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Exploring Change in Epistemic Beliefs Among History Teachers

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Abstract

This exploratory study of 14 history teachers sought to understand how an immersion into research on and lesson planning about the pre-Civil War secession debates in Georgia influenced their epistemic beliefs. The beliefs in question concerned what history is, how its claims to know the past are justified, the roles accounts and evidence play in those justifications, and how history might be taught. Data sources included results from the Beliefs About History Questionnaire (BHQ) administered in a pre/post design, papers written as a result of research investigations, lesson plans, and interviews with a subsample of teachers. Results suggest that immersion did little to influence and/or stabilize inconsistent epistemic beliefs. Attenuating factors included the compressed nature of the experience, the power of teachers' preexisting beliefs about what history is and how it is to be taught, trouble connecting knowledge outcomes to the knowing process, and related difficulties understanding how to think through and plan investigative lessons. These factors were especially salient because the teachers faced broad school-based curriculum coverage demands, pacing-guide surveillance, and a testing culture at odds with history as investigation, all influences that shape epistemic beliefs about history.

Keywords: epistemic beliefs, history, inquiry teaching, researching the past

Introduction

During the first week of an intensive two-week university course in which 14 prospective and practicing teachers (hereafter, simply teachers) were immersed in a process of historical research at a small house museum, Erica made this comment during an interview about how she was thinking about what she was undertaking:

I guess I was naïve, but I thought history was biased—just everyone’s opinion—and I wanted to know the facts. The reality is that there is no black and white. There are facts, dates, but even I’m going to have a bias when I present history, so I’m glad I know that going into [teaching].

Here, Erica seems to be saying that she had customarily thought of history as little more than someone’s expression of personal bias. She thought, perhaps, that with more careful investigation, systematic research and attention to evidence, she could arrive at the facts of the matter. She assumed such effort would eliminate the “mere opinion.” However, she also seems to realize that, although there are some brute facts, bias is ever present. And she realizes it affects her in ways that will make themselves known in her own classroom once she begins teaching history. That is, her own biases will find presence in how she presents the past to her students.

If we take a minute to unpack her statement and how we just interpreted what she said, we find a set of ideas laced with epistemic content. By this we mean beliefs about *who historical knowers are* and *how they make sense* of the past, what the “*facts and dates*” might be that stand somehow independent of knowers, and the existence of (a priori?) *biases* that influence how we read the facts and dates and what they mean to us. We also hear her signal an *epistemic development process* in her notation of having been naïve in ways that she now is not.

On the one hand, there are objects from the past (and we use the term objects very broadly here) that have the force of brute facts (Erica’s facts and dates). Things happened when they did and were carried out by certain individuals rather than others who did not live during the time when those things occurred, for example. On the other hand, if those who wish to understand these brute facts choose to investigate them (i.e., as knowers), they cannot do so without bringing their present, and perhaps current assumptions and positionalities with them to the understanding process. Erica refers to the outcome of this as bias or mere opinion. So we have knowers and what can be known and the interplay between them. There is tension here, tension between objects and subjects. Do objects speak in their own terms or are they inert? Must subjects (knowers) give them meaning? If so, how much license do subjects have in imbuing objects with meanings? Are some meanings better, more accurate say, than others? How is this all resolved? What role does/can the knower’s beliefs about the past vis-à-vis the present play? Must they result in mere opinion? Is there a regulatory process subjects can appeal to, one with criteria that corral bias? By our lights and at least in history, these questions have significant epistemic content. That content, how it works, develops, and shifts is the subject of this study.

Studying Epistemic Beliefs

In the study, we investigated changes in 14 history teachers' epistemic beliefs about the domain of history, its modes of inquiring about the past, the heuristics used in building evidence-based interpretations, and the process and criteria by which interpretations are justified. The study also explored to some degree how those beliefs transferred to the process of teaching the subject to secondary students.

During that intensive two-week-course (referred to as "An Apprenticeship in Historical Thinking"), the 14 were immersed in a process of historical research in which they investigated questions dealing with the pre-Civil War secession debates. In small research teams, they developed their own questions, searched out archival accounts in the museum's collection, and constructed evidenced-based interpretations that addressed their questions. During the process, the group paused periodically to discuss criteria for conducting sound historical research and for justifying claims. Then they translated their research results into lesson plans to use with their students, discussing how they would use what they learned during the investigation process with those students.

In our exploratory work with these teachers during the course, we were asking the following research questions:

- In what ways does immersion into archive-based historical research influence the teachers' epistemic beliefs?
- Does wrestling with the tension between knower and objects from the past affect those epistemic beliefs? If so, in what ways, and if not, why not?
- Is there any suggestion of a developmental-change process that appears during the immersion? If so, what might it look like?
- Does the researching process influence how the teachers might think about teaching their own students and helping them deal with their epistemic beliefs about what history and the past are? If so, in what ways?

The immersion into historical research and the process of translating what was learned from it into lesson plans for teaching was designed to open up epistemic space. Historical research and experiences in wrestling with historical questions in the presence of objects from the past asks that inquirers (subjects/knowers) confront those objects (what can be known) and make meaning from them. Because that process is often embedded with uncertainties and ambiguities and has important implications for teaching, it has the capacity to push knowers to become more conscious of the epistemic resources they (as knowers) can (or cannot) mobilize in addressing their questions in the face of objects that might tell them about the past. As such, it offered us opportunities to study the epistemic cognition landscape and address the sorts of questions we posed.

Relevant Literature

In their review of epistemic cognition in history, VanSledright and Maggioni (2016a) observe that, despite a plethora of general psychological studies of epistemic beliefs (e.g., Baxter-Magolda, 2008; Hofer & Pintrich, 2002; Khine, 2008; King & Kitchner, 2002; Perry, 1970; Piaget, 1950), there has been little long-term research on the topic in the domain of history education. They trace out a sample of cognitive studies in that imply or at least suggest attention to epistemic content. But they note the many difficulties

researchers have encountered in determining with any precision the epistemic nature of learners' belief structures and how they influence or respond to the problem of dealing with the tensions that arise for knowers who are trying to make sense of the object *residua* from a past that makes it feel like a foreign country (see Lowenthal, 1985; 2015). They also discuss how historians have attempted to account for their own wrestling with the tension. However, the overlap between the work of historians and cognitive researchers and psychologists is tendentious at best.

A few studies have been undertaken within the domain of epistemic beliefs in history, and their relation to teaching, that do suggest some initial directions. But understanding epistemic cognition in the field remains largely open to the need for additional research. The research work has spanned Germany and The Netherlands, Israel, the UK, the USA, and also more recently other countries around the globe. We briefly sample several of these studies here as examples of its range, and also of its nascent status.

In the USA, a good share of the more explicit work on epistemic cognition in history has been conducted by Maggioni (2010) and her colleagues (e.g., Maggioni, et al., 2004; Maggioni, et al., 2009a; Maggioni, et al., 2009b; VanSledright, et al., 2012). Maggioni began by developing a Likert-scale instrument she later called The Beliefs About History Questionnaire (BHQ). It consisted of a series of statements with epistemic content to which respondents were asked to agree or disagree on a six-point continuum (strongly agree to strongly disagree). The instrument was developed through an attempt to wed the general psychological studies literature on epistemic beliefs (e.g., Bendixen & Feucht, 2010; King & Kitchner, 2002; Hofer & Pintrich, 2002; Kuhn & Wienstock, 2002; Perry, 1970) with theories of historical cognition emerging from the domains of history and history education (e.g., Lee, 2004; Lee & Shemilt, 2003; Megill, 2007; Novick, 1988; Seixas, 2000).

Working with college students and history teachers, she pilot tested the instrument and refined the items. She conducted a factor analysis to determine the fit of the items with their underlying theories (Maggioni, et al., 2004). She also asked a group of historians to validate the instrument's items (Maggioni, et al., 2009a). In 2010, she employed the instrument with three high school history teachers and their students (Maggioni, 2010).

The efforts eventually produced a scoring system for the BHQ that allowed researchers to assess the relative strength of a respondent's commitments to three differing epistemic belief stances, what she and her colleagues termed (a) objectivism (initially described as a "copier" stance), (b) subjectivism, and (c) criterialism. On the BHQ, there are 22 items, approximately divided into three 7-item clusters, one cluster for each of the three stances. The Likert scale's 6-point continuum allowed for weighting the strength of epistemic commitment to each stance.

Objectivism refers to an emphasis on the belief that objects "out there" generally have meanings independent of knowers and that they speak those meanings to knowers in unambiguous ways. Objectivists tend to over-privilege the power of objects to convey meaning. This position, if held naively or too strictly, is difficult to sustain especially in the face of conflicting and/or contradicting accounts from the past.

Subjectivists tend to over-privilege the power of the knower, imbuing her/him with considerable (some might say excessive) interpretive license over the meaning of objects. Naïve subjectivists tend to be open to the charge by objectivists that they frequently exercise unacceptable bias in their interpretations. Subjectivists often claim that history is merely someone's opinion because they operate with almost no criteria for regulating

history's interpretive process—the past means what a knower wants it to mean because we are all entitled to our opinions. This stance is also difficult to sustain because it leaves investigators with no strong criteria for coming to agreement about how we might understand the past.

