertwined nature of representation, memory, history, and politics— a theme I explore throughout this dissertation.

outside of gender norms. At the time of this dissertation's publication an anti-trans executive order entitled, "defending women from gender ideology and extremism and restoring biological truth to the federal government" was issued by the U.S.' Far-Right executive administration (Exec. Order, No. 14168, 2025). The "defense of women" rhetoric used mirrors the 19th century anti-suffrage arguments Truth questioned. However, as Truth's example shows, people facing sanctions are not without agency.

I look to the work of historians Marissa J. Fuentes and Robin D.G. Kelley and educator LaGarrett J. King as examples of critical questioning in the disciplines of history and history education. Fuentes (2016) questioned epistemic violence in the historical archives and provided an alternative methodology, *reading along the bias grain*, to interpret the experiences of Black women in historical accounts through non-White perspectives. Kelley (1996) questioned how political resistance is defined and conceptualized *infrapolitics* to reframe Black resistance to racial oppression. King (2020) questioned the White epistemic logic of history education and created a *Black Historical Consciousness* framework to teach a U.S. History with significance to Black students. These authors asked critical questions, and in answering their questions through research, redefined foundational methods, concepts, and frameworks in their disciplines. Their work provides examples of the power of critical research and redefinition to produce change.

Cherryholmes (1982) argued, "knowledge claims and power relations interpenetrate. This is readily comprehended when it is considered that knowledge claims are products of discourse and discourse is structured by rules and power relations" (p.345). Critical sociocultural analysis brings to the surface ideologies present in claims of knowledge with the aim of challenging oppressive norms. Critical research questions, or research questions that examine the way power structures how history is taught and learned, frame my studies. These questions include: *What*

perspectives inform definitions of historical knowledge used in the field of history education? (Manuscript One), How do Reading Like a Historian world history lesson materials challenge or reinforce existing cultural assumptions about women/gender in history? (Manuscript Two), and How do preservice and novice history teachers integrate the QFT into their instructional decision-making, and what factors shape this process? (Manuscript Three) By asking critical questions, I challenge the taken for granted principles that undergird the work of scholars, teacher educators, curriculum developers, policy developers, and classroom teachers.

The manuscripts in this dissertation are organized as follows: *Manuscript One: Concepts, and skills, and consciousness-oh my! Defining Historical Knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America (1970-2020)*, an investigation of the theoretical conception of historical knowledge during the development of history education as an academic field. *Manuscript Two: Whose Historical Thinking? Representation of Women in The Digital Inquiry Group's Reading Like a Historian World History Curriculum*, a content and discourse analysis of the representation of women and gender in the Digital Inquiry Group's *Reading Like a Historian* world history curriculum. Finally, *Manuscript Three: "It made me look at history teaching in a different way" Preservice and Novice Teachers' experiences using the Question Formulation Technique for Historical Inquiry*, a qualitative study of preservice and novice teachers' experiences learning to use and using an instructional strategy for historical inquiry. With these manuscripts I illuminate how historical knowledge is defined within and across different spheres of history education.

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**Concepts, and skills, and consciousness-oh my! Conceptualizing historical knowledge in
England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America, 1970-2020**

Sara Evers^{a*}

^a School of Education, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, U.S.A

*1226 Howbert Ave SW, Roanoke, Virginia, 24015; (703) 217-4219; saralevers@vt.edu

Abstract

This study investigates the development of scholarly ideas about historical knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America from 1970-2023. Comparative analysis highlights how academic, geographic, and historic contexts shaped history education discourse through the push-and-pull relationship between scholarly ideas, public debate, and classroom curriculums.

Keywords: curriculum history; historical thinking; historical consciousness; history education

Historical thinking...comes from the work of historians. It is rooted in how they tackle the difficult problems of understanding the past, how they make sense of it for today's society and culture, and thus how they get their bearings in a continuum of past, present, and future. As history educators, our goal is to enable students to begin to do the same, in a step-by-step process that is challenging but not overwhelming. Otherwise, in the reading of history, they remain simply the passive, and often unwilling, recipients of someone else's work. (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p.7)

Seixas and Morton (2013) contend that for historical learning to aid people in understanding their position in society, the work of historians must be recontextualized for use in K-12 classrooms. Teacher educators and curriculum developers look to academic literature when creating methods and materials to support the practice of history teachers. In this literature, scholars explore what it means to know history and, when connected to classroom practice, their ideas have a powerful influence on how students understand themselves as historical beings. Certain ideas expressed in influential writings about history education—to name a few examples, Rösen's (2005) theory of historical consciousness, Lee's (2005) first- and second-order concepts, and Wineburg's (2001) historical thinking— became a foundational part of how we understand history education. But the question emerges, how did they get there? I am interested in the genealogy of the conceptualizations about historical knowledge which shape history pedagogy and curriculum.

Utilizing a Foucauldian and Bernsteinian lens, this review interrogates the discourse of history education as a manifestation of societal norms and constructs. It explores the dynamic interrelations between scholarly dialogue, pedagogical practices, public debate, and the social construction of historical knowledge, aiming to unearth the conceptual genealogy that underpins contemporary educational paradigms. Discourse, as Foucault posits, frames knowledge within the context of social practices, including language use (Foucault, 1975, 2002). It forms and enforces norms, casting deviation as transgression (Foucault, 1976, 1995; Gee, 1990). In

education, discourse materializes through academic citations, pedagogical strategies, and curriculum development. Bernstein (2003) underscores that these elements result from the social construction of knowledge, reflecting a network of choices shaping what we call a curriculum.

This study investigates the paradigms through which history education is conceptualized and enacted. The focus of my research is self-consciously Eurocentric. I recognize multiple discourses in history education occur in parallel to each other and important scholarship is established or emerging which examines historical knowledge through other cultural frames (e.g., Ho & Barton, 2022; Wallace-Casey, 2022; Wallace, 2024). I focused on North American and European scholarship because of the influence of these geographic regions on dominant paradigms I experience as a teacher educator. I view this study as a crucial first step in creating space within United States discourse for diverse perspectives on historical knowing. This review turns a critical and historical lens to foundational definitions of historical knowledge to examine the discursive genealogy of the knowledge that shapes history education discourse.

The following questions guide my study:

- (1) How have scholars in the field of history education researched and conceptualized historical knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America from 1970 to 2020?
- (2) How have notable public debates about history education intersected with the construction and implementation of historical knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America?
- (3) What perspectives inform definitions of historical knowledge used in history education?

Through this research, I aim to illuminate the values and perspectives present in the taken for granted ideas used by scholars, curriculum developers, policy makers, and classroom teachers.

Methods

This bricolage study draws on methods of analysis from the fields of history and social science to trace continuity and change in the field of history education, identifying discursive trends. Bricolage research is useful when investigating how power moves through complex social systems because it aids researchers in “produc[ing] texts that refused to be read in simplistic, linear, incontrovertible terms” (Denzin, 2018, p.5). I used historical methods to weigh the evidential value of sources (e.g., government issued curriculums) by reading documents within and across other primary and secondary source texts. I used this historical analysis to develop an account of change over time in scholarship, curriculum development, and policy in the field of history education. I examined this chronology through the qualitative paradigm of discourse theory to unearth the (re)production of knowledge in social communications. These methods supported my nuanced examination of change over time and identification of the multiple perspectives shaping definitions of historical knowledge. Additionally, the “bricolage” label serves as a playful reminder of the historic influence of social science methods on academic history and the importance of historical contextualization to social science inquiry (Appleby et al., 1994; Denzin, 1994), highlighting a central theme of this study— the constructed and fluid nature of the academic disciplines.

Through the production and reproduction of knowledge, discursive social practices create and sustain norms of the taken-for-granted world (Foucault, 1975, 1995; Gee, 1990). Abbot (2008) employed the metaphor of the star system to describe academic discourse, suggesting that while foundational academic works can serve as guiding stars, they also resemble Christmas ornaments—shiny and distracting signifiers that accompany “must-have” citations. Foundational ideas about historical knowing permeate scholarship, forming a lens through which new

scholarship is received and evaluated. Star systems can stifle exploration of research which falls outside of the established canon and create increasingly insular bodies of literature. The resulting knowledge domain is static and fragmented. Investigation of the origin and substance of the “star signs” of history education can highlight moments of interaction between ideas and change in how history education is understood. By examining the historic development of history education through the paradigm of discourse, this investigation illuminates how entrenched knowledge and scholarly enclaves sustain norms in the field.

Data Collection

Data for this study consisted of academic publications, policy documents, and curriculum materials about the nature and purpose of historical knowledge. Only English language materials were analysed.³

When collecting data, I began by reading broadly to see what histories and reviews of the field are present in the literature. I first reviewed the field handbooks, *The Wiley International Handbook of History Teaching and Learning* (Metzger & Harris, 2018a), *The Palgrave Handbook of Conflict and History Education in The Post-Cold War Era* (Cajani et. al., 2019), and *The Palgrave Handbook of History and Social Studies Education* (Berg & Christou, 2020). I next searched widely for “history education literature review” in the WorldCat database. Finally, I conducted a targeted search of literature reviews published in the last twenty-five years in the

³ Following APA 7 guideline 8.6 passages of translated text are cited using the in-text citation style: ([Author], [Original Publication Date] as cited in [Publication Author], [Publication Date], [page number]. APA stipulates only the secondary source be placed in the reference list. However, because this study aims to communicate the genealogy of scholarly ideas I included the original publication in the reference list. These references are formatted according to the conventions of their academic context. Additionally, while only English language materials were analyzed, at times non-English language publications are cited in the Findings to communicate the position of these publications in the development of the field. I determined this position by reading about, and partial translations of, original texts in English language publications such as, Körber (2015), Köbl and Konrad (2015), and Bracke et al. (2014).

journals: *Review of Educational Research*, *International Journal of Education*, *Paedagogica Historica*, *Teaching History*, *The History Education Research Journal*, and *Theory and Research in Social Education*. During my search I used the key word “history” for review journals and “review” for subject matter journals. I manually filtered results for articles reviewing research on how history is learned/taught and histories/reviews about of the development of history education.

From my initial reading I identified three geographic areas for research (England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America), a time period to study (1970-2020), and foundational scholars (e.g., Peter Seixas). I chose this geographic research focus because publications about historical knowledge from these regions are recognized by the field as pillars of literature used to conduct research and design curriculum in my sphere (Baildon & Afandi, 2018; Gómez-Carrasco et al., 2022; Hammerlund, 2020; Keirn, 2018; Metzger & Harris 2018b). I distinguished the period of study (1970-2020) from two moments of change in the field of history education, the advent of study about historical understanding in the 1970s and increased international conversation about historical thinking at the turn of the millennium. This period captures multiple generations of academics to trace the development and perseverance of foundational scholarship in the field.

To identify publications, I first searched for foundational authors in WorldCat. Publications were indexed in Endnote and reviewed chronologically from oldest to newest to ascertain the trajectory of the author’s work. This allowed me to assess how empirical research was used to ground the definitions of historical knowledge constructed by authors. While reading I collected notes in a chart which includes the categories: author, background, major works, concepts/organizing principles, citations used, empirical research, and other notes (see Figure 1).

Figure 1:

Example of Data Collection Method

Authors	Major works/years	Concepts/organizing principles (e.g., nature of history, purpose of history education, historical empathy, emotion/trauma morality/ethics, literacy, sourcing, contextualization, content v. skills, first and second order concepts, argumentation, perspective, background knowledge, orientation (in time and space) etc.)	Other notes
Sam Wineburg @ Stanford PhD, Stanford University, Psychological Studies in Education advisor: Lee Shulman Dissertation:	Historical thinking and other unnatural acts: Charting the future of teaching the past (2001) citations: 3991 Towards a theory of teacher community (2001)	<i>Book Notes: Historical thinking and other unnatural acts: Charting the future of teaching the past</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compilation of other studies • Broken into parts: intro (why study history?), challenges for students, challenges for teachers, history as national memory • Purpose of history education: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ "history teaches us to make choices, to balance opinions, to tell stories, and it becomes uneasy-when necessary-about the stories we tell." ix ○ "History holds the potential, only partly realized, of humanizing us in ways offered by few other areas in the school curriculum," p5 ○ "Situating ourselves in time is a basic human need." p6 • Prior research on teaching and learning history 	Research focus: Civic Education Curriculum and Instruction History of Education Psychology Religion Secondary Education Teachers and Teaching Writes for popular press

Scholarly works were supplemented by grey literature like curriculum documents from government and professional organizations (e.g., England’s Key Stages Curriculum). I contextualized these documents by reading secondary sources about their creation and implementation; chronological notes were taken from these readings.

I finalized data collection through an iterative process comprised of further reading and memo writing, conversations with colleagues, and attendance of social studies and history education conferences. During this process I identified gaps in my review which led to the incorporation of the work of additional scholars. The primary authors reviewed were: Bodo von Borries, Arthur Chapman, Terri Epstein, LaGarrett King, Peter Lee, Alaric Dickenson, Rosalyn Ashby, and Denis Shemilt, Stéphane Lévesque, Linda Levstik and Keith Barton, Hans-Jürgen Pandel, Jörn Rüsen, Cinthia Salinas and Brooke Blevins, Peter Seixas, Carla van Boxtel and Janet van Drei, Bruce VanSledright and Jerome Brophy, and Sam Wineburg. I operate within Anglo-American history education discourse, and I included Epstein, King, and Salinas and Blevins because their work contributes an important counterpoint to the dominant epistemological frames used in history education scholarship in the United States. Authors in this list are grouped to denote their collaborative work and, to the best of my ability, the authors and

works selected for review are representative of major trends of the field of history education. While not used to generate the scholarship reviewed, Gómez-Carrasco’s (2022) bibliographic network analysis of global connections between scholars of history education substantiates my choices. Their analysis indicates major publications which provided the theoretical foundation of research on historical thinking and historical consciousness including works by: Peter Lee, Stéphane Lévesque, Linda Levstik and Keith Barton, Jörn Rüsen, Peter Seixas, Carla van Boxtel and Janet van Drie, Bruce VanSledright and Sam Wineburg.

Data Analysis

I traced the academic and public discourse surrounding the nature and purpose of historical knowledge in two ways. First, as shown in Figure 2, I created a chronology of key studies (e.g., Project Chata), academic publications (e.g., *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*), curriculum documents (e.g., the C3 framework), and education policy initiatives (e.g., the Dutch Canon).

Figure 2

Example Creation of Developmental Chronologies for Regions Studied

	1970s	1980s	1990s	2000s	2010s
	Northwestern Europe				
England	<p>“New History” emphasizes disciplinary approach to history.</p> <p>1972 School’s Council History Project launched with the aim of reforming history Education (Dawson, 1989), headed</p>	<p>“History Wars” rage as a national history curriculum becomes the subject of public debate.</p> <p>Lee, Dickinson, & Ashby study how children make sense of</p>	<p>1991 First version of a National Curriculum is introduced. The curriculum is a compromise between traditional history education and “new history”; revision in 1995 (Haydn, 2019)</p>	<p>2000, 2007 National Curriculum for History revised (Haydn, 2019)</p> <p>Lee (2006) Publishes on a concept of historical literacy</p>	<p>Lee & Shemilt (2011) fit empathy into the progression model.</p> <p>2011 Lee (2011) explicates concept of historical literacy in <i>Debates in History Teaching</i> (Davies, 2011)</p>

Next, I used collected data to analyze scholarly ideas about history education though comparison of the theoretical grounding, definition of historical knowledge, and organizing principles included in publications. As Figure 3 shows, I identified two distinct discourses about historical

knowledge; one with a sociocultural emphasis and another with an emphasis on individual cognitions.

Figure 3

Example Identification of Discursive Patterns through Comparative Analysis

Theorist(s)	Theoretical grounding	Purpose of History Education	definition of historical knowledge, what does it mean to know history?	Conceptualization of historical learning	Organizing principles
Barton & Levstik (2004)	Sociocultural Theory of mediated action- Wertsch, situated learning & Vygotsky	Participation in pluralist democracy; humanistic education	Critical of individual cognitive approach; declines to define historical knowledge	History is learned through culture; learned through mediated action	Stances towards history: identification, analytic, moral, exhibition (<i>learned through culture</i>) Cultural tools in action: narrative, inquiry, empathy, care
Peter Lee (Dickenson & Ashby)	Individual Cognitions Use of schemas in Ch.5 of <i>Historical Teaching and Historical Understanding</i> , references Piaget's work with children; lists Piaget and Peel as theoretical influences; describes how Piaget's experiments are more difficult to apply to history than natural science	Transformative education, history offers a rational past, development of a disciplinary cognitive apparatus for assimilating new knowledge; history is important in its own right; orient self in time	History means learning about the past, historical knowledge is "coming to grips with the discipline" by understanding it's procedures	Progression model, first order (substantive) & second order (procedural) concepts; historical literacy (def: to cultivate "active historical consciousness")	Disciplinary ideas (second order concepts): time, change, empathy, cause, evidence, historical accounts; historical literacy is a set of dispositions: to produce arguments relative to questions (evidence), acceptance that we may tell stories different from the ones we prefer, importance to accord others respect

Figure 4 illustrates how I further dissected ideas about historical knowledge by comparing across conceptions within the discourses identified.

Figure 4

Comparison of Definitions of Historical Knowledge within Works with an Emphasis on the Individual's Cognitions

Table X: Concept Based Historical Thinking

Lee (2005)	Seixas & Morton (2014)	Levesque (2008)
Time	--	--
Change	Continuity & Change	Continuity & Change
Empathy	Ethical Dimension Historical Perspectives	Historical Empathy
Cause	Cause & Consequence	--
Evidence	Evidence	Evidence
Accounts	--	--
--	Significance	Significance
--	--	Progress and Decline
--	Historical Perspectives	--

Some concepts with different names share dimensions. For example, through the concept of historical empathy, Levesque explores the question "How do we understand predecessors who had different moral frameworks?" Levesque's conceptualization of empathy is [similar](#) to Seixas and Morton's "ethical

Following bricolage research methodology, I used historical methods to corroborate between sources and determine the value of the data as evidence to answer my research questions. For example, I noted that while scholars in the United States like Sam Wineburg and Bruce VanSledright acknowledged sociocultural influences on historical knowing (i.e., VanSledright, 1998 and Wineburg et al., 2007), their curriculum outputs (i.e., *Reading Like a Historian* and the C3 Framework) emphasized the individuals' knowledge development. These curriculums were corroborated by the historical trajectory of their empirical research about historical knowledge (e.g., VanSledright & Brophy 1992 and Wineburg, 1991a). Additionally, as evidenced by the widespread use of the curriculums and position in research handbooks, Wineburg and VanSledright are leading voices in the United States research and curriculum development. I determined credible evidence substantiates the claim that history education discourse in the United States emphasizes the individual's cognitive development. Through this process, I compared the development of ideas about historical knowledge in the spheres of academia, government policy, and the initiatives of professional organizations. I used this method to weigh evidence, analyze perspective, and synthesize information, identifying the

chronological development of discursive patterns in conceptualization of historical knowledge within and across the regions.

Limitations

This study is limited by its Eurocentric focus and English-language scope. I contend that turning a critical eye to history education discourse necessitates examining the dominant paradigms of my geographic context. As Armento (1996) and Hicks et al. (2012) point out, it is impossible to fully capture every scholarly work relevant to a research question. For example, my review of Canada scholarship does not encapsulate important work in the French language, limiting my exploration of French-Canadian scholarship. The purpose of this study is to turn a historical and comparative lens to the development of conceptualizations about historical knowledge. This approach requires a broad scope and is a valuable way to map knowledge production in the field of history education. A more limited scope would allow for increased depth but would miss patterns in the progression of the field and interactions among schools of thought. The focus and broad scope of the review means that some literature must be omitted.

Findings

In the 1970s, shifts in academic thought across England, Germany, the Netherlands, and North America sparked a new focus on historical knowing, teaching, and learning. By 2000, two approaches emerged: an Anglo-American school focused on the role of individual cognition and an approach emphasizing the role of society/culture common in German, Dutch, and critical North American scholarship. Scholars exchanged ideas through volumes like Stearns et al. (2000) and Seixas (2004), and governments introduced curriculum models such as the FUER

Model (2001) and the C3 Framework (2013). My findings, organized by research question, explore these developments.

How have Scholars in the Field of History Education Researched and Conceptualized Historical Knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America from 1970 to 2020?

This section addresses research question one by presenting a chronology of the development of conceptions of historical knowledge through theory and research. Findings are split into the three geographic regions investigated: England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America. The research, authors, and publications featured represent structuring ideas in the literature or important alternative perspectives.

England

In England, dissatisfaction with Piaget's theory of cognitive development led researchers to study how students learn history. Using empirical research and historical theory, they defined historical knowledge, emphasizing instruction in first- and second-order concepts as essential to student learning.

Origins. Historically, history education in England followed the “Great Tradition” of transmission of national historical narratives for the purposes of moral education (Sheldon, 2012). The 1972 Schools Council History Project (SCHP) marked the start of English research into how students learn history, introducing a “new history” curriculum inspired by psychology's focus on disciplinary thinking (Baildon & Afandi, 2018). The SCHP emphasized inquiry-based learning, teaching students about the role of historical evidence in the creation of historical accounts (Husbands, 2011). Designers felt the new history curriculum should relate to the

interests of young people—a commitment reflected in the SCHP syllabus which connects educational units to the “educational uses of history for pupils” (see Table 1). Project evaluator, Denis Shemilt, conducted influential research about student’s development of historical understanding during the early days of the project (Haydn, 2019; Shemilt, 1980).

Table 1

Syllabus Used in the Schools Council History Project as Reproduced in Dawson (1989, p.223)

Educational Uses of History for Pupils	Syllabus Unit	Optional Topics
1.It helps to explain their present	A Study in Modern World History	E.g., The Arab-Israeli-Conflict, Conflict in Ireland
2. It helps them to understand people of a different time and place, and this is a widening and therefore valuable social and educational experience.	A Study in Depth of a period of history	E.g., Elizabethan England, Britain 1815-1851, The American West 1840-1895
3. It provides material for the understanding of human development and change in the perspective of time and also of the complexity of causation in human affairs	A Study in Development	Either “Medicine through Time” or “Energy through Time”
4. It contributes to leisure interests	History Around Us	E.g., A study of a local church or castle, individual site or housing
5. It developed the ability to think critically, and to make judgements about human situations.	An “unseen” examination paper using historical sources	A new topic each year for each examination

Peter Lee, Alaric Dickinson, and Rosalyn Ashby expanded on SCHP with Concepts of History Teaching Approaches (Project Chata), a large-scale study investigating progression in students' understanding of history. Before conducting this research Lee, Dickinson, and Ashby developed theories about student development of historical knowledge influenced by historical theory and changes in the field of psychology.

Theorizing Historical Understanding. Dickinson and Lee (1978) critiqued and built from the work of Jean Piaget and E. A. Peel when theorizing about children's development of historical knowledge. They recognized the difficulty in transferring Piaget's experiments to the study historical learning which they described as, "[a] much more abstract task in history than in Piaget's experiments in physical science. It is not a matter of observing that such and such a possibility does not occur, but deciding if it meets a certain criteria" (Lee, 1978, p.84).

Dickinson and Lee acknowledge how Peel sought to address this deficiency in his work when distinguishing between explanation in history and the natural sciences. According to Peel, when thinking historically people engage in *possibility thinking* to make inferences about the past; in contrast, the natural sciences employ *content-dominant thinking* during which people engage in observation and description when drawing conclusions (Dickinson & Lee, 1978). However, Dickinson and Lee concluded that Peel's scientific principles do not fully apply to history.

Dickinson and Lee (1978) and Dickinson et al. (1984) used descriptions of historical methodology from historians like W.H. Dray, E.H. Carr and R.J. Collingwood to present new ideas about student learning and historical knowledge. They defined the mental processes of historians through historical theory, which they contrasted with the models of scientific thinking being used in the field of psychology. Lee (1978) conducted a pilot study with Dickinson using criteria for assessing student understanding derived from their theoretical work.

Researching Historical Understanding. Lee, Dickinson, and Ashby began robust study of student's understanding of the past in the 1980s (Ashby & Lee 1987; Dickinson & Lee, 1984). Most early research into students' understanding focused only on substantive knowledge (Lee & Dickinson, 1993). In contrast, Project Chata studied what students know of the discipline of history itself. The longitudinal case study assessed progression of students understanding of

evidence and explanation from ages 7-14. Findings showed that while students' development was not rigidly defined by age, progression can be used as a framework for student learning (Lee & Dickinson, 1993). In the 1990s, Project Chata was reported on in a series of articles which influenced the development of the Key Stages National Curriculum in England (Ashby et al., 1997; Lee & Dickinson, 1993; Lee et al., 1996a; Lee et al., 1996b).

Defining Historical Knowledge. Lee (1991) articulated ideas regarding the nature and purpose of historical knowledge. He wrote:

The discipline of history offers a rational past, not merely a practical one designed to suit the interests of particular groups or kinds of activity. It is rational because it incorporates public criteria and operates through open procedures. These do not guarantee the truth, but they do make the discipline a serious attempt to produce the best account we can, given the state of our questioning and the evidence available. In this sense objectivity (as opposed to partiality or vicious relativism) is built into the discipline of history (1991, p43).

Lee criticized a vision of history education aimed at socializing national citizens or prompting societal reform. According to Lee (1991), history education does not develop “skills or lessons that can be directly applied in clearly defined activities” but rather “the reason for teaching history is not that it changes society, but that it changes pupils; it changes what they see in the world, and how they see it” (pp. 42-43). Lee considered history education to be valuable “for its own sake” because it expands our view of the world and what is possible.

Lee (1991) argued that it is important for students to understand first- and second-order concepts to develop a genuine picture of the past. First-order concepts, sometimes called substantive concepts, refer to what history is about, the substance or content of history (e.g., king). These concepts require understanding of the parameters which define them in their time and place. Second-order concepts refer to the ideas structuring student understanding of substantive knowledge. These are the procedural concepts used by historians and include: time,

change, empathy, cause, evidence, and accounts (Lee & Dickinson, 1993; Lee, 2005). First- and second-order concepts work together when forming a historical account.⁴

Lee (1995) explored the tension between postmodernism and his definition of historical knowledge when responding to Keith Jenkins's review of his work on the purpose of history, Lee lambasted postmodernism, characterizing his own views as "unrepentantly modernist" and describing Jenkins' ideas as shallow, hypocritical, and ignorant of the historical field. Jenkin's (1991) assertion that historians and educators must "adopt a method which deconstructs and historicizes interpretations" (p.68.) was criticized by Lee as being "about as effective as Parliamentary discourse" (1995, p. 32). In his renunciation of Jenkins, Lee prescribed Jenkins a long reading list of philosophers of history from Europe and North America.⁵ Lee's polemic sheds light on the influences on his work and his theoretical understanding of the nature of historical knowledge in the early stages of his career.

In later publications, Lee engaged with the role of narrative in the construction of historical knowledge (Lee, 2006, 2011). He used the term "historical literacy" to describe how

⁴ I will use the substantive concept of "king" to illustrate the relationship between first and second order concepts. Students need an understanding of time and change in history to recognize that periods in history are ruled by different states of affairs which change over time. For example, the first-order concept of king is characterized differently during the age of absolutism than in the modern era. The second order concepts of empathy and cause help students recognize that people from the past did not view the world the same way we do and that events in the past occurred because of "relationships among a network of events, processes, and states of affairs" (Lee, 2005, p. 52). In empathizing with the perspectives of people in the past, students come to understand how societies conceived of "king" differently and that the change in meaning was the result of a network of causes. Creating a historical account involves choosing causes which will be used to explain the events of the past. Through development of the concepts of evidence and accounts students further understand the role of the historian in creating an account of the past, a history. Historians use the "traces of the past" as evidence to make inferences about what happened in the past. As students develop the concept of accounts they understand that history is constructed through the interpretation of evidence and it is not a complete picture of the past. The past is unknowable; historians use the disciplinary tools available to them to form an evidence-based account of what happened. Evidence is interpreted according to the historian's inquiry. A historian asking, "how did monarchs during the 17th century maintain their power?" looks for traces from the past which can be used to answer their question. For example, historians might use the palace of Versailles as evidence when making a claim in relation to this historical question. First- and second-order concepts form the disciplinary conceptual apparatus by which historians "do history."

⁵ E.g., Ankersmit (1986), Carr (1986), Fell (1991), and Gorman (1982).

people cultivate dispositions towards the past, orient themselves in time, and understand the different arguments being made by history, thus developing an “active historical consciousness” (Lee, 2011, p.61). According to Lee (2011), a historically literate person possesses the following dispositions towards the past:

- a commitment to construct the best picture of the past possible by using the standards of the historical discipline,
- acceptance that we may construct narratives counter to our wishes (questioning assumptions), and
- recognition that people from the past deserve respect.

Lee continued to emphasize disciplinary instruction, arguing that historical literacy dispositions are formed as students develop a disciplinary conceptual apparatus through which they interpret the past.

Progression of Historical Understanding. First- and second-order concepts are part of a progression model defined as “the acquisition of more powerful ideas [about history]” (Lee & Shemilt, 2009, p. 15). The progression model does not follow set age-dependent stages, but rather helps educators mark the path students take as they develop an understanding of history as a discipline. The progression model is informed by SCHP and Project Chata research; Lee and Shemilt (2009) reported that students enter the classroom with limited understanding of the “possibilities” of history, instead regarding historical narratives inevitable. They argued students must have a disciplinary conceptual framework or they will fall into a “narrative fallacy”—writing descriptive narrative rather than explanatory accounts. The concept of a historical account is “concerned with how students view historical narratives or representation of whole passages of the past” (Lee, 2005, p. 59). Students tend to view historical narratives as either true

or untrue and turn to common sense explanations like bias on the part of the narrator to explain differences in historical accounts. As students develop a disciplinary framework for making sense of the past, they begin to understand that accounts are developed through interpretation (Lee, 2005).

Lee built on the empirical research conducted by himself and his colleagues to publish conceptual articles and chapters on student understanding of history (Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lee, 2004; Lee, 2005; Lee 2012). This work became part of a broader international conversation about historical knowing and learning.

The Content vs. Skills debate in academic discourse. The “content vs. skills” division is a key debate in English scholarship. Counsell (2002) explored what she calls the “false dichotomy” between content and skills. She argued that the term “skills” became a catch-all and that differing “big ideas” and concepts (like evidence, inquiry, and continuity and change) may be thought of as skills or conceptual understandings. A progression framework which overemphasizes instruction in second-order concepts may be ineffectual in bringing together procedural knowledge and substantive content to develop students’ historical understanding.

Other British scholars warned against a separation between substantive knowledge and historical thinking skills. In *Knowing History in Schools*, authors discussed school history education in the context of the “knowledge turn” in English education (Chapman, 2021). They engaged with Young’s (2014) influential concept of powerful knowledge when forefronting disciplinary knowledge in curriculum. As part of this discussion, Chapman included a model of the dimensions of historical knowledge developed from English scholarship. Drawing from several U.K. theorists including Lee and Shemilt, his model breaks down the dimensions of first-order knowledge and understanding into general substantive concepts, singular factual

propositions, historical concepts, and colligations. Some scholars define colligations separately from either first- or second-order concepts because they involve the application of the second-order ideas like historical time and change to the substance of history (Lévesque and Clark, 2018). Through the designation of colligations under first-order knowledge Chapman firmly connected content to skills.

Using theory and research about progression in student understanding of history, English scholars conceptualized historical knowledge as the ability of students to construct a historical account using a conceptual apparatus of first- and second- order concepts. Their work became a touchstone in history education research globally.

Germany and the Netherlands

Working in the field of history didactics, German and Dutch scholars of history education study formal teaching and everyday historical learning (Erdmann, 2008). Rüsen (1987) described the development of this field as a shift from traditional German academic history—which separated history from practical life— to a historical social science. In the 1970s, German scholars developed a theory of historical consciousness to define and explain historical learning (Jeismann, 1977; Pandel, 1987; Rüsen, 1976). Later, research explored its structure and dimensions (Angvik & von Borries, 1997; von Borries, 1988). In the Netherlands, van Drie and van Boxtel (2008) defined the mental process of students when they interpret the past as historical reasoning.

Origins. In the 19th through early 20th centuries, German history education sought to develop moral and nationalist traits in students (Wilschut, 2010). During the same period, history education in Dutch schools reflected the differing religious and ideological “pillars” of society. Public and private schools taught memory history regarding the contribution of differing pillars

to the progress and achievements of the Netherlands (Grever, 2019). In both countries, changes in society, politics, and academic history during the 1960s lead to the creation of an influential school of historical consciousness.

Theorizing Historical Consciousness. Rüsen (2005) defined history as, “time which has gained sense and meaning” (p. 2). Building from this definition Rüsen conceptualizes historical consciousness as “‘Sinnbildung über Zeiterfahrung’, or, “‘formation of meaning over experience of (changes within) time’” (Rüsen, 1989, as cited in Körber, 2015, p.9). Rüsen presented a definition of historical learning rooted in the individual’s experience of history in their everyday and academic life. He defines historical knowing is an active process related to the person’s awareness of themselves as a historical being.

Rüsen (1983, as cited in Körber, 2015, p.10) addressed the academic dimension of historical knowledge in his disciplinary matrix of the research process of professional historians. Historians bring ideas about the past from their day-to-day experiences into their research; they interpret the past according to the methods of the discipline and choose a form of presentation according to the conventions of the discipline (i.e., a narrative form). Historical knowledge enters everyday life through its function in orienting the individual in time, which in turn shapes the interests which scholars bring into their historical interpretations. In Rüsen’s cyclical model of historical thought history, through its connection to everyday life, serves practical purposes.

Rüsen turned to the idea of narrativity when defining the mental processes people experience as they make sense of the past and orient themselves in time. Building on the work of Hayden White and others, Rüsen describes historical narration as the “process of making sense of the experience of time” and states that historical narration forms “a system of mental operations defining the field of historical consciousness” (2005, p.10). The role of narrative in

the development of historical consciousness is a central tenant in Rüsen 's work. Citing Rüsen (1996), Rüsen (2005) described history as,

a narrative bridge that follows the natural stream of time, starting from the past and leading into the future. This mental bridge of historical narrative serves to orient our activity in the sphere of practical life, as well as in the internal life of the human self (p.148).

He defined the essential competence of historical consciousness as three competencies of historical narrative. They are the competencies of,

- *experience*: the ability to grasp the temporal quality of the past and differentiate it from the present;
- *interpretation*: the ability to grasp what is meaningful to the temporal whole (past, present, and future), and to integrate information into a knowledge of time to understand the weight of historical significance; and
- *orientation*: the ability to utilize the whole for the purpose of life orientation, for example using historical knowledge when conceptualizing one's human identity. (Rüsen, 2004)

Like Dickinson and Lee, Rüsen sought to address the deficiencies in applying Piaget's learning theory to history (Rüsen, 2005). He developed a typology of "historical thinking" occurring in different stages in the development of the narrative competencies of historical consciousness. As show in Table 2, he posited four types of historical thinking occurring during different stages of historical consciousness: traditional, exemplary, critical, and genetic.

Table 2

Types of Historical Thinking (Rüsen, 2004)

Type	Function
Traditional	reinforces our traditions/values, affirms cultures and identities, and defines morality as tradition

Exemplary	understands history as a lesson for the present, assumes regularity of life and cultural patterns, and ascribes morality a timeless quality
Critical	looks to the evidence provided by counter narratives to critique present value systems and defines morality as relative to time
Genetic	views social life as complex because of its temporality, integrates different perspectives into ideas about temporal change, and views historical identity as something that exists in a moment of time but will change

This typology later became a blueprint for student competency in historical consciousness.

Karl -Ernst Jeismann also viewed historical consciousness as a mental process (Körber, 2015). Robert Thorp (2017) credited Jeismann with the first definition of historical consciousness and supplied the following translation:

By historical consciousness we mean the permanent presence of the awareness that mankind and all social institutions and forms of co-existence created by us exist in time, i.e. they have an origin and a future and represent nothing unchangeably or unconditionally (Schieder, 1974, p. 78f). Besides the mere knowledge of or interest in history, a historical consciousness also incorporates the relationship between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perspective on the future. Since history cannot be perceived as an image of past realities but can only be made aware through selection and interpretive reconstruction, historical consciousness is the awareness that the past is present in representations and conceptions. (Jeismann 1979, as cited in Thorp, 2017, p.7)

Jeismann's definition emphasized the interpretive nature of historical knowledge and argued for the presence of the present in our understanding of the past. Barricelli and Sauer (2009) credited Jeismann with introducing ideas from history didactics into the sphere of history education during the 1980s.

In the 1980s scholars began theorizing historical consciousness as a set of overlapping awarenesses (Köbl & Konrad, 2015; Körber, 2015). Hans-Jürgen Pandel (1987, as cited in Körber, 2015, pp.7-8) developed a matrix model of the structural dimensions of historical consciousness with the aim of classroom use and empirical study. In his model historical

consciousness is a mental structure consisting of seven entwined forms of consciousness divided into social categories. These include the following forms:

- **basic:** *awareness of time* (orientation in time), *reality* (assigning “real” and “imaginary” to people and actions), and *historicity* (differentiation between the static and changeable), and
- **social:** *identity* (reflection on historically grounded feelings of belonging), *politics* (awareness of power relations), *economy-society* (awareness of social-economic difference), and *morality* (moral awareness along social norms).

Pandel’s matrix describes how historical knowledge orients the individual in society.

Bodo von Borries pyramid model breaks historical consciousness into four levels (von Borries, 1988, as cited in Körber, 2015, p.8). At the base of the pyramid historical consciousness is characterized by ignorance and lack of conscious awareness. As individuals develop new levels of historical consciousness they critically reflect on history and take actions to reconcile the past with present. Like in Pandel’s matrix, the pyramid model represents historical consciousness as a status, a form of a person’s relationship to the past. According to von Borries (2000), history instruction should develop students’ capabilities in the methods of historical problem solving which go “beyond school and textbook to embrace films, televisions, newspapers, museums, archives, citizens’ initiatives and other evidence of life lived in a contentious historical culture” (p.258). Von Borries (2000) points to the work of Lee, Ashby, Shemilt, Levstik, Seixas, and Wineburg for examples of this type of history instruction.

Researching Historical Consciousness. In 1988/89 Rösen and colleagues used qualitative content analysis to study historical consciousness in 249 high school students in the Ruhr district of Germany. Bracke et al. (2014) reported on Rösen’s findings, survey results

indicated variability in student's competency to perceive and interpret change over time and that "historical consciousness reacts astonishingly flexibly to the respective situations it was confronted with" (2014, p.27). Bracke et al., (2014) also report on a 1991 study by Pandel which used qualitative methodology to study his matrix model of historical consciousness in primary, secondary, and university aged students. While empirically inconclusive, the results of this study provided insights about the dimensions of historical consciousness in the matrix model. These studies helped evaluate the veracity of the theoretical models of historical consciousness being developed in Germany.

Von Borries (1997) used quantitative methodology to study historical consciousness on a large scale; he surveyed 6,500 students and teachers in East and West Germany to investigate historical understanding, use of media, types of instruction, student's ability to interpret events, and participant political decision making. Two additional large-scale surveys compared the historical consciousness of students and teachers in 27 countries (von Borries, 1995; Angvik & von Borries, 1997). Von Borries found alignment between student understanding and Rösen's typology and offered the following suggestions for history education: teach history as interpretation, consider gender, language, and cultural diversity, make use of media, teach in a problem-oriented way, and employ Rösen's typology (Bracke et. al., 2014).

Körber & Meyer-Hamme (2015) note that in the new millennium, German research began investigating student achievement through a psychological lens which emphasized individual cognition over sociocultural development (e.g., Gautschi et al., 2007; Sauer, 2006). This research borrows from Anglo-American models of education which emphasize the use of objectives and assessment to measure student learning (Davoli & Entorf, 2018). These studies

represent a shift in scholarship towards research which emphasizes the mental processes of individuals during the development of historical knowledge.

Historical Reasoning. History education scholarship in the Netherland follows conventions in history didactics and Anglo-American schools of thought. In the 1980s the second-order concepts used in England and the inquiry of U.S. “new social studies” movement gained ground in Dutch scholarship and curriculum development (van Boxtel & Grever, 2011; Wilschut, 2010). Dutch history education is also informed by ideas about the role of history in shaping culture and identity. The Center for Historical Culture at Erasmus University Rotterdam was founded in 2006 to research historical culture, defined as, “various forms of historical understanding and relationship to the past, articulated by individuals, groups, institutes and large communities in a broad array of narratives, media, ideologies and attitudes” (Erasmus University Rotterdam, n.d.a). Reflecting the purview of history didactics, the Center works with educational institutions, museums, memorial sites, and heritage organizations.

Van Drie and van Boxtel (2008) introduced the influential concept of historical reasoning to describe the mental activity of students when they interpret the past. Historical reasoning refers to:

an activity in which a person organizes information about the past in order to describe, compare, and/or explain historical phenomena. In doing this, he or she asks historical questions, contextualizes, makes use of substantive and meta-concepts of history, and supports proposed claims with arguments based on evidence from sources that give information about the past. (2008, p.89)

Van Drie and van Boxtel stressed that historical reasoning is shaped by historical knowledge, historical thinking, and epistemological beliefs. They defined historical thinking as, “heuristics that support higher-order operations such as writing an essay about a topic or interpreting a historical cartoon” (2008, p.89). Historical reasoning is theoretically grounded in Wertsch’s

theory of mediated action and was developed through van Drie and van Boxtel's empirical research investigating student reasoning during inquiry. Students employ historical reasoning when they describe change, compare, and explain the past. Components of historical reasoning include: asking historical questions, use of sources, contextualization, argumentation, use of substantive concepts, and use of meta-concepts.

In recent years, van Boxtel and van Drie (2018) created an expanded model of the components of historical reasoning. Their visualization includes the cultural tools students draw on during historical learning and places historical learning within the spheres of public and academic history. Historical reasoning integrates ideas about historical knowledge from the Anglo-American and historical consciousness schools. Arthur Chapman described the concept as, "the best model of historical knowing we have...it shows how knowledge, conceptual understanding & skills are vital in learning history & how they can interact together to engage students in history" (tweet, Oct 13, 2023). Chapman's commentary speaks to the influence of Dutch scholarship on understandings of historical knowledge in the field of history education.

North America

Researchers in the United States worked from a psychological perspective when studying how students learn history. Early research studied student reception of historical narratives and the mental processes of historians. Beginning in the late 80s and early 90s publications from Europe began to influence North American research about student understanding of history.

Origins. In the United States, Progressives led early reform efforts to centralize curriculum making in social studies education (Woyshner et al., 2004). Professional organizations designed social studies curriculum that would teach students to think, thus preparing them for civic and public life (Bohan, 2004). In the 1960s the "new social studies"

movement instigated curricular reforms aimed at teaching current issues and promoting disciplinary thinking and inquiry-based instruction (Keirn, 2018). These movements were challenged by conservatives advocating for history instruction centred on the transmission of national narratives (Woyshner et al., 2004). Canadian Progressives had similar aims as their U.S. counterparts; however, the use of history instruction for citizenship education was complicated by the diversity of ethnic, cultural, and national identities spread across Canada (Lévesque & Clark, 2018; Morton, 2000). Canadian history education prior to 1970 served a nation building purpose for two different nations—French and Anglo— within Canada. In the 1970s, Canadian history education shifted its focus to social and cultural histories of the many groups within Canada, this scope has expanded to include First Nations (Osborne, 2003). In the North American academic sphere, the cognitive revolution and Progressive reform movements set the stage for research investigating historical understanding.

Early Research. Linda Levstik examined how narrative shapes young students' historical understanding (Levstik, 1981, 1983, 1986, 1989). She argued historical fiction and primary sources spark inquiry by encouraging children to imagine historical perspectives, generating curiosity and questions but warned that emotional narratives might limit deeper perspective taking by students (Levstik, 1981, 1983; 1986). Like her global counterparts, Levstik aimed to move beyond Piaget and Peel's learning theory; she used literary theories to interpret how students experience historical narratives.⁶ Building from Hayden White's (1980) ideas about the role of narrative in transmitting a shared reality, Levstik (1989) noted that historical fiction makes visible to subjective/interpretive nature of historical accounts and can be used as a counterpoint to historical textbooks.

⁶ E.g., Applebee, 1978; Favat, 1977

Building from European Research. During the 1990s, Levstik and colleague Keith Barton studied student understandings of time, social institutions, evidence, multiple perspectives, and significance (Barton & Levstik, 1996; Barton, 1997a; Barton, 1997b; Levstik & Barton; 1996; Barton & Levstik, 1998; Levstik, 1997). Barton and Levstik concluded that students' historical understandings are mediated by cultural tools and advocated for placing history instruction in the broader context of social issues relevant to students' lives. In these articles Barton and Levstik referenced the growing body of research from England.

Other researchers began citing articles from Europe when conducting empirical research investigating historical understanding. Brophy and VanSledright's studies of young children's understanding of history revealed that students were capable of increased sophistication in their understanding of the past but lack a conceptual framework for connecting their thinking about history (Brophy et. al., 1992; Vansledright & Brophy, 1992; VanSledright; 1995; VanSledright, 1996; VanSledright & Kelly, 1996; Vansledright, 1997). In Canada Seixas built from English and German scholarship. His early work studied historical understanding among students in multicultural settings, learning with film, understanding of historical significance, and the moral dimensions of historical learning (Seixas 1993a; Seixas, 1993b; Seixas, 1994a; Seixas, 1994b). These researchers recognized history as a distinct form of knowledge and argued for instruction in the organizing frameworks of the discipline in North America classrooms. Seixas (1999) advocated for a discourse around "doing history" in North America.

Researching Historical Thinking. Sam Wineburg researched the cognitions of historians and students when interpreting primary sources. This work became the basis of an influential conceptualization of historical knowledge defined by student development of "historical thinking skills."

Wilson and Wineburg (1988) interviewed novice social studies teachers with different disciplinary backgrounds and noted the impact of their conception of history on their teaching practice. Wineburg (1991a; 1991b; 1998) next studied the cognitive processes employed by historians and students when interpreting sources. Wineburg (1991a) observed think-alouds with history professors and Advanced Placement high school students as they interpreted historical documents and pictures. He identified three heuristics used by historians: corroboration, sourcing, and contextualization. Wineburg (1991b) describes the “epistemology of text”—or beliefs about the human origins of historic texts- understood by historians. Wineburg (1998) furthered this research when investigating the interpretations of historians with different cognitive resources. He found that subject matter expert historians read intertextually while the non-experts form interpretations by asking questions of the text and revising knowledge based on the documents. Wineburg used this research to define the “historical thinking” of historians.

Defining Historical Knowledge. Levstik and Pappas (1992) suggested a cultural framework for studying historical learning based on constructivist understanding of cognitive development. Their model emphasized history as a distinct knowledge domain shaped by individual cognition and societal discourse, with narrative central to understanding the past. This work pushed against the Piagetian tradition by using new theories about domain-specific cognitive development situated in social and cultural worlds.⁷

In *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts* Wineburg (2001) defined a vision for history education grounded in the heuristics used by historians identified in his research. While most chapters focus on Wineburg’s historical thinking heuristics, a small section of the book explores the sociocultural construction of historical knowledge. In a chapter discussing the role

⁷ E.g., Bakhtin (1986), Bruner (1986), Geertz (1983), and White (1980).

of collective remembering/forgetting in making sense of the past, Wineburg references the work of scholars interested in the relationship between culture and historical knowledge like James Wertsch, Pierre Nora, and Peter Seixas. Wineburg et al. (2007) used the term “cultural curriculum” to describe the role of collective memory in historical learning.

Barton and Levstik (2004) argued that history education should develop democratic citizenship by providing a humanistic education which promotes reasoned judgment, an expanded view of humanity, and deliberation over the common good. They conceptualized historical knowledge as stances towards history and the cultural “tools” (i.e., narrative, inquiry, empathy, and care) used when engaging in historical activities. They described the following stances:

- *identification*: connection between self and the past, heritage,
- *analysis*: understanding of cause and consequence, developing generalization, and learning how accounts were created,
- *moral response*: remembrance and forgetting, justice, heroism, and
- *exhibition*: exhibiting information about the past for personal fulfilment, accountability, or to benefit others.

When creating this definition Barton and Levstik align the cultural tools used by students when they experience history with Wertsch’s theory of mediated action.

VanSledright and Limón (2006) defined historical knowledge by combining first- and second-order concepts with Wineburg’s historical thinking skills. In their conception, the historical knowledge domain is split between substantive and procedural knowledge. First- and second-order concepts are categorized as substantive knowledge. “Strategic knowledge,” such as assessing the reliability of sources and writing an account, is categorized as procedural

knowledge. VanSledright (2011) updated this definition with reference to the work of Lee, Wertsch, and Seixas when publishing a matrix of historical knowledge which incorporates epistemic stances towards history and the past. Changes in VanSledright's conception of historical knowledge mirror stages in the introduction of ideas from Europe into North American scholarship.

Definitions of historical knowledge from Canadian scholars join ideas about individual cognitive construction of historical knowledge from Anglo-American schools with ideas about the role of history in society from the school of historical consciousness. Lévesque (2008) defined historical knowledge as substantive knowledge and procedural knowledge. He argued history education should be organized around the following procedural concepts: historical significance, continuity and change, progress and decline, evidence and historical empathy. In a similar vein, Seixas and Morton (2013) organized historical knowledge around a "Big 6" list of historical thinking concepts including: significance, evidence, continuity and change, cause and consequences, historical perspectives, and the ethical dimension. Their book provides clear strategies and methods for teachers while still exploring the "fundamental epistemological and ontological problems of history" (Seixas, 2017, p.597). These works showcase how Canadian scholarship bridged the divide between different schools of thought in history education.

Critical U.S. Scholarship. Critical U.S. scholarship challenged how ideas about historical knowledge serve the needs of multicultural students. Terri Epstein researched differences in Black and White youths' experience of historical narratives (Epstein, 1998, 2000). She found the students' identity influenced historical learning, beliefs about the credibility of secondary historical sources, historical experiences, and belief in the existence of a national U.S.

identity. Her work laid the groundwork for critical understanding of historical teaching and learning.

Building from the work of Epstein, Levstik, Barton, and Wertsch, scholars developed the concept of critical historical inquiry (CHI) to harness the potential of historical thinking to challenge master narratives in history (Blevins et. al., 2020; Salinas et al., 2012; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Salinas et al., 2016). Blevins et al. (2020) defined CHI as,

a 'critical' conceptualization of historical inquiry includes an explicitly conscious examination of the dominant, yet often erroneous, metanarratives found within the school curriculum as well as an interrogation of the ways in which structures of power continue to reproduce oppressive, nation-building narratives in the school curriculum (p.36).

CHI proponents argue that student attention should be directed to the perspective of those interpreting historical source evidence (Salinas & Blevins, 2014). Critics question the practicality of this mode of inquiry and point to the lack of classroom study, although a recent review of literature suggests a growing body of research about CHI in practice (Reich et al., 2023).

LaGarrett King is another voice challenging definitions of historical knowledge. He began his research by investigating Black history curriculums across time (King et al., 2010; Brown et al., 2011; King et al., 2012). He next studied Black representation in television and online history programming, the historical thinking of students of color, and preservice teachers' knowledge of Black History (King & Brown, 2012; King & Womac, 2014; King et al., 2014; King, 2019). King's body of research shows the influence of a different academic canon including: Stephen Biko, Franz Fanon, Sylvia Wynter, W.E.B. Dubois, Michel-Rolph Trouillot, Joyce King, and European scholarship about historical consciousness. From his empirical research and this canon, King (2020a) developed a Black Historical Consciousness Framework.⁸

⁸ King (2020b) elaborates on the theoretical influences of his framework. King argues any conversation about historical consciousness and Black history must look at the creation of Blackness. He anchors his use of Swedish scholar Thorp's (2014) three manifestations of historical consciousness (i.e., narrative, use of history, and historical

The Black Historical Consciousness Framework recognizes that what is historically significant to white people may not be historically significant to Black people (King, 2020a). King argued that academic and school history is rooted in a white epistemic logic which defines history as a singular hegemonic narrative. The Black Historical Consciousness Framework understands historical consciousness as deriving from multiple historical narratives and recognizes multiple histories as legitimate in “an effort to understand, develop, and teach Black histories that recognize Black people’s humanity” (p.337). The framework is organized around six principles including: power and oppression, Black agency, resistance and perseverance, Africa and the African Diaspora, Black Joy, Black Identities, and Black Historical Contention—principles which are significant to the Black experience.

The conceptualizations of historical knowledge developed in the academic sphere entered the classroom through policy initiatives and curriculum materials. I next explore how public debates about the nature and purpose of historical knowledge intersected with curriculum initiatives.

How have Notable Public Debates about History Education Intersected with the Construction and Implementation of Historical Knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America?

The empirical research and conceptualization of the 1970s, 80s, and 90s led to an influx of works which synthesized research and presented teachers, teacher educators, and curriculum and policy developers with distinct pedagogies for historical teaching and learning. This section

culture) in the definition of Black consciousness from South African scholar Stephen Biko. King synthesizes Biko’s definition of Black consciousness as “an attitude and way of life that encompasses the following: 1) collective agency and resistance to white oppression, 2) redefinition of Blackness and Black humanity, and 3) group pride in themselves, their value systems, their culture, their religion, and their outlook on life” (2020b, p.164). He brings Biko and Thorp’s ideas together in his definition of Black historical consciousness.

explores notable examples of how public debate intersected with the construction and implementation of historical knowledge in the regions studied.

English History Wars

The curriculum put forth by the SCHK project was only adopted by one third of secondary schools in Britain (Haydn, 2019). However, ideas about progression developed by scholars of history education are evident in the structure of a national curriculum which is split into three “key stages” in the development of historical knowledge (Department of Education, 2013). Public debate began in the 1980s when England and Wales started the process of adopting the key stages as a national curriculum (Booth, 1993).

The English “history wars” marked the beginning of Conservative secretaries of education taking a more active role in shaping history curriculum. Conservatives criticized the focus on “skills” in new history curriculum and pushed for a return to traditional instruction in “content,” conceived as national narratives (Guyner, 2012). The 1991 National Curriculum for History was a trade-off between these factions. History education continued to teeter totter between an emphasis on national narratives and instruction in second-order concepts from the 90s into the present day. The 1995, 2000, and 2007 revisions of the National Curriculum regained some emphasis on developing students’ disciplinary understanding of history. However, in 2013 secretary of education Michael Gove proposed a draft with a heavier emphasis on the transmission of content knowledge and, like previous iterations, the resulting curriculum was a compromise between new and traditional history instruction (Guyner, 2012; Haydn, 2019).

During the history wars, conservatives argued that the inclusion of diverse histories was a folly of political correctness (Bradshaw, 2009). The 2014 National Curriculum included one explicit reference to diversity, stating that the purpose of history education is to help students

understand the “diversity of societies and relationships between different groups” (Department of Education, 2013, p. 245). Bracey et al. (2017) argued the content of the National Curriculum is largely defined by the experiences of southern English people and that diversity should be considered in a variety of ways (e.g., class, race, gender, etc.) and a variety of contexts (e.g., local, national) when designing curriculum.

The English history wars highlight the intersections between history education, education policy, and the project of nation building.

German “PISA Shock”

In 2001, German underperformance on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) sent a ripple through the German education discourse and a wide coalition of politicians, business leaders, scholars, teacher’s associations, and parent groups called for reform (Davoli & Entorf, 2018; Erdtl, 2006; Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development, n.d.). Following this “PISA shock” government initiatives began to transform historical consciousness into a more assessable competence (Kölbl & Konrad, 2015).

In 2001, the Research and Development of Reflexive Historical Consciousness (FUER) group created a progression model of historical consciousness using Rüsen’s definition of historical consciousness (Lévesque & Clark, 2018). Their process model of historical consciousness delineates integrated competencies in “historical thinking” including: asking historical questions, using methodological approach, re- and de- construction of individual and collective orientation in time, and subject matter knowledge (Körber, 2015). Achievement of competence in these dimensions of historical thinking involves a mental process where student use disciplinary methods to re- and de- construct historical narratives with reference to the function of history in society. The shift towards objectives-based history education continued in

2012 when the Historical Thinking Competencies in History project (HITCH) began developing instruments to assess historical thinking (Körber, 2015; Körber & Meyer-Hamme, 2015). FUER and HITCH indicate how scholars of history education responded to public debate about educational achievement and assessment.

The Association of German History Teachers offered their own solution to assessing historical consciousness (Köbl & Konrad, 2015). They created a set of national standards with clear cut measures of competency in subject matter and historical thinking which were rapidly implemented in schools (Ertl, 2006). Critics argued these standards divorce subject matter from interpretive and reflexive competencies and neglect critical questioning of national narratives (Köbl & Konrad, 2015; Lücke, 2012 as cited in Köbl & Konrad, 2015, p.22). Even with the increased federal influence over school curriculum post “PISA shock,” it is difficult to fully determine the impact these reforms on the decentralized German school system (National Center on Education and the Economy, 2017). Findings from Köbl and Konrad’s (2015) review of curricular materials across Germany indicate they reflect the FUER group’s conception of historical consciousness.

German PISA shock reveals how international structures of education, which emphasize accountability and objectives-based instructional design, impacted the construction and implementation of definitions of historical knowledge in Germany.

The Ten Eras Framework and Dutch Canon

In 2001, the Dutch government commissioned a historian and educator-led committee to create a national curriculum framework. While designers were inspired by Rüsen’s ideas, historical consciousness was overshadowed by learning targets emphasizing chronology and historical thinking skills (van Boxtel, 2020). The resulting Ten Eras Framework was organized

by chronological era and included instruction in orienting concept knowledge and historical thinking skills (Grever, 2019; van Boxtel & Grever, 2011). Between 2006 and 2007 the Ten Eras Framework was implemented in primary and secondary school curriculum; however, because the framework does not specify the historical events which must be covered, student achievement was difficult to assess via national examination (van Boxtel & Grever, 2011; van Boxtel, 2020).

In 2002, the assassination of politician Pim Fortuyn incited public debate about Dutch national identity and the role of history education (van der Vlies, 2022). Fortuyn was believed to be killed for his anti-immigrant, anti-multiculturalism, and anti-Islam views (Simons, 2002) and van der Vlies (2022) explains the impact of the incident on history education,

[there was] a lot of discussion about the national identity and who we are as Dutch and about perhaps failure of the multicultural society and what can be done about it. So, I think the complexity of the multicultural societies and the role of history education within those societies is shared between England and the Netherlands.

In 2005 the Dutch minister of education established a historian-led commission to formulate a canon of Dutch history and culture. A canon of 50 chronological “windows” was created which includes people, substantive concepts, and events deemed important to Dutch history. Historians criticized the canon for lacking a rationale for topic selection and excluding diverse perspectives; however, the canon was popular with the public for its heritage focus. Teachers, while largely ambivalent, valued the canon’s advocacy for history education and its emphasis on local history. The canon has fostered collaboration among schools, museums, and became part of the mandatory learning targets in 2008 (Grever, 2019).

Both the Ten Eras framework and Dutch canon marked a shift towards a chronology and skills focused history curriculum in the Netherlands. While scholars noted the influence of historical consciousness frameworks from Germany on Dutch on theories of historical

knowledge, implementation of this theory of knowledge in school curriculums proved challenging (van Boxtel, 2020).

North American History Wars

History education became the subject of national debate in the United States and Canada during the 1980s and 90s. In response to reports of student underperformance like *A Nation at Risk* and the Dominions Institutes' survey, public outcry fuelled conservative advocacy for increased focus on the transmission of national narratives in history classrooms (Keirn, 2018; Evans, 2014).

The United States has a long tradition of history wars dating back to controversy over Rugg's issues-based textbooks in the 1930s. In the 1980s and 90s debates about history education intersected with increased federal control over curriculum through accountability measures (Evans, 2006). The Bradley Commission on History in Schools was created as part of the "back to basics" movement which advocated for content-heavy curriculum assessed through standardized testing (Keirn, 2018). This movement came after the Reagan administration published *A Nation at Risk*, which warned the public that U.S. students were falling behind their international peers in measures of content knowledge (Evans, 2014). In 2001 the accountability measures of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation led states to adopt content-heavy standards, steering history curricula towards lecture of political narratives (Crocco, 2018). NCLB was the precursor to Common Core which provides federal grants on the basis of math and reading achievement. More recently, anti-CRT rhetoric and divisive concepts legislation seek to shift history education away from inquiry and disciplinary thinking and towards transmission of non-critical national narratives (Dickenson et al., 2023). Studies of standards documents note the

impact of the accountability movement on the mis/underrepresentation of marginalized groups in history classrooms (e.g., Au, 2009; Maurer, et al., 2017).

In 1997, the Dominion Institutes reported young Canadians lacked knowledge of Canadian history, sparking alarm about the quality of history education (Morton, 2000). This debate continued when Granastein (1998) published *Who Killed Canadian History?*, a book which argued against trends towards social and cultural history in Canadian academic and school history (Sandwell, 2012). These publications asserted students lacked knowledge of Canada history, prompting a push for a more nationally focused curriculum. Public interest in history education heightened during this time, protecting its status as a course within the social studies. However, provincial interests prevented a pan-Canadian curriculum, underscoring debates about history education and national identity in Canada (Osborne, 2003; Sandwell, 2012).