Criticalism refers to a cluster of epistemic beliefs that show coordination between knower and objects. It is a middle ground position that attempts to deal adaptively with the epistemic roadblocks inherent in objectivist and subjectivist beliefs, especially those that are naïve or rigid. A criticalist believes that the knower has interpretive license and that objects do not speak in their own unmediated ways. But she is nevertheless constrained by interpretive communities and their criteria for settling meanings that limit the types one can attribute to objects. Evidence preponderance (derived from objects) plays a strong role here in justifying the knower's claims to understand the past. Knowing the past, therefore, is not an interpretive free-for-all. Rather, it is guided by cautious interpretive judgment while being constrained by a limited range of object meanings in a more balanced relationship.

With this three-part framework in mind, Maggioni (in collaboration with VanSledright and Reddy; see Maggioni, et al, 2009b) developed a scoring system to gauge respondents' stances. Because they argued that, in a pluralistic, polyvocal/ polysemantic world, criticalism appeared to be the most psycho-socially adaptive, they chose to identify the degree to which respondents were consistent with it (expressed as a percentage, with 100% being full consistency). The result they termed a "consistency with criticalism score." In short, the higher the "consistency score," the greater a commitment to criticalism. To refer to someone as a criticalist required a score of 90% or higher on the BHQ.

Using this framework and scoring approach, Maggioni's collaborators also used the instrument in different settings. VanSledright and Reddy (2014), for example, conducted a series of studies with college students in which they applied the BHQ in a pre/post data-gathering method. They created a semester-long course in learning to teach history that invited history students to wrestle with what it might mean to teach grade school pupils to investigate the past and build interpretations based on original and secondary accounts (objects) that frequently were in conflict with one another. The experience raised a series of questions for the college students that contained epistemic content (e.g., how do we justify our claims about knowing the past?). The BHQ attempted to sample shifts in epistemic stances as students struggled to develop some adaptive coordination in their beliefs.

Summarizing the results of Maggioni's (2010) individual work and studies she conducted with colleagues (Maggioni, et al., 2009b) along with others who followed her (VanSledright & Reddy, 2014), we find several general patterns. Across a range of samples, from high school and college students to practicing history teachers, epistemic beliefs about history as measured by the BHQ before and following interventions, indicated considerable instability. A few respondents showed transitions that tended toward sequentiality, moving for example from an objectivist stance to a more subjectivist one, or from subjectivist to criticalist. But what was for more common was what the researchers referred to as "wobbling," the movement back and forth across stances in inexplicable ways. The learning experiences undertaken by respondents in schools (high school and college students) or professional development interventions (teachers) tended to provoke

considerable wobbling that did not subside regardless of how long the interventions lasted (up to 18 months for some teachers). Consistency scores as a measure of alignment of beliefs with criterialism (bar set at $\geq 90\%$) rarely averaged more than about 75% (more common among the teachers, a lower percentage among students).

In the case of VanSledright and Reddy's (2014) work, inconsistency and wobbling was unexpected because the course intervention they designed was intended to expressly assist students in attaining more solid coordinated beliefs. The researchers observed that changing epistemic beliefs toward the more adaptive criterialist position, for example, appears to be slow, unpredictable, sometimes cognitively painful, and difficult to accomplish even amidst fairly robust interventions.

Others who study epistemic beliefs about history have also recorded this type of inconsistency and wobbling. In a project conducted in Israel, Tabak, Weinstock, Zviling-Beiser (2010) presented nine college history majors with conflicting historical cases that contained competing accounts. Students were asked in post-task interviews to discuss the trustworthiness of the sources, the degree to which one could obtain some certainty in interpreting the cases based on the accounts, and how knowledge claims generated about the cases could be justified. The questions were designed to raise epistemic beliefs in ways that would allow the researchers to gauge them.

Tabak et al. (2010) coded six of the nine history majors to be between primary commitments to multiplism (their term for subjectivist beliefs), and commitments to coordinated beliefs, what they termed evaluativism and what Maggioni and colleagues called criterialism. The history majors immediately recognized the interpretive problems they faced. Although the students sought to sort out the problems more definitively by interrogating the accounts' authors, they eventually swore off a solution, observing that history could not be understood as an exact science (a reference to difficulties in understanding objects) and/or that, in history, anyone could generate an interpretation (over-privileging of the subject/knower). Competing accounts were common and presented perhaps unresolvable problems. The six (of 9 or 67%) did not offer criteria for arbitrating among better or less adequate interpretations. That did not necessarily mean they held to no such criteria; however, none appeared forthcoming in the rather pointed post-task interviews the researchers conducted. Two-thirds of the history majors appeared to be wobbling between privileging object meanings and privileging subjects' interpretations and were unable to call upon criteria that would allow them to resolve differences in ways that permitted justifiable interpretations.

In the United Kingdom, researchers involved in Project Chata (e.g., Lee, 2004; Lee & Ashby, 2000; Lee & Shemilt, 2003) studied the development of children's and adolescent's reasoning about what they termed second-order concepts such as accounts, evidence, and causation. Although the researchers make no mention of being interested in epistemic beliefs per se, working with such second-order concepts tends to stimulate epistemic development. Studying them permits at least a partial window into how these young people's belief systems operate on those concepts.

One of the more telling studies that emerged from Project Chata, was a report on young people's progression in understanding (a) historical accounts (objects), and how they could be thought of as (b) evidence for making claims to understand the past. Evidence in history is crucial for justifying claims to know and justification is crucial to epistemology. For each concept, Lee and Shemilt (2003) developed a six-point

developmental progression from naïve and cognitively unproductive understandings that brought doing history to a stop to more coordinated and adaptive meanings that allowed history to continue. It is possible on analysis to see that their progressions suggest movement from a simple appreciation that objects (accounts from the past) pretty much are definitive, because they mean what they say, to a later realization that knowers are involved in giving objects meaning. Finally, among the most cognitively advanced learners, we read Lee and Shemilt to be making a case that they begin to balance and coordinate their objectivist and subjectivist beliefs in ways that permit interpretive resolutions, ones not readily unavailable to Tabak et al.'s history majors.

Perhaps what is most interesting is Lee and Shemilt's (2003) observation that the most advanced forms of progression in their models were not necessarily held by the oldest students, and that there was considerable variability in how consistently any given student applied their beliefs. In Project Chata, students were asked to respond to tasks not unlike those the Israeli history majors confronted. Reasonably often a student might respond to one task at a higher level of progression only to drop to a lower one if the task changed enough to stimulate more or less interpretive difficulty (i.e., more or less trouble in resolving contradictions among testimonial accounts). A type of epistemic wobbling and/or inconsistency also seemed to affect Project Chata participants.

Although only a sampling, the aforementioned studies suggest the need for additional work on epistemic beliefs in history if we are to better understand the sources of wobbling and inconsistency. If certain types of beliefs and ideas tend to grind history to a halt, as Lee (2004) maintains, and if they hinge on over-privileging objects or knowers' unrestrained interpretive license, it might help to sort out how to bring those beliefs and ideas into a more adaptive epistemic coordination. Theoretically at least such a move could permit history to continue and historical understanding to deepen.

The studies also implicate the important role such beliefs may play for prospective and practicing history teachers who may be unaware of the way those beliefs will or do influence what their students learn. If teachers lack awareness of their own beliefs and justification schemes, they can unwittingly pass along unproductive ideas to their students. Maggioni (2010) maintains that she saw ample evidence for such misadventures in the three history classrooms she studied. VanSledright and Maggioni (2016b) also reported similar outcomes among teachers involved in three different professional development experiences.

Research Methods

Participants

There were 14 teachers in the course. They spanned four different specializations offered by the university's teacher education program: bachelors-degree (a) middle grades (n=1) and (b) high school level (n=4); (c) master's degree initial licensure (n=1 in middle grades, n=4 at the high school level); and (d) M.Ed. post-licensure (n=4). All were white and middle class except one male who was African American (Ryan). Nine were female and five were male.

All teachers agreed to participate in the study. However, we invited six of them to engage us in rounds of two interviews, one each for the two weeks of the course (12 total). The interview informants were Erica, who readers met at the outset, Adam, Martha, Ryan,

Stacy, and Susan. The other teachers were Ashley, Camden, Christian, Gena, Linda, Lucy, Michael, and Teresa (all identifying names are pseudonyms).

Context

The 14 were enrolled in the “Apprenticeship in Historical Thinking” course offered by a university in the southeastern U.S. The course was offered as a summer-semester elective to prospective and practicing social studies teachers. It was taught at a house museum that commemorated the life of a prominent southern civil-war era family. The museum possessed a 300,000-item archive of original letters and documents pertaining to that family. Many of the more perishable items in the archive were stored at a university special-collections library. That library also became a location and source for the research process. The pre-Civil War secession debates became the focus of the participants’ research because of the museum’s collection of documents and source materials on that topic that participants could investigate.

The course that comprised the intervention involved two key elements: (a) a research process on the secession debates; and (b) three 4-hour seminars on teaching history to secondary students using documentary materials such as those researched and collected by the teachers. The seminars were underpinned by research work in the field of history education (for sample reviews, see Lee, 2004; VanSledright & Limon, 2006; Wineburg, 1996). The goal of the seminars was to assist the teachers in translating the results of their research and the documentary evidence they collected into inquiry-based lesson plans that they could use to teach their own students. Both the research and the lesson-planning processes were designed to push the teachers to grapple with the epistemological issues associated with historical thinking, its consequential development of varied and sometimes contested understandings, and problems connected to teaching such history lessons in schools.