While school systems in North America are decentralized, federal governments influence the curriculums produced by academics and professional organizations through the provision of funding. Following Senator Robert Byrd's goal of improved teaching of "traditional" American history, The U.S. Department of Education established the Teaching American History (TAH) grant program in 2003 (Katz, 2018). The TAH issued \$150 million in grant money to districts for professional developments about teaching disciplinary thinking, however, the sustained impact of the projects is questionable (U.S. Department of Education, 2005). Furthermore, some worried the program's emphasis on traditional history would discourage projects seeking funding for teaching the history of marginalized groups (Hahn et al., 2007). In Canada The Historical Thinking Project, funded in part by the federal Department of Canadian heritage, offered training and resources to Canadian provinces (Historical Thinking Project, n.d.a). Internal reports indicate the wide reach of this project on Canadian schools (Historical Thinking Project, 2014).

The C3 framework of the National Council for the Social Studies aimed to secure social studies' place in schools after its exclusion from Common Core standards. Developed by scholars of social studies and history education,⁹ the framework aligns Common Core standards with inquiry-based social studies pedagogy. Subjects within social studies are subdivided and the history education framework aims to develop students' ability to think historically when developing evidence-based arguments (National Council for Social Studies, 2013). While the C3 framework has been adopted by state departments of education, in some localities the curriculum has been excised as part of the educational culture wars (Grant et al., 2023).

The *Reading Like a Historian* educative curriculum is another notable curriculum initiative in the United States. Wineburg's historical thinking heuristics form the basis of its curriculum, which uses document-based lessons to instruct teachers in using cognitive apprenticeship and explicit strategy instruction to teach analysis of historical documents (Fogo et al., 2019; Reisman, 2012a; Reisman 2012b; Reisman & Fogo, 2016). *Reading Like a Historian* is widely used and researched and was funded by grants from the U.S. Department of Education (American Historical Association, 2024; Digital Inquiry Group, n.d.). These initiatives show how governments, academics, and professional organizations interact when implementing ideas about historical knowledge into history classrooms.

These notable examples of public debate about history education indicate a relationship between nation building, federal policy/funding, and the construction and implementation of historical knowledge. This relationship raises questions about the perspectives influencing history education discourse. I next explore the academic, theoretical, and political perspective which inform definitions of historical knowledge used in the field of history education.

⁹ Authors include Kathy Swan, S.G. Grant, John Lee, Keith Barton, and Bruce VanSledright.

What Perspectives Inform Definitions of Historical Knowledge Used in the Field of History Education?

Research questions one and two chronicle how research and theory conceptualizing historical knowledge was developed and enacted in the regions profiled. Findings are subdivided by geography to highlight the role of academic and geopolitical contexts in shaping history education discourse. The purpose of research question three is to look across regions, identifying discursive trends to illuminate the perspectives that inform normative definitions of historical knowledge. This section reports on the academic, political, and theoretical perspectives identified in the discourse of surrounding definitions of historical knowledge.

Academic Perspectives

During the period in which pioneering works about teaching and learning history were developed, academics were influenced by historical theory and educational psychology when conceptualizing historical knowledge. Table 3 presents an overview of these academic perspectives.

Table 3

Academic Perspectives Found in Definitions of Historical Knowledge

Academic Perspectives	Historical Theory	Educational Psychology
Geographies	England, Germany and the Netherlands, and Canada	England, North America, and The Netherlands
Influences	Historians (<i>E.H. Carr, R.G. Collingwood, Gustave Droysen</i>); Philosophers of History (<i>Pierre Nora, Frank Ankersmit</i>); Critical Historians (<i>Joan Scott, E.P. Thompson</i>)	Disciplinary knowledge (<i>Jerome Bruner, Paul Hirst, E.A. Peel</i>) Socio-constructivism & socioculturalism (<i>James Wertsch's theory of mediated action</i>)

Scholars in England and Canada used ideas from the discipline of history to develop theories and concepts about historical learning. For example,

- historical methodology defined by historians E.H. Carr and R.G. Collingwood was used by English scholars to understand the dimensions of historical knowledge (Dickinson et. al., 1984; Lee & Dickinson, 1978; Shemilt, 1984),
- Lee (2011) and Lévesque (2008) reference philosopher of history Frank Ankersmit's theories about colligatory concepts and historical accounts, and
- Siexas (1996) references both Carr's ideas about concepts of historical understanding and the critical push against the dominant historical methodology from historians like Joan Scott and E.P. Thompson.

These references indicate the influence of academic history on history education scholarship in England and Canada.

German and Dutch history education scholarship is rooted in history didactics scholarship, a field which connects communication of history in academic and public life. German models for historical learning are centred around development of *Geschichtsbewusstsein*, a term with a broader scope than its English language counterpart, "historical consciousness" (Barricelli & Sauer, 2009). Foundational theories of historical consciousness used in German and Dutch research reflect this holistic conception of historical knowledge. Rüsen (1987), a leading figure defining *Geschichtsbewusstsein*, names historian Gustave Droysen as an early voice asking the key questions of history didactics. Van Boxtel and van Drie's (2018) place historical reasoning within the spheres of public *and* disciplinary history. These works highlight the interconnectedness of education and historical theory in Germany and the Netherlands.

Influenced by changes in the field of psychology during the cognitive revolution, scholars in England, North American, and the Netherlands investigated the domain specific cognitions of young learners. Work began in England with Shemilt, Lee, Dickinson, and Ashby's study of progression in student understanding of historical concepts. In the United States, Levstik used social and cultural psychological theory when studying historical learning. As the academic conversation about history education grew more international, other scholars in North America and the Netherlands, like VanSledright, Wineburg, Seixas, van Boxtel, and van Drei, built on the empirical research about historical learning conducted in England to develop definitions of historical knowledge.

The turn of the millennium is a notable moment of this scholarly exchange. As shown in Table 4, the edited volumes Stearns et al. (2000) and Seixas (2004) united scholars to report on the latest developments in history education research. Post-2000 scholarship from Canada and the Netherlands began joining the Anglo-American and historical consciousness schools of history education (e.g., Lévesque, 2008; Seixas, 2004; van Drei and van Boxtel, 2008; van Boxtel & van Drei, 2018). E.H. Carr and R.J. Collingwood, key figures in the English tradition, frequently appear in U.S. discussions of disciplinary thinking (as seen in the C3 framework). Their inclusion indicates that historical theory influenced American definitions of historical knowledge through the lens of English education scholarship. Seixas (2016) argued intercultural dialogue between German and Anglophone schools will continue to “enhance the conceptual clarity, enrich the conceptual scope, strengthen the empirical research agenda, and, hopefully, thereby, improve the utility of the research field for practitioners in schools, museums and other sites of history education” (p.437).

Table 4

	<i>Knowing, Teaching, & Learning History: National and International Perspectives (2000)</i>	<i>Theorizing Historical Consciousness (2004)</i>
Editors	Peter N. Stearns, Peter Seixas, and Sam Wineburg	Peter Seixas
Contributors	England (<i>Shemilt, Lee, Ashby</i>), Germany (<i>von Borries</i>), and North America (<i>Seixas, Levstik, Wineburg, Wertsch, Lowenthal</i>)	England (<i>Lee</i>), Germany (<i>Rüsen</i>), The Netherlands (<i>Lorenz</i>), and North America (<i>Seixas, Wertsch, Laville</i>)
Origins	1997 American Historical Association symposium (panel discussants: <i>Katz and Bruner</i>)	2001 University of British Columbia international symposium following opening of the Center for Historical Consciousness (director: <i>Seixas</i>)

Critical scholars in the United States are an important counterpoint to this genealogy. King reaches outside of touchstones from the U.S. academic canon to historians and theorists like Franz Fanon, Stephen Biko, and Robert Thorp. Levstik used historian Haydn White’s theory of narrativity when developing a cultural framework for historical learning. These influences speak to the transdisciplinary nature of critical scholarship.

Theoretical perspectives

A discourse emerged to describe competence in historical understanding and “historical thinking” became a prominent term used to describe historical knowing. Table 5, located in the Appendix, presents language use in key concepts related to historical knowing and learning. Conceptions of historical knowledge fall into two schools of thought divided by an emphasis on the role of individual cognition (common in Anglo-American scholarship) or society/culture (common in German, Dutch, and critical U.S. scholarship) in historical learning. Authors whose pedagogical models emphasized the individual cognitions of learners (i.e., Lee, VanSledright, Wineburg, Lévesque, and Seixas) used language like: “conceptual apparatus”, “thinking

historically”, and “historical thinking concepts.” Authors working from a sociocultural lens, such as Rösen, van Boxtel and van Dreij, and Salinas and Blevins, used historical thinking to describe the cognitive processes of learners as they experience history within society and culture (e.g., “historical thinking...influence[s] our cultural orientation”).

The definitions of historical knowledge provided by the authors illustrate how scholars operating from different lenses use historical thinking as benchmark. For example, although Barton and Levstik rejected the use of the term historical thinking in their work they added a footnote rationalizing this omission (2004, p. 24). Rösen (2004) employed the term historical thinking in his typology for the development of historical consciousness. Wineburg (2007) borrowed language from the school of historical consciousness when writing an article for a European publication (e.g., historical thinking “requires an orientation to the past” p.6). Use of the term historical thinking appears to be time bound. The definitions of historical knowledge developed by Jeismann, Pandel, and von Borries, all published in German pre-2000, do not connect to the language of historical thinking. While Lee’s definition runs parallel to historical thinking through its focus on cognition, he uses terms from English discourse. Finally, Rösen’s employment of “historical thinking” is prominent in publications written in English post-2000. These examples indicate authors began to use the language of historical thinking as a lingua franca as the field became more international.

History education discourse in England and North America center individual cognitions. The curriculums developed for use in United States classroom emphasize the mental processes of students as they employ text-based reading strategies (e.g., *Reading Like a Historian* and the C3 framework). In England and Canada, the Key Stages of the national curriculum and Historical

Thinking Project also take this approach through their focus on students' development of a conceptual apparatus of disciplinary concepts. While English and North American scholars address the role of culture in historical learning— for example historical literacy (Lee, 2011), historical positionality (VanSledright, 1998), cultural curriculum (Wineburg et al., 2007), and Seixas' body of work on historical consciousness— curriculum outputs developed by scholars in these regions center on student's development of disciplinary heuristics or concepts.

The sociocultural emphasis is dominant in the history education discourse in Germany and The Netherlands and critical U.S. scholarship. The FUER model of competency in historical thinking involves the re- and de- construction of societal narratives. Van Drie and van Boxtel integrated ideas about student use of disciplinary and cultural tools when engaging in historical reasoning. The cultural approaches to history education put forth by King, Barton and Levstik, and Salinas account for the role of narrative on representations and understandings of history. These American scholars, like academics in the field of history didactics, research the relationship between history, society, and identity. Their conceptualization of historical knowledge pushes against approaches to history education which limit focus on the way in which the theoretical and ideological commitments of historians impact historical accounts

Van Drie and van Boxtel's concept of historical reasoning is a rare example of thorough integration between ideas from the Anglo-American and historical consciousness schools of history education. Their socio-constructivist approach situates student cognitive activity within historical culture, linking epistemological beliefs, historical knowledge, and meta-historical strategies to practical competencies. This synthesis provides a useful model for educators and researchers seeking to reconcile different approaches to history education.

The theoretical perspectives reflected in definitions of historical knowledge mirror academic lineages and as discussed in the next section, the geopolitical contexts of their development.

Political Perspectives

Across regions history education was the subject of public and academic debate following nation-wide reports that students were under-performing on assessments and/or backlash from conservatives pushing for the transmission of national narratives in history classrooms. Table 6 tracks the influence of notable public debates about history education on the conceptions of historical knowledge manifested in curriculum and scholarship. Increased government control through policy initiatives almost always led to a shift from inquiry and disciplinary thinking and towards transmission-based, content heavy instruction in national political narratives. Canada is the exception, where the multi-national character of their society stifled the creation of a pan-Canadian curriculum. However, across nations, political discourse about the nature and purpose of history education linked historical learning to national heritage and citizenship education. In the curriculum reforms sparked by public debate, historical knowledge became defined as the acquisition of national political narratives.

Table 6

Public Debates and the Construction and Implementation of Historical Knowledge

Country	Control of Edu.	Debate	Educational Outcome	Response in Academia
England	National	Creation/revisions of the National Curriculum	Decreased emphasis on second-order concepts	False dichotomy between skills and knowledge
Germany	Local	PISA shock	Implementation of national standards with heavier content focus;	Failure of historical consciousness models to address social inequality and diversity; National standards are not reflexive; Shift towards

			FUER and HITCH assessment models	psychological research about student achievement
The Netherlands	National	Assassination of Pim Fortuyn	The Dutch Canon; increased teaching of local history	Lack of disciplinary grounding and lack of diverse representation in the history curriculum
U.S.A.	Local	<i>A Nation at Risk</i> ; divisive concepts legislation	Content heavy curriculum centered on national narratives	Lack of disciplinary grounding; Lack of diverse representation in history curricula; history education rooted in white epistemic logic
Canada	Local	Dominions Institute's survey; <i>Who Killed Canadian History?</i>	Increased teaching of local history	Western bias of models of historical consciousness

While academics and professional organizations did not abandon disciplinary ideas about historical knowledge in favour of narrative transmission, some scholars point to the seeds of this nationalism in the theories and concepts that define the field. Lowenthal (1998) argues the placement of history under the broader umbrella of social studies education in North America contributes to the emphasis on national narrative transmission. He posited "educators jettisoned history for social studies [and] social studies became civics, a synonym for patriotism" (p. 125). Even nations where history is a distinct school subject face this challenge. Scholars across regions questioned how well history education serves the needs of multicultural student bodies (Bradshaw, 2009; Lücke, 2012 as cited in Kölbl & Konrad, 2015, p.22; King, 2020a; Salinas et. al., 2012). The concerns of these scholars, along with history education's role in citizenship and nation-building, highlight its function as a form of moral education in the regions examined.

Discussion

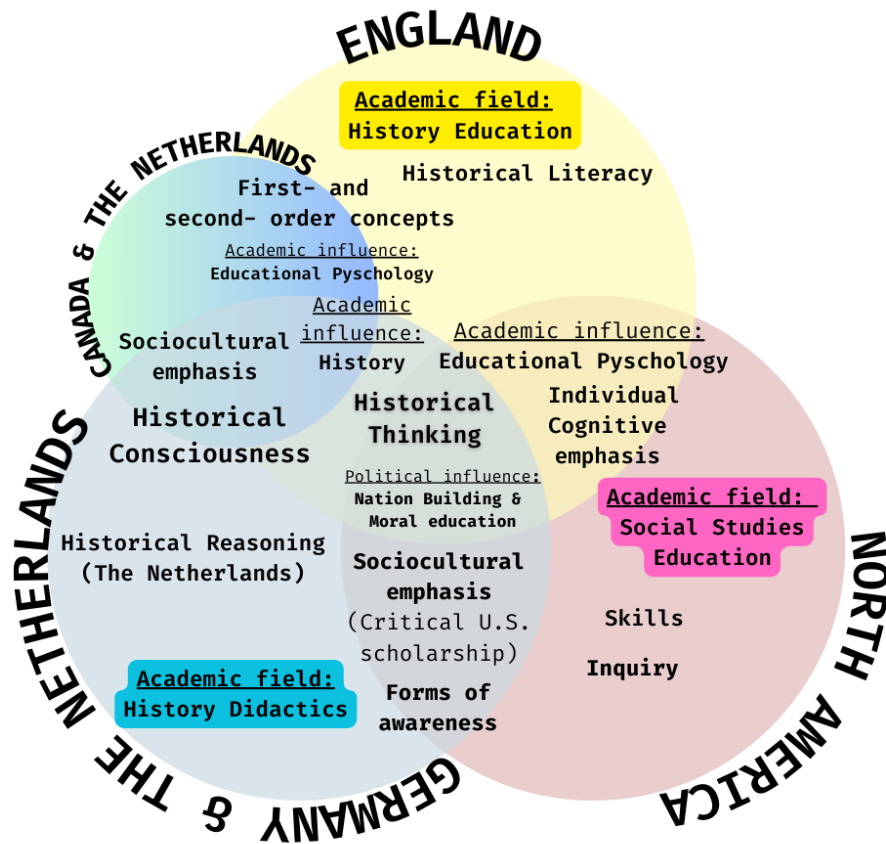
This study turns a historical lens to the development of definitions of historical knowledge to make visible the intricate interplay between scholarly inquiry, public discourse, and pedagogical practice. To do so I asked, (1) How have scholars in the field of history education researched and conceptualized historical knowledge in England, Germany and the

Netherlands, and North America from 1970 to 2020? (2) How have notable public debates about history education intersected with the construction and implementation of historical knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America? and (3) What perspectives inform definitions of historical knowledge used in the academic field of history education?

Figure 5 visualizes the fragmentation and intersections in history education discourse discussed in this paper. While some regional divisions remain, discursive trends between the regions emerged. These findings have implications on how we perceive the scholarly ideas about historical knowledge that shape students’ experiences in the history classroom.

Figure 5

History Education Discourse in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America



With this study I aimed to illuminate the “star system” of academic literature about historical knowledge. Is, as Abbot (2008) worried, scholarly history education discourse insular and fragmented? Or will we see scholars build from, push further, and challenge taken-for-granted ideas? The western perspective of history education discourse is being critiqued and ideas from the non-western world are increasingly entering academic conversation (Grever, 2019; Ho & Barton, 2022; Wallace-Casey, 2022; Wallace, 2024). The handbooks referenced in this review, while dominated by North American and European authors, contain chapters studying history education in non-western contexts (e.g., Moyo, 2020; Baildon & Afandi, 2018). Additionally, historians critique the moral focus inquiry questions developed for use in history classrooms, indicating another evolving strain in the discourse surrounding historical knowledge (American Historical Association, 2025). The extent and pace by which emerging ideas will influence dominant schools of thought remains to be seen.

While scholars may explore new ideas, there are barriers to the implementation of scholarly ideas about historical knowledge in classrooms. Findings indicate that the proximity between scholars and policy initiatives impacts what gets taught in schools. Scholars in England worked directly with governmental bodies on the creation of a national curriculum and it is organized around ideas developed by these researchers. In the Netherlands the implementation of the Dutch canon quickly went from development by a commission of historians to being mandated in schools. Nations with decentralized curriculum show less proximity between the concepts developed in academic spheres and the curriculum implemented in schools. In the United States scholars are reliant on grant funding and a network of professional organizations when designing curricula. These trends highlight how power shapes the curricular materials taken up by local departments of education. This is a timely implication in light of the current

use of the U.S. Department of Education funding to police how race is taught in schools (Graef, 2025).

The theoretical emphasis of regional definitions of historical knowledge indicate that academics and curriculum developers must respond to public discourse about the nature and purpose of historical knowledge for their materials to have impact. For example, in the United States the conceptualizations about historical knowledge which emphasize individual cognition appear to have the most traction in history classrooms. The widespread use of the *Reading Like a Historian (RLH)* educative curriculum is impressive considering the decentralized nature of the U.S. education system and ongoing politicization of history education. In contrast, the relative lack of classroom implementation of critical historical inquiry pedagogy in the United States indicates barriers to its use. The other regions studied show similar trends. German history education shifted towards psychological research and more assessable models of competency following public outcry about student achievement. This public debate also spurred the implementation of content heavy curriculums focused on national narratives. This suggests conceptions of historical knowledge which emphasizes learners' mental processes aligns more closely with— or at least does not outwardly challenge— public sentiment about the nature and purpose of history education. This relationship is fickle, as political polarization intensifies even these sanctioned curriculums have come under attack (e.g., backlash against the C3 framework). In each of the geographic areas analysed the vision for history education with the most traction in schools does the least to challenge heritage education. The “spark” for these reforms—evaluation of students' knowledge— suggests a relationship between assessment, nationalistic heritage education, and a transmission model of history instruction.

Practical Implications

Teacher educators and curriculum developers in the U.S. struggle to make in-roads reorienting history instruction around disciplinary thinking and inquiry. How can the discursive link between European and critical American scholars be leveraged to provide teacher educators, curriculum developers, and teachers with concrete strategies for history education which helps students grapple with the place of history in their everyday life? The findings of this study may help educational actors in my professional context, the United States, construct and educate preservice teachers in history pedagogy which meets these challenges. For example, scholars and teacher educators might,

- Instruct future teachers in pedagogical methods which integrate the individual cognitive and sociocultural dimensions of historical learning.
- Encourage preservice teachers' exploration of multiple definitions of historical knowledge and prompt them to critically reflect on the perspectives reflected in objectives for history education provided by state and professional organizations.
- Provide preservice teachers with opportunities to articulate and reflect on their own definition of the purpose of nature of history education by drawing from sources from the disciplines of history and education.
- Connect preservice teachers with curriculum materials from a variety of geographic contexts. I recognize language presents a barrier to this. For English speakers in the United States, resources for teaching historiography from England and activities for unpacking the ethical dimension of historical thinking like those found in *The Big 6 Historical Thinking Concepts* can enrich teachers' practice.

- Provide preservice teachers with strategies for selecting curriculum resources and navigating their use in politicized classrooms.
- Participate in spaces which encourage scholarly interaction across geographies and disciplines such as NCSS-CUFA's International Assembly and NCHE's annual meeting. Use these spaces as a place to share both ideas and curricular resources like textbooks, learning activities, and class assignments.

These recommendations can initiate a conversation in the academic sphere about the perspectives which inform history education and open avenues for new approaches to reform efforts. By exploring the development of theories of historical knowledge, history education reformers can speak from a place of joint understanding when organizing advocacy efforts.

Conclusion

This study investigated the development of scholarly ideas about historical knowledge in England, Germany and the Netherlands, and North America from 1970-2023. Comparative analysis highlights how academic, geographic, and historic contexts shaped history education discourse. While the study underscores the importance of situating history education within broader social and historical narratives, findings raise questions about the future trajectory of discourse in historical knowledge, teaching, and learning. The prevalent Western models from 1970 to 2010 are only now beginning to be reassessed (Grever & Adriaansen, 2019; King 2020a; King 2020b). While North American and European authors dominate, this study calls for embracing studies from more diverse contexts to challenge established paradigms and invite different perspectives to research and curriculum development related to historical knowing.

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Appendix

Table 5

Language Use in Definitions of Historical Knowledge, Emphasis Added

Scholar	Term(s)	Definition
Individual Cognitive Emphasis		
Lee	Historical Knowledge (First- and Second- Order Concepts)	“the key concepts of history (the discipline) are counterintuitive ” (Lee, 2005, p.33)
	Historical Literacy	History as a way of seeing the world; requires a disciplinary “ conceptual apparatus ” (Lee, 2011, p.56)
Lévesque	Historical thinking	Historical thinking is “the intellectual process through which an individual masters-and ultimately appropriates- the concepts and knowledge of history and critically applies such concepts and knowledge in the resolution of contemporary and historical issues... ” (Levesque, 2008, p.27)
Seixas & Morton	Historical thinking	“ Historical thinking is the creative process that historians go through to interpret the evidence of the past and generate the stories of history” (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p.2). “ The six [historical thinking] concepts can be presented as the strategies that historians use” (Seixas & Morton, 2013, p.4)
VanSledright	Historical thinking	“ Thinking historically -that is, employing background organizing concepts in concert with specific analytic strategic processes - results in coming to understand the past-that is, being able to produce a coherent story about the past, or a history” (VanSledright, 2011, p. 53)
Wineburg	Historical Thinking	Historical thinking is “skilled historical practice...of historical cognition” (Wineburg, 2001, p.xi); historical thinking as an “unnatural act”

		<p>“Historical thinking requires an orientation to the past informed by disciplinary canons of evidence and rules of argument” (Wineburg, 2007, p.6)</p> <p>“historical consciousness developed as a result of a complex interplay between home, community, school, and the historicizing forces of popular culture” (Wineburg et al., 2007, p.44)</p>
Sociocultural emphasis		
Barton & Levstik	Historical Learning	<p>“We decline to define terms like <i>historical thinking</i> and <i>historical understanding</i>. Rather than defining these terms and then trying to ascertain whether or how students engage in them, we’re interested in what research has to say about students’ participation in activities related to the past” (Barton & Levstik, 2004, p.24)</p>
King	Black Historical Consciousness	<p>“Black historical consciousness is an effort to understand, develop, and teach Black histories that recognize Black people’s humanity.” (King, 2020a, p337); Framework includes instruction around 6 first-order concepts (called “principles” or “themes”) central to Black histories (e.g., power, oppression, and racism)</p>
Jeismann	Historical consciousness	<p>By historical consciousness we mean the permanent presence of the awareness that mankind and all social institutions and forms of co-existence created by us exist in time, i.e. they have an origin and a future and represent nothing unchangeably or unconditionally (Schieder, 1974, p. 78f). Besides the mere knowledge of or interest in history, a historical consciousness also incorporates the relationship between interpretation of the past, understanding of the present, and perspective on the future. Since history cannot be perceived as an image of past realities but can only be made aware through selection and interpretive reconstruction, historical consciousness is the awareness that the past is present in</p>

		representations and conceptions (Jeismann, 1979, as cited in Thorp, 2017, p.7)
Pandel (1987)	Historical Consciousness	Dimensions of conscious awareness of the past “Three of them are specific for the domain of history. They are: Z: “Zeitbewusstsein”: consciousness/awareness of time (back then – today/tomorrow); W: Wirklichkeitsbewusstsein: consciousness/awareness of reality (fictional – factual); H: Historizitätsbewusstsein: consciousness/awareness of historicity (static – variable) Four others are focused on the complexity of society : I: Identitätsbewusstsein: consciousness/awareness of identity (we – you/them); P: Politisches Bewusstsein: political consciousness/awareness (high up – low down); Ö: Ökonomisches Bewusstsein: socio-economic consciousness/awareness (poor –rich); M: Moralisches Bewusstsein: moral consciousness/awareness (right – wrong) (Pandel, 1987, as cited in Körber, 2015, pp.7-8)
Rüsen	Historical consciousness	“‘Sinnbildung über Zeiterfahrung’, or, “ formation of meaning over experience of (changes within) time ” (Rüsen, 1989, translation Körber, 2015, p.9). Types of historical thinking (i.e., traditional, exemplary, etc...) are stages in the development of historical consciousness which influence our cultural orientation (Rüsen, 2004; 2017)
Salinas & Blevins	Critical Historical Inquiry	“history is not neutral, that historical thinking provides an avenue to explore history beyond a simple listing of people, places, and things , and that a more critical consciousness provides those multiple perspectives that are uncomfortable and yet essential for understanding the complexities of history” (Salinas, et al., 2012, p.20)

van Boxtel & van Drei	Historical Reasoning	<p>“the term historical reasoning emphasizes the activity of students and the fact that when learning history, students not only acquire knowledge of the past, but also use this knowledge for interpreting phenomena from the past and the present” (2008, p.88)</p> <p>“a coherent set of historical thinking activities that aim at reaching justifiable conclusions about historical phenomena” (2020, p.61)</p>
von Borries (1988)	Historical Consciousness	<p>Historical consciousness as statuses of awareness of the past; Language used in highest achievement of historical consciousness in pyramid model: “historical insight”, “critical reflection of history”, “responsible action”, “coming to terms with the past by working through” (von Borries, 1988, as cited in Körber, 2015, p.8)</p>

Whose Historical Thinking? Representation of women in The Digital Inquiry Group's

***Reading Like a Historian* world history curriculum**

Sara Evers^{a*}, David Hicks^b, and Suzanne Shelburne^c

^a School of Education, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, U.S.A.; ^b School of Education, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, U.S.A.; ^c Career and Professional Development, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, U.S.A.

*1226 Howbert Ave SW, Roanoke, Virginia, 24015; (703) 217-4219; saralevers@vt.edu

Abstract

This study reports on a content and discourse analysis of the Digital Inquiry Group's world history *Reading Like a Historian* educative curriculum. History curriculum has a powerful influence on how students view the past and underrepresentation of women in curriculum materials is an enduring issue. Educative curriculum materials are an influential, yet understudied, component of teaching practice heralded for the ability to instigate classroom reform. This study examines the representation of women in online world history lessons through the framework of women's history scholarship. Findings indicate: the majority of lessons present a male-defined history, lessons featuring women inconsistently support historical interpretation through the frames employed by historians of women and gender, and modification of original documents excludes women and limits the use of gender as a category for analysis. Despite the reform minded mission of DIG materials, the *Reading Like a Historian* world history lessons perpetuate male-defined history that marginalizes women.

Keywords: educative curriculum, gender, world history curriculum, historical thinking

Building on Woyshner's (2002) foundational work on the marginalization of women's history in secondary education, this study explores the representation of women in the Digital Inquiry Group's (DIG) curriculum resource: *Reading Like a Historian (RLH)* world history lessons. There is an established tradition of research, including Woyshner's, scrutinizing the representation of women in textbooks, standards, and lesson plans (Crocco, 2006; Chick & Corle, 2016; Clark et al., 2004; Engebretson, 2014; Hahn et al., 2007; Maurer et al., 2017; Roberts & Butler, 2012; Winslow, 2013). Studies have illuminated the impact of the history curriculum on students' perceptions of women, both as historical agents and in contemporary society (Akita & Mori, 2021; Levstik & Groth, 2002; Schmidt, 2012; Wineburg, 2001). Additionally, studies continue to suggest that women's representation in history classrooms remains marginalized (Seibert, 2020; Shelburne, 2022). Given Woyshner's (2002) assertion that the application of the structuring principles of women's history scholarship to history curriculum could help address the underrepresentation of women in history classrooms this paper critically explores the gap between current scholarship on women's history and DIG's *RLH* world history lessons.

This study examines the world history lessons produced by the Digital Inquiry Group (DIG), previously known as the Stanford History Education Group (SHEG). Founded by Sam Wineburg in 2002, DIG transformed history teaching in schools through its inquiry-based approach (Digital Inquiry Group, n.d.a.). Its *Reading Like a Historian (RLH)* curriculum, downloaded over 15 million times globally, exemplifies an influential and widely accessible resource (Digital Inquiry Group, n.d.b.) which has been represented as an example of impactful digital scholarship (Wineburg, 2013). The comprehensive and free nature of *RLH* lessons make them an accessible resource for world history teachers—a group often grappling with a content-

heavy subject matter– who tend to rely on curricular aids to enhance their content knowledge (Crocco, 2011). *RLH* material writ large have emerged as an important educative resource for teachers (Krajcik & Delen, 2017; Reisman & Fogo, 2016). Considering the under-researched nature of world history (Bain & Harris, 2009; Girard & Harris, 2018; Harris & Bain, 2011), conducting an examination of how women are represented in *RLH* world history lessons reflects the enduring importance of: (1) critically unpacking embedded and taken for granted ideological values and presuppositions running within and through institutions and curriculum (Cherryholmes, 1982) and, (2) studying how historical knowledge and history teaching continues to evolve over time and space (King, 2017; Lévesque, 2008; Seixas, 2004).

This study extends Woysner's analysis, probing the presence and portrayal of women in the curriculum. Given current attacks on social studies education over the teaching of divisive concepts and difficult histories and difficult histories (National Coalition Against Censorship, 2021) alongside the ongoing critiques historians of women's history level at interpretations defined by hetero-normative and white male-centric history (Fuentes, 2016; Lerner, 1977; Scott, 1986; Tetreault, 1986; Woysner, 2002), this is a timely study. If *RLH's* aim is to educate students in "thinking like a historian," the question arises: whose historical thinking are students reflecting?

We assessed the *RLH* world history curriculum, seeking to discern how the materials either challenged or reinforced assumptions about women and gender. Using the lens of contemporary frames in women's history scholarship, we critically explored the extent to which the curriculum sustains cultural biases that perpetuate women's oppression (Chick & Corle, 2016; Clark et al., 2005; Stevens & Martel, 2019). Two research questions guided the study:

- (1) How are women and their experiences represented in the content and discourse of *RLH* world history lesson materials?
- (2) How do *RLH* world history lesson materials challenge or reinforce existing cultural assumptions about women/gender in history?

Literature Review

Women in the Social Studies Curriculum

Despite gaining ground during the 1970s, feminism and the study of gender and sexuality in social studies education has not secured a central space in the field (Bohan, 2017; Crocco, 2004; Schmeichel, 2011; Woysner, 2012). At the same time, the representation of women in social studies curricula remains significantly marginalized (Clark et al., 2005; Crocco, 2006; Crocco, 2018; Engebretson, 2024; Hahn & Bernard Powers, 1985; Hahn et al., 2007; Lerner, 1977; Leslie, 2021; Trecker, 1971; Tretreault, 1986; Sadker et al., 2009; Woysner & Shocker, 2015). Formal social studies curricula are often derived from textbooks and state standards. It is important to analyze these materials because they inform teachers and students about which content is deemed valuable or historically significant (Ross, 2006; Au, 2009, 2012; Winslow, 2013).

Educational policies, standards, textbooks, and curricula are shaped through negotiation, compromise, and ideological struggles. Standards are often crafted by state boards of education composed of politically appointed members and influenced by policymakers and interest groups, with decisions driven by political ideologies and epistemological beliefs about the nature and purpose of history education (van Hover et al., 2010). Textbooks, developed by publishers seeking to align with various standards, tend to reflect and reinforce dominant narratives and

ideologies (Goldstein, 2020). In contrast, curricula can emerge from diverse sources including teachers, academics, and professional organizations. Curricula often aligns itself with standards, but not always— indicating the potential of curricular materials, such as DIG’s materials, to operate independently from standards and provide alternative and critical perspectives to textbook-based history. Multiple studies (Akita & Mori, 2021; Chick & Corle, 2016; Roberts & Butler, 2012, Shelburne, 2022) reveal a profound underrepresentation of women across standards, textbooks, and curricula with depictions often relegated to a limited roster of political or celebrated figures.

The under representation of women within social studies textbooks is not a recent phenomenon. Three decades ago, Sadker and Sadker (1994) highlighted the near absence of women in social studies textbooks. Subsequent studies (Chick 2006; Chick & Corle, 2016; Clark et al., 2004; Shocker & Woyshner, 2013) echoed these findings, demonstrating how textbooks prioritize political and military history—dominated by the experiences and perspectives of white, western men—over social history (Bennett & Williams, 2014; Engebretson, 2014; Schmidt, 2012; Woyshner, 2006).

Because of the prevalence of military and political history narratives, Crocco (2018) noted that “efforts to incorporate gender and sexuality into school history over the last several decades have largely been token attempts to include these groups in a national narrative focused on political and economic change” (p. 340). As with textbooks, Engebretson’s (2014) discourse analysis of the 2010 National Council for the Social Studies curriculum standards noted the privileged place of political history and the underrepresentation of women. Similarly, a study by the National Women’s History Museum found that the political and military history in American history standards resulted in greater representation for men (Maurer et al., 2017). Maurer et al.

(2017) found fifteen commonly cited women across United States history standards including Susan B. Anthony, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman. Only three, Rosa Parks, Norma McCorvey, and Eleanor Roosevelt were from the post-World War II era. When women are represented in US History textbooks and standardized curricula the research suggests they are typically found in narratives detailing social/political reform movements such as abolition, temperance, or suffrage (Crocco, 1997; Schafer & Bohan, 2009; Schmidt, 2012; Schmeichel, 2015; Winslow, 2013).

This pattern of limited representation persists in students' historical understanding. At first glance a reading of Wineburg and Monte-Sano's (2008) survey of high school students' perceptions of the most famous Americans would seem to reveal there has been an increase in the representation of women in student's minds. When asked to list the "most famous Americans in history" over half of the 10 most named figures in the study were women. However, this finding requires a couple of qualifications. First, the women named (i.e., Rosa Parks, Harriet Tubman, Susan B. Anthony, Amelia Earhardt, Oprah Winfrey, and Marilyn Monroe) align with Banks' (1989) critique of a "Heroes and Holidays" approach to representing marginalized groups. Second, as the study authors noted, the procedures of the study— which stipulated no presidents be listed and at one stage prompted students to list women— "inflated the number of women that appeared on students final list" (Wineburg & Monte-Sano, 2008, p. 1189). While findings suggest potential for increasing visibility of women in U.S. History, the methodological decisions reveal the need for intentional efforts to make women visible to students. Studies that examined classroom interventions to promote teaching women's, including women of color's, history reveal how rarely women, gender, and intersectional analysis appear in social studies curriculum (Kohlmeier, 2005; Vickery et al., 2019).

In terms of world history education, scholars note that an absence of women, Western bias, and educators' lack of knowledge shape instruction (Merryfield & Subedi, 2003; Ortega-Sánchez & Heras-Sevilla, 2023; Shelburne, 2022; Winslow, 2013). Winslow's (2013) study of New York State's Global Studies standards and end-of-course assessment found that in the last 25 years the exam only featured 25 women, and the only women represented in the curriculum, "occupied positions of political or military power, like Elizabeth I of England and Catherine the Great of Russia" (Winslow, 2013, p. 326). Similarly, Shelburne (2022) examined the representation of women across Virginia's 2008 and 2015 world history standards and curriculum frameworks and found only seven women.

To counter this bias, Noddings (2001) argued for increased emphasis on social history. However, this proposition has been critiqued for its potential to confine women to the social realm (Woyshner, 2002) and reinforce normative definitions of womanhood (Schmidt, 2012). Woyshner (2002) called for a broader definition of political history encompassing any action taken to influence the government and community, thus including a wider range of women's experiences. Wineburg (2001) criticized the myopic focus on political and military events, asserting that the scarcity of women in history curricula is misleading, socially dysfunctional, and an educational challenge that needs addressing.

Scholars have proposed solutions such as policy and practice alterations, alongside curriculum blueprints and lesson plans specifically designed to address the pervasive underrepresentation of women in social studies (Brugar et al., 2014; Eckert, 2024; Hahn et al., 2007; Hickey & Kolterman, 2006; Levstik, 2001; Merryfield & Subedi, 2003; National Council for the Social Studies, 2022; Sincero & Woyshner, 2003; Waring & Forsyth, 2024). While groups like the National Women's History Museum have made efforts to create classroom

materials featuring women's experiences, research indicates that more work is needed to represent the perspectives of Black women in the lesson plans produced by this organization (Colley & Broome, 2020; Colley & Patterson, 2022). In this context, the Digital Inquiry Group, with its mission to improve history education through research, direct engagement with classrooms, and provision of free materials, holds the potential to make a substantial contribution to this ongoing discourse. The question remains: how do DIG materials augment or transform the representation of women in the social studies?

***Reading Like a Historian* Lessons as Educative Materials**

Educative materials are an influential component of teaching practice (Bopardikar et al., 2021; Brunner & Abd-El-Khalick; 2020; Quebec & Ma, 2018) but remain underexplored within social studies education (Callahan et al., 2014). A recent study by the American Historical Association found that history teachers use free online resources more than textbooks and 52% of survey respondents reporting using *RLH* materials (American Historical Association, 2024). As Ball and Cohen (1996) argued, educative materials intimate connection with daily instruction makes them potential catalysts for teaching reform. Recently, online educational resources such as DIG's *RLH*, "Read, Write, Inquire," and the C3 hub have emerged in social studies. Commercial platforms, like "Teachers Pay Teachers," supplement these with additional content (Rodriguez et al., 2020). Among these *RLH* world history lessons are a well-established and high-quality alternative to textbooks that promote teaching reform (Ball & Cohen, 1996; Davis & Krajcik, 2005; Drake et al., 2014).

The DIG educative curriculum stands out due to its popularity and influence (Blankenship, 2015; Fogo et al., 2019; Johnston, 2014; Reisman, 2012a, 2012b; Reisman & Fogo, 2016). At the time of study completion, the DIG website housed 114 U.S. history and 53

world history *RLH* lesson plans, in addition to source analysis and assessment materials.¹⁰ DIG materials are living resources, online lesson plans may be updated and added to, and new topics introduced. This immediacy highlights the power of DIG's online educative curriculum to quickly and efficiently provide teachers with resources. At the same time, older versions of lessons may continue to be circulated among teachers and used in the classroom. In terms of its wide usage and incorporation of scaffolds for teaching historical thinking, DIG's online *RLH* lessons constitute educative curricular materials connected to the everyday practice of history educators.

DIG materials encourage students to "think like a historian," embodying disciplinary methods such as contextualization, corroboration, and source analysis. Research on DIG has primarily evaluated its effectiveness in promoting historical thinking and literacy. *RLH* lesson plans follow a consistent structure: background information, a Central Historical Question (CHQ), analysis of primary sources with student handouts, answering of the CHQ, and a final discussion. Each lesson comes with a lesson plan, student handouts, original source documents, and an image-based PowerPoint for background information. Reisman (2012a) measured the effect of the *RLH* curriculum on students' historical thinking, transfer of historical knowledge to current issues, mastery of factual knowledge, and growth in reading comprehension. Over a period of six months, the author found substantial gains across all four areas. Reisman and Fogo (2016) assessed the quality of history instruction using the materials and found that while teacher's limited subject and pedagogical content knowledge negatively impacted the quality of instruction, *RLH* supported teachers in engaging students in historical reading and thinking. Fogo

¹⁰ As of February 2025, there are 134 U.S. history, and 57 world history lessons housed on the DIG website. World history lessons not included in this study are on the topics of the Kingdom of Meroë, samurai, the Russian Civil War, and the Zapatista Uprising.

et al. (2019) studied teacher rationale for changing the *RLH* materials and concluded they are a curricular fit. When teachers adapted the materials to fit the needs of their students, they did not disrupt the core structure/theory of the content of the materials.

Taking a different approach to research on DIG's *RLH* resources, Collin and Reich's (2015) comparative analysis of a lesson from two different educative organizations: DIG and the Zinn Education Project interrogated the implicit assumptions of differing disciplinary literacy models. They found DIG's *RHL* lesson centered academic knowledge and encouraged student disciplinary thinking in ways that might provoke moral questions. However, they suggested that DIG materials did not guide students towards historical thinking that addresses ethical considerations of how histories are represented in terms of asking, "moral questions of who has the right to tell which histories in which ways?" (Collin & Reich, 2015, p.20). In contrast, the critical literacy of the Zinn Education Project's lesson emphasized moral education as everyday understandings of use of history in the public sphere.

While Reisman and Fogo highlighted DIG's efficacy in teaching academic historical thinking, Collin and Reich (2015) questioned its capacity to mobilize moral knowledge for civic action. Despite these investigations, the historical content represented in DIG lessons, including representations of women in *RLH* materials have not been fully examined. Given studies that critique the lack of representation of women in social studies curricula, it is crucial to examine their depiction in influential materials like DIG. Guided by scholarship on women's history, we aimed to fill this gap in the analysis of DIG's representation of women within their world history lesson collection.

Theoretical Framework

This study uses theoretical frames from women's history scholarship to analyze the content and discourse surrounding women and gender in the *DIG* world history lessons. Historians draw on different theoretical perspectives and methods of interpretation when constructing historical accounts. These perspectives are part of their "historical read" of source materials and influence their choices regarding source selection and frames for analysis (Leinhardt & Young, 1996). For example, political, Africanist, economic, postcolonial, and social historians researching the Industrial Revolution would select different sources and ask distinct questions, leading to diverse historical interpretations. Similarly, historians of women and gender use analytical frames to challenge male-centric historical narratives. Thinking like a historian involves recognizing how different frameworks shape historical inquiry. In this section we review the historiography of women's history to synthesize a theoretical framework which can be used to analyze the representation of women and gender in the *RLH* world history lessons.

Women's history scholarship emerged alongside the second wave of feminism during the 1970s and '80s (Popkin, 2016). Lerner (1977) called for a "paradigm shift" in historical studies, challenging the relegation of women to the private sphere and their consequent erasure from mainstream political histories. She proposed a phase model of women's representation, which was later developed into an evaluative framework by Tetreault (1986). Lerner's phases span from male-defined history, where historical narratives exclude women and are oriented along male ways of being, to female-oriented history, where women's experiences are valued and researched:

- *Phase One, Male-defined history*: women excluded from historical narratives; historical narratives are shaped by male-defined value systems.

- *Phase Two, Compensatory History*: the history of significant women.
- *Phase Three, Contributory History*: the history of women's contributions and status within male-defined society.
- *Phase Four, Oppression Framework*: women's history only included in oppression narratives.

Phase Five, Female-oriented History: the experiences of women in the past are valued and researched; women's perspectives are considered when constructing historical narratives.

Lerner's classification of women's representation in history sparked further frameworks used to critique male-dominated historical narratives in historical scholarship and school curricula (McIntosh, 1983; Sklar, 1980; Tetreault, 1986). Scott (1986) championed the inclusion of gender as a category of analysis in historical scholarship, alongside class, geography, and race. Scott argued that gender is a constitutive element of social relationships and a primary way of signifying relationships of power. She maintained that historical investigation that uses gender as a category of analysis "will provide new perspectives on old questions... redefine the old questions in new terms, [and] make women visible as active participants" (p.1075). This approach challenged "male-defined" history by interrogating the assumed norm of white male history and expanding the understanding of political action to include women's contributions and influence on historical events.

Lerner, Scott, and others started a conversation about the representation of women in historical scholarship and the importance of centering women and gender to fully examine the human experience. Dayton and Levenstein's (2012) review of U.S. women's and gender history scholarship identified key areas of inquiry in the field, including: "the intersection of race, class,

gender and sexual orientation (and other categories) in shaping individual women's identities and gender regimes; relational differences among women of varied statuses; the mutual construction of sexual and gender norms; and the conceptual destabilizing of gender and sex" (2012, p.794). These categories highlight how scholars began to critique binary understandings of gender as solely "male" or "female," and explore how gender-identities intersect with other dimensions of identity, such as sexuality, race, and class.

Contemporary historians of women and gender stress the importance of spatial and intersectional analyses, emphasizing their relevance to understanding gender and race relationships in different historical and geographical contexts (de Groot, 2018; Yan & Offen, 2018). Yan and Offen (2018) pointed to a close link between "gender studies and new critical histories of colonialism and empire, contact zones, cross-cultural encounters and racialization" (p. 18). Spatial analysis aids intersectional analysis of race and gender by considering how gender functions across the cultural geographies of the past, thus illuminating the gendered structures of colonial and racial subordination. For example, Wiesner-Hanks (2010, 2015) blended global history with research on women, gender, and sexuality, revealing the value of a wide spatial lens to extend historical research beyond traditional categories like military and political analysis of nation states.

Stryker (2007) and Fuentes (2016) interrogated the concept of "woman" in women's history. Stryker (2007) brought a queer lens to "the woman question" and defined gender as a historical and geographical construct used to maintain control and hierarchy. Gender history has emerged to study gender in its many forms, including study of masculinity, nonbinary gender identities, and the transgender experience across time (Dayton & Levenstein, 2012). The study of women's history and gender history is deeply intertwined. Examining gender as a historical

and geographic construction requires the deconstruction of the social signifiers, including sexual practices, of gender identities across time. Fuentes' (2016) research investigating the racial and gendered power dynamics within colonial Caribbean society exemplifies this theoretical approach. Fuentes argued white women possessed forms of power because of the presence and position of enslaved women in society. Fuentes posited that "gender" was a privilege of white women and that the co-opting of the bodies of women of color for sexual objectification rendered them "genderless" in the historical context of white colonial Caribbean society. Her work underscores the importance of intersectionality, a concept introduced by Crenshaw (1989), to understand how multiple forms of discrimination and privilege interact to shape individual and collective experiences. Intersectionality provides a critical lens for examining how women's roles in history are constructed and how their agency is framed within broader social structures.

Like earlier scholars, contemporary historians of women's history critiqued the marginalized place of women as a niche topic of interest in the realm of social history and continue to advocate for the mainstream integration of gender as a category of historical analysis. Influenced by feminist theory, including second wave feminism and Black feminism, Queer, and post-colonial studies, the theoretical frameworks used in women's history challenge oppressive gender narratives in historical scholarship. Contemporary scholars advocate for the recognition of gender as a historically constructed concept and the critical examination of race and gender power relations through spatial analysis.

We surveyed the literature and synthesized the following theoretical frame representing how women are positioned in historical narratives:

- *Women-oriented*: The experiences of women are valued and researched. Multiple gender perspectives are used to construct historical narratives.

- *Gender as a category for historical analysis:* Historical investigation asks questions about the relationship between gender and power. Historical narratives represent women as active agents whose experiences are important to the study of the past.
- *Gender as a geographic and historical construction:* Historical investigation examines how gender is defined across time, culture, and place. Historical narratives do not represent gender identity as static or universal concepts.
- *Spatial analysis of the intersection of race and gender:* Historical investigation asks questions about the gendered dynamics of cross-cultural encounters and includes analysis of the intersection of race and gender.

These theoretical understandings provide a guide for investigating how the content and discourse surrounding women in the *RLH* world history lessons challenge or reinforce cultural assumptions about women/gender in history. In the context of world history, the concept of intersectionality is particularly vital. Women’s experiences cannot be fully understood without examining how gender operates in different cultural and historical contexts, often intersecting with colonialism, economic exploitation, and racial subjugation.

Gender is an important category of analysis and investigating how gender operates as a system of power provides deeper insights into historical events, systems and structures. Shifting beyond binary understandings of “man” and “woman” recognizes the constructed and fluid nature of gender over time, culture, and space and in doing so challenges reductive and myopic narratives. These principles guided our evaluation of the *RLH* world history lessons. However, we recognized that this scholarship can still reproduce binary discourses especially when the omissions and absences of women in the materials analyzed are pervasive. We aimed to challenge this binary discourse by:

- Drawing on Stryker’s (2007) critical essay “Transgender Feminism: Queering the Woman Question” as a theoretical touchstone to critique normative understandings of gender.
- Including the category “gender as a geographic and historical construction” in the analytical framework to foreground the fluidity and contextual nature of gender.
- Shifting the language in the framework from biologically-oriented terms like “female” to descriptors of gender identity, such as “women.”
- Addressing Queer erasure in the discussion section by critiquing the absence of non-binary and gender-diverse representations in the *RLH* curriculum.

In adopting this framework, our goal was to be part of a larger critique of how gender itself is constructed and represented in curriculum. We also looked to the Queer agenda for social education outlined by Schmidt (2024) which integrates gender \diamond sexuality to “interrupt/disrupt” Western, binary constructions of gender. Women’s historians support this agenda when investigating power and hierarchy in gender relations of different times and places. By synthesizing these approaches, we aimed to illuminate the limitations of traditional gender discourses in history education and propose more inclusive frameworks for future curriculum development.

Methods of Inquiry

The research methods within this study align with a rich tradition of research examining the role of textbooks, standards, and education policies in shaping discourse in education (Abowitz & Harnish, 2006; Fleming, 1987; Leonardo, 2003; Lucy, et al., 2020; Schocker &

Woyshner, 2013; Siebert, 2020). These prior studies employed discourse and content analysis to shed light on how narratives concerning race, gender, ethnicity, and key historical and civic concepts are perpetuated in curricular texts. Similar methodologies have been deployed in research on women's representation in various social studies curriculum (Chick & Corle, 2016; Clark et al., 2004; Engebretson, 2014; Roberts & Butler, 2012; Shelburne, 2022; Winslow, 2013). The central methods of data collection and analysis within these studies included identification of the number of women in texts and an unpacking, often through a feminist lens, of how language “hangs together” to reinforce/challenge gender discourse (Gee, 1990). This study extends this tradition, examining women's representation in the *RLH* educative curriculum.

In this qualitative investigation, we applied both content and critical discourse analysis to the *RLH* world history lesson materials. Elements of content analysis were adopted (Marshall & Rossman, 2016), where specific language units (e.g., named women) are tallied to evaluate women's representation. Language units (e.g., a word, phrase, or passage) were assessed in the context of the whole lesson and in relation to their role in contemporary gender constructions (e.g., descriptions of women leaders like Cleopatra). The synthesized theoretical frames of women's history scholarship (e.g., use of gender as a category of historical analysis) were used to critically analyze the positioning of women in the curricular discourse of the *RLH* lessons (e.g., incorporation of women's experiences into the central historical investigation).

Our approach to critical discourse analysis was informed by a recognition that knowledge claims possess the power to shape discourse (Foucault, 1975/1995). Language, viewed as a social practice, acquires meanings that are historically and socially situated (Fairclough et al.,

1997; Wodak & Meyer, 2016). The norms of the taken-for-granted world are constructed and maintained through discourse, and non-normative behaviors are penalized (Gee, 1990).

Educational institutions and organizations, as knowledge arbitrators, generate and perpetuate power through normative classroom discourses. The curriculum, including online educative curriculum, become powerful instruments that define legitimate knowledge and either perpetuate or disrupt dominant discourses (Apple, 2004).

Data Collection and Analysis

The *RLH* world history lessons in this study are housed on the DIG website, which is consistently updated with new lessons and materials. The study focused on *RLH* world history lessons available on the website, uploaded prior to October 2022. The study encompasses 53 world history lessons spanning from ancient Egypt to the late twentieth century, categorized by era (ancient, modern, and medieval), with the number of lessons increasing in recent eras. These lessons were the primary data source, and only English language materials were considered.

The literature frequently notes the absence of women in social studies curriculum. This study approached analysis by looking for the presence of women and analyzing how they were represented and positioned. Researchers were inclusive about what constituted presence when locating women in the lessons. For example, images of women in lesson PowerPoints, even when not part of the lesson inquiry, were included in frequencies of women's representation. Data collection included lesson introductions and images on website landing pages, student materials, teacher materials, original source documents, and lesson PowerPoints. For our purposes, data consisted of images, words, phrases, and passages of text. For each lesson the following information was collected: lesson title, lesson CHQ, named men, named women, collective/unnamed references to women (e.g., "wife," "mother," images), and words, phrases,

and passages of text that reference women, gender, or sexuality. Due to the emphasis on source analysis within each lesson, source authors were included under named men and women. We excluded authors from the count of named men and women when gender was indiscernible in student handouts (e.g., gender neutral first names, sources without authors, authors listed by first initial). A handful of lessons attribute authorship; when available the publication date, date of last update, and lesson author were also collected.

The analysis proceeded in two stages. The first stage quantified representation of women in lessons, coding for the number of named men and women and the presence of women’s experiences. Table 1 provides an example of how analysis was used to capture the extent women are represented in all world history lessons. Frequencies were placed in a spreadsheet and used to calculate the Gender Disparity Ratio (GDR) of named women to men in *RLH* world history lessons. GDR is equal to the number of named women divided by the number of named men. Since division by zero is not possible, we replaced any instances where the number of named men is zero with infinity (inf) to ensure that calculations can proceed without errors. In no instance was this necessary. A GDR of one means perfect gender parity, a GDR over one means there are more named women than men, a GDR of less than one means there are more named men than women, and a GDR of zero means there were no named women in lessons.

Table 1

Sample Analysis of Women’s Representation

Lesson	Named Women	Unnamed Women	Named Men	Experiences of women featured
Hammurabi’s Code	0	✓	5	✓
What can we learn about Babylonia from Hammurabi’s Code?		“rights of wives” “his		Use of gender as a category of historical analysis

wife” “status
of women”

e.g., Teacher Materials:
“The codes outline an
inferior social position for
women.”

Descriptive notes were made about the tone and context of language used. Frequencies and GDR were used to indicate the representation of women but were not used to determine whether a lesson featured the experiences of women. A lesson might include only one named woman but position her as central to the historical inquiry. We determined a lesson to feature the experiences of women if the lesson was about a woman/women-centric event, featured women’s perspectives in the source set, highlighted women’s contributions, or used gender as a category for historical analysis.

The second level of analysis addressed the positioning of women in the lessons. Nine lessons were identified as featuring the experiences of women. To identify the power dynamics, present in the discourse around gender in these lessons, the theoretical frames of women’s history scholarship were used (de Groot, 2018; Lerner, 1977; Stryker, 2007; Tetreault, 1986; Yan & Offen, 2018). Lessons were coded for certain frames such as: women-oriented history, the use of gender as a category of historical analysis, the representation of gender as a geographic and historical construction, and a spatial analysis of the intersection of race and gender. In an iterative process we held up these theoretical understandings as a mirror to see the extent of their connection to the data. Researchers deliberated on codes identifying the narratives around gender presented in these lessons and how women were positioned as significant/insignificant historical actors. Table 2 provides an example of the analysis of discursive links between theoretical frames in women’s history scholarship and data from the lessons.

Table 2

Discursive Links Between Theoretical Frames and Lesson Materials

Lesson & CHQ	Sample data	Woman - oriented history	Use of gender as a category of historical analysis	Gender as a geographic and historical construction	Spatial and intersectional analysis
Hammurabi's Code What can we learn about Babylonia from Hammurabi's Code?	Student materials: “What do codes 117, 138, & 141 suggest about the status of women in Babylonian society?”	✓ Materials guide students and teachers to consider the perspective of women when constructing a historical narrative in response to the CHQ.	✓ Materials ask students to consider the relationship between gender and power.	✗	✗

The lessons which did not feature the experiences of women were determined to fall under phase one of the analytical model used by women’s historians: male-defined history, or history that excludes the experiences of women. Researchers discussed how the images, phrases, and words that did reference women in these lessons operated within the framework of male-defined historical narratives.

Additionally, we noted references to women/gender were often cut in modification of original documents for student use. In critiquing this exclusion, we determined whether the cut text could be used to answer the CHQ and discussed the implications of its exclusion on students’ interpretation of the past. Table 3 provides an example of where references to women/gender were cut and researcher use of theoretical frames to analyze the impact of these omissions on the discourse around gender in the history lessons.

Table 3

Sample Analysis of Omitted Text

Lesson & CHQ	Omitted Text	Could the omitted text be used to answer the CHQ?	Impact of omission on students' historical interpretations
Ibn Battuta What was the Muslim world like in the 1320s?	<i>Document A:</i> These men are celibate; the married men have separate convents... Meccan women are extraordinarily beautiful and very pious and modest. They too make great use of perfumes to such a degree that they will spend the night hungry in order to buy perfumes with the price of their food. They visit the mosque every Thursday night, wearing their finest apparel; and the whole sanctuary is saturated with the smell of their perfume.	✓	The omitted text describes gender and sexuality norms in 14 th century Muslim society. The text supports student investigation of differences in gender construction across geography and time.

From collected data, memos, and discussions, the following findings emerged: (1) the majority of lessons present a male-defined history, (2) lessons featuring women inconsistently support historical interpretation through the frames employed by historians of women and gender, and (3) modification of original documents excludes women and limits the use of gender as a category for analysis.

Limitations

While the products from DIG encompass a wide range of resources, including civic online reasoning, U.S. history lessons, assessment tools, and materials for historical inquiry, this study focuses exclusively on the world history lessons. This scope represents a limitation, as a comprehensive analysis of the representation of women and gender in the *RLH* curriculum would require examining its U.S. history lessons as well. Our rationale for this world history focus is threefold: first, while the *RLH* U.S. history lessons have been extensively studied (Resiman &

Fogo, 2016), world history remains under-researched (Bain & Harris, 2009; Crocco, 2011; Girard & Harris, 2018; Harris & Bain, 2011). Second, world history inherently grapples with global diversity and complexity, offering unique opportunities to explore marginalized voices, including women's. Third, as former world history / global studies teachers, we recognize the persistent challenges of finding and accessing engaging, high-quality inquiry-based materials, making DIG's world history lessons go-to resources for many teachers and teacher educators.

Positionality

In terms of our positionality as researchers, we lean on King's (2024) argument that positionality statements are most valuable when they crucially reflect on how researchers' perspectives inform the research process rather than focusing on personal identities. While positionality statements that disclose researchers' sexual, racial, and gender identities can be valuable in certain contexts, we intentionally chose to center our professional roles and collaborative process in this statement. This decision aligns with King's (2024) perspective that reflexivity in positionality statements enhances the research process, while performative disclosures risk detracting from the study's purpose. By focusing on our professional experiences as educators and researchers, we aim to avoid performative gestures that might distract from our examination of women and gender in widely used curriculum materials.

As a doctoral student, a full professor, and alumni doctoral student, we brought diverse perspectives shaped by our teaching experiences as world history and global studies educators in Virginia and New York. Now, as teacher educators, we use DIG materials extensively in our work with students. Throughout this study, we held weekly discussions to reflect on theoretical frameworks, data analysis, and findings. These meetings facilitated critical conversations about gender, feminism, and intersectionality, which informed our analysis and revealed how our

professional experiences shaped our interpretations. Given the fact that the lead author kept reminding the professor that he was old, time was spent discussing generational paradigms and differences in our understanding of women and gender as we designed and embarked on the study.

Recognizing the value of DIG as a transformative resource for history education, we approached this study with pedagogical curiosity, aiming to explore how women are represented in this ambitious curriculum. We intentionally adopted a “generous read” of the materials, seeking to identify and assess representations of women, even in ambiguous contexts (e.g., the inclusion of 18 women in the Atatürk lesson). From the outset, we were mindful of the importance of situating ourselves professionally in the genealogy of our field (Boveda & Annamma, 2023). This study constitutes what Nader (1972) terms “studying up”, which for us means critically examining a respected and influential curriculum. Our shared professional identities as educators within patriarchal and heteronormative school cultures underscored the importance of synthesizing a framework that integrates women’s history scholarship with gender studies to interrogate intersectionality and challenge binary narratives. Ultimately, this research highlights the persistent marginalization of women in history education and underscores the potential of *Reading Like a Historian* lessons to advance gender representation meaningfully. By grounding our work in women’s and gender history, we aim to move beyond critique and contribute to the development of more inclusive practices in history education.