The research segment took longer than initially designed: seven of the 10, four-hour sessions. Once teachers, working in pairs or triads, developed research questions and began work with sources in the archives, they became enthralled with what they were reading and studying. One archival search would lead to another and another. Enthusiasm for the search, coupled with struggles to definitively address their research questions led teachers to mine the materials in ways that made it difficult for them to stop. This resulted in less time to tackle the problems of translating the work into teachable lesson plans. Some teachers became frustrated as time devoted to the course, and lesson planning in particular, ended more abruptly than they had hoped. Among a few, we observed a tendency to blame the instructor for not organizing the course more efficiently. The instructor also expressed frustration that the time frame for the course did not permit more engagement with working through the epistemological problems teachers encountered at a number of steps along the way.

One key stimulant for the teachers’ frustration was the realization that the epistemological issues inquirers encountered on the way toward developing historical understandings based on accumulations of documentary evidence would likely slow down curriculum coverage in a school setting. Pacing guides were realities the more experienced teachers knew all too well. And the typical U.S. history curriculum they taught called for rapid coverage because it spanned Atlantic seaboard encounters (1600) all the way through the Clinton administration (2000) in myriad detail. Teachers came to realize that they were

staring down a real pedagogical dilemma: Would they teach as tellers of historical truths as the state standards and local curriculum mandated, or would they teach as guides, encouraging understanding through historical investigations? The former masks history's epistemological problems and is efficient, but tends to suffocate student interest. The latter is more engaging, as the teachers themselves experienced. But it is slow, fraught with contest, and depends for reasonable success on working out knower/object problems.

Data Gathering: Instruments and Measures and Their Analyses

Observations. A member of the research team sat in on approximately 75% of the class sessions and gathered field notes. All of the charts, graphs, and presentation notes the instructor used were collected. The instructor's lesson plans were also retained as a record of the general flow of the course. These notes and materials were used to document the intervention and describe details of the course in what appears in the preceding section.

Beliefs about History Questionnaire (BHQ). The BHQ (see VanSledright & Reddy, 2014) served as a primary data-gathering instrument because our research questions hinged on understanding shifts (or the lack thereof) in the teachers' epistemic beliefs as influenced by course experiences. As we noted, it derives from the work of Maggioni and colleagues (e.g., Maggioni, et al, 2009a; 2009b). We discussed its structure and what it attempts to measure earlier. We briefly reprise it here before turning to how we analyzed the data it generated in this study.

Respondents can be scored based on how they respond to three clusters of items that represent epistemic positionings:

- (1) belief that objects from the past tell us that past in a straightforward way/objects are to be trusted to convey meaning/referred to as objectivism;
- (2) belief that meaning resides fundamentally with the knower/the knower or inquirer has license over saying what objects from the past mean/referred to as subjectivism; and
- (3) belief that the knower is responsible for establishing meaning but is constrained by both the nature of objects and what others also think they mean/referred to as criterialism for the stress on how community criteria set limits on establishing the meaning of objects.

Both objectivism and subjectivism, as we are defining them here based on the earlier work, are considered naïve epistemic beliefs because they lead to cognitive impasses in doing history and are therefore maladaptive. Criterialism draws from the criteria upon which it is based to break impasses and permit the doing of history. It is therefore more adaptive to building understanding.

The course was designed to move teachers toward criterialism. As such, we scored the BHQ with a view to seeing how consistent the teachers were with criterialist beliefs before the course began and then assessing them at the course's end. Growth in criterialist consistency might then have been at least correlated to the course experiences. If so, we could use other data gathering efforts to shed light on how those experiences worked.

To establish criterialist consistency scores, we identified how many times a respondent *agreed with* criterialist items and *disagreed with* objectivist and subjectivist items. That number became the numerator of a fraction with the total number of items on the BHQ (22) being the denominator. The result allowed us to calculate percentage criterialist consistency scores (e.g., $18/22 = 81\%$). Following Maggioni and colleagues

(2009b), we set the bar for full consistency with criterialism at $\geq 90\%$. Short of this was considered epistemic instability with respect to the adaptive position of criterialism.

We also were able to use the Likert-scale structure (strongly agree to strongly disagree) on the BHQ to assess the relative strength of respondents' beliefs with regard to each of the three positionings. That helped us to see if respondents leaned more so on some belief positions even if they tended to be inconsistent across them. This process opens a window onto understanding at which intersections inconsistencies may lie (e.g., strong allegiance to subjectivist beliefs, coupled with moderate allegiances to criterialist beliefs and weak objectivist beliefs, or another permutation).

Interviews. We conducted interviews with the six teachers noted in the foregoing. During the interviews that lasted from 15-45 minutes (depending on how loquacious teachers were), we hoped to elicit a range of reactions to the course, its impact on their understandings of teaching history, its influences on their beliefs about what history was, how it worked, and how knowledge claims are justified, what they thought it meant to teach secondary learners history as an investigative process, and the like. In the end, due to technical difficulties in the second week, we recorded and transcribed eight full interviews, six from week one, and two from week two. The four unrecorded interviews were reconstructed from notes *ex post facto*. We therefore understood them to be somewhat less reliable records and analyzed them as such.

Research Papers. After an initial discussion in the course introducing them to the secession debates in the south prior to the Civil War and an explanation about documents and resources that were available via the museum and its archives, teachers identified research questions they would pursue. They worked in dyads or triads. After they had completed their research, the teachers produced historical papers varying in length from 17 to 25 pages complete with references and the occasional footnote.

We analyzed the papers by looking for epistemic content. A definitive history of the secession debates has not been written in part because those debates varied from state to state, producing different outcomes at different stages of the southern secessionist movement. South Carolina, Alabama, Mississippi, and Louisiana voted early to secede. In Georgia, however, the question of secession was put to eligible voters a bit later, and some historians have questioned whether that vote tally actually signaled majority support for secession despite Georgia lawmakers' declaration that it did. Other states such as Virginia and North Carolina pursued somewhat different trajectories. Historical reports surrounding secession decisions and their particularities make for interesting but tricky research. Claims to know what happened (a type of content laden with epistemological issues) are often difficult to make with certainty. Therefore, textual hedges and routine qualifications to knowledge claims are necessary, unless one is convinced that she knows something for sure, and the evidence chains are unequivocal.

Teachers, for example, who may have leaned toward objectivist epistemic beliefs, approached the research task by putting faith in the objects they encountered in source material. Reporting out the results then became a relatively straightforward process. Hedges and qualifications would be absent from research papers of these teachers, implying objectivist leanings. Singular interpretations of source materials would likely be common and counterveiling accounts dismissed. Other teachers operating from stronger subjectivist epistemic moorings might conversely be more prone to write up the claims without hedges and qualifications because they believed that researchers have broad license

to conclude what they wish. We looked in the papers for (a) the use of hedges and qualification language, (b) first person insertions in the text regarding claims, and (c) levels of evidentiary support for those claims. We attempted to gather holistic epistemic-beliefs impressions about the teachers, albeit indirect, from the way they “did history” in the paper.

Although this type of holistic coding process does not produce clear and inarguable cases of epistemic positioning, it does shed some light on how respondents think and communicate historical claims, whether they lean towards reliance on objects, or themselves, or some coordinated combination of the two. We used what we learned from examining the research papers to augment our understanding of the results from the BHQ.

Lesson Plans. These plans also can contain epistemic content. For example, do teachers construct lesson plans from their research papers that communicate to their students the limits of what we can know and claim about the secession debates? Or conversely, do they design lessons that convey the idea that outcomes were a *fait accompli* and need no further analyses or investigation because a “correct” interpretation can be advanced? We studied the lesson plan documents looking for (a) how lesson goals were structured (e.g., learners needing to find a predetermined correct answer, or hold a debate about the debates and express their opinions on secession with disregard for contextualized historical evidence), (b) the role the concept of evidence played (or not) in the lesson and strategies for teaching about the concept if it was present, and (c) the degree to which teachers communicated some level of uncertainty around making definitive claims about the secession debates. As with the research papers, these forms of data helped us to better understand results from the BHQ and cautioned us about what we could say about positionings vis-à-vis our research questions.

Results

Epistemic Consistency

Since the results on the BHQ were pivotal to our overall sense of change in teachers’ epistemic beliefs as a consequence of the intensive two-week course experience, we begin by describing those outcomes. There are a number of different ways to display these results. We start with change in criterialist consistency scores (Table 1) arranged from high to low scores based on pre-assessment results. Then we move from there to other means to display these data to indicate direction and types of movement.

Table 1. Change in Criterialist Consistency Scores Pre/Post by Teacher

Teacher	Degree Program	Consistency Score Pre BHQ	Consistency Score Post BHQ	Change % by teacher
Gena	B.S. Social Studies	.91*	[missing]	—
Teresa	B.S. Middle Grades Social Studies	.91*	.86	-5
Erica	M.A.T. (B.A. & M.A. History)	.82	.77	-5
Lucy	B.S. Social Studies	.81	.68	-13
Ashley	M.Ed. (B.S. Social Studies)	.77	.82	+5
Michael	M.A.T. (B.S. Political Science)	.77	.82	+5
Ryan	M.A.T. (B.S. Political Science)	.73	.64	-9
Martha	M.Ed. (B.A. History Major)	.73	.82	+9
Stacy	M.A.T. (UG?)	.68	.73	+5
Linda	M.Ed. (B.S. Social Studies)	.68	.59	-9
Susan	B.S. Social Studies	.64	.82	+18
Camden	M.A.T. Middle Grades Social Studies (UG?)	.64	.82	+18
Adam	M.Ed. (B.S. Social Studies)	.55	.59	+4
Christian	B.S. Social Studies	.50	.55	+5
Median		.77	.77	
Mean		.72	.73	+2.8

* Considered a criterialist stance.

As the outcomes suggest, there was an aggregate upward shift towards criterialist beliefs over the course's two-week experience. However, the change was small, and there was considerable variability among the teachers. Five teachers scores showed movement away from criterialist beliefs, three of them relatively substantial (Linda, Lucy, Ryan). The remaining eight (Gena failed to turn in her post BHQ) moved toward those beliefs but only three teachers demonstrated sizeable changes (Camden, Martha, Susan). Seven registered changes of plus/minus 5% or less. None of the teachers ended at or above the criterialist consistency threshold ($\geq .90$), despite two of them beginning there. Five did, however, approach it at post BHQ with consistency scores between .82 and .86 (see Table 2).

Table 2. High-to-Low Percentage Change from Pre- to Post-BHQ by Teacher

Teacher	Degree Program	Pre/Post BHQ Score	Change %
Susan	B.S.	.64 / .82	+18
Camden	M.A.T.	.64 / .82	+18
Martha	M.Ed.	.73 / .82	+9
Ashley	M.Ed.	.77 / .82	+5
Michael	M.A.T.	.77 / .82	+5
Stacy*	M.A.T.	.68 / .73	+5
Christian	B.S.	.50 / .55	+5
Adam	M.Ed.	.55 / .59	+4
Teresa	B.S.	.91 / .86	-5
Erica	M.A.T.	.82 / .77	-5
Ryan	M.A.T.	.73 / .64	-9
Linda	M.Ed.	.68 / .59	-9
Lucy	B.S.	.81 / .68	-13

* Stacy's Post BHQ consistency score landed at the mean.

Of the five teachers who landed above the mean on the pre BHQ, three of them (Teresa, Erica, Lucy) became less consistent with criterialism across the course and they were three of the most initially consistent in their epistemic beliefs. The other two—Ashley and Michael—shifted towards greater consistency, but only by five percentage points. For those who were initially more consistent with criterialism, the course experience appeared to destabilize beliefs. The patterns we note in Table 2 appear unrelated to college education program and amount of education overall. For example, those with the highest (Susan, Camden, Martha) and lowest (Ryan, Linda, Lucy) post-BHQ consistency scores came from the Bachelors, M.A.T. and M.Ed. programs.

Strength and Nature of Beliefs

Strength/Certainty. We conducted two different types of BHQ-item analyses to see if we could determine patterns among the three different types of items. Using the Likert-scale range, the first approach allowed us insight into whether the course experiences overall tended to encourage stronger, more solid beliefs, be they objectivist, subjectivist, or criterialist. Given the earlier work that suggested considerable epistemic “wobbling” (e.g., Lee & Shemilt, 2003; Maggioni, 2010; VanSledright & Reddy, 2014), we took responses such as somewhat agree (Likert Scale 3 response) or disagree (4 response) as potential signals of that wobbling. In Table 3, we use the same distribution order shown in Table 2 but indicate whether registration of beliefs increased or decreased in strength relative to increases in consistency with criterialism.

Table 3. Changes in Certainty in Responses Pre- to Post-BHQ by Teacher

Teacher	Overall % of Change in Consistency Pre to Post BHQ (from Table 2)	# of Uncertain Responses at Post BHQ (Likert Scale 3-4)	Change from Pre BHQ	Overall Uncertainty Level at Post BHQ*
Susan	+18	7	+1	Moderate
Camden	+18	13	+1	High
Martha	+9	2	-2	Low
Ashley	+5	5	-2	Moderate
Michael	+5	7	-4	Moderate
Stacy	+5	2	-3	Low
Christian	+5	6	-4	Moderate
Adam	+4	4	+1	Moderate
Teresa	-5	7	-1	Moderate
Erica	-5	4	+3	Moderate
Ryan	-9	2	-2	Low
Linda	-9	11	+1	High
Lucy	-13	8	+2	High
Means	+2.8	6	-.70	Moderate

* Uncertainty Ratings by number of post-BHQ items: High = 8 items or greater, Moderate = 4 to 7 items, Low = less than 4 items.

The results displayed in Table 3 indicate that, overall, beliefs tended to be slightly stronger and more certain (agree/disagree or strongly agree/disagree) on average at post BHQ. The mean equaled 6 items, or a moderate level of uncertainty on average. For a few teachers (Michael, Stacy, Christian), certainty/strength of response grew considerably (4 or 5 more certain responses each at post), and one student—Erica—became less certain (3 more uncertain responses). Three teachers indicated high uncertainty in their beliefs overall by post BHQ, seven registered moderate uncertainty, and three expressed low uncertainty. The course experience did relatively little to strengthen certainty of beliefs among the teachers. Ten of the 13 exited the experience continuing to indicate moderate to high uncertainty in their convictions. Levels of uncertainty also appeared to operate independently from increases or decreases in criterialist consistency. For example, both Martha and Ryan registered low uncertainty but Martha's consistency score rose 9% while Ryan's fell by the same amount.

Nature of Beliefs. The second approach for displaying results allowed us to look at specific items in order to identify more closely the sources of wobbling. The items most revealing in this regard focused on agreement with statements on both the pre- and post-BHQ administration in which teachers were either repeatedly (a) at odds with criterialist beliefs or (b) strongly aligned with them. We looked at items in which half or more of the teachers identified agreements with non-criterialist beliefs and ones in which all the teachers aligned themselves with criterialist statements.

We begin with agreement on statements at odds with criterialist beliefs. Here we were able to examine the types of epistemic beliefs, and their links to the objectivist and subjectivist epistemic positions, to which teachers were repeatedly attracted (Table 4).

There were six statements that fell into this category. Five of them sampled subjectivist beliefs, and one, objectivist beliefs.

Table 4. Agreement with Non-Criterialist Statements on Pre- and Post-BHQ

Statement	Statement Type	# of Teachers (n=13) Agreeing with the Statement	
		Pre BHQ	Post BHQ
#2 History is simply a matter of interpretation.	Subjectivist	10	10
#4 Students who read many history books learn that the past is what the historian makes it to be.	Subjectivist	9	7
#12 The past is what the historian makes it to be.	Subjectivist	7	7
#14 It is impossible to know anything for sure about the past; we weren't there.	Subjectivist	7	7
#16 The facts speak for themselves.	Objectivist	4	7
#17 Students need to be aware that history is essentially a matter of interpretation.	Subjectivist	11	9

The results in Table 4 suggest that the teachers were attracted to a number of BHQ statements that favored subjectivist beliefs (5 items). The expansive role of the historian or investigator in shaping interpretations and constructing them in her/his own image appeared to be something about which many of the teachers were convinced. The knower prevailed upon the past and held considerable, if not open license to interpret at will. Contrasting with that backdrop, the four teachers who believed at pre BHQ that the facts or the objects from the past appeared to speak on their own terms continued to be convinced of that at post. They were joined in that conviction by three additional teachers. Apparently, for those seven, facts delimit the inquirers' interpretive license. But these seven also agreed with the majority of the subjectivist items noted in Table 4. We do not know exactly how the seven teachers reconciled these contradictory beliefs. The course experience appeared to somehow cultivate the idea among the seven that facts do indeed "speak for themselves" without mediation by interpreters, although that was not part of course design or purpose.

There were four criterialist statements (of 7 total) on which *all* 13 who responded to the pre- and post-BHQ agreed. These are displayed in Table 5.

Table 5. Agreement with Criterialist Statements on Pre- and Post-BHQ

Statement	Statement Type	# of Teachers (n=13) Agreeing with the Statement on Post BHQ
#1 Students need to support reasoning with evidence.	Criterialist	13
#7 Students need to learn how to deal with conflicting evidence.	Criterialist	13
#11 History is critical inquiry about the past.	Criterialist	13
#13 Comparing sources and looking for author subtext are essential components of the process of learning history.	Criterialist	13

In comparing the subjectivist and objectivist beliefs statements on which teachers agreed in Table 4 with these four in Table 5, we observed that the latter beliefs reflect deep agreement around a *process of coming to know* the past. Reasoning with and dealing with conflicting evidence, inquiring critically, and comparing sources and subtext can be thought of as indispensable tools in the historian/investigator's toolkit. They refer to how one does history. All the teachers agreed.