Findings

Across the lessons, the content and discourse of teacher and student materials present a male-defined history where women are represented to a limited degree. Where women’s experiences are featured, most lessons present a woman-oriented historical narrative and use

gender as a category of historical analysis. However, few lessons examined the geographic and historical construction of gender or supported intersectional analysis. Finally, even when the central historical question is broad enough to incorporate the experiences of women, editing of original source documents in the lesson materials exclude women and the use of gender as a category of historical analysis. Findings indicate that while a limited number of lessons challenge dominant historical narratives which place study of women and gender on the margins, the majority of lessons reinforce notions that women are insignificant to the study of the past.

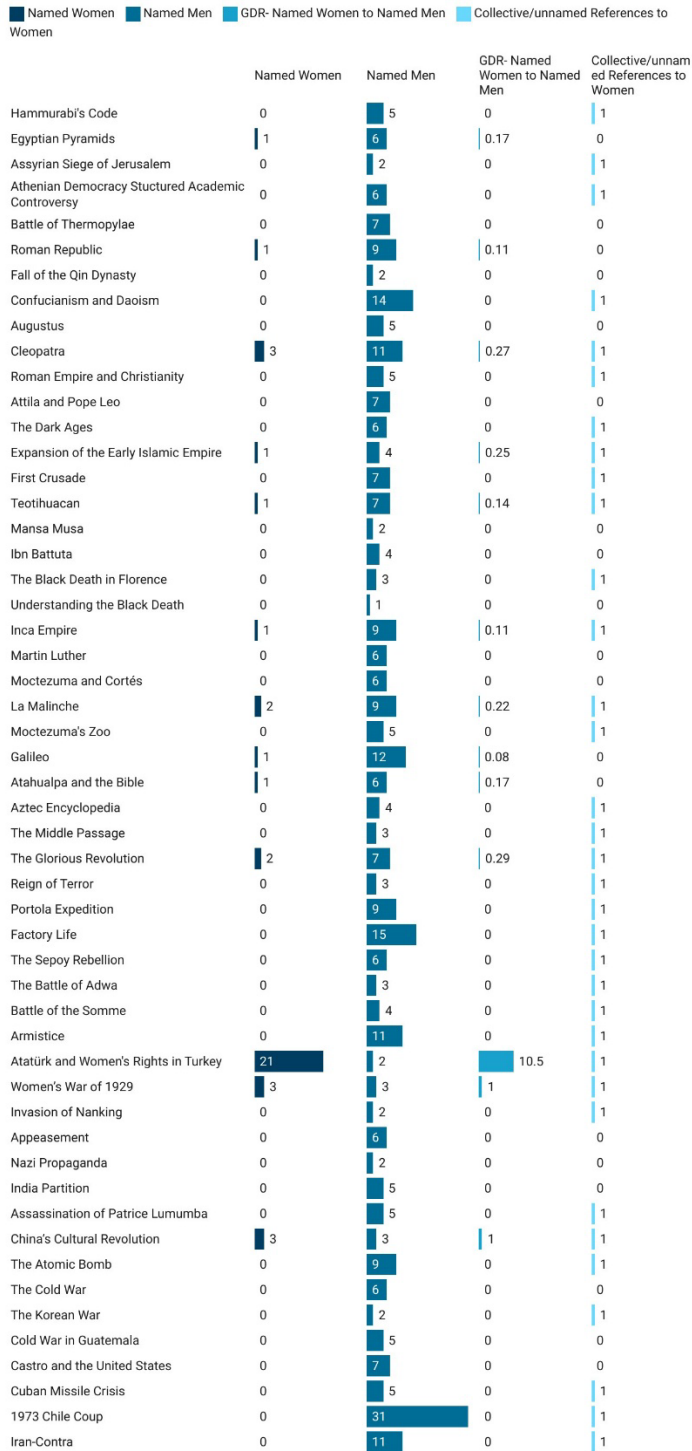
The Majority of Lessons Present a Male-Defined History

Male-defined history represents women as insignificant to the study of the past by excluding women from historical narratives that are constructed along male-defined value systems (Lerner, 1977). Women are underrepresented in the content of the *RLH* world history lessons and are discursively represented as lacking agency as historical actors, thereby undermining their historical significance. When women are mentioned, it is usually in a collective, unnamed capacity, or as symbolic figures, in relation to men, or as victims. Figure 1 presents frequencies of gender representation and Gender Disparity Ratios of named women to named men in *RLH* world history lessons. The presence of women in collective/ unnamed capacities is represented as a value of one and lack of collective/unnamed reference is represented as a value of zero. The GDR of the *Atatürk and Women's Rights in Turkey* lesson is a clear outlier in representation due to a single slide in the lesson PowerPoint depicting 18 women in the Turkish parliament. Only two lessons reach parity in GDR, *China's Cultural Revolution* and *Women's War of 1929* and in 16 lessons women are not represented in either named or unnamed capacities.

Figure 1

Representation of Women in RLH World History Lessons

Representation of Women in RLH World History Lessons



Created with Datawrapper

Out of all the lessons, thirteen include named women in curricular materials. These include historical figures like Cleopatra but also the authors of secondary and primary sources as well as named goddesses. Often, references to "women" and "female" are used generically when referring to large groups, as seen in the *Assyrian Siege of Jerusalem* lesson. Specific terminology like "Citizen women" is used in the *Athenian Democracy* lesson to denote different voting rights. Images of unnamed women also appear frequently in lesson PowerPoints, typically as background figures or accompanying men. Of the 41 named women in lessons, 18 names come from a blurry and out of focus image of women in parliament from the *Atatürk and Women's Rights in Turkey* lesson (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Slide from Atatürk and Women's Rights in Turkey lesson PowerPoint



Women's identities in lessons are often tied to their relationships with men. For instance, in the *Expansion of the Islamic Empire* lesson, a woman warrior is described in relation to her male relatives. Similarly, *Cleopatra's* identity and power in the lesson bearing her name is largely framed in relation to men: “involved with Marc Antony,” “had relationships with both Julius Caesar and Mark Antony,” “descendant of Ptolemy,” and “Caesar establishes Cleopatra as ruler of Egypt.” In many cases, her defeats are attributed to male figures, thus placing the focus away from her and towards the male counterparts. The final discussion question in the teacher materials shifts focus away from Cleopatra to the male figure, Octavian: “Victors write history. What can we learn about Octavian from these stories?” Within the lesson Cleopatra is described as charming and ruthless, a description in contrast with Augustus who is defined by powerful adjectives without reference to charm: “ruthless and forgiving, rash and calculating.” Such representations subtly reinforce stereotypes that women rely on their sexuality to achieve power, suggesting that their political agency is dependent on their relationship with men.

Many women represented in lesson PowerPoints are not real-life historical actors, but religious or symbolic figures. For example, images of woman religious figures from the Christian tradition are present in an image in the *First Crusade* lesson. An image of an Aztec sculpture of the goddess Coatlicue is included in the *Teotihuacan* lesson PowerPoint. The single woman represented in the *Sepoy Rebellion* lesson is not an actual person, but the personification of the virtue “Justice,” also an image in the lesson PowerPoint.

In the context of military history lessons (e.g., *Assyrian Siege of Jerusalem*, *First Crusade*, *Invasion of Nanking*, and *Armistice*), women are often depicted as victims of violence, a position reflecting powerlessness. With few exceptions (e.g., *Expansion of the Islamic Empire*) military forces are portrayed as exclusively male. The experience of women as victims of war is

underexplored and gendered violence in warfare is unexplored. Documents and/or support materials in the lessons on the *Invasion of Nanking* and *Armistice* give some mention of the experiences of women and children as civilian casualties of war. Even when source documents contain content on sexual violence, *RLH* lessons often avoid discussing this sensitive topic. This is seen in the *Invasion of Nanking* lesson where mention of rape is included via Source C, but no guidance for discussion on this matter is provided in teacher materials. The student activities for Document C focus on reliability and corroboration between sources rather than historical interpretation which uses gender as a category of analysis. Similarly, two documents in the lesson on the *Armistice* describe how conditions created by both war and the armistice negatively affected women and children. The inquiry focuses on determining attitudes toward the armistice ending World War I and the student work centers around evidence and corroboration. While students could reference the conditions of women and children as evidence to support attitudes against the war, the teacher materials do not encourage these interpretations.

Lessons Featuring Women Inconsistently Support Historical Interpretation Through the Frames Employed by Historians of Women and Gender

We identified nine lessons as featuring women: *Hammurabi's Code*, *Athenian Democracy*, *Cleopatra*, *La Malinche*, *Aztec Encyclopedia*, *The Battle of Adwa*, *Atatürk and Women's Rights in Turkey*, *Women's Ways of 1929*, and *China's Cultural Revolution*. The discourse around women and gender in these lessons inconsistently aligns with theoretical frames in women's history scholarship. Women-oriented history includes the perspectives of multiple genders when constructing historical narratives. Though sometimes to a minimal degree, the lessons featuring women also presented a women-oriented history by centering a woman historical figure, a women-centric event, or including the contributions/perspectives of

women. However, rarely do the lessons support teacher/student examination of gender as a geographic and historical construction or an intersectional analysis of race and gender. Table 4 shows the alignment between lessons featuring women and the frames used in women’s history scholarship.

Table 4

Discursive Links Between Theoretical Frames of Women’s History and Lessons Featuring Women

Lesson & CHQ	Discursive links between frames and lessons			
	Woman-oriented history	Use of gender as a category of historical analysis	Gender as a geographic and historical construction	Spatial and intersectional analysis
<p>Hammurabi’s Code</p> <p>What can we learn about Babylonia from Hammurabi’s Code?</p>	<p><i>Source C:</i> 138. If a man wishes to separate from his wife who has borne him no children, he shall give her the amount of her purchase money and the dowry which she brought from her father's house and let her go.</p>	<p><i>Student materials:</i> What do codes 117, 138, & 141 suggest about the status of women in Babylonian society?</p>	×	×
<p>Athenian Democracy Structured Academic Controversy</p> <p>Was ancient Athens truly democratic?</p>	<p><i>Source C:</i> Citizen women; Total number of people: 29,000.; Percentage of the population: 12%; Ability to vote: No</p>	<p><i>Student materials:</i> According to the Athenian Constitution, who had the right to vote in Athens?” and “Which groups of Athenians were able to vote? Which groups were not able to vote?</p>	×	×

Cleopatra	A woman historical figure is the focus of historical investigation.	✗	✗	✗
Did Cleopatra die by snakebite?				
La Malinche	<i>Teacher materials:</i> What do historical sources tell us about Malinche’s role in the conquest of Mexico? There are no surviving documents made by Malinche herself, but she appears in multiple historical sources about the conquest.	<i>Student Materials:</i> Vocabulary- Malintzin: name Indigenous people called Malinche; adding “-tzin” in Nahuatl is a way to show respect Tweet in lesson PowerPoint: Spaniard colonization w patriarchy.	✗	✓ <i>Teacher materials:</i> [Students] may argue that she was enslaved by the Spanish, subjected to sexual violence, and had to carry out their orders ...[or that] ...her work as an interpreter came to be respected by the Spanish.
What was La Malinche’s role in the conquest of Mexico?				
Aztec Encyclopedia	<i>Teacher Materials:</i> While it seems that the research assistance and elders were not representative of Aztec society as a whole—for example, women were not included-	<i>Student materials:</i> Who made the document? What were their perspectives, experiences, and knowledge, and how might these have influenced what they wrote?	✗	✗
How reliable is the Florentine Codex for learning about Aztec history and culture?				

<p>The Battle of Adwa</p> <p>How did Ethiopia defeat Italy at the Battle of Adwa?</p>	<p><i>Teacher materials:</i> The other factors mentioned to explain Ethiopia’s victory – namely, the courage and support of the people and the participation of women.</p>	<p>×</p>	<p>×</p>	<p>×</p>
<p>Atatürk and Women's Rights in Turkey</p> <p>Did Atatürk’s reforms actually improve the status of women in Turkey?</p>	<p><i>Document D source note:</i> Sabiha Sertel was a prominent Turkish feminist, writer, journalist, activist, and socialist. She wrote an advice column in her journal <i>Resimli Ay</i> (The Illustrated Monthly). Under the name Cici Anne, or “sweet mother,” she would respond to letters from women asking her views on various subjects.</p>	<p><i>Student materials:</i> Using evidence from these documents, write a paragraph that addresses the question: Did Atatürk’s reforms actually improve the status of women in Turkey?</p>	<p><i>Student materials: 2.</i> According to Atatürk, why had being a good mother always been the most important virtue for Turkish women?</p>	<p>×</p>
<p>Women’s War of 1929</p> <p>What happened at the start of the Women’s War of 1929?</p>	<p><i>Source A:</i> A meeting of women was called and Nwanyeruwa's excited story was told as confirmation of the rumor [that women would be taxed].</p>	<p><i>Source A:</i> From the whole countryside women poured into Oloko and proceeded according to custom to "sit" upon the man who had tried to assess Nwanyeruwa.</p>	<p><i>Teacher materials:</i> This angered Igbo women, many of whom already resented British rule and the fact that the British ignored their traditional roles and</p>	<p><i>Student materials:</i> What do you predict Nwanyoji’s perspective on the Women’s War will be? Why might her perspective differ from Margery Perham’s?</p>

rights in Igbo society.

China's Cultural Revolution	<i>Document C source note:</i> Rae Yang was a young girl in the spring of 1966, when she became a part of the Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.	×	×	×
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Three lessons presented women-oriented history but did not align with any other frames of women's history scholarship: *Cleopatra*, *The Battle of Adwa*, and *China's Cultural Revolution*. The *Cleopatra* lesson is women-oriented because it centers a woman in the historical narrative. However, the lesson's primary focus is on the circumstances of her death and does not actually examine or feature her experiences as a historical actor. The *Battle of Adwa* lesson supports the use of information about the experiences of women to answer the lesson inquiry, "How did Ethiopia defeat Italy at the Battle of Adwa?" In supporting discussion the teacher script states, "The other factors mentioned to explain Ethiopia's victory – namely, the courage and support of the people and the participation of women." Despite the mention of women's contributions, the experiences of men and women in war are not explored through the lens of gender. Finally, *China's Cultural Revolution* presents a women-oriented historical narrative by providing students multiple sources from the perspectives of women to answer the question, "Why did Chinese youth get swept up in the Cultural Revolution?" This lesson again supports

the use of information about women’s experiences to answer the CHQ but does not guide teachers or students towards the use of gender as a category of analysis when creating an historical interpretation.

Of the lessons that do not center women as the main topic of historical inquiry only three lessons guide teachers/students towards the use of gender as a category for historical analysis.

The student materials for the *Hammurabi’s Code* lesson asks, “What do codes 117, 138, & 141 suggest about the status of women in Babylonian society?” as part of their guiding questions.

Teacher materials provide a script to answer the question:

The codes outline an inferior social position for women. Code 117 suggests that men may have been able to sell their wives into forced labor to repay a debt. ...However, the codes also suggest that women had some rights in Babylonian society. ...code 117 limits the amount of time that women might be in servitude as repayment for debt. Both could have been improvements over past practices.

The *Athenian Democracy* lesson employs a Structured Academic Controversy format to address the question, “Was ancient Athens truly democratic?” In this process, students analyze a chart indicating the percentage of citizen women in Athens' population. They are prompted with questions like, “According to the Athenian Constitution, who had the right to vote in Athens?” and “Which groups of Athenians were able to vote? Which groups were not?” Contrary to typical lessons, there is no teacher script provided to guide discussions, suggesting that students are to debate women's voting rights independently. Finally, the *Aztec Encyclopedia* lesson presents a Central Historical Question (CHQ): “How reliable is the Florentine Codex for learning about Aztec history and culture?” The teacher script supports discussion of the missing perspectives of women, "...it seems that the research assistance and elders were not representative of Aztec society as a whole—for example, women were not included.” Each of these examples highlights the lesser status of women in past societies.

Four lessons center around notable woman historical figures, women's rights, or a woman-centric historical event as the main topic of the historical inquiry: *Cleopatra*, *La Malinche*, *Atatürk and Women's Rights in Turkey*, and *Women's War of 1929*. Outside of the *Cleopatra* lesson, lessons that center around women as central to the historical inquiry align with multiple frames of women's history scholarship.

For example, the *La Malinche* lesson guides teachers and students to use gender as a category of historical analysis and employ spatial and intersectional analysis of race and gender. The CHQ asks, "What was La Malinche's role in the conquest of Mexico?" According to background information in the teacher materials, La Malinche was an indigenous woman who traveled with Cortez and acted as a translator. She is a popular figure of legend in Mexican history and is commonly depicted as a traitor due to her relationship with conquistadors. In this lesson, La Malinche's gendered experience of sexual abuse, slavery, and motherhood is used to introduce the contested history of La Malinche

The lesson on La Malinche begins with a tweet depicting her as a controversial figure due to her relationship with the conquistadors. Subsequent materials encourage students to interrogate the sources of historical information about Malinche, emphasizing her absence in primary documents yet her significant presence in accounts of the conquest. Using gender as an analytical tool, the lesson encourages students to delve deeper into Malinche's portrayal and role in Mexican history.

Students are prompted to critically examine historical sources, including their dates, perspectives, and intended audiences, and compare them to form their understanding of Malinche's role. Sources present her as both a victim in terms of sexual abuse and slavery and a

person of significance. For instance, the lesson guide leads students to consider how Aztecs perceived Malinche through her respectful title, "Malintzin."

The lesson highlights Malinche's agency, facilitating diverse interpretations of her role in the conquest. This is evidenced in the teacher materials that guide class discussion of sources analysis,

Students may have various interpretations of what Malinche's role was in the conquest of Mexico based on this document alone. They may argue that she was enslaved by the Spanish, subjected to sexual violence, and had to carry out their orders, including as an interpreter. Alternatively, they may argue that she was enslaved but through her work as an interpreter came to be respected by the Spanish.

Here the teacher script supports historical investigation that asks questions about the racial and gendered dimensions of cross-cultural encounters during Spanish colonization. The lesson concludes by drawing attention to the lack of sources from Malinche's perspective. The lesson underscores her experience as a woman and as a political figure while promoting discourse on the influence of transnational events on gender relations. However, the lesson falls short in addressing potential sexist biases introduced in the introductory tweets concerning women's sexual relationships. Despite this oversight, the La Malinche lesson aligns with ongoing work by historians of women and gender, focusing on women's experiences in historical events.

The *Atatürk and Women's Rights in Turkey* lesson specifically focuses on women's rights and asks, "Did Atatürk's reforms actually improve the status of women in Turkey?" The gendered experiences of women are central to the lesson inquiry, as sources explore the lives and perspectives of women. Source D gives detailed background of author Sabiha Sertel, informing students she was a prominent Turkish feminist, writer, journalist, socialist, and activist. Additionally, student materials encourage students to consider gender as a geographic and historical construction. For example, the question, "According to Atatürk, why had being a good

mother always been the most important virtue for Turkish women?" guides students towards critically examining gender norms as part of their primary source analysis.

Notably, despite the representation of women in the lesson, there is a gender imbalance in the primary source documents provided for student analysis. Three out of five sources originate from male authors. Moreover, the title of the lesson is anchored on the male figure of Atatürk, also known as "Father Turk." The lesson, while focusing on women's rights, limits its exploration to a specific area of women's political participation—the right to vote and hold public office, thereby presenting a somewhat restricted view of women's involvement in politics.

The *Women's War of 1929* fully aligns with the theoretical frames of women's history scholarship. The lesson poses the question, "What happened at the start of the Women's War of 1929?" The teacher's guide reveals that thousands of Nigerian women protested a proposed tax on Igbo women. Students examine documents from two women: Margery Perham, a British historian who documented colonial Nigeria, and Nwanyoji, a protester. Students are tasked with evaluating the document reliability and explaining discrepancies between sources. The background materials and sources represent women as active participants, explores gender roles, and discusses gender-specific forms of protest. For example, one source describes how women, coming from all over the countryside, enacted a customary protest by "sitting" upon the man who proposed the tax assessment on Nwanyeruwa. A supporting question in the student materials is designed to probe Nwanyoji's perspective on the Women's War and how her viewpoint may differ from Perham's. However, the instructional guide orientates the discussion towards Perham's British heritage, rather than her gender identity, with the rationale that Perham's interest in African history, particularly the British colony of Nigeria, explains her perspective.

Modification of Original Documents Excludes Women and Limits the Use of Gender as a Category for Analysis

In our analysis of *RLH* world history lessons, we observed several issues around how women are (not) included and discursively represented. These representational deficiencies are further exacerbated within lessons where source materials are modified for student use. In nineteen of the *RLH* lessons, references to women were omitted from the original documents prepared for student use, thereby limiting the use of gender as a lens for historical analysis. Similarly, in two other lessons, language that could help analyze masculinity was also excluded.

For instance, in the lesson focused on the leadership of *Augustus*, the original documents make numerous references to the role of women in Roman religion, citing deities and priestesses. However, in the student-version of these texts, these mentions are absent. Likewise, in the lesson on *Ibn Battuta*, the original source materials provide insights into gendered practices and perceptions in the 14th-century Muslim world: For example, "These men are celibate; the married men have separate convents" and "The Meccan women are extraordinarily beautiful and very pious and modest." The student materials exclude these references, limiting the possibility of student exploration of gender and sexuality and the experiences of women.

While the *Cleopatra* lesson provides sources, such as Michelangelo's sketch of Cleopatra, an excerpt about Cleopatra written by Shakespeare, and writings by historians Plutarch and Dio, that together could serve as an entry point to inquire into how Cleopatra's gender and sexuality are depicted in relation to her status, agency, and power, the lesson instead asks the question: "Did Cleopatra die by snakebite?" Interestingly the modification of Plutarch's sensual descriptions of Cleopatra found in the original document, "She was lying on a mean pallet-bed, clad only in her tunic", are cut from the student versions. Such edits censoring sensual

descriptions of Cleopatra and concentrating the historical question on the cause of her death serve to dilute the potential for exploring gendered depictions of Cleopatra and their significance.

The *First Crusade* lesson asks students to compare Christian and Muslim perspectives to answer the question, “What happened when Crusaders entered Jerusalem during the First Crusade?” In teacher and student materials women are mentioned in an unnamed capacity and described as victims, “neither women nor children were spared.” However, women are present as active participants in warfare in the original sources student documents draw from. In the original account from Raymond d'Aguiliers, women are mentioned as both civilians and combatants present at the battle, “One incident must not be omitted. Two women tried to bewitch one of the hurling machines, but a stone struck and crushed them, as well as three slaves, so that their lives were extinguished, and the evil incantations averted.” Omission of this reference to women warriors perpetuates a discourse that denies women agency in historical narratives about warfare.

A key passage about the role of women in the Muslim League was cut from the modified source from Muhammad Ali Jinnah in the *Indian Partition* lesson. In the inquiry, students are asked, “Was the partition of India a good plan given what people knew at the time?” The original source from Muhammad Ali Jinnah contains a lengthy passage about the importance of a committee of women. The inclusion of the passage could have provided additional material for close reading and contextualization questions while expanding the historical narrative. While this question may not be directly related to the central question, it does provide information about the political activities of Muslim women in 1940s India. Women worked to enlist other women in the Muslim League, and they organized propaganda campaigns to promote political consciousness in women.

A modified version of Winston Churchill's speech to the House of Commons is part of the lesson on *Appeasement*. Once again, the original documents enrich the historical context and provide more to the story. During this speech in the House of Commons, Churchill engages with Viscountess Astor. Churchill begins by stating the Munich Agreement is a defeat for both Great Britain and France. To which Viscountess Astor replies, "Nonsense." At another point, Astor calls Churchill rude and he responds stating, "she must very recently have been receiving her finishing course in manners." The teacher materials did not provide any additional information. Students do not need the story of Nancy Astor to answer the central question, "Was appeasement the right policy for England in 1938?" However, she did support Chamberlain's policy and voiced early opposition to the war. Additionally, Churchill's retort about manners and a finishing course illustrates views about women in politics.

In two lessons references to beliefs about masculinity and the sexual practices of men are omitted from modified student documents. In the original source document, from the *Battle of the Somme* lesson, soldiers are described as entering battle "in the true spirit of a sane and cheerful manliness." In the *Understanding the Black Death* lesson, an original source document states, "men must preserve chastity as they value their lives", linking sexual behavior to health outcomes. Such exclusions halt inquiry into how gender and sexuality function across time and culture.

Women and their experiences are excluded from the historical thinking activities *RLH* world history lessons facilitate. Except for a handful of lessons, teachers and students are not encouraged to consider gender when interpreting past events. Where women are present, they are not presented as figures with historical significance. A factor compounded by the modification of original documents for student use.

Discussion

This study examined the representation of women in the *RLH* world history curriculum. We asked: (1) How are women and their experiences represented in the content and discourse of *RLH* world history lesson materials? and (2) How do *RLH* world history lesson materials challenge or reinforce existing cultural assumptions about women/gender in history? Our analysis of 53 world history *RLH* lessons found women to be underrepresented, framed as less significant than males, and sidelined through editing of original documents, guidance provided in lesson materials, and focus of CHQs. These findings reveal that the marginalization of women in history curriculum remains an enduring problem and the gap between secondary education curriculum materials and women's history scholarship persists.

Taken as a whole, *RLH* world history lessons predominantly reflect phase one of Lerner's framework: male-defined history where women exist in the margins as wives, mothers, symbols, and passive figures. Consistent with literature, women's participation in political and military events is a largely unexplored narrative (Bennett & Williams, 2014; Chick & Corle, 2016; Engebretson, 2014; Schmidt, 2012; Woyshner, 2002, 2006). Other frames employed by historians of women and gender are absent. The *RLH* world history lessons frequently center inquiry around cross-cultural encounters between groups across geographic regions, but lessons rarely support teachers and students' intersectional analysis of the racial and gendered dimensions of these interactions. Additionally, *RLH* lessons avoid addressing sexuality. References to heterosexuality—whether of men or women—are edited out/omitted from original documents when they are modified for student use and there is no representation of Queer sexuality. No people are identified/represented as Queer in lesson documents or accompanying

background information. This finding is consistent with previous studies that highlight the absence of Queer representation in the social studies (Schmidt, 2010; Thornton, 2003).

As discussed in the theoretical framework, the long tradition of binary framing of gender in history scholarship and education reproduces itself and persists in the discourse of school curricula. This binary was reinforced by the materials analyzed, where no individuals are represented as Queer, transgender or non-binary. Eisner (1985) conceptualized such exclusions as the null curriculum or “the options students are not afforded, the perspectives they may never know about, much less be able to use, the concepts and skills that are not part of their intellectual repertoire” (p. 107). In this case, the null curriculum teaches that women, gender identity, and sexuality are topics of irrelevance to understanding the past. The lessons analyzed represent gender solely in binary terms, depicting individuals as either “man” or “woman.” These findings suggest that even reformist curricula are not immune to the taboos around sex and gender which fuel the ongoing backlash towards trans and gender-diverse individuals.¹¹

We contend, it is important that history education equips students to understand how social constructs, including gender, evolve over time. History education has the capacity to lay the conceptual groundwork for this understanding by helping students understand themselves and their social institutions as existing in the continuum of time (Jeismann 1979, as cited in Thorp, 2017, p.7). The integration of gender as a category of analysis in our history classrooms provides students the opportunity to understand that just as governmental and economic systems change over time, so do the rules around gender. The first step is to intentionally include women

¹¹ At the time of this study’s revision, a series of alarmist executive orders were issued by the United States government targeting trans-people (Exec. Order No. 14168, 2025; Exec. Order No. 14183, 2025; Exec. Order No. 14187, 2025; Exec. Order, No. 14190, 2025).

in history lessons, but it is not enough to simply “add women and stir.” Reckoning with gender as a social institution requires addressing its role as a mechanism of control. As Stryker (2007) noted, and as we are seeing in our current moment, gender operates as a means of control “when some loss of gender status is threatened, or when claims of gender are denied” (p. 61).

Within lessons that did include content about women opportunities to highlight the experience of women and unpack gendered perspectives were missed or overlooked. For example, the opportunity to inquire into how sexist notions of women’s leadership have shaped Cleopatra’s depiction across time is missed in favor of a discussion of the accuracy of historical narratives recorded many years after the events occurred. While the importance of analyzing sources for authors' perspectives is a signature strategy within *RLH* lessons, it is noteworthy that the *Women’s War of 1929* lesson fails to engage students in analyzing how historian Margery Perham’s gender identity might impact her work. In the *First Crusade* lesson the potential for intersectional analysis of Western gender norms is lost due to text edits made to the original document. In the *Invasion of Nanking* lesson, the use of rape as a weapon of war is presented as significant not necessarily as an example of gender-based violence but rather as an event to be used as a piece of evidence when evaluating the accuracy of differing historical accounts. In these examples, interpreting/modifying sources using the frames women’s history would reposition women and gender as important to the study of the past.

Interestingly, the *La Malinche* lesson serves as a significant outlier, in terms of its emphasis on spatial analysis to examine difficult historical topics such as sexual violence, native complicity in colonization, and sexism in historical representation. This lesson is a case example of how the theoretical frames used by historians of women and gender can align with the

historical thinking work scaffolded by the *RLH* lessons. The stark contrast between this lesson and others raises important questions regarding the author of this lesson's knowledge of women's history and agency in emphasizing gender in contrast to other authors: To what extent do the authors of *RLH* lessons have the freedom to explore divisive issues? What does the lack of women reveal about the priorities of lesson authors? Such questions are challenging to answer as the majority of lessons do not attribute authorship. Further research should extend this study to DIG's U.S. History resources to determine if similar patterns regarding the representation of women exist there or if it is a unique issue within the world history section.

The *RLH* lessons as an educative curriculum are in and of themselves a product of research on the nature of historical thinking that sought to challenge teaching history through the non-critical chronicling of the past. The internet provided the portal for these important educative materials to be shared freely at multiple scales. DIG educative resources perpetuate a version of historical thinking which has become the desired or aspirational pedagogical ideals for many educators. However, this lens appears to present the "historian" as a singular, normative figure, rather than reflecting the diversity of perspectives within the field. All historians employ source analysis and corroborate between different accounts, however in emphasizing specific aspects of historical thinking and letting them drive the inquiries presented by DIG the theoretical commitments and intertextual reading that are a part of a historian's thinking are lost.

Wineburg developed the historical thinking skills used in the *RLH* curriculum based on empirical research investigating the cognitions of historians during the 1990s. Examining how this research was interpreted when developing DIG's historical thinking pedagogy may help explain the gap between women's history scholarship and the *RLH* world history lessons.