Most of the beliefs in Table 4 about which half or more of the teachers also agreed are linked to the *outcome* of the inquiry process, not the process itself per se. The belief statements in Table 4 focus on interpretations and license to make them, not directly on the more technical features of how one does historical investigation. In this sense, the teachers could agree on a technical process with criterialist underpinnings, while simultaneously giving rather excessive interpretive and subjective license to the knower. Investigative processes thereby appear disconnected from the endpoint interpretation, allowing for contradictory beliefs to seem reconciled, or at least detached. The teachers seemed to be saying: You have to follow required techniques, but once done, you get to conclude pretty much what you want. Consistency around beliefs in a regulated inquiry *process* does not need to be aligned with beliefs about what interpretive *outcomes* are generated.

If this makes sense, it might be possible to conclude that, for many of these teachers, they operate (wittingly or not) on the idea that how one does history is distinct from what that doing produces. The two may have never been systematically connected for them. Lack of connection may well be a consequence of how they learned what history is in 15 or 16 years of formal education and 20 or more years as informal students of the subject. In those experiences, students often learn that *what* one knows is far more important than *how* one knows it. Erica recalled, "I feel like I was always just told all the time: This is what it is. This [content] is what you have to believe." Objects from the past speak for themselves (what schools stress). When they don't, it opens up the terrain to anyone's interpretation (see also Maggioni, 2010). But in school, the latter appears to occur rarely. Erica did note, though, that she knew the idea that "objects speak for themselves" that school history promoted was less true than what she was typically told.

Erica was attempting to reconcile her many experiences with, "This is what it [history] is—this is what you have to believe," and her idea that, "History is not monolithic, but is made up of individual actors, none of [whom] are exactly alike, and each...acts for his/her reasons—there are [always] differing perspectives." She seemed to be saying that she knew that "this is what it is" denies the presence of multiple historical actors who, through personal ways of knowing the past, produce "differing perspectives." She just wasn't sure what to do with that problem. The ambiguity inherent in this realization was perhaps reflected in her contradictory responses to items on the BHQ. To address those contradictions, she appeared to embrace a knowing process that she thought might promote a practice of making students' differing interpretive (and subjective) conclusions widely acceptable. She simply had not thought yet about interpretive limits and criteria that might govern them. She may have shared these fused, but paradoxical beliefs, with a number of the other teachers.

Beliefs Embedded in Research Papers

The research papers teachers produced in dyads and triads tended to reflect this separation between investigation (knowing) and interpretation (outcome). The papers were heavy on laying out evidence to support theses regarding the secession debates. They focused on displaying the interpretive outcomes of the research process. Unlike, for example, Laurel Thatcher Ulrich's (1991), *A Midwife's Tale*, in which she reveals the machinery of investigative processes as she tells Martha Ballard's story and connects the two, the teachers focused solely on the stories they sought to tell, on the end results of their efforts. Few footnotes were used that might have displayed the vicissitudes and complications of their investigative processes, of how inquirers engage the difficult task of turning complex source materials and objects of research into evidence. Accounts, evidence gathering, and the historical cognitions that connect process to outcome were alluded to only through bibliographies. In other words, the researching process teachers undertook was largely masked in the papers they produced.

This result could have been an artifact of how the teachers made sense of the research-paper task. In the course, the requirements of the paper were deliberately left vague. The idea was to give the teachers a variety of opportunities to decide how they would construct them as long as they were linked to the topic focus and rooted in the research undertaken. Beneath this approach was the belief that leaving the requirements more open would result in teachers putting some degree of epistemic positioning on display through their choices.

All five papers reflected how teachers chose to turn the research-paper task into the familiar documents-based-question (DBQ) response. They began with a thesis statement and then, drawing from the documents and source materials, argued their way to a conclusion that supported the interpretation suggested by the thesis statement. Teachers saw little need to detail how they arrived at the thesis confirmation, or to note doubts they held, limitations imposed by the nature of the evidence, or opposing arguments that might be entertained.

Teachers did register concerns, however, during early discussions of their group's research trajectory and how their work would result in a paper. Several teachers who we interviewed also noted interpretive issues. To summarize, teachers often described the plethora of perspectives on the secession debates that arose in their digging through the original and secondary sources. This, they said, complicated the process of arriving at solid conclusions. A number of them noted that they came to learn that "history is not written in stone," as Stacy put it, and "history is not monolithic," as Erica observed. Questions surfaced repeatedly in small groups. Adam, for example, pressed his partners by asking frequently: "Is he [the person they were studying] using his political prowess [relative to the secession debates]...to secure himself a political promotion?" The more his group dug into the materials, the less clear an answer became. Yet, in the groups' paper, there was no sign that they had puzzled over this interpretive problem.

At one point midway through the research process, the class as a whole engaged in an open discussion of problems associated with turning accounts into evidence to make claims. The instructor noted that when accounts and traces do not form a complete and/or unequivocal storyline, it was customary to use qualifiers and hedges in making knowledge claims. Examples of such qualifiers and hedges were illustrated. Only two of the five papers contained them and we found them to be used sparingly. None of the papers entertained alternative interpretations as cautions about drawing definitive conclusions in

the face of thin or contradictory evidence. Then again and understandably, if the task was conceptualized as a type of schooling-based DBQ response with which the teachers were familiar, the goal would have been to state a thesis and “prove” its viability using whatever evidence could be mustered. Such exercises often encourage the separation of knowing from knowledge, of process from outcome, even though the former beget the latter.

Beliefs Expressed Through Lesson Planning

The lesson-planning task was more structured than the research paper task. Teachers requested this structure because many of them had written numerous lessons and needed to know features such as intended audience, planning template to be used, topic viz. state standards, duration, use of documents (or not), assessment specifications, and the like. As a result there were fewer degrees of freedom in design and construction.

Specifications for the lesson included a template that indicated how to think about audience (choice of middle or high school, but students they had taught or knew best), link to state standards for that grade level, topic (research paper), documents (how many and which ones were choices), lesson sequencing (inquiry-based with a question students were to address via documents), and a formative assessment requirement (their choice of design but the instructor encouraged them to align it to the lesson goals). Lesson plans were individual efforts. Approximately two and a half class sessions (10 hours) were spent on discussing inquiry-based planning, teaching, and assessing before teachers constructed the lessons. In this sense, the teachers received considerable guidance and structure. Because they took the course for a grade, they strove to follow that structure, whether that thought they would actually teach the lesson or not. They worked hard to produce plans that followed the guidance provided and the lessons conformed generally to an inquiry model, with arguably two exceptions. What we do not know is whether the teachers did this as an exercise to obtain a satisfactory course grade, or whether they actually intended to teach from those plans. The first option suggests a degree of mastery but without appropriation. If that occurred, the task did little to help them think through the epistemic issues they had encountered.

This possibility presents us with limits about what we can say regarding beliefs as expressed through the lessons. We draw on our analyses of the lessons here only to further clarify if possible some of the results concerning epistemic beliefs we observed in our previous explanations.

In the middle of the work leading up to the lesson planning task, several teachers began registering objections about whether it made sense to design full-blown inquiry-based lessons for *their* students. Could inquiry into a few source documents simply be used to supplant the textbook, but without altering the standards-driven outcome they were supposed to teach? This was the point at which concerns about the viability of investigative lessons were expressed directly. Many of them hinged on worries about the breadth of curriculum coverage (400 years), the prevalence of pacing guides designed to police the coverage of that curriculum, and end-of-grade tests that sampled facts and details found in the standards document.

Objections and concerns were often fronted by the most experienced teacher, Martha. She wondered how they were supposed to squeeze in investigative lessons, especially those spanning multiple class periods, when they were charged with plowing through 400 years of American history. In our interviews with her, she noted, “It [the researching process] is

interesting because it's a lot harder. It requires much more energy and there's a much greater investment of time." She paused and then added, "I think if you did this in your classroom, you'd end up with a bunch of frustrated people. There's such a thing as too much frustration, especially with high school kids. They'd just give up."

She turned these sorts of worries into complaints about how impractical the course had become in the messages it was sending about the value of researching the past, using documents, and teaching students to develop evidence-based interpretations. She thought it was valuable in its own right, just not applicable to the types of classroom contexts within which she and the others were working. The course messages were at odds with her school system's messages about what history was and how it was to be taught. Those messages favored beliefs underpinned by objectivism (and the rare subjectivism when interpretations could not be resolved), whereas the course messages were pointing a way toward a criterialist middle ground that favored drawing from disciplinary criteria to arbitrate interpretative outcomes, rather than let the curriculum or textbook do it. But her sense was that there was no time or latitude to systematically teach those criteria successfully given extant coverage, pacing, and testing policies. She seemed to be saying that, to fully embrace criterialism, connect and coordinate knowing and knowledge, and bring it all to the classroom, would make her already difficult work only much more so.

The course experience may have succeeded in opening up space for examining epistemic beliefs *about history* and pointing toward more adaptive ideas. However, it did not offer much for handling the policy environment in which the teachers were embedded, one that called for them to follow a prescribed path when *teaching history*. When it came to school-based pedagogy, downplaying knowing (historical cognition processes) and focusing instead on predetermined knowledge outcomes, might have been what the teachers imagined was their "adaptive" solution. It seemed to be the one perpetually reinforced at school. And the illusory comfort of knowledge certainty is indeed seductive, and can be anxiety reductive.