Wineburg (1998) investigated how historians with different background knowledge read

historical texts. This study reinforced his (1991) findings that historians use the following heuristics when interpreting documents: corroboration, sourcing, and contextualization. These heuristics became foundational to DIG's historical thinking skills. Wineburg (1998) positioned these historical thinking skills in relation to other research, including Leinhardt and Young's (1996) work, which offers a broader model of historical thinking.

Leinhardt and Young (1996)'s model of historical thinking includes a separate "interpret" process which incorporates the textual and historical reads of historians. This approach is particularly relevant to this study's analysis of the representation of women and gender in the *RLH* world history lessons. They asserted that historians draw on disciplinary context when constructing interpretations based on larger theoretical frameworks. They described the influence of this thinking on historical accounts:

[the] historical read invokes the interpretive stance assumed by historians, which includes their global sense of historical purpose and their theory of history. Different historians have different notions of the purpose of history... Different historians also have different theoretical positions. For example, a Marxist historian, a feminist historian, and an economic historian, each constructing explanatory narratives of the same series of events, would emphasize different aspects (p.449).

The historical read recognizes that the perspective from which the historian structures their inquiry— influenced by their purpose for history and theoretical stances— shapes their creation of a historical account. For example, as this study illustrates, when reading historical documents historians of women's history employ different theoretical frameworks for analysis to create a historical account than those employed by most *RLH* world history lesson authors. The historical read extends to teachers; Apaolaza-Llorente et al. (2023) found that teachers who define themselves as "very feminist" integrate critical gendered analysis into the curriculum while the curriculums of middling or non-feminist teachers fall into the compensatory and contributory phases of women's history instruction.

While recognizing the power of Leinhardt and Young's scholarship, Wineburg (1998) foregrounded the thinking tasks of sourcing, contextualization, and corroboration, perhaps to create a definition of historical thinking which does not take the background knowledge of students for granted. Wineburg (1998) offered the following commentary on Leinhardt and Young (1996), "however, when asked to step out of their specialization and read a document they had never seen, historians relied on more general problem-solving strategies, such as those identified in the study by Wineburg (1991)" (p.323). Due to *RLH*'s focus on reading primary sources and because students are not involved in the development of the central historical question or the selection of documents/document text—students do not perform the mental process of the historical read in *RLH* lessons. Instead, students piece together arguments aligned with the historical account created by the lesson author through their staging of the central historical question, selection and modification of sources, and provision of guiding questions. While this approach is practical, and many would argue necessary given the constraints of classroom time and resources, it also reflects the limitations of current historical thinking curricula. The findings of this study, which reveal an underrepresentation of women and a gap between DIG's world history resources and the methodologies employed by historians of women and gender, illuminates the importance of unpacking how historical thinking pedagogy incorporates or could incorporate more diverse perspectives.

Though they investigated the same phenomenon (the cognitive processes of historians when reading texts) Wineburg and Leinhardt and Young drew different conclusions about the implications of their research for history education. Wineburg advanced ideas for historical thinking heuristics that can be used by students with little background knowledge. Leinhardt and Young posited students should participate in the selection of inquiry topics, identification of

sources, and reading across texts which are “vibrant, positioned...and have a clear historical voice and stance” (1996, p. 480). Through its focus on the “general problem-solving strategies” of historians, the *RLH* historical thinking pedagogy de-emphasizes the ideological nature of historical interpretation. The views of Wineburg presented here are nearly thirty years old. We are optimistic about the recent work of scholars— including those involved in *RLH*— who have built from Wineburg’s work to address this gap with the creation of curriculum materials about Historiography-Based Inquiry (Marczyk et al., 2022; Marczyk et al., 2024). The findings of this study underscore the importance of these scholars’ ongoing work and its impact on the creation of future educative resources.

Although the *RLH* curriculum encourages critical reflection on history, it struggles to extend this critical lens to the representation of women within their world history resources. Despite some availability of historical content about women, the emphasis on making historical thinking skills accessible to learners appears to have come at the expense of including the experiences of women as a central point of the historical inquiry. Rather it seems that decisions to build resources with broad appeal may have led to the development of palatable, sanctioned, safe, sanitized—and male-oriented— choices in the content and direction of historical inquiries.

As social studies teachers and teacher-educators we contend it is important to consider how failing to discuss the historical construction of gender – as well as race, class, ethnicity– in the classroom limits students’ ways of thinking about the past, present, and future. We agree with Schmeichel (2014) when she argued, “attention to women in social studies cannot work towards equity as long as it is characterized by a shifting away from the troubling and potentially difficult explorations of systemic processes that shape gender relationships in asymmetrical ways” (p.247). Guidelines for pedagogical approaches to reducing gender-based violence emphasize

the importance of understanding this violence as a social issue and not an individual event (Lange & Young, 2019). Providing historical context for assumptions about gender and sexuality is an important step in young people's understanding of gender-based oppression (Engebretson, 2013). The emphasis on military history in *RLH* world history materials presents an opportunity to investigate gender-based violence in warfare, aligning with current frames in women's history scholarship which emphasize the racial and gendered dimension of transnational encounters. However, such a discussion appears to have been set aside in favor of more comfortable questions about narrative details and differences in national accounts.

We recognize the complex ideological issues that come with enacting curriculum that address hard histories. The DIG educative curriculum makes choices to increase its accessibility to teachers and students. But what are the consequences of these choices? As the NCSS (2021) contended, "It is important for *all* social studies educators to use their pedagogical knowledge, professional judgment, legal mandates, and classroom experience when teaching in the classroom." While it is important for materials to be accessible, it is also important for designers of educative curriculum materials to include content from different perspective and not ignore or reduce the histories of women and other groups. Understanding these frameworks is part of understanding the essence of history. Teaching one history, through the paradigm of male experience, versus histories which consider history through the ways of being of multiple identities, creates a historical master narrative (Jenkins, 1991). If lesson inquiries are formulated using male paradigms of historical thought and are scaffolded by teacher/student materials where women and gendered analysis is largely absent, these lessons instead serve to reinforce narratives that place women in subordinate positions in society. Examination of the representation of

women in educative curriculums like DIG's *RLH* lessons is an important component in understanding how women's history is currently taught in secondary schools.

Implications

The *RLH* curriculum's focus on pre-designed historical questions and curated source sets is both a strength and a limitation. These materials offer an invaluable resource for teachers who may lack the time, training, or confidence to create inquiry-based lessons. However, this reliance may also constrain opportunities for students to engage in developing their own questions and selecting documents, potentially presenting inquiry as a formulaic process rather than a dynamic act of historical thinking. At the same time, the challenges teachers face in designing inquiry-based lessons cannot be overlooked (Thacker, et al., 2018; van Hover, et al., 2021). DIG materials provide accessible entry points for implementing inquiry in classrooms that might otherwise prioritize content memorization over critical thinking (van Hover et al., 2012). Rather than dismissing these materials, it is critical to both appreciate the value of *RLH* world history lessons and explore ways to adapt them to offer perspectives that promote the representation of more diverse voices. Recognizing the strengths and limitations of *RLH* world history lessons provides an opportunity to explore practical implications of this study for teachers, teacher educators, and curriculum developers.

Teaching

For classroom history teachers, this study highlights the importance of adopting a critical lens when using pre-designed curricular materials like *RLH*. Teachers can extend these lessons to include additional sources that represent women and non-binary individuals, challenging

traditional narratives and fostering a more inclusive approach to history. For example, they might:

- Incorporate primary sources that foreground diverse perspectives, such as writings by women, Queer individuals, and people of color.
- Frame historical questions that invite students to analyze power structures and interrogate whose voices are included or excluded.
- Use collaborative activities, such as historiographical debates or document-based inquiries, to help students uncover the complexities of gender and identity in history.

Teachers could also revisit original source materials, discussing source restoration to include more sophisticated gender representations. Additionally, emerging digital archives and online platforms provide valuable opportunities to extend and enrich the RLH curriculum, making it more inclusive and intersectional.¹²

Teacher Education

Teacher educators play a pivotal role in preparing preservice teachers to navigate the complexities of teaching history through an inclusive lens. This study's methods and findings can guide teacher educators in using DIG materials to model their current use, critically examine them, and adapt them to address issues of gender and intersectionality. Specifically, teacher educators can:

- Guide teachers in understanding the aims of *RLH* lessons and the rationale behind their design.

¹² E.g., the “Speaking While Female” online speech archive (<https://speakingwhilefemale.co/>) and PBS’ map of Gender-Diverse Cultures (https://www.pbs.org/independentlens/content/two-spirits_map-html/)

- Introduce critical frameworks and analytical criteria tools to evaluate and modify curriculum materials.
- Emphasize the importance of historiography in teacher preparation. For example, the process of analyzing lessons in this study can itself be mirrored as a pedagogical strategy, helping preservice teachers learn to critically examine historical narratives and engage students in these practices. This approach could complement existing efforts in discipline-specific methods programs.
- Facilitate discussions on the representation of marginalized groups in history curricula and other resources, helping preservice teachers identify gaps and develop strategies to address them.

Curriculum Development and the Historiographical Eye

An emerging insight from this study is the need for a “historiographical eye” as a pedagogical tool. The historiographical eye is essential to teaching about the nature of history and offers a valuable approach to teaching how historical narratives are constructed, whose voices are prioritized, and how power shapes history. Integrating this perspective into curriculum development and classroom teaching can enrich how history is taught and learned. For example:

- Curriculum developers on such initiatives as the *RLH* project could integrate historiographical analysis as a core element of lesson design, providing opportunities for students to critically examine and reconstruct historical narratives. This approach would deepen students’ engagement with the interpretive nature of history.
- DIG could collaborate with educators and historians through sustained partnerships to develop lessons that address gender and intersectionality. These efforts could revisit and

adapt existing templates to create more inclusive historical narratives while preserving the strengths of the current framework.

Taken together these implications recognize the importance and value of the social studies community collaborating as curriculum designers to expand curriculum libraries and develop lessons that intentionally incorporate diverse and intersectional perspectives. For teacher educators, this means fostering a critical awareness of curriculum design and leveraging high-quality online resources, such as DIG's *Reading Like a Historian* (RLH) curriculum, to develop model lessons that challenge traditional narratives. For classroom teachers, it means engaging students in inquiries that address the complexities of gender, power, and identity in history. These collective efforts can contribute to a history education that reflects the diversity of human experiences while empowering students and teachers to think critically about the past and its connection to the present.

Conclusion

As noted in our introduction, Cherryholmes (1982) reminded us that “criticism is needed to disclose and peel back the layers of values and commitment embedded in interpretations and explanations... Social Studies materials based on the product of an unreflective social science tend to reinforce and reproduce those values” (p. 61-62). Similarly, Wineburg's (2012-13) critique of Howard Zinn's *A People's History of the United States* clearly recognized the value of criticism and reflection on established resources and the danger of seeing history as static narrative:

History as truth, issued from the left or from the right, abhors shades of gray... Such a history atrophies our tolerance for complexity. It makes us allergic to exceptions to the rule. Worst of all, it depletes the moral courage we need to revise our beliefs in the face

of new evidence. It ensures, ultimately, that tomorrow we will think exactly as we thought yesterday—and the day before, and the day before that. Is that what we want for our students (p. 34)?

DIG's *RLH* educative resources, like other online educative curricula, continue to grow with the addition of new inquiries. As resources continue to be developed, our analysis highlights the potential benefits of revisiting and revising what has been built. The American Historical Associations argues that historical questions matter (Barringer et al., 2023); do the current inquiry questions create a space for students to engage in significant inquiries that involve developing an informed and disciplined approach to understanding history and the past?

Revisioning could well begin by reworking and moving beyond such question as: “Did Cleopatra die by snakebite?” and “How many Persians were at the Battle of Thermopylae?” As we consider such revisioning, we must ask ourselves: do our current choices when designing inquiries create a history that atrophies or amplifies our tolerance for complexity? How can we build inquiries that are informed by a diversity historical thought to prepare students to see the same thing and come to different conclusions as they enter the contested space that is historical “truth”?

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**“It made me look at history teaching in a different way” Preservice and novice teachers’
experiences using the Question Formulation Technique for historical inquiry**

Sara Evers^{a*}

^a School of Education, Virginia Tech, Blacksburg, Virginia, U.S.A

*1226 Howbert Ave SW, Roanoke, Virginia, 24015; (703) 217-4219; saralevers@vt.edu

Abstract

This study uses qualitative research methods to investigate preservice and novice teachers use of an instructional strategy, the Question Formulation Technique (QFT), for facilitating student-driven historical inquiry. Data was derived from semi-structured interviews, observation, course assignments, and classroom materials produced by study participants. Using the framework of “curriculum in use” this study illuminates teacher beliefs about historical inquiry, pedagogical choices, and the potential of the QFT to foster inferential and inquiry-based history instruction. Findings highlight how participants aligned the QFT with their instructional goals regarding student engagement, formative assessment, and historical thinking. Participants adapted the technique according to the constraints of their school contexts, at times limiting the QFT’s use for historical inquiry. However, their classroom experience of the QFT, coupled with the training and mentorship, informed participants’ perception of the QFT as a portal to student-driven historical inquiry.

Keywords: historical inquiry, pedagogical decision making, teacher education

Inquiry is at the forefront of social studies pedagogical discourse in our current moment. As seen in *Social Education*'s regular columns, The C3 Framework and the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) are gaining prominence. These columns are one feature in The National Council for the Social Studies' incorporation of inquiry into its vision for social studies education (Waring, 2023). This discourse represents a rising current within social studies education, leading teachers to grapple with how to implement inquiry effectively in the classroom. As Performance-Based Assessments (PBAs) emerge as alternatives to traditional multiple-choice exams, many educators are seeking strategies to facilitate deep historical thinking. Inquiry as a method is not new; throughout the 20th century, reformers advocated for the source method as foundational for historical understanding (Evans, 2006, 2011; Fling, 1900). Research and theory on student learning in history positions inquiry-based instruction as vital to students' development of historical knowledge (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Brush & Saye, 2014; Evans, 2011; Grant et al., 2017; Seixas, 1993). However, research shows that many teachers struggle to implement it effectively in their classrooms (Dack & Triplett, 2020; van Hover & Yeager, 2004; Martell, 2013; Martell 2020; Neumann, 2021; Wilson et al., 1994). This difficulty stems from a combination of internal and contextual constraints, including teachers' beliefs about history education, the pressure to cover extensive content, and the increasing politicization of inquiry-based learning as a perceived gateway to controversial or "divisive" content.

This study investigates the experiences of preservice and novice teachers as they implement the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) to facilitate student-driven historical inquiry. The QFT, initially developed by the Right Question Institute (RQI) for democratic participation within community groups, has been adapted for educational use as a structured approach to question generation. It provides a scaffolded framework for students to develop

meaningful historical questions, enhancing engagement and deepening inquiry (Right Question Institute, n.d.). During the QFT protocol, participants are guided in the process of developing significant questions in response to a prompting image, text, or other piece of media known as a “Question Focus” (Q-Focus). The protocol includes the following steps:

- (1) Present Q-Focus;
- (2) Produce your questions using the following rules: ask as many questions as you can, do not stop to discuss, judge, or answer, record exactly as stated, change statements into questions;
- (3) Improve your questions: categorize as Closed- (answer with “yes”, “no”, or one word) and Open-ended (require longer explanation), and change questions from one type to another
- (4) Strategize: prioritize which questions to answer, create an action plan or discuss next steps, share with group
- (5) Reflect on process (Right Question Institute, n.d.)

The Library of Congress’ (Library) Teaching with Primary Sources’ (TPS) division worked with RQI to incorporate the use of the Library’s archival sources as Q-Foci. The QFT typically takes 20 minutes of instructional time, an important consideration in content-laden history courses.

The QFT’s brevity and scaffolds for student questioning suggest its potential to make historical inquiry accessible to teachers and students.

Recent partnerships between RQI and the Library of Congress have explored the potential of integrating the QFT with primary source analysis, yet little research has examined its application in history education specifically. Hughes and Heckart (2023) published a practitioner focused article showcasing the use of the QFT in a third-grade history classroom and Hicks

(2023) reported on the use of TPS-RQI educative online modules to prepare students to teach difficult histories. Empirical research examining the effects of the Question Formulation Technique (QFT) on student learning in other disciplines indicates its positive impact on student engagement, creativity, and collaboration (Al-Olimat, 2022; Clark et al., 2019; Norsyazwani & Noor, 2021; Ševa & Ivana, 2023; Summers et al., 2024).

This study aims to fill this gap by examining how preservice and novice history teachers learn to use and use the QFT in their classrooms. Given the significant role teachers play in determining both the content and the pedagogy of history instruction (Apple, 1992; Ball & Cohen, 1996; Thornton, 1989), understanding their experiences with the QFT provides insight into how inquiry-based instruction is negotiated within the realities of teaching. Teacher education programs emphasize the importance of historical inquiry, but practical constraints—such as heavy instructional loads, high-stakes testing, and diverse student needs—often shape how teachers adapt and implement these methods (Long, 2006; van Hover & Yeager, 2004).

This study is guided by the following research questions:

1. How do preservice and novice history teachers integrate the QFT into their instructional decision-making, and what factors shape this process?
2. How do preservice and novice teachers explain the use of the QFT in relation to their conception of teaching history?

By foregrounding teachers' perceptions and experiences, this research explores both the affordances of the QFT for facilitating student-driven inquiry and the social and institutional factors influencing its implementation. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on history education by providing empirical evidence on how inquiry-based strategies are

adapted in practice, bridging the gap between theoretical advocacy for historical inquiry and the realities of classroom teaching.

Literature Review

This literature review consists of two parts. To frame the QFT as an instructional strategy which may support historical inquiry, I first review how historical inquiry and student question asking are discussed in the literature. Next, I review previous research investigating teachers' pedagogical decision making when implementing history instruction.

Historical inquiry and student question asking

Historically, inquiry has been integral to efforts to instruct students in the disciplinary methods of historians (Evans, 2011). Blevins et al. (2020) describe historical inquiry as “a way for students to begin to construct their own interpretations and understanding of past events through the reading and interpretation of primary and secondary sources” (p.36). This definition emphasizes student activity and the role of source work in creating historical accounts. In contrast to traditional history education, where teachers transmit a single historical narrative about a long span of history, an inquiry-based approach develops student understanding of history as a series of complex arguments about the past (Seixas, 1993). Inquiry makes the process of knowledge creation more transparent and supports students' conception of history as inferential.

Scholars of history education argue that student question formulation is fundamental to student learning (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Hicks et al., 2012). Pedagogical works about teaching history connect questioning to the procedural thinking of historians, arguing that question asking is foundational to student understanding of the nature of historical evidence and “doing history”

(Foster & Pagett, 1999; Lévesque, 2008; Seixas and Morton, 2013; VanSledright, 2011). Sources like documents and artifacts do not inherently constitute evidence but become evidence when a question is asked of them. Thus, question asking is central to the interpretive nature of knowledge construction in history as more than one historical interpretation will arise from a piece of evidence depending on the questions being asked by the historian. Historical inquiry combines question asking with source selection and analysis, claim making, and construction of historical accounts.

A variety of pedagogical methods and frameworks have emerged to support historical inquiry in the classroom. Problem-Based Historical Inquiry applies ideas about creating student centered classrooms using Project-Based Learning to history education (Brush & Saye, 2014; Callahan et al., 2014; Howell & Saye, 2018; Saye & Brush, 2004). Scholars developed the concept of critical historical inquiry (CHI) to harness the potential of inquiry to challenge historical master narratives by encouraging students to ask critical questions about the perspectives of primary and secondary sources (Blevins et. al., 2020; Salinas et al., 2012; Salinas & Blevins, 2014; Salinas et al., 2016; Santiago, 2019). The C3 Framework provides teachers with the Inquiry Design Model (IDM) to help them plan inquiry-based lessons and DIG inquiry-based lesson plans are an important educative resource for teachers. Online repositories from these organizations provide teachers with pre-written inquiries for classroom use (C3 Teachers Hubs, n.d.; Digital Inquiry Group, n.d.).

These methods and frameworks suggest the power of inquiry to center students, disrupt a didactic approach to history education, and include diverse perspectives. However, they inconsistently center students' ability to form the questions used in inquiry activities. In contrast, European frameworks for historical learning— like the German FUER model, the National

Curriculum in England, and van Drie and van Boxtel’s model of historical reasoning— include the ability to frame historical inquiry through question asking as a measure of students’ development of historical knowledge (Department of Education, 2013; Körber, 2015; van Boxtel, & van Drie, 2018). These differences showcase geographic differences in the discourse around historical knowledge and inquiry. The QFT is an important scaffold for student generation of questions and can help incorporate student development of historical questions into inquiry-based instruction in the United States.

This literature posits that students learn history by asking questions and constructing evidence-based claims about the past. However, this conception of historical learning does not always align with how teachers understand historical knowledge or the dominant practices in history education (Evans, 1989).

History Teachers’ Pedagogical Decision Making

While historical inquiry is a major thrust of teacher preparation programs and professional developments (Fichten, 2019; National Council for the Social Studies, n.d.), this education can feel disconnected from the reality of classroom practice (Battey and Franke, 2008; Klein and Riordan, 2009; Meuwissen, 2005; Seixas & Webber, 2014). The literature points to the following influences on history teachers’ pedagogical decision making: teacher knowledge and beliefs about history, educational and cultural background, and contextual constraints.

Wilson & Wineburg (1988) found that the academic background of novice teachers influenced their conceptions of history and instructional approach. Using survey and interview data, Evans (1989) developed typologies to express how teachers’ conceptions of historical knowledge and purpose for history education define their teaching practice. Evans (1990) followed up this study with an investigation of how teachers’ conceptions impact transmitted

curriculum and student experiences. He concluded that student experience aligns with teachers' intentions when educators used explicit strategies to enact their conception of history education. Van Hover and Yeager's (2007) case study found that one teacher's purpose for history instruction, to instill moral values, influenced her decision to employ didactic teaching methods lest her students draw the "wrong" conclusions during inquiry activities.

Additional studies highlight how history teachers' educational and cultural backgrounds impact their pedagogical decision making. Hicks (2005) found teachers' experiences as students impacted their understanding and attitude toward teaching history, leading to a recreation of teaching norms. Salinas and Castro (2010) concluded that preservice Latino male teachers drew from their educational and cultural backgrounds when making pedagogical decisions. These teachers took a constructivist view of history when encouraging students to question traditional historical narratives. Like in Hicks (2005), the experiences of the Latino teachers as students, in this case what did not work for them, shaped the choices they made as teachers.

Studies indicate contextual constraints like lack of mentorship, resistance from colleagues, high-stakes testing, and under-resourcing limits history teachers use of inquiry (Cornbleth, 2001; Hicks, 2005; Monte-Sano et al., 2020; O' Neill, 2008; Salinas & Castro, 2010; Seixas & Webber, 2014; van Hover & Yeagar, 2004). Seixas and Webber (2014) noted that University Supervisors and Cooperating Teachers focus feedback on teaching competencies like classroom management at the expense of disciplinary pedagogy. Teacher's report entrenched, didactic modes of history instruction, enforced by colleges and testing mandates, restrict the amount of instructional time spent on inquiry (Cornbleth, 2001; Hicks, 2005; Monte-Sano et al., 2020; Salinas & Castro, 2010; van Hover & Yeagar, 2004). Additionally, teachers are limited in

their ability to participate in social studies reform efforts which might lead to inquiry by heavy workloads and a lack of substitutes to cover classes (O'Neill, 2008).

Thorton (1989) positioned teachers as curricular-instructional gatekeepers who use their own frames of reference to determine how curriculum is enacted, suggesting teachers have tremendous power to shift the pendulum of history instruction towards the use of inquiry. Despite findings which highlight how teachers' founts of knowledge can lead to classroom innovation (Salinas & Castro, 2010), research investigating teacher adaptation of inquiry-based instruction often center curriculum products as instigators of reform (Fogo et al., 2019; Reisman & Fogo, 2016; Thacker et al., 2017). This study extends research which examines the participatory relationship between teachers and curricular materials during the enactment of history instruction (e.g., Fogo et al., 2019; Reisman & Fogo, 2016). While these studies acknowledge the important role of teacher adaptation of curricular materials, authors analyze teachers' curriculum use in relation to externally defined methods of history instruction, such as pedagogical and subject matter content knowledge and the intentions of curriculum designers. Pedagogical Content Knowledge is a valuable framework for analysis because it helps conceptualize the complex task of transferring subject matter knowledge to classroom instruction within the sociocultural context of the school (Gudmundsdottir & Shulman, 1987; Monte-Sano 2011; Monte-Sano & Budano, 2012). However, critics argue this frame holds a deficit and static view of teacher knowledge (Cochran et al., 1993; Hasweh, 2005), neglecting the "wisdom of practice that the teacher acquires when repeatedly teaching a certain topic" (Hasweh, 2005, p. 290). This study offers an alternative perspective by examining the affordances of the QFT through the lens of teachers' integration of the technique into their instructional design,

positioning teachers as the writers of the “theory of content” (Deng, 2011) of QFT instructional materials and the primary agents of curricular reform.

Conceptual Framing

My investigation is framed by Cornbleth’s (1985) concept of curriculum in use. Cornbleth (1985) provided an alternative to notions of curriculum as a product and technical project. In the latter view, curriculum is defined as a plan to guide instruction and curriculum construction is a technical task performed by professional curriculum developers. The curriculum product consists of learning objectives, content, materials, activities, and means of assessment. Instructional strategies like QFT exist as part of the discrete components of this product, a classroom activity and a procedure to be carried out by teachers. Cornbleth questioned the underlying assumptions of this view of curriculum, which treats curriculum as a planning task and sees curricular reform as the outcome of changes to the curriculum product.

In contrast Cornbleth posited curriculum construction as an on-going, social process. She presents a broader definition of curriculum as “curriculum in use” which she described as, “the actual, day-to-day classroom interactions of students, teachers, ideas, and materials” (1985, p.32). Curriculum in use does not separate the creation of curriculum during the instructional design process from its implementation. Cornbleth (1985) highlighted the role of context stating, “social organization, including teacher and student roles (and attendant rights and obligations) and patterns of interaction, provides a setting for academic activities that can extend or constrain students' learning opportunities” (p.37). In this view, curriculum is an interpretive process and multiple contextual factors influence how teachers and students conceive of and experience instruction. When viewed through the lens of curriculum in use, the QFT instructional strategy is created and recreated through classroom use.

Analyzing teachers' experiences learning to use and using the QFT through the lens of curriculum in use underscores the potential of the QFT to foster student-driven historical inquiry by bringing awareness to the contextual factors that shape teachers' integration of ongoing professional developments into their curriculum.

Methods of Inquiry

In this study, I use the qualitative methods of semi-structures interviews and document research to generate data. Qualitative research works from a “commitment ...to study the social world from the perspective of the interacting individual” (Denzin, 2018, p.7). By using qualitative methodology, I aim to capture the experience of new teachers in rich detail, illuminating their experiences when making instructional decisions within their sociocultural context.

I took on the role of “Insider/Outsider” during the research process (Merton, 1972). Participants were recruited from the teacher preparation program where I worked as a Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) and University Supervisor. I was an Insider as one of the actors involved in training and mentoring students in the use of the QFT and an Outsider as a researcher conducting interviews and revisiting observation notes/course assignments through the lens of my research questions. Denzin (2018) argued there is “no solidified ethnographic identity...[the researcher] works within a “hybrid” reality. Experience, discourse and self-understandings collide against larger cultural assumptions concerning race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, class and age” (p.7). Following Denzin’s assertion, I argue that the “Insider/Outsider” moniker, while a useful descriptor of the research process, offers a false dichotomy. Researchers exist in a liminal space between these statuses because they always insert their reality into the research process. I entered this study as a researcher after acting as a GTA and University Supervisor to

participants. I refer to myself as “GTA and/or University Supervisor” throughout this report to capture my historical role during the study duration. Figure 1, located in the Appendix, provides documentation of Internation Review Board approval for this study.

To navigate how my commitments shaped my interpretation of data I used abductive coding— an analytical method which “alienates” the researcher from data to bring to the surface anomalies and illuminate how the findings push against researcher assumptions (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). Abductive coding is a flexible approach to coding data during which researchers generate categories and themes based on existing concepts and theory in literature. It blends inductive (from the “bottom up”) and deductive (“top down”) approaches to data analysis (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012). In an iterative process, I followed abductive inferences about the data in relation to theory and findings in the teacher education literature, looking for a “best fit” lens through which to interpret the data. This process also made visible the ways in which the data does not fit into existing knowledge constructs. By using abductive coding, I approached the data through multiple lenses, dissecting varied explanations for how participants experienced and perceived their instructional decision making. This method of analysis aligns with Timmerman and Tavory’s (2012) argument that abductive analysis sharpens researchers’ focus on unexpected data, eliciting theoretical innovations when interpreting complex social phenomena.

Participants and Contexts

This study followed participants from their initial experience learning to use the QFT in the Methods classroom through their application of the technique as student teachers and into their first and second years as classroom teachers.

Participants

Study participants include 18 preservice and novice teachers of history and social science. I selected participants from two cohorts of preservice teachers in a teacher preparation program for History and Social Science education over the academic years 2022-23 and 2023-24. The seven students in the 2022-23 cohort were earning a Master's in Curriculum and Instruction. Four of these students continued participation in the study into their first year of teaching, an additional participant participated as a second year-teacher. The 23-24 cohort consisted of six master's students and five undergraduate students of Curriculum and Instruction. Participants included 17 white students, one Latina student, two Jewish students, ten cis-female students, seven cis-male students, and one trans-woman. 17 of the study participants were educated in public schools during the era of multiple-choice testing. This report uses pseudonyms to protect the identity of study participants.

Training in the QFT

Participants learned to use the QFT during their Methods I course. During a “course within a course” experience preservice teachers first participated in a QFT activity as students. A representative from the Library's Teaching with Primary Sources (TPS) division led students in the activity using a Q-Focus found in the Library's online archives. Students next completed four online modules about the use of the QFT with TPS. These modules, produced by the RQI, first introduced the QFT and the Library's resources for teaching with primary sources. Next, modules explored how the QFT and TPS can be combined for classroom learning and guided teachers in the creation of their own inquiry-based lesson using the QFT+TPS. These modules provided a foundation for using the QFT in combination with historical sources to foster student-driven historical inquiry. Associated assignments included module reflections, a bibliographic

organizer of Q-Foci, lesson plans which use the QFT, and a final screencast reflection. The purpose of this “course within a course” was to instruct students in the use of QFT as an instructional strategy for teaching social studies as an inferential and inquiry-based discipline. Participants were not required/instructed to use the QFT in other course assignments or during student teaching.