Discussion and Conclusion

Our sense of the results is that the story here is a complex one. On the one hand, it is likely that the teachers valued knowledge outcomes over the cognitive processes that produce them, because their primary frame for thinking about history was shaped by how they thought about teaching it. By the lights of state's history standards documents to which they felt obligated, teaching them involved presenting vast lists of names, dates, terms, and colligatory concepts that needed to be dispensed in quick succession if teachers were to meet the staccato step of the pacing guides and prepare their charges for state tests. In this vein, objects from the past and the predetermined storylines built around them were to be most prized.

Yet, at the same time the teachers were conflicted about this. A number of them were history majors or had taken a large number of history courses. They explained again and again in interviews (and via their BHQ responses; see Table 4) that they understood history to be multi-perspectival, that inquirers needed to interpret the past, and that a variety of interpretations could be entertained. Erica best summed up this unsettled sentiment when she said with some degree of disdain, "There's no freedom to teach. I realize it's not the way it should be. Critical thinking is just gone...you know, challenging your students to

think for themselves.” Ryan added, “You’re kind of constrained by the state standards. I can’t teach this and this if I want to cover the main [standards] goals.”

History for many of them contained a powerful subjective presence. In short, they saw the history they were charged to teach (objectivist in orientation) to be in conflict with this interpretive, subjectivist sense. They simply did not know how to square up the contradictions. They appeared to compartmentalize: History on the one hand, history teaching on the other. This appeared in their registration of beliefs on the BHQ, in the research papers, and to a lesser extent in the lesson plans, but most obviously in the in-class objections to coordinating them.

Although the course experience was designed to help them work through the potential contradictions and raise consistency in beliefs via the adaptiveness inherent in the criterialist position, it only partially succeeded. It appeared to raise awareness about epistemic problems, but did little to resolve them. The teachers remained epistemically inconsistent, stuck between privileging an interpreter’s license and realizing that, at least as far as policymakers, test developers, and standards writers were concerned, there was an objective history—fixed, static, and relatively unmalleable. They had signed on to be its reluctant messengers. Caught in the middle, they wobbled epistemically, uncertain about how to sort through it, particularly in their role as history teachers.

Epistemic wobbling and/or inconsistency in history and history teaching seem to be conditions at rest. Interventions such as course experiences described here appear to do relatively little to disturb inertia. Among teachers anyway, they may provoke shifts in beliefs around a few technical aspects (knowing, historical thinking) within a discipline such as history. However, they appear to be much less potent in addressing beliefs about the nature of interpretive outcomes (e.g., they are either putative or, when on a few occasions they are in dispute, personal opinions will do just fine). They also seem relatively impotent in addressing what it means to teach history as a doing enterprise, in which knowledge is directly connected to and dependent on a process of knowing, rather than as a receiving one. These 14 history teachers appear to work at the crossroads of hardened binary categories: History as an admirable and intriguing, but complex disciplinary and professional practice on the one hand counterpoised against a schooling effort that appears to prize simplicity and certainty on the other.

As we noted, history teachers are embedded social actors. They are primarily embedded in a schooling context in which the messages they receive about the proper epistemic beliefs are shaped by objectivist stances that reflect the behaviorist orientations upon which they were built. Letting go of those orientations and embracing new beliefs (e.g., connecting knowledge to knowing) means for these teachers that they risk sanctions from their employers (e.g., being called out for failing to meet requirements of the pacing guide). Change in one part of the organization (among teachers) does not necessarily result in change in another (among policymakers, supervisors). Power to sanction is regulatory and resides with the powerful.

Risk engenders no small amount of anxiety and fear. Such psychological distress in turn produces defensive strategies. The data from this study suggest that they took the form of knowing and knowledge separation, category compartmentalization, and general resistance. The teachers will very likely and unwittingly pass those defenses off onto their students in one form or another. Defensiveness can inhibit cognitive and psych-social adaptivity. Epistemic inconsistency and/or wobbling will be the consequence. For us, one

key question remains: Who might benefit most from perpetuating this sort of condition at rest, and to what end?

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Reexamining the American Civil War through a Peace Education Lens

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Abstract

Many historians and educators in modern society have portrayed the American (U.S.) Civil War as virtuous due to the abolition of slavery that resulted. This reality makes critiquing the justifications for the war more complicated. However, the nuanced conflicts are where a peace education approach becomes more vital. This article explores the ways teachers can use a peace education perspective to problematize the justifications for the American Civil War while simultaneously confronting the societal injustices that led to the conflict. This approach is clearly distinct from the problematic “Lost Cause” or neo-Confederate framework which minimizes or justifies the slave system. Through critiquing a conflict such as the American Civil War, students can gain a more robust understanding of peaceful solutions to both international war and seemingly insurmountable national conflict. This paper also seeks to draw educators back to one of the primary goals of the historic peace education movement, the deconstruction of militaristic ideology.

Keywords: peace education, militarism, American Civil War

Introduction

Though it has been over 150 years since General Robert E. Lee surrendered at Appomattox, the Civil War still plays a major role in American society. The tension that still surrounds the history of the war led to actual violent conflict and the death of a young woman in Charlottesville, Virginia in August of 2017 after pro-Confederate and white supremacist groups rallied against the proposed removal of a statue of Robert E. Lee (Fortin, 2017). The anger and violence should perhaps lead us to consider how we discuss the Civil War and what the implications are in a time where the nation once again appears to be in a state of deep divide. This paper proposes that a peace education approach is needed when examining the Civil War.

When questioning the Union narrative of the Civil War, there is an obvious danger in diminishing the horrific reality of slavery. This problem has been exemplified by the Lost Cause ideology (Faust, 1989) which minimizes slavery and portrays the war as one of Southern independence (Gallagher & Nolan, 2000). The unscholarly and racially insensitive treatment of the Civil War, seen through the movement of white nationalists

and Confederate sympathizers (Stolberg & Rosenthal, 2017) may have created an understandable hesitation to critique the Civil War from those who are concerned about modern racial justice. However, there is a danger in social studies educators hesitating to critique the war or overlooking the soldiers killed and families torn apart. In the possible hesitancy to deconstruct a conflict which led to the death of hundreds of thousands of soldiers on both sides, there could be a dismissal of the horrific reality of fellow countrymen killing one another. By justifying or even praising the Civil War as a war of liberation, educators could be unintentionally promoting militarism.

Due to this seeming contradiction, this article proposes a different framework for critiquing the Civil War—a framework of peace education. Peace education explores non-violent solutions to conflict while simultaneously addressing structural violence and injustice (Fitzduff & Jean, 2011; Galtung & Høivik, 1971; Reardon, 1988). This more comprehensive approach allows for the needed critique of the Civil War while also acknowledging and confronting the racial and structural injustices of the era. This is an important role peace education can serve when it comes to the historical study of war as it makes the ideologically constructed justifications and rationalities behind war more uncertain. In order for students to truly understand historical conflict through a peace education lens, it is not sufficient to only critique wars that are more widely acknowledged to be unjust. That stance is fairly easy and may not actually lead to a true critique of warfare in general. To understand historical conflict through a peace education lens, it is necessary to re-examine conflicts that may appear not only necessary, but even virtuous (McCorkle, 2017). By critiquing the American Civil War through the lens of peace education, educators can begin to deconstruct war and militarism in general by proposing historical alternatives to war. They can also lay the groundwork for more peaceful solutions to national strife.

In a nation like the U.S. where militarism is a central part of identity and of public and political life (Renshon & Suedfeld, 2007; Winke, 2016) and the political divide continues to increase (Cohn, 2014; Pew Research Center, 2016), it is of even greater importance for American students to understand and make sense of their nation's Civil War. If educators and scholars justify the violence of a deeply divided nation in the 19th Century, it is more difficult to promote and establish peaceful solutions for an increasingly divided nation in the 21st Century. It should be noted that the critique of historical war is relevant beyond this singular conflict. The problematizing of the American Civil War is merely an example of how educators can begin to challenge traditional narratives of historical conflicts.

Peace Education and Historical Conflict

Harris and Morrison (2012) define peace education as a philosophy and process that “involves students and educators in a commitment to create a more just and peaceful world order” (p.4) and peace educators as those who look at “the cause and provide knowledge about alternatives to violence” (p.11) Peace education originally began as a pedagogy largely based on international peace and preventing warfare (Harris, 2008). In recent decades peace education has expanded into different areas including environmental education (Arikan, 2009; Naoufal, 2014), critical theory (Bajaj, 2015; Brantmeier, 2013), and human rights education (Reardon 2002). There has also been a focus on how pedagogical practices and school structures are necessary for the implementation of a truly vibrant peace education (Hantzopoulos, 2008; Rothman, 2014). Peace education has also

focused on the ideals of positive peace (Montessori, 1972; Reardon, 1988) which take into account structural issues which lead to conflict. While the more multifaceted nature of modern peace education has many advantages, many of the goals of the early peace education movement focused specifically on the topic of war and peace between nation-states (Harris, 2008). One of the earliest examples of peace education in the United States was the American School Peace League which began in 1908 and at one point had chapters in two thirds of the states. One of the central goals for the teachers in this organization was that “their students wouldn’t want to wage war against foreigners” (Harris, 2008, p.53). Another example of this emphasis was Brookwood Labor College where students involved in the labor movement learned about the importance global peace had on true social progress. As Charles Howlett (2008) states “In fighting for social justice against powerful economic interest groups, the College relied on the crusade for world peace as one important step for promoting domestic social reform” (p. 2). Maria Montessori (1932) also spoke to this emphasis when she stated that for a better educated population, “war would not be a problem for them at all. They would see it simply as a barbarous state, opposed to civilization—an absurd and incomprehensible phenomenon, as expendable and defeatable as the plague.” John Dewey (1923) envisioned a history and geography curriculum which refused to make a “fetish out of patriotism” and instead produced “feelings of respect and friendliness for the other nations and people of the world” (p. 516).