Participants received mentorship in the use of the QFT throughout the study duration. As students completed the “course within a course” assignments, the TPS representative and course Graduate Teaching Assistant (GTA) offered feedback and suggestions to students. This feedback offered TPS resources and encouraged students to make connections between the QFT and course content. Students continued to receive mentorship in the use of QFT during their fall and spring student teaching experiences. The course GTA, who graded and offered feedback on QFT assignments, served as the preservice teachers’ University Supervisor. In this capacity they prompted reflections and provided feedback after observing the use of the QFT in the field.

Members of the 22-23 cohort were sponsored by the Library’s TPS Eastern Region to attend a national education conference and present their QFT work. During this experience participants received continued mentorship. Students who participated in the study during their first year of teaching received feedback and assistance from the same TPS representative and course GTA they worked with during the program. Prior to teaching a lesson using the QFT participants received feedback on their lesson plan, asked questions, and attended an optional meeting to workshop their ideas.

Contexts

There were three research sites for the study, a Methods classroom, preservice teachers’ field experience classrooms, and novice teachers’ classrooms. The Methods classroom was

located at a university in Southern Appalachia. Preservice teachers used the QFT in high schools and middle schools in rural, small-city, and college town locations near their university. Novice teachers continued their use of the QFT in suburban and rural schools in the same state as their university.

Data collection and analysis

Data consisted of preservice and novice teacher materials related to the use of the QFT, secondary student work samples, observation field notes, and semi-structured interview transcripts with novice teachers. Preservice and novice teacher materials include the QFT “course within a course” assignments, lesson plan assignments for the Method I class, lesson plans used in the classroom, curriculum materials (e.g., student worksheets), reflections on the use of the QFT in an end of program e-Portfolio, and conference presentations. Materials from assignments include reflections, bibliographic organizers, QFT lesson plans, and screencast reflection videos. Secondary student work samples include questions asked by students during the QFT and student writing assignments. Observation field notes were taken by the GTA/University Supervisor while evaluating preservice teachers in the field and include preservice teacher reflections during pre- and post- observation meetings. The focus of these observation notes was preservice teachers’ practice broadly including classroom management, instructional design, communication with students, assessment procedures, and instruction in historical methods. Meeting notes relay preservice teachers’ vision for their practice, instructional choices during the observed lesson, and challenges experienced.

I conducted semi-structured interviews with novice teachers after they taught a lesson using the QFT. The focus of these interviews was teachers’ conceptions of the purpose and

nature of historical knowledge, definition of inquiry, vision for their practice, and experience learning to use and using the QFT. Example questions include:

- What is the purpose of history education? How do you define historical knowledge?
- How did you adapt the QFT to fit the needs of your students or the constraints of your curriculum?

Using abductive coding, findings were generated from the data by analyzing resonance with and divergence from existing research on the topic. Table 1 maps how abductive coding and analytical memos were used as a tool in this iterative process of analysis.

Table 1

Example Use of Abductive Coding and Analytical Memos to Develop Study Findings

Phase 1: Open coding of data	
<i>Excerpt from Preservice Teacher Reflection Journal: 3/22-23- For our Trail of Tears lessons I started off with a QFT of a piece of art I found that I thought was so beautiful and sad and really displayed the pain the Cherokees felt. Even without reading anything that image was able to show my students the cost of the Trail of Tears.</i>	<i>Open codes: use of the QFT for perspective taking; preservice teachers turned to the QFT use they approached a “hard history” units (i.e., Westward Expansion)</i>
Phase 2: Analysis of codes in relation to the literature	
<i>Open codes: use of the QFT for perspective taking; preservice teachers turned to the QFT use they approached a “hard history” units (i.e., Westward Expansion)</i>	<p><i>Analytical memo: Where do I see the “the literature” in the codes?</i></p> <p><i>Literature: use of pedagogical content knowledge to analyse the Reading Like a Historian curriculum (Reisman & Fogo, 2016), Husbands’ (2011) framework for history teachers’ knowledge, Evans’ (1989) history teacher typologies, Ball’s (2003) concept of performativity as a technology of power.</i></p> <p>Preservice teachers use of the QFT to teach hard histories reflects their commitment to social justice through history education indicating the valuing</p>

	of organizing data through teacher typologies.
Phase 3: Resonance, anomaly, and iteration	
<p><i>Analytical Memo- resonance and anomaly:</i> Ron Evans typologies derived from: images of history teachers, teaching identities within history, conceptions of history teachers</p> <p>Teacher typologies emerging from study data: Conformist, Activist, History Buff/Sage on a Stage, Historian/Philosopher, Educationalist, Caretaker</p> <p>Preservice teachers use of the QFT for perspective taking during a hard history unit indicates an “activist” teaching typology. However, open codes of other data (e.g., modification for the QFT to fit school norms) indicated these typologies, the “inner world” of participants, were not the only factor shaping teachers’ instructional decision making.</p>	<p><i>Analytical memo-iteration:</i> Cornbleth’s curriculum in use more fully reflects the data because of its emphasis on the sociocultural context in which teachers enact curriculum.</p>
Phase 4: Analysis through lens of “curriculum in use”	
<p><i>Analysis through “Curriculum in Use”:</i> Defined as the “actual day to day classroom interactions of student, teachers, ideas, and materials” (Cornbleth, 1985, p.32). Where in the data do I see these interactions?</p> <p>Teachers used the QFT not only for perspective taking during units of hard history, but also for the deconstruction of historical narratives about “Westward Expansion.” However, this use was dependent on the teachers’ conception of historical knowledge and autonomy in the classroom.</p>	<p><i>Preliminary Findings:</i> Relationships involved in the use of the QFT (cooperating teacher-preservice teacher relationship, teacher-student relationship, teacher-teacher relationship, and administrator-teacher relationship); Contextual influences on use of the QFT; Interaction between teachers’ ideas about historical inquiry and vision for their practice and their use of the QFT</p>
Phase 5: Refining themes	
<p><i>Research questions:</i> How do preservice and novice history teachers integrate the QFT into their instructional decision-making, and what factors shape this process? and How preservice and novice teachers explain the use of QFT in relation to their own ideas about teaching history?</p> <p>Through training and mentorship, preservice teachers developed a conception of how the QFT could be used to center students in historical inquiries about hard histories. Teachers developed other uses of the QFT when aligning the QFT to instruction goals like student engagement. Their ambitious uses of the QFT were curtailed by</p>	<p><i>Themes:</i> Alignment with instructional goals; Constraints and adaptations; Impact of Training and Mentorship; the QFT as a Portal to Student-Driven Historical Inquiry</p>

curriculum mandates and lack of support from teaching teams.	
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I first reviewed data across all participants looking for trends in how they used the QFT in the classroom. From this inductive approach codes emerged from the data like: *use of QFT for perspective taking* and *preservice teachers turned to the QFT use they approached a “hard history” units (i.e., Westward Expansion)*. Next, I placed these codes in relation to the literature on history teacher pedagogical decision making/knowledge including the following: Husbands’ (2011) framework for history teachers’ knowledge, Evans’ (1989) history teacher typologies, Ball’s (2003) concept of performativity as a technology of power, and Cornbleth’s (1985) curriculum in use. I wrote analytical memos to assess which frames were supported by the data.

Initially, Evans’ (1989) typologies resonated with the data. Inspired by Evans, I developed my own typologies to describe QFT use. However, I noticed significant codes lay outside this frame. For example, preservice and novice teachers modified their use of QFT to fit the norms of their school placements. I concluded that teacher typologies placed too much emphasis on the inner world of the participants. With the sociocultural context of teaching in mind I reassessed the data and revisited the literature. I concluded that Cornbleth’s (1985) “curriculum in use” captured the experience of participants as reflected in the data.

I next re-examined the data through the lens of my conceptual framework and the research questions, (1) How do preservice and novice history teachers integrate the QFT into their instructional decision-making, and what factors shape this process? and (2) How preservice and novice teachers explain the use of QFT in relation to their own ideas about teaching history? As detailed in the conceptual framing, curriculum in use defines curriculum as encompassing the “actual day to day classroom interactions of student, teachers, ideas, and materials” (Cornbleth,

1985, p.32). I asked the question, “where in the data do I see these interactions?” and generated preliminary findings. Finally, through an iterative process of memo writing, I refined these preliminary findings into the following themes: alignment with instructional goals, constraints and adaptations, impact of training and mentorship, and the QFT as a portal to student-driven historical inquiry.

Findings

Findings indicate widespread use of the QFT in practice. The most sophisticated uses—those emphasizing historical inquiry—were prevalent among teachers who connected strong conceptual understandings of history as an interpretive discipline to their training in instructional design. New teachers adapted the strategy to work within the constraints of their school contexts. Participant experiences indicate that the integration of the QFT with instructional design methods for history education enabled novice teachers to implement the strategy in the classroom. Sustained mentorship further reinforced this conception, providing ongoing support in applying the strategy effectively.

Alignment with Instructional Goals

Teachers adapted the QFT to fit their instructional goals, with three primary modes of use emerging from the data:

- *As an Engagement Strategy:* Many teachers used the QFT at the beginning of lessons as a “hook” to generate student interest. By selecting visually engaging or emotionally charged sources as Q-Foci, teachers successfully fostered curiosity and participation.

- *For Formative Assessment:* Some teachers used the QFT as a tool to gauge student understanding, revisiting student-generated questions at the end of lessons or units to track learning progress and reflection.
- *To Develop Historical Thinking:* A subset of teachers integrated the QFT within broader inquiry-based learning activities, encouraging students to generate research questions, analyze primary sources, and de/construct historical arguments and narratives.

While these diverse applications demonstrate the QFT's flexibility to work within teachers' instructional goals, some uses did not prompt deep engagement with the sources as historical evidence—indicating teachers' conception of history and instructional design process impacted the potential of the QFT to platform deep inquiry.

Many preservice teachers first attempted to integrate the QFT into their instructional design by using the activity as a “hook” during lesson warm-ups. The QFT was positioned at the start of lessons to encourage student curiosity about a variety of historical topics. Riley reflected, “I chose this particular Q-Focus as I believed it would ... provide an intriguing “hook” for them to grasp as we begin a new unit.” The course GTA noted students were more engaged in lessons which used the QFT as a “hook.” While many of these teachers increased their ambitions for the QFT as they progressed through the program, engagement was still a driving factor for their use of the technique.

Additionally, preservice teachers used the QFT to assess student's content knowledge. Some teachers used the questions generated by the QFT to assess student retention of knowledge from prior lessons. Teachers utilizing the QFT as a warm-up revisited student-generated questions after direct instruction and used the questions to reinforce course content and check for understanding. Sophia explained: “the purpose of returning to the QFT and answering student

questions is to both demonstrate that their inquiries did not go unanswered and give them an opportunity to see how they actually learned since they began the lecture.” Sophia conception of historical inquiry began and ended with student question asking. She related historical learning to acquisition of content knowledge, demonstrating how her conceptions limited the QFT’s potential for inquiry.

Pre-service teachers’ Q-Focus selection highlights how their conception of historical knowledge intersected with their instructional design process and shaped their use of the QFT. When trained in pairing Library archives with the QFT preservice teachers curated a collection of sources and built lessons from this source set. However, in practice teachers did not start with this archival work. Instead, they selected Q-Foci that complimented planned lectures and activities, looking for sources which would spark student interest through emotion. Perhaps because of their process of source selection, preservice teachers using the QFT for engagement and formative assessment typically did not incorporate sourcing activities into their lessons. Preservice teachers struggled to find sources for their world history courses in Library archives. After teachers encountered this difficulty, the TPS representative created a world history source guide which extended beyond Library collections. Despite this support, Q-Foci were less likely to be presented to students with source information in world history classes. In these instances, preservice teachers process of and experience with source selection might have limited the potential of the QFT for deep inquiry.

In contrast, teachers using the QFT to develop historical thinking forefronted perspective and instructed students in the use of sources as evidence in a historical inquiry. These teachers engaged students in asking significant historical questions, analyzing sources, and perspective

taking. At times, these historical thinking activities were part of a larger inquiry culminating in students' de/construction of historical narratives.

Preservice teachers gradually incorporated the QFT into historical inquiry. Brian explained how he experimented with the QFT as a preservice teacher, "I have been thinking about... how I can use the QFT in other ways that are more involved/extended [by] encouraging students to think particularly about narrowing down questions they might want to research." He presented students with a Q-Focus depicting Ottoman society and provided students with a worksheet to scaffold their selection of a significant question for historical investigation (Figure 2).

Figure 2

Scaffold for Student Selection of Significant Questions

Part 2 – Prioritize Your Questions
Directions: Decide as a group what you believe to be the **top 3** questions you asked in part 1 – copy them down here.

1. What is their religion?
2. What those people?
3. Where are they going?

Part 3 – Focus, Share, and Reflect
Directions: Of the 3 questions from part 2, pick 1 to share with the class along with a rationale (or the reason why your group chose that question). While you hear your classmates share, think about how you might answer some of the questions asked.

Final Question: What is their religion?

Rationale: It will help know what people they are, & where their from, and their morals

Brian began with the QFT prioritization step before asking students to rationalize their choice of question. Here Brian laid the groundwork for a more ambitious lesson centered on student

research. His use highlights the role of experimentation and incremental growth in the adoption of the QFT for historical inquiry.

Other preservice teachers experimented with the QFT as a scaffold for historical thinking. Rachel explained how she used the QFT to scaffold contextualization during source analysis, “I chose a Q-Focus where students can use prior knowledge from in the unit to contextualize the source.” Her lesson plan provided further details,

[the students] learned about Social Darwinism from the day before. The Q-Focus of the activity will be a political cartoon that displays the attitudes of Americans during the period, going to countries in Africa and “saving” them according to their own philosophy.

Rachel used student-generated questions to guide interpretation of the symbolism in the image using their contextual knowledge of U.S. Imperialism.

Preservice teachers turned to the QFT to incorporate multiple perspectives when teaching hard histories. Madison perceived that the QFT can help students “uncover the effects [of the colonization of Africa] on Europe and Africa.” In a similar vein, preservice teachers in U.S. History classes employed the QFT to during the “Westward Expansion” unit to include indigenous perspectives. Teachers approached this use in two ways, 1) by presenting students with a Q-Focus from a marginalized perspective or 2) by conducting two QFT activities with sources from different perspectives. In both cases the QFT activity was used to prompt ethical deliberation about the actions of people in the past.

Emily built from this use when scaffolding an inquiry aimed at deconstructing historical master narratives about “Westward Expansion.” Emily’s sixth graders asked her, “Why are Native Americans always bad?” She responded by creating a series of lessons using the QFT to

deconstruct historical narratives which otherize people of color. These lessons were structured around the following guiding question and objectives:

How does what *we know* as history differ from person to person?

Obj. ¹ SWBAT [students will be able to] compare and contrast their versions of history with history from another perspective

Obj. ² SWBAT analyze their own work to determine missing perspectives through discussion of news articles from the previous week

Students completed the QFT with two images depicting the Gold Rush, one of White settlers and the other of Chinese immigrants. After the QFT activities, the students were asked to compare the types of questions they asked for each image. Emily remarked, "The difference [between the questions generated] was a concept I wanted them to acknowledge on their own to examine their own potential biases." She built from these QFT activities in later lessons; after reading a primary source written by a Hidatsa woman, Emily facilitated a discussion about why certain groups are regarded as "us" or "them." An exit ticket from the lesson indicates one student re-evaluated their understanding of Westward Expansion: "we needed to learn that Natives were good, and they weren't harming us, we were harming them and their land." Here the QFT was used as part of a multi-lesson inquiry deconstructing the historical narratives surrounding White settlement of the American West.

Two novice teachers used the QFT activity as part of an inquiry culminating in student construction of historical arguments. When describing their lesson planning process, these teachers indicated they used the Understanding by Design framework, which they were introduced to in their teacher preparation program. Justin described his process,

so I actually approached it with the end goal in mind and I worked backwards... I wanted the kids to actually use the questions and I wanted them to come up with something and

make it matter... my first thought when I decided I was going to do it was okay, “I’m going to make the kids write.”

His students chose one question generated during the QFT to answer utilizing the Assertion-Evidence-Commentary paragraph format. Riley asked students to create a caption for the Q-Focus source explaining what is happening in the image and why. To create their captions, students were tasked with answering four questions generated during the QFT by analyzing the source. In these examples, the QFT use intertwined with teachers’ pedagogical training.

The teachers using the QFT to develop historical thinking placed the activity in the center of their units. Rather than use the activity as a “hook” to introduce content, they expected students to draw on contextual information from the unit when engaging with the Q-Focus source. Teacher use of the QFT indicates how conceptions of historical knowledge interacted with their instruction design process and determined the extent the QFT was used for historical inquiry.

Constraints and Adaptations

Despite seeing the promise of the QFT teachers still faced significant constraints in implementing it. Teachers introducing new methods experienced resistance from Cooperating Teachers and colleagues. Additionally, testing created a mandated curriculum which limited time for inquiry. As a result, teachers adapted the strategy to fit within their school culture.

Mark was eager to see how the QFT could help “create a safe and fun learning environment for my students.” However, the structure of his Cooperating Teacher’s classroom—where students silently took lecture notes or completed book work—left little room for collaboration and exploration during the QFT. Mark’s class completed question generation in

silence and used their lecture notes to answer their questions at the end of class. Both activities were followed by a short, whole class debrief where students shared questions and answers for Mark's assessment. This use transformed the QFT from an exploratory activity into a rote learning exercise. Mark's use aligned with his CT's instructional style and Mark's intention for the students to be "more focused on answering their questions based on the notes."

Preservice teachers are guests in the classroom and, while excited to experiment, their teaching was influenced by Cooperating Teachers' instructional styles. Angela described why not feeling "like the real teacher" limited her exploration as a student teacher:

But I think it is hard to experiment because, my placements were great but some of the cohort did not work as easily with their CTs and then that makes it— and I'm someone who gets stressed and anxious— that I didn't love experimenting either because I was so scared of doing something wrong.

This experience was compounded by the pressure to meet accreditation standards during formal observations by their Cooperating Teacher and University Supervisor.

Novice teachers were also hesitant to go against norms. Participants are expected to teach the same curriculum as others on their teaching team. Riley remarked that, "in an ideal world they [administration] want us to all be doing the same exact thing, at the same exact time." Angela explained that she only used the QFT in her Honors classroom because the Honors team shared her teaching philosophy and supported her ideas. She described the standard-level team as resistant to change and joked about their entrenched curriculum, "I'm telling you those PowerPoints are older than I am." As the "new kid on the block" she felt like she could not "argue against" standard practices.

Riley expressed an interest in bringing current events and disciplinary thinking into her history classroom. However, she was "warned by her colleagues" to be careful about

controversial current events and found it difficult to engage students in disciplinary thinking in team-taught classes. She said projects were hard to implement because of the focus on improving Standards of Learning (SOL) test scores for her classes of Multi-Lingual Learners. Riley reflected, “I have a lot of co-teachers in my room and sometimes– I guess I feel they don’t share the same beliefs about history as I do. So, we can’t—we don’t always teach history in the same way.” Her Q-Focus, a primary source about the Fugitive Slave Act, was not used to explore current events. This use contrasted with her conception of history education and belief that topics like the Civil War “lend itself really well to discussion of current events.” While her QFT lesson involved source analysis and writing, it did not fully live out her instructional goals.

The testing environment of the school impacted the teachers’ decision making. Despite a desire to incorporate the QFT into a project-based summative assessment, Angela assigns multiple-choice exams because of pressure to prepare students for “test heavy” AP courses. Local alternative assessments, in the form of PBAs, impacted novice teachers differently. The difficulty of passing the writing-oriented tests led teachers to prepare some students for the traditional multiple-choice SOL exam. Riley’s explained that her Multi-Lingual Learners are prepared for the SOL exam and because the students “aren’t good at remembering names ...[and] places we definitely focus on recall still.” Although most students would not take the SOL, Angela’s standard level team continues to use content-heavy lectures and lengthy multiple-choice assessments. Justin was able to devote more class time to the QFT and incorporate writing activities because his team is preparing students for PBAs. These examples show how accountability shapes classroom routines and how administration’s expectations of common assessments created friction in teams where novice teachers want to deviate from rote learning.

Riley explained the challenges faced by her students:

I find that some of them are just so jaded, they feel like school is very difficult for them because they have struggled for so long...they are stuck in the same place I think they feel like. So, once they get up to sixth grade they don't feel like trying anymore.

For these students people, places, and dates, the hallmark of transmission-based history instruction, are difficult to learn. Riley's emphasized the importance of relationship building and literacy supports for these students. During source work she uses Newsela to adjust the Lexile level of one to two sentence-length texts. During the QFT activity students orally shared their ideas and Riley helped them formulate written words. These adaptations required Riley to set aside more class time for the activity, which presented a challenge.

These examples highlight the tension between pedagogically ambitious teaching and an entrenched approach to teaching history centered on rote memorization. The pacing of the mandated curriculum often limited the time available for sustained inquiry-based learning. Many novice teachers felt compelled to align their instruction with exam-driven content coverage, restricting their use of student-generated questions for deeper exploration.

Impact of Training and Mentorship

Training and mentorship developed new teachers theoretical understanding of historical inquiry and history as interpretation. Preservice teachers were trained in using the QFT for student-driven historical inquiry by a TPS representative and their university instructors during their Methods I course. Course assignments guided learning through reflections on four online modules, the creation of a bibliographic organizer and lesson plan, and a reflective screencast where preservice teachers answered the question: *how have the TPS and QFT professional development program begun to shape my understandings of how to teach difficult knowledge through a disciplinary inquiry-based lens?* Their development of conceptual understandings—

paired with explicit strategies for instruction– made sophisticated use of the QFT for disciplinary inquiry easier for teachers.

The TPS representative and course GTA gave targeted feedback designed to connect classroom use of the QFT to theoretical understanding of history pedagogy. The TPS representative helped teachers navigate the Library of Congress archives when selecting sources related to their teaching goals. In her feedback, the course GTA helped preservice teachers connect their vision for history education to methods and strategies for history education. Novice teachers received additional guidance from these mentors when using the QFT in their own practice, a sustained mentoring relationship which facilitated their continued use of the QFT.

The QFT assignment sparked insights into historical inquiry in preservice teachers. Riley reflected:

The QFT process mirrors how the process of historic inquiry works. ...the questioning involved in the QFT process is exactly what historians do when they are curious about an event, image or anything they see. ...It's helpful for students to see the processes of question asking and how curiosity and change exist in historical thinking.

She explained how the QFT can help students deconstruct historical narratives by applying a different interpretive lens, “they now can see that they can change the narrative. That they can ask a question and shift the narrative about an event.” Teachers also developed insights related to practice, Parker chose a playbill from the Great Depression as a Q-Focus “due to its ability to allow students to analyze not only the contents of the playbill itself but the context of its creation...some questions may require proper research skills.” These examples illustrate teachers’ connection of the QFT to historical inquiry in theory and practice.

Introduction to the QFT in the Methods course aided implementation in the classroom. Angela explained, “I know how those assignments work, what am I changing and adapting for

what I actually know being an active first year teacher.” Teachers relayed finding/selecting sources and using the teaching protocol was easier after participating in models and examples.

The QFT as a Portal to Student-Driven Historical Inquiry

Training in the QFT, coupled with classroom practice, bridged theoretical conceptions and practice implementation for new teachers, deepening their conception of historical inquiry. The quick and flexible steps of the QFT afforded teachers the chance to experiment with its use and classroom implementation developed teachers confidence to facilitate student-driven historical inquiry in their classroom and school contexts.

New teachers’ experience using the QFT aligned with their conception of historical knowledge and inquiry. Justin defined historical knowledge as asking, “why does it matter? And using that critical thinking skill, being able to put it down on paper, being able to write– that’s a big one. Being able to create off of that.” Angela described historical inquiry as, “more independent [from the teacher]...Can you collaborate? Can you find your own sources?” She contrasts her definition of inquiry– which stipulates student-driven activity– with the Digital Inquiry Group’s (DIG) lesson plans and the PBAs provided by her county which involve, “using what we’ve given you versus discovering your own argument.” She views SHEG lessons and PBAs as useful for building students’ writing and source analysis skills but does not see them as historical inquiry activities. When describing the success of the QFT, Justin and Angela emphasized the aspects of the activity which align with their conception of historical knowledge.

Riley described how the QFT decreased the “heavy lifting” of primary source instruction, “it allows them to do a lot of the work on their own...when I teach primary sources without the QFT I need to do so much more prep work...[and] direct teaching.” In contrast the QFT, “starts easy

with the questions and when we get to our next step with like the captions, almost all of my students they tried, and they didn't shut down first." This description connects with her understanding of inquiry as students' being "curious and willing to dive into something even if [they] don't know what's going to happen." Teachers expressed surprise and excitement at the level of student engagement. They described the QFT as "approachable" and a "confidence builder." Riley stated:

I think it did make me look at teaching history in a different way. Especially, for my students. Because sometimes I'm worried that they aren't— that I'm not doing enough to help them or I'm not doing enough to develop those skills. Or I'm not doing enough to get them up to the level that they should be at.

But doing it [the QFT] made me realize that it is okay for them to just try something and see how it goes. For them to be able to have that independence and autonomy and even if they don't get it all the way at least they tried and they did it on their own. Because I think that's another important thing just about teaching in general. We need to let students try something on their own and take the reins of their own learning.

Teachers emphasized how the QFT opened their eyes to the ways students can drive their own learning.

Teachers believed that the QFT could support their aspirations for teaching history. Justin described using the QFT with activities centered on creation and question asking like a presentation or using questions in a debate format. Angela expressed interest in using the QFT in a unit long inquiry. Riley believes regular use of the QFT will help her incorporate more primary sources into her classes. They conceived of the QFT as a way to overcome institutional constraints and live out student-centered history classrooms which support curiosity and exploration.

Discussion

Curriculum in use provides a window into how pedagogies for history instruction are implemented by teachers in the classroom through their curricular choices. This study explored how teachers conceptualized the use of the QFT in relation to their instructional goals for history education. I asked the questions: (1) How do preservice and novice history teachers integrate the QFT into their instructional decision-making, and what factors shape this process? and (2) How do preservice and novice teachers explain the use of the QFT in relation to their conception of teaching history? Findings highlight how participants aligned the QFT with their instructional goals regarding student engagement, formative assessment, and historical thinking. Participants adapted the technique according to the constraints of their school contexts, at times limiting the QFT's use for historical inquiry. However, their classroom experience of the QFT, coupled with training and mentorship, informed participants' perception of the QFT as a portal to student-driven historical inquiry.

The social organization of the school, in terms of preservice and novice teachers' relationships with veteran teachers and administration, influenced new teachers' curriculum in use. Preservice teachers anxious about meeting the expectations of Cooperating Teachers and University Supervisors limited their experimentation with the QFT, adapting it to fit standard practices in their placement. Expectations by administration to use a common curriculum dictated how novice teachers spent class time and mandated assessments defined the normative curriculum within each school context. Even with the advent of PBAs, multiple-choice SOL exams continued to guide the use of lecture and rote learning in standard level classes. New teachers envisioned future uses of the QFT aligned with their beliefs in project- and research-

based history instruction. However, accountability measures influenced preservice and novice teachers' adaptation of the QFT to fit school contexts.

Ball's (2010) concept of "performativity" might help untangle how accountability controls teaching and learning history. Ball argued that accountability measures are part of the policy technology of "performativity" which assigns sanctions and rewards to teachers based on the "performance" of certain qualifications. In the context of the accountability movement teachers adopt certain practices to meet administration expectations regarding preparing students for mandated exams. Riley expressed worries that she is not "doing enough" to help her students perform at grade level. She described how students face a similar angst; students used to not meeting school expectations "shut down" when faced with uncertain outcomes. These reflections place teachers and students in the same trap of the accountability movement, performance of mandated outcomes. Participants perceived that fear of failure—experienced by teachers, preservice teachers, and students—curbed exploration and experimentation in history classrooms.

Historical learning requires false starts and dead ends. E.A. Peel (1965) described thinking in history as "possibility thinking" comprising a set of "comprehensive judgements involving the imagination and invocation of possibilities to explain the phenomenon" (p. 172). Teacher experiences of the QFT evidence its potential to shift how teachers and students view complex historical thinking tasks, creating space for inquiry. Their enactment shows the power of quick, scalable strategies to overcome structural constraints when integrating inquiry as an everyday practice guided by student curiosity. This contrasts with inquiry-based resources like DIG lesson plans and IDM which organize inquiry as a top-down teacher-guided process and, in the case of IDMs, require multiple class periods to enact. After using the QFT teachers reported increased student engagement and evinced a belief that students could drive their own learning.

This vision of historical inquiry aligns with disciplinary and constructivist stances which state question asking is part of “doing history” and aids in student learning (Barton & Levstik, 2004; Foster & Pagett, 1999; Hicks et al., 2012; Lévesque, 2008; Seixas and Morton, 2013; VanSledright, 2011). Teachers relayed the QFT showed them that it is okay for students to try something without teacher guidance and the value of the false starts of students.

Findings indicate the thorough integration of the QFT into the Methods class and field experience through assignments, reflections, and mentorship aided teachers’ integration of the QFT into their development of an instructional design framework for history education. Mentorship and training supported preservice teachers’ exploration of their instructional goals for the QFT in conjunction with the social studies pedagogies taught in the Methods course. Once in the classroom, preservice teachers reached for the QFT to introduce historical content, assess student knowledge, develop historical thinking, and introduce multiple perspectives on difficult historical topics. These findings are consistent with Evans’ (1990) assertion that when teachers’ vision for history education is paired with explicit teaching strategies, teachers’ conception of their practice aligns with student experiences. Initially, preservice teacher use of the QFT aligned with the goals of neophyte teachers concerned with student engagement and the basic principles of assessment. As the preservice teachers entered the classroom more fully, they increased their sophistication of the QFT’s use, extending it beyond the “hook” and incorporating it into historical thinking activities.

This study points to the benefit of examining how teachers take ownership over instructional strategies. Teachers developed the QFT in alignment with their instructional goals, creating innovative uses for the strategy. For example, teachers juxtaposed multiple QFTs to deconstruct historical master narratives through comparison of perspective and representation.

Those using the strategy for historical thinking placed the QFT in the middle of units to aid students' contextualization of sources using other (primary and secondary) sources from the unit. These pedagogical decisions support student engagement in a complex and often unapproachable component of historical thinking: intertextual reading (Leinhardt and Young, 1996; Wineburg, 1991). Using the QFT, teachers guided students in drawing from multiple resources including their own experience, first order historical concepts, and primary sources to read across texts when forming conclusions. Often source work is presented to students as an isolated skills activity, ostensibly to increase accessibility by minimizing the need for extensive content knowledge. However, this approach limits students' ability to select and read across sources, a process essential to the discipline of history. Angela saw this clearly when making a distinction between her understanding of inquiry and curriculum products which provide students with source sets. Teachers using the QFT for historical thinking and inquiry made instructional choices which facilitated students' use of content knowledge during the activity.