Some contemporary scholars (Duckworth; 2015; Summy & Saunders, 1995; Yogeve, 2015) have built on this earlier heritage in using peace education as a way to deconstruct war and conflict in the history curriculum. Cheryl Duckworth (2015) sees peace education as an area of study that can move beyond an attempt to “foster enhanced communication or cultural skills” to one that can “interrupt macro historical causes of violence” (p.167). Israeli scholar, Esther Yogev (2013), describes methods to undermine the dominant historical narratives in war torn areas. She uses the example of her home country to show how a change in an understanding of history can lead to more opportunities for peace. She calls for a “pedagogy of subversion that will strengthen the political-critical dimension in history education” (p.52). Other scholars have proposed a “peace history” which centers on the role of peace activists. This peace history emphasis largely arose from the anti-war movements in the 1960s and 1970s. Summy and Saunders (1995) stressed the important yet overlooked role of peace activists in nuclear proliferation and the end of the Vietnam War. They also stress how peace activists, even if unsuccessful, set the dynamic for greater possibilities for future peace. As they state, peace history points to the “universal and eternal quest for peace” (pp.125-126).

Peace education scholar, James Page (2000), argues that peace education is vital to an understanding of past conflicts since war is often portrayed as inevitable (Wilson, 2012). In his view, “No war is inevitable. Interestingly, a belief in war’s inevitability can be identified as a crucial cause of war itself, since it engenders the mentality of the pre-emptive strike. The inevitability belief functions as a self-fulfilling prophecy” (p.441). Page also warns of the focus on the macro-strategies of war instead of looking at the plight of the individuals involved. Page argues that a deconstruction of war in the classroom is a path towards a more complete history. As he states, in history there is often a “forgotten or underdeveloped narrative that emphasizes a history of love and nurturing, joy and fulfillment” (p.446). It is a “narrative of the common people” and not just the nation-state (p.446). McCorkle (2017) argues that it is imperative that peace education returns to its

historical roots of deconstructing and opposing militarism and war without losing its more recent multifaceted approach. History and social studies teachers can use peace education to critique past conflicts while simultaneously helping students understand the importance of justice in creating that peace. As Montessori (1972) states,

What is generally meant by the word peace is a cessation of war. But this negative concept is not an adequate description of genuine peace ... the prospect of true peace makes us turn our thoughts to the triumph of justice and love among men, to the building of a better world where harmony reigns. (pp. 6–8)

Pedagogy of Peace Education

When critiquing war through a peace education perspective, it is necessary to not only consider the content but the pedagogical practices. Peace education is grounded in the ideas of student centered learning and emancipatory pedagogy where students are the ones who form solutions (Jenkins & Jenkins, 2010; Rhys & Betts, 2008). This is at the center of a more emancipatory model of education proposed by critical theorists such as Paulo Freire (1970). Therefore, it is essential that students themselves imagine alternative solutions to the American Civil War and warfare in general. Simply having the teacher question the justifications for the war will achieve few meaningful results. Allowing students to form these solutions not only encourages them to improve their critical thinking skills, it also further opens their minds to peaceful solutions to conflict in general. The goal is not to just create anti-war solutions, but mold students who are resilient in forming paths towards a positive peace. There are no easy answers. It takes imagination and a willingness to construct peaceful solutions even if it means a radical change in perception. Ultimately, this critical focus can be beneficial in helping students identify and critique other dominant societal narratives besides war.

The Civil War in the Context of Peace Education

When examining the American Civil War, the modern narrative is often based on the theory that the war was inevitable (Calore, 2008). Since the founding of the nation, the unsettled issue of slavery drove the North and South apart. Other historians have portrayed the conflict as justified because it kept the republic together (Harris, 2014), and even more importantly, it ended the scourge of slavery (Blight, 2001). Many, especially those outside the American South, may see the war as tragic but a necessary step for national and overall human progress. It is pertinent that educators re-examine these narratives in the history classroom.

The Inevitability of War

Through using a peace education lens, teachers can encourage students to examine the argument of the inevitability of the war. A basic question that may allow students to begin this larger critique is whether the important division on the issue of slavery made armed conflict inevitable. Could there have been other solutions? What other decisions could the country have made in the lead up to the American Civil War which could have prevented the conflict? This can help students question the inevitability of war in general and explore how individuals and populations make choices that can lead to peace or conflict. It is

important for students not to see the world from a fatalistic perspective, but rather as one that is “open-ended” as views on the inevitability of war can “create the possibility of a peaceful future and the creative resolution of tension, or...promise only endless destruction” (Page, 2000, p. 446). Before introducing students to the problems of inevitability in relation to the Civil War, teachers could critique the idea of inevitability in other conflicts which may be easier to see such as the War in Iraq or the War in Vietnam. Part of this process is simply having students recognize the prevalence of this belief in inevitability which they may not be immediately obvious.

Alternative historical decisions. When viewing the American Civil War from the Confederate position, it may be easier for many modern students outside of parts of the American South to see the solutions. The South could have been willing to end the institution of slavery, refused to leave the Union after the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1860, and not fired the first shots on Ft. Sumter. For those holding to a Southern or Lost Cause perspective, there might need to be an additional exploration of the ideas of positive peace (Montessori, 1972) in relation to the injustice of the institution of slavery.

It could be more difficult for students to understand what the North could have done to stop the war, short of completely capitulating on the issue of slavery. This may be why the war is often celebrated in history as it is seen as a war of liberation. Due to the positive historical outcomes, a conflict like the American Civil War is where a true exploration of peace becomes more difficult, but also more important if the goal is to find alternative solutions to violent conflicts.

One solution students could discuss is whether the North could have simply allowed the South to leave and start their own nation. Was the South in the best position to have a stable, independent government? This could be an opportunity for students to do a type of role play activity where they explore the chaos that often ensues when a nation separates. May it have been possible that the South would have eventually sought to rejoin the Union out of the benefits it received from being part of a larger nation? In this position, the Northern states would have been in a more advantageous position to accept the terms of readmission into the Union, including possibly banning slavery. Perhaps, students could also investigate modern examples of events such as “Brexit” to compare the problems that nation-states have when breaking away from a union. Would the people of the South have eventually pressured the Confederacy to rejoin the Union due to the advantages they received? Separation may seem ideal at first, but the long term effects may be more problematic. Teachers could also do a more in-depth exploration of the Southern economy and how it may have fared long term without Northern industry. Bateman and Wise (1981) explore how little the South had been able to progress industrially due to both the institution of slavery and resistant attitudes by many Southerners. Students could form a hypothetical model of the South, five years after secession, and explore what political and economic issues might have plagued the new country.

Complicating the “Union” Justification

Teachers can also critique the ethical rationale that the war was necessary because it kept the Union together. It is imperative to reinforce to students that this was the primary reason for the North engaging in the war, not banning slavery, which is seen in Lincoln’s own words. As he wrote in a 1862 letter to editor of the *New York Tribune*, Horace Greenly,

My paramount object in this struggle is to save the Union, and is not either to save or to destroy slavery. If I could save the Union without freeing any slave I would do it, and if I could save it by freeing all the slaves I would do it.

There are different questions to consider when examining the justification of the war from the position of saving the Union. Did the secession of the Southern states justify armed conflict? What were the reasons for wanting to keep the country together? Was the United States truly one nation after the deep and bitter conflict? Teachers could then apply this discussion to contemporary situations. If a current state or territory tried to secede, would it justify armed conflict? What would students think today if Texas or California decided to leave the nation, and the United States went to war against them? Teachers can frame the debate not on whether the Civil War was justified, but whether the Civil War was justified based on the issue of preserving the Union (since that was the primary original goal). Using this as the framework for the debate may lead to vastly different conclusions than a discussion on the justification of the war in general. Peace education allows students to critique the nationalist narratives that justify historical conflicts. By using this approach, teachers can honestly explain the benefits that follow certain conflicts while deconstructing the myths and rationale behind the conflict. Peace education also allows for a larger critique of nationalism overall (Dewey, 1923) and explores how this ideology can lead to both structural injustice and violence.

Ulterior motivations. Students can also explore the argument that the war was fought at least partially for Northern capitalists (Zinn, 2003) who were intricately linked with the Southern slave economy (Baptist, 2014). This discussion on economic motivations could lead students to look at the multifaceted nature of war. There are official reasons governments give for a war. However, there can also be a mixture of ulterior and more problematic reasons. Students could analyze some of the ulterior motives of other past wars including the economic interests of men like J.P. Morgan in World War I (Prins, 2015) and the role that oil has played in many of the conflicts in the Middle East (Gendzier, 2015; Pelletière, 2004). To help students understand this point, they could also research some of the specific industries and industry leaders during the Civil War who were dependent on the country staying together. Since peace education seeks to create a more holistic idea of peace (Harris & Morrison, 2012), a strong critique of ulterior motivations is a necessity.