Counsell (2002) criticized the separation of skills and content, arguing that history education should teach for resonance (connection to prior knowledge) in order incite student curiosity and questions and help them grapple with the abstract concepts of history. She also championed the inclusion of teachers' perspectives in curriculum design in her study of the methods created by teachers to navigate the "content vs. skills" divide and motivate lower-attaining and marginalized students (Counsell, 2011). In this study, Counsell argued that curriculum reform will not lead to improved outcomes for students unless the structural issues of classrooms are addressed and research investigating the work of history teachers leads to crucial understandings about how history can be taught. This ethos is reflected in *Teaching History*, a

practitioner journal edited by Counsell, which frequently features methodological articles written by classroom teachers.

Practical Implications

These findings highlight the importance of not only training teachers in historical thinking but also fostering pedagogical environments that support experimentation and student-driven inquiry. This includes administrative support for curricular flexibility, the development of professional learning communities (PLCs) focused on inquiry-based teaching, and access to instructional resources that encourage innovative history teaching. Ensuring that teachers have institutional backing to implement these strategies can lead to more sustained engagement with historical inquiry.

Teacher Education

Teacher education programs can integrate more structured mentorship and classroom experimentation with inquiry-based strategies to bridge the gap between theory and practice. For example, they might:

- Adopt a “reflective framework” to support conceptual understanding of historical inquiry. Reflective assignments can prompt preservice teachers to integrate knowledge about how students learn history with ideas for inquiry-based instruction in their future practice. Creating experiences, like teaching demonstrations, which engage preservice teachers in structured self-reflection about the challenges and successes of implementing inquiry can prepare them to navigate constraints once they enter the profession
- Integrate historical inquiry into training in instructional design. Instructors can model how inquiry can be incorporated into curriculum at multiple levels— as lesson activities,

whole unit research projects, and multi-day IDMs. Preservice teachers can practice pacing instruction and plan for progression in historical knowledge by developing curriculum maps structured around historical inquiry.

- Develop mentorship networks. Mentorship networks— like the one in this study— support new teachers in bridging theory to practice. Methods instructors can facilitate the development of mentorship networks by inviting representatives from professional organizations into Methods courses as guest “co-teachers.” Graduate schools and professional organizations can support mentorship networks by providing faculty, GTAs, and new teachers funding to attend conferences where they can nurture these relationships. Cooperating Teachers can and should become a part of these mentorship networks. Teacher education program should make intentional efforts to place preservice teachers in classrooms which value and demonstrate historical inquiry.

By adopting a holistic approach to teacher training in university, school, and professional development settings teacher educators can build and sustain networks which aid teacher integration of theory and practice.

School Administration

Entrenched school cultures constrained participants’ use of the QFT. School administration can foster environments which value inquiry by:

- Creating Professional Learning Communities (PLCs) for inquiry-based teaching. Novice teachers benefit from collaborative spaces where they can discuss challenges, share strategies, and refine their approaches to historical inquiry. Schools should institutionalize PLCs focused on inquiry-based pedagogy. Teachers should be given adequate training and planning time to implement unfamiliar pedagogies.

- Supporting pedagogical innovation. School administrators should recognize and incentivize teacher innovation in history classrooms. Providing teachers with greater curricular flexibility and creating assessment models that value student inquiry over rote memorization can foster more meaningful history instruction.
- Addressing colleague resistance. Schools should provide structured professional development sessions where veteran teachers are introduced to the benefits of inquiry-based strategies like the QFT. Facilitating peer observations where teachers see the QFT in action could reduce resistance and encourage broader adoption. As stated above, teachers must be provided with adequate time and resources so professional developments do not become a burden to teachers overladen with administrative tasks.

These recommendations highlight schools as an intermediary space between teacher education and education policy and bring to the surface places of constrained agency in fostering cultures of inquiry. For example, limited budgets might make it difficult to provide teachers with substitutes or additional planning time. These constraints underscore the importance of a) providing schools with additional funding to support inquiry initiatives, b) educating teachers and schools about available grant funding, like that offered by the Library's TPS, and c) supporting pedagogical innovation by providing teachers with curricular flexibility.

Policy and Curriculum Design

Policy makers and curriculum developers can collaborate to build and implement history curriculum which supports inquiry-based instruction within the classroom. For example, they might:

- Create assessments that align with history education as a disciplinary practice. The power of multiple-choice assessments to reify transmission-based history education even after

their discontinuation indicates how assessments can be leveraged to refocus practice around historical inquiry. Rather than a “one-size fits all” approach to assessment, policy makers should give teachers the support and flexibility to design and use a variety of assessments. Teachers should be provided with model rubrics, assessments, and pacing guides, and encouraged to develop their own assignments aligning to disciplinary-based learning objectives.

- Build flexible curricular materials that incorporate inquiry on multiple levels. Teachers need pathways into inquiry which are flexible to their classroom and school contexts. Curriculum developers can create assignments and other curricular materials which work on multiple scales and complement a variety of historical thinking activities.¹³ Curriculum designers can provide teachers with a roadmap for layering inquiry and source analysis into preexisting units through standards aligned pacing guides which model planning for progression in student development of historical thinking concepts. These pacing guides can help teachers bridge the gap between entrenched practices and inquiry models.
- Expand access to a range of high-quality inquiry-based curriculum resources. Developing open-access repositories of vetted inquiry-based strategies, lesson plans, and assignments can help connect teachers to a variety of scale-able curricula. For example, an online repository Q-Foci collections, lesson plans, and larger inquiry assignments could support widespread implementation of the technique. Additionally, school administration, county

¹³ C3’s “Building Blocks of Inquiry” are a step towards a more modular view of inquiry aimed at supporting day-to-day inquiry practice (Swan et al., 2024).

supervisors, and teachers can be educated in how they can pursue grants, like those offered by the Library's TPS, to support inquiry-based curricular initiatives.

- Build from methods developed by classroom teachers. Curriculum developers should revisit their curriculum products after classroom use and refine applications with reference to how teachers are using the products in the classroom. Classroom educators can be invited to share methods developed in their classrooms at conferences and in publications.

By proving teachers with flexible approaches to inquiry policy makers and curriculum designers can de-mystify historical inquiry for veteran teachers and help new teachers work in their teaching teams to create inquiry-based curriculum.

The integrated nature of these recommendations, which recognize how resource allocation can support inquiry-based instruction at multiple stages in the “theory to practice” continuum, highlights history education as a hierarchal network of actors exerting varied levels of agency. By exploring the experiences of new teachers this investigation sheds light on the role of agency and power in curricular enactment. These recommendations strive to make inquiry more accessible to teachers by providing ideas for making inquiry activities and source work part of their daily practice.

Directions for Future Research

By examining how teachers adapted the QFT, rather than an analysis of fidelity to the curriculum product, this study provides a framework for future research investigating classroom use of other strategies and curriculum materials for historical inquiry. Moving forward, research should continue to investigate how inquiry-based teaching strategies can be sustainably

integrated into history education. Future research might also explore how University Supervisors' and Cooperating Teachers' conception of historical knowledge, familiarity with Methods course instruction, and priorities during classroom observation impact new teachers' use of disciplinary methods. These actors shape preservice teacher practice through evaluation and mentorship. The social organization of University Supervision in this study—where the University Supervisor served as the Methods course Teaching Assistant and an active participant in TPS initiatives— facilitated preservice teacher integration of disciplinary methods into their instructional design as student teachers. Literature notes that University Supervisors and Cooperating Teachers provide feedback on a multitude of teaching competencies and mentorship in disciplinary pedagogy is often overlooked (Seixas and Webber, 2014). Examination of differences in mentorship relationships can provide insights into teacher adaptation of instruction strategies. These directions for future research offer valuable opportunities to explore history curriculum as a dynamic and social process and help dissect how theory is taken up in schools.

Conclusion

Student-driven inquiry is a vital component of instructing students in the nature of history and the ways of thinking of historians. The relationship between teacher agency and contextual constraints motivated this study's emphasis on the conceptions and experiences of teachers when investigating the use of QFT to foster student-driven inquiry. Study participants were preservice and novice teachers who were educated in the era of standardized, multiple-choice testing and enter the classroom and in the midst of a national culture war over what is taught in schools. Participants' experiences with the QFT as they transition from students to teachers shines a light on the ways in which teachers interpret and adapt the methods and strategies learned in teacher education programs as they become embedded in school cultures.

This study contributes to ongoing conversations in history education about the role of inquiry in teaching and learning. By examining how preservice and novice teachers engage with the QFT, it highlights the challenges and opportunities of implementing inquiry-based strategies within real-world classroom constraints. The findings underscore the need for stronger institutional support, more flexible curricula, and expanded professional development opportunities to ensure that historical inquiry is not just a theoretical ideal but a practical reality in history classrooms. This study suggests we need to rethink how we introduce historical inquiry curriculum to teachers. The QFTs' flexibility gave teachers space to experiment with its use and integrate it into diverse historical thinking tasks. This finding points to the need to design and provide teachers with inquiry strategies that work on multiple scales— an important theoretical insight. By bridging the gap between research, teacher training, and classroom practice, we can move toward a model of history education that empowers students to ask meaningful questions, analyze sources critically, and construct nuanced understandings of the past.

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Appendix

Figure 1

IRB Approval Letter



Division of Scholarly Integrity and
Research Compliance
Institutional Review Board
North End Center, Suite 4120 (MC 0497)
300 Turner Street NW
Blacksburg, Virginia 24061
540/231-3732
irb@vt.edu
<http://www.research.vt.edu/siro/hrpp>

MEMORANDUM

DATE: May 9, 2024
TO: David Hicks, Sara Louise Evers
FROM: Virginia Tech Institutional Review Board (FWA00000572)
PROTOCOL TITLE: preservice teachers learning the Question Formulation Technique
IRB NUMBER: 24-513

Effective May 9, 2024, the Virginia Tech Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) determined that this protocol meets the criteria for exemption from IRB review under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category (ies) 4(ii).

Ongoing IRB review and approval by this organization is not required. This determination applies only to the activities described in the IRB submission and does not apply should any changes be made. If changes are made and there are questions about whether these activities impact the exempt determination, please submit an amendment to the HRPP for a determination.

This exempt determination does not apply to any collaborating institution(s). The Virginia Tech HRPP and IRB cannot provide an exemption that overrides the jurisdiction of a local IRB or other institutional mechanism for determining exemptions.

All investigators (listed above) are required to comply with the researcher requirements outlined at:

<https://secure.research.vt.edu/external/irb/responsibilities.htm>

(Please review responsibilities before beginning your research.)

PROTOCOL INFORMATION:

Determined As: Exempt, under 45 CFR 46.104(d) category(ies) 4(ii)
Protocol Determination Date: May 9, 2024

ASSOCIATED FUNDING:

The table on the following page indicates whether grant proposals are related to this protocol.

Invent the Future

VIRGINIA POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE AND STATE UNIVERSITY
An equal opportunity, affirmative action institution

Conclusion

My dissertation critically traced how educational actors answer the question, “what does it mean to know history?” by mapping the construction and implementation of historical knowledge from theory to practice. I reported on three studies which investigate (1) the development of definitions of historical knowledge in foundational scholarship, (2) how women are represented in the *Digital Inquiry Group’s* world history curriculum, and (3) the pedagogical decision making of classroom teachers as they learn to use an instructional strategy for student-driven inquiry. These studies shed light on the genealogy of knowledge that informs teacher education, curriculum development, and teaching practice

Given that pedagogies for teaching history are currently being critiqued for their White, Western bias (Grever & Adriaansen, 2019; King 2020; Wallace-Casey, 2022; Wallace, 2024), an examination of how historical knowledge is defined is a timely scholarly contribution. The findings from this work have implications for educational actors who strive to create pedagogical models for teaching history which engage all students in the development of a disciplinary conceptual apparatus which aids them making sense the past and the role of history in society. As Salinas et al. (2012) argued, “history is not neutral, that historical thinking provides an avenue to explore history beyond a simple listing of people, places, and things, and that a more critical consciousness provides those multiple perspectives that are uncomfortable and yet essential for understanding the complexities of history” (p.20). Such a history education for young people is difficult to realize without an examination of the stories which have been repeated and the “common sense” truths embedded in research, curricular design, policy, and practice.

Interpretation of Findings from Dissertation Studies

Across manuscripts critical questioning emerged as a tool for understanding and making sense of history education. At each level of analysis, research questions forefronted theoretical perspective, the social construction of knowledge, and the agency of actors working within the structure of schooling. The structure and design of my dissertation provides a framework for seeing and rethinking history education as an evolving discourse that can be shaped and reshaped through scholarly critique and conversation, curricular reform, and pedagogical agency. This research illustrates how theoretical tensions in conceptions of historical knowledge manifest in curriculum development and shape teaching practice, contributing to our knowledge about how change is enacted in history education. These insights have implications on how we approach history education reform in terms of advocacy, curriculum development, and teacher education.

Findings illuminate the social process of reform in history education. Reform relies upon and is shaped by a social network of universities, professional organizations, and federal, state, and local governments. Weiss (1979) described the process by which social science research is applied to non-university settings as, “not one of linear order from research to decision but a disorderly set of interconnections and back-and-forthness that defies neat diagrams” (p.428). A hierarchical social network influences history education theory and practice through the allocation of money to support curriculum design and professional training, and policy mandates on the federal, state, local, and school level. As shown in Manuscript One, the proximity of academic theory to curriculum mandates is dependent on the political structure of schooling. Governments exert control over history curriculum both directly, through policy, and indirectly through financial support for education initiatives. Professional organizations emerged as an integral component of educational reform, shaping the construction and implementation of

historical knowledge across study contexts. Varied stakeholders interrupt an idealized vision of linear progression from theory to practice.

Manuscripts Two and Three illustrate the practical impact of this social system. The Library of Congress' Teaching with Primary Sources' resources and mentorship provided crucial training and support for new teachers using the QFT. However, because the Library of Congress is a national archive it required intentional effort on the part of course instructors and the TPS representative to support world history instruction. This finding aligns with research indicating a dearth of curricular resources for teaching world history (Bain & Harris, 2009; Girard & Harris, 2018; Harris & Bain, 2011). Without intentional effort, the use of the QFT might be limited to instruction in national narratives. The *RLH* curriculum highlights the importance of intentional effort on the part of teacher educators and curriculum developers. *RLH* lesson plans push against normative instructional practices by accessibly introducing disciplinary thinking into history classrooms. However, intentional effort was not made to meaningfully include women and gender in the curriculum, reproducing discursive trends in social studies education which diminish the place of women and Queer people in history. The discourse of history education is shaped by people who form relationships over time and who interact in a variety of spaces. These examples illustrate how power structures in these social communications reinforce the central place of national, male-defined narratives in history curriculum through the supports provided to teachers.

Findings expose how the definitions of historical knowledge used to design and enact curricula are ideologically positioned. Theory, both in the discipline of history and history education, has a perspective which should be analyzed. There are dangers to flattening theoretical perspectives to create accessible teaching methods and materials. Manuscript Two

suggests building pedagogical materials around the “general problem solving” processes of historians (Wineburg, 1998) negatively impacted the representation of women and gender in the curricular materials. The “neutral/universal” definition of historical knowledge which structures much historical thinking pedagogy overlooks a fundamental aspect of history by failing to acknowledge historians as theoretically and ideologically situated.

Manuscript Two study findings also raise concerns regarding the prioritization of individual cognitive processes in conceptualizing historical knowledge. *RLH* inquiries often ask epistemological questions about the accuracy of historical accounts, presenting a scientific view of historical knowledge rather than exploring the complexities of how history functions in society and the dynamism of historical interpretation. This choice has implications for the aims of history education because it reveals who curricula is designed for— or more generously and perhaps accurately, illustrates how choices made to produce curricular materials with traction in schools may lead to the unthinking/unintentional reproduction of historical master narratives. My dissertation research highlights the importance of turning a critical lens to widely-used curricula to examine their implicit assumptions about the nature of historical knowledge.

This dissertation showcases the power of examining theory as an emergent social process— historical knowledge does not exist in isolation, rather it is constructed through intellectual debate over time and space. Theory is represented and disseminated through curricular materials but is ultimately shaped and enacted by teachers. Preservice and novice teachers’ use of the QFT illustrates this process. While their use of the QFT for historical inquiry was often inconsistent and fledgling, teachers did consider the strategy worthwhile and find space for it in their curriculum. Their example shows how strategies learned in teacher education programs extend beyond the intentions of curriculum designers and serve a variety of purposes,

calling into question commonsense wisdom about the practicality of engaging students in critical and sophisticated disciplinary literacy work. Emily's use of the QFT to deconstruct historical narratives asked students the question, "How does what we *know* as history differ from person to person?", evoking Jenkins' (1991) question of "who is history for?" Emily integrated differing accounts of westward expansion to develop students' use of meta-historical concepts to reflect on their epistemological beliefs about history. This activity extended far beyond her instruction in the QFT in her teacher education program. Emily's curriculum-in-use illuminates the dynamic relationship between theory and practice.

A central theme runs throughout study findings: despite well-meaning, genuine, and sustained efforts to shift history education towards "doing history" the transmission of national political narratives and the under/misrepresentation of marginalized groups continues. In various "history wars" public controversy surrounding student achievement served as a catalyst for government initiatives which defined historical knowledge as the acquisition of content knowledge about national history. The limited content knowledge of students and valid concerns about accessibility appears to have focused the DIG world history curriculum around a narrow set of historical thinking heuristics. These design choices resulted in the creation of a normative definition of historical thinking which neglects the diversity of frames historians use when interpreting the past. Additionally, preservice and novice history teachers found it difficult to act outside of the norms of their school contexts when enacting the QFT for student-driven inquiry. They perceived these norms to stifle inquiry and exploration of current issues in the classroom. While the problem of reform in history education endures, recommendations for instigating change emerged from this research.

Recommendations

My dissertation asked critical questions for the purpose of redefinition and change, and findings suggest the need to rethink history education in the United States. Looking across disciplines, theories, geographies, and beyond academic discourse, to classroom practice, can provide ideas and resources for changing how we approach history pedagogy.

Redefining Historical Knowledge in the Development of Curricular Materials

Redefining historical knowledge in the development of curricular materials begins by acknowledging that theories of historical knowledge are ideologically positioned. Paying attention to how different traditions conceptualize history allows developers to critically examine implicit assumptions and design curriculum which is thoughtful and intentional in its goals. Curriculum materials should look to the example provided by van Boxtel and van Dri (2018) to integrate individual cognitive-based models with sociocultural approaches to history education. For example, curriculum developers can:

- Include historiography in definitions of historical knowledge. If instruction in disciplinary thinking is the desired practice for history education, historiography, part of the nature of history, must be included in definitions of historical knowledge. History education can involve students in asking “who is history for?” not just as recipients of historical knowledge but as creators of historical knowledge. Curriculum developers can design inquiry-based tasks which engage students in secondary sources from diverse

perspectives, highlighting how historiographical debates shape our understanding of the past.¹⁴

- Support student generation of historical inquiry questions and selection of sources.

Findings indicate there are significant limitations to pre-designed inquiries. If students are to develop critical consciousness about the construction of historical knowledge, we must help students recognize how question asking and source selection are ideological acts which shape the interpretation of evidence and creation of historical accounts. Involving students in the development of historical questions and selection of historical sources highlights the role of theory in the construction of history. Curriculum developers can create criteria for the inquiry questions developed by students so that their questions are significant and utilize the concepts through which disciplinary historians establish “truths” about the past.¹⁵ While I acknowledge the value of pre-designed inquiries for overworked teachers, such inquiries limit students’ development of fundamental procedural concepts like “the historical read.”

- Bridge individual cognitive and disciplinary approaches with sociocultural approaches to historical teaching and learning by reconceptualizing the “cultural curriculum” as “popular historiography.” History education can teach for content knowledge resonance by evoking “popular historiography.” Historical thinking pedagogy importantly seeks solutions for engaging students with limited content knowledge in inquiry. However, analysis of *RLH* lessons points to the limitations of this approach. Scholars working from

¹⁴ There are a number of examples and resources for instruction in historiography which can guide teacher educators, curriculum designers, and classroom practitioners (e.g., Marczyk et al., (2022, 2024) and *Teaching History’s* regular feature, “What historians have been arguing about...”).

¹⁵ Findings indicate the QFT can facilitate student generation of historical questions. Gibson and Miles (2024) provide a framework for teacher development of inquiry questions that can be adapted as criteria for students. See also: Barringer et al. (2023).

historical consciousness and critical sociocultural frames (Barton & Levstik, 2004; King 2020; Rüsen, 2005; Salinas & Blevins, 2014) highlight how students are exposed to shifting historical interpretations through public sites, political rhetoric, and popular media depictions of historical narratives. Reconceptualizing this knowledge as a “popular historiography” provides an entry point for student development of a disciplinary stance towards the past. Students have their own developing theoretical commitments as young people making sense of themselves and their world. This knowledge can help students develop significant historical inquiry questions and guide their selection of historical sources. Rethinking our notion of the types of sources appropriate to intertextual historical reading might help teachers overcome content-knowledge barriers to student-driven historical inquiry.¹⁶

These recommendations can help create historical inquiry frameworks which support student development of a disciplinary conceptual apparatus which accounts for the diversity of human experience. Such inquiry frameworks are necessary if history education is to support students in developing a critical (Salinas & Blevins, 2014), or analytical (Barton & Levstik, 2004), or genetic (Rüsen, 2004) awareness of themselves and their institutions as historically situated and involve them in constructing and recognizing truthful, in the little “t” sense, accounts of the past (Lee, 1991).

¹⁶ Organizations like Facing History and Ourselves and Read.Inquire.Write. provide useful scaffolds for helping students connect primary source texts with their knowledge of the past as learned through their lived experiences. For example, Read. Inquire. Write.’s “Orient to Content” tool and Facing History and Ourselves’ “Text-to-Text, Text-to-Self, Text-to-World” strategy.

Redefining the Purposes for History Education

The nature and purpose of history education, and the definition of historical knowledge, should not be taken for granted. For advocates and policy makers this dissertation highlights key considerations when thinking about the goals of history education. Study findings provide clear evidence that even in high quality curriculum materials groups can be marginalized and excluded. However, new teachers' use of the QFT illustrates how history education can move beyond memorization of facts and analyze the perspectives present in and missing from historical accounts. Given thoughtful supports teachers can work within the structure of schools to help students ask questions, analyze sources, and interpret historical events using evidence-based reasoning. Advocates and policy makers should engage in open-discussion and deliberation to build consensus for mutually satisfying policy and initiatives. For example, they might:

- Build relationships with researchers to develop curriculum which reflects current understandings about historical knowing, teaching, and learning. In policy discussions the contours of citizenship education in history courses should be dissected, with academics providing evidence of the impact of emphasizing national political narratives on disciplinary instruction and the representation of marginalized groups.
- Address gender bias and Eurocentricity in approved and widely used curriculum by conducting audits to assess whose perspectives are represented and how groups are positioned within curriculum. Create incentives for the creation of

curricular materials which position diverse perspectives as significant to the study of the past.¹⁷

- Fund training and mentorship programs, like the Library of Congress Teaching with Primary Sources, which provide ongoing support throughout the transition from preservice to practicing teacher.
- Critically examine how mandated assessments define historical knowledge and advocate for assessments which support inferential and inquiry-based history education. This should occur at multiple levels, involving not only the creation of new standards and assessments by governments but also educating teachers in the theory which informs these assessments and training them to design and integrate assessments into their curriculum.

The political sphere is a fraught arena for enacting change. It is vital that academics understand and conceptualize their work within the broader discourse about history education. Explicitly discussing how historical knowledge is defined within the partnerships between academics, professional organizations, and policy makers is a step towards reform efforts with traction in schools.

Redefining the Role of Teachers in Curriculum Development and Enactment

Teacher educators and teachers must work together to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Findings across manuscripts suggest that teachers need to receive explicit training in

¹⁷ If used strategically, Executive Order Number 14190 (2025) might provide a mandate for such incentives through its definition of patriotic education as an “accurate, honest, unifying, and ennobling characterization of America’s founding and foundational *principles* [emphasis added]...[and] a clear examination of how the United States has admirably *grown closer* [emphasis added] to its noble principles” This can be read to argue that a patriotic and unifying education necessitates representing how diverse peoples experienced founding principles throughout the history of the United States, and how progress towards these principles is inconsistent and incomplete.

how theoretical concepts in history and history education, like historical thinking, historical consciousness, and historiography, are enacted through inquiry-based history instruction. Teacher education programs should not shy away from engaging students in examination of pedagogical theory during Methods courses. For example, teacher educators can support teachers in:

- Learning to critically analyze curriculum materials before using them. This includes asking questions such as: Whose voices are missing? How is gender, race, class, and power represented in the narratives and sources of predesigned curriculum materials? How can I supplement/adapt curricular resources to include diverse perspectives?
- Learning to connect curriculum materials to frameworks for instructional design. Instructors can model for students how instructional strategies within lesson and unit objectives to support student learning. Methods courses can integrate instructional design training with disciplinary initiatives like the C3 Framework or county/state level inquiry-based assessments.
- Developing a definition of historical knowledge and purpose for history education that moves beyond state and professional organization standards. This can be done by educating preservice teachers in multiple sets of standards/frameworks (e.g., state, NCSS, The Black Historical Consciousness Framework) and their provenance, before involving them in analysis of what these standards/frameworks reveal about the values and priorities of their creators. While it is important to teach future educators to align instruction with state standards, these standards are just the starting point. Teacher educators can facilitate preservice teacher creation of course, unit, and lesson objectives which

are aligned with a holistic set of teacher-created standards which draw from multiple sources and teachers' own interpretations of historical significance.

These recommendations position teachers as intellectual partners in the construction and enactment of historical knowledge.

I have adjusted my teaching as a result of this research. My courses now present preservice teachers with concepts about historical teaching and learning from a variety of geographic contexts so they might articulate a purpose for history education which incorporates important individual cognitive, sociocultural, and critical perspectives on historical learning. I task students with analyzing how their disciplinary education and professional and state education organizations conceptualize historical knowledge. Preservice teachers reflect on how these constructions influence the representation of marginalized groups and the potentials of the standards to meet their goals as history instructors. I integrate education in instructional design frameworks with reflection activities about how the structure of schooling impacts pedagogical decision making. I engage students in practical exercises which help them intentionally design instruction which navigates these barriers and live out their vision for their practice. These adjustments are the result of my reflection on research findings.

I aim to promote history education that develops in all young people an understanding of the interpretive nature of historical knowledge, engages them in historical inquiry, and supports them in making sense of themselves and their world as historically situated. With these actionable recommendations I am optimistic that steps might be taken towards reforming history education to meet these aims.

Contributions to the Field and Directions for Future Research

By engaging in discourse analysis and historiographical critique this dissertation brings a nuanced and critical approach to history education research. Often scholarship focuses on one aspect of the ecosystem of history education; by mapping this system and tracing knowledge production at different levels and in different spheres my dissertation brings a new perspective to history education reform. When interrogating power and marginalization in history education on these different levels I critically engage with and question the epistemic foundations of our knowledge of history education. Doing so highlights knowledge production as a dynamic social act occurring in multiple spheres of history education. Examination of the intersections between academic, public, professional, and classroom envisioning of the nature and purpose of history education offers unique insights into how definitions of historical knowledge are taken up in schools and ultimately experienced by students.

My research positions curriculum as an intermediary and generative space where theoretical assumptions about history shape classroom practices and realities. I center teachers as agents of change in history education, a focus which brings to the front teachers' experiences and the supports they need to implement historical inquiry. Dissertation studies illuminate the pedagogical tensions teachers navigate when trying to balance disciplinary approaches with institutional constraints. By centering teachers as the ultimate creators of curriculum through its use, I position teachers as important resources for knowledge creation in the field of history education.

This research focused on an insular knowledge system: Anglo-American and European scholarship, curriculum development, and enactment. The dominant influence of these knowledge paradigms on my experiences as a classroom educator, curriculum developer,

researcher, and teacher educator, motivated my belief in the importance of examining this discourse. I view this exploration as a first step towards looking for and examining other discourse about historical knowledge.

Future research might investigate overlooked places, such as non-Western and practitioner discourses, where curriculum is produced to examine how historical knowledge is constructed and implemented. History teachers reported the use of self-made and online materials more than any other resource (American Historical Association, 2024). Self-made materials are passed down from teacher to teacher in school buildings, representing the intellectual lineage of in-practice teacher-craft. Some of the online materials reported were created by curriculum developers, like *RLH* lesson plans and IDMs, but other highly used materials were created by actors outside of the field of history education. For example, 79% of study participants relayed using the edutainment YouTube series “Crash Course” to teach U.S. History. How do these materials represent the nature of history? Whose perspectives and which historical narratives do these materials emphasize? As the field begins to answer these questions, my dissertation research provides a guide for analyzing how power, knowledge, and agency collide in the construction and enactment of history curricula.

Future research might investigate curriculum not as a static product but as something created and recreated through pedagogical decision making. Researchers can approach study of history curriculum from a critical but non-deficit view by asking questions such as:

- What discourses about the nature and purpose of history education are re/produced in commonly used curriculum materials?
- How do teacher-made curriculum materials align with the theory and methods of teacher preparation programs?
- What pedagogies are reflected in the curriculum materials created by teachers? How have practitioner developed curricular materials been overlooked in scholarship? Can we build theory/pedagogical frameworks from teacher-craft?

- What curriculum materials are teachers recommended or required to use by local, state, and federal governments? How do teachers integrate these materials into their pedagogical decision making?
- What is the discourse around the nature and purpose of history education in teacher practitioner spaces? How can analysis of “teacher chat” in online forums illuminate the challenges faced by history teachers?¹⁸
- How do history teachers perceive the role of curriculum in realizing their visions for their practice?

Research investigating these questions can illuminate continuity and change in history education discourse through its emphasis on curriculum use and creation by a myriad of actors. By highlighting history curriculum as the product of people acting within their social, historical, and cultural contexts we can identify roadblocks and pathways to reform.

This research advances the field by demonstrating that history education is not merely a question of pedagogical technique, but a deeply contested field where knowledge, power, and agency intersect. By interrogating the construction of historical knowledge in theory, curriculum, and practice, this dissertation offers a pathway for the field to engage in an important conversation about how conceptions of historical knowledge shape whose histories we choose to tell and why. By bridging theory and practice, this conversation can explore how we can approach teaching histories with students in ambitious ways. Through this conversation, I hope to help sway the pendulum of history education towards instruction which aids students in developing the type of historical knowledge which helps them navigate, “the tense intersection of remembered past and expected future” (Rüsen, 2005, p.2).

¹⁸ E.g., A history teacher expressed frustration with how their district mandated IDM use on the subreddit r/historyteachers (ferriswheeljunkies11, 2023).

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