The Issue of Slavery

Though slavery may not have been the original reason for the North to engage in war, there is the vital question of whether an avoidance of war would have allowed slavery to continue. This is a central question that teachers cannot merely overlook. Though this was not the primary reason for the North fighting the war, it was central to the Southern Secession as is seen through the original Declaration of Secession by the state of South Carolina (1860) over what the state saw as “the current of anti-slavery feeling” in the North. It is also the event that led to the abolition of slavery.

Due to our historical view, it is natural to assume that a Civil War would have been the only way to stop the inhumane and racist institution of slavery, but this could be due to a failure in understanding how other nations ended slavery without going to war. On this point, students could explore alternative solutions for how slavery could have been abolished without war. Could the North and other European nations have boycotted the

staple crops from the South until slavery was abolished? Though a boycott most likely would have weakened both the North and South, if the North was resolute enough in their desire to end slavery, it could have been quite an effective tool as the Southern economy was largely dependent on Northern industry (Bateman & Wise, 1981). Students could research how sanctions have caused other nations to change national policy.

Example of other nations. Students could also research how other nations abolished slavery. For example, Great Britain ended slavery without war. Parliamentarians like William Wilberforce led the movement to abolish the slave trade through the legislative process (Tomkins, 2007). Later, Great Britain actually paid Caribbean slave-owners to release their slaves (Olusoga, 2015). Of course, there is a deep injustice in a government giving money to slave owners instead of giving it to the freed slaves (Manning, 2013). However, if this was the only way the U.S. could have actually stopped a civil war, would it have been worth it? (Powell, 2008). Another example teachers can discuss is what occurred in Brazil where abolitionists purchased the freedom of slaves (Powell, 2008). Obviously, the deeply sectional nature of slavery in the United States presents specific issues and quandaries, but other global examples can help provide more context for the discussion. An activity a teacher could consider is breaking students into groups and having each group explore how slavery was abolished in one specific nation. They could then analyze whether that same approach would have been possible in the United States.

Slavery as a dying institution? Students can also consider whether slavery was a dying institution. Though slavery was still strong at the time of the American Civil War (McPherson, 2008), there are some historians that argue that the Southern economy was actually suffering from relying on chattel slavery instead of turning to a more “free labor” approach (Cairnes, 1969). Governments were already abolishing slavery all around the world at the time of the American Civil War. Would the slave system in the American South have continued for a great deal longer with the changing international economy? Would it have collapsed like the former feudal system in Europe? Popular depictions seen in films, such as the *Confederate States of America* (Wilmott, 2004) and the proposed upcoming HBO series *Confederate* (Chen, 2017), of what would have happened if the South had won the war portray slavery continuing to the present day. However, given the international decline of slavery, this would have been unlikely.

The efficiency of war for true emancipation. There is also the vital question of whether the American Civil War was actually the most effective route to ensuring true liberation for the slave population. After the war and the end of Reconstruction, many Southern blacks returned to a near slave like existence under the sharecropping system and the segregated, Jim Crow South. If the American Civil War is going to be praised for ending slavery, there is the troubling aspect of how it largely failed in granting any true form of equal civil rights. As one former slave told the Federal Writer’s project,

Lincoln got the praise for freeing us, but did he do it? He give us freedom without giving us any chance to live to ourselves and we still had to depend on the southern white man for work, food and clothing, and he held us through our necessity and want in a state of servitude but little better than slavery. Lincoln done but little for the Negro race and from living standpoint nothing. White folks are not going to do nothing for Negroes except keep them down. (Hall, 1938)

Having students more deeply examine the conditions for freed slaves under the Jim Crow South may be a way to deconstruct the idea that the war led to true liberation or a positive peace. This exploration could also extend to the modern era and the racial injustice that is still endemic in our society (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995).

Danger in Seeing Victory in Retrospect

It is a temptation for students in the 21st Century to look at the Civil War with an assumption that the Union was going to be victorious. As historian Gary Gallagher states, “There’s an Appomattox syndrome--we look at Northern victory and emancipation and read the evidence backward” (as cited by Horwitz, 2013). How would students view the war differently if the South had won? Would the victory over the North have cemented the ideas of slavery even further? If the North would have lost, how would modern students look at the lives lost and the money spent? How would the North have evolved differently if it would have lost the war? What would have happened if more Northern cities had been destroyed like those in the South? To take it even further, if the South would have won and there was a movement to reunite the country, the South may have had the upper hand to actually set much of the policy in the nation. Having students engage in a type of creative writing assignment where they imagine what the results would have been if the North had lost the war may help lead to a strong critique of the war overall. It is important when introducing this type of thinking to tread with a degree of caution as it is impossible to know exactly what would have happened and to make sure that this does not inadvertently support the Lost Cause ideology.

The Horrors of War

A peace education perspective is also advantageous because in conflicts like the American Civil War positive outcomes can be stressed to such an extent that the horrors of the war are overlooked. A new estimate from historian, David Hacker (2011), puts the soldier death toll in the American Civil War at 750,000. To put that in context, more U.S. soldiers died in the American Civil War than all the other American wars combined. In comparison, there were only 4,535 deaths in the American Revolution (Crigger & Santhanam, 2015). In addition to the sheer number of casualties, there was the harsh reality of thousands of fellow countrymen slaughtering one another. At times, soldiers were fighting against their fellow community members and in rare occasions, even members of their own family. Even less historical focus has been placed on how the war affected women and children. The war was especially detrimental to Southern women who were often caught in the cross-fire of guerilla warfare and became refugees as they sought to escape war-torn areas. (“Women in the Civil War,” 2012). As part of this critique, students can examine their own textbooks and historical resources for how they present the American Civil War and conflict in general. Is the focus primarily about generals, strategy, and ultimate outcomes? Is there any coverage of the effect on the lives of the common people involved? A largely political history can neglect the stories of normal individuals, which can make wars seem more appealing or justified. Teachers can also introduce primary sources that detail the experiences of soldiers both in warfare and in the trauma and PTSD that often follows combat. Peace education can allow social studies to center the discussion on war back on the individuals and families negatively affected. This aspect is often purposely minimized by the government forces. An example of this is seen in the

reticence to display the caskets of dead soldiers (Caffety, 2009). This can often sanitize war and ironically minimize the reality of death from the discussion of war.

Differentiating Peace Education from the Lost Cause

Unfortunately, most of the historical critique of the American Civil War has come from those who want to deny the role of slavery and justify the Southern secession. This apologist narrative began shortly after the war ended (Pollard, 1866). According to Gallagher and Nolan (2000) the Lost Cause can be defined as a Southern retelling of the Civil War which minimizes slavery, celebrates the Antebellum South, blames abolitionists for sectional conflicts, portrays the war as one of independence, and “attributes the Northern victory to sheer weight of number and resources” (p.4). Unlike this ideology, using a peace education lens when exploring the American Civil War should not lead towards sympathy with the Confederacy. Peace education allows for a strong denunciation of the structural injustice and inhumanity of the Southern slave system while still imaging alternatives to war. Problematizing the American Civil War and the Union’s actions, does not mean that the South was justified in its pursuits of either secession, upholding slavery, or aggression toward the North. It also does not signify a type of false equivalency that paints both sides as “equally wrong.” This is a pitfall to which some anti-war voices have fallen victim. To critique or oppose the war of the nation-state does not necessarily mean that the nation has moral equivalency with the enemy. One side can be more morally culpable without denying the role that both sides played in the conflict. Peace education with its emphasis on creating a positive peace based on societal justice (Reardon, 1988) does not take a morally neutral or relative stand, but rather deeply considers the ethical implications of conflict for both individuals and societies.

It may be beneficial for teachers to state this contrast upfront as critiquing the national narrative of the Civil War may put some students on the defensive, especially in today’s polarized world. This is especially true for African-American students and other minority students who still face discrimination and justifiably see the racist elements in the rhetoric of many of those who have questioned the war. It could also be troubling for students in the American South who may be strongly resistant to the neo-Confederate ideology, which is still strong in certain areas. Conversely, the goal should be to deconstruct--not reinforce--the ideals of neo-Confederate ideology, which some students may hold. A peace education view should never be used as a tool to justify oppression and injustice in the name of avoiding war. This distinction is central to understanding peace education, which is about creating structural justice, not merely preventing conflict (Brock-Utne, 1995).

Modern Relevance of Study

Political Polarization

A central goal in the critique of the Civil War through a peace education lens is to reimagine the ability of the nation to deal with internal conflict without resorting to war. If we are unable to see alternative solutions to our past Civil War, it could make it more difficult to see how we can resolve heightened national strife in the present. This goal is of special importance in a time when the U.S. population is becoming more polarized politically. The Pew Research Center (2016) details this division in their recent study. It

reveals that in 1994 only 21% of Republicans had a “very unfavorable” view of the Democratic Party. By 2016, that number had risen to 58%. Similarly, the “very unfavorable” view of Democrats towards the Republican Party rose from 17% to 55%. The study also found that 49% of Republicans said the Democratic Party made them afraid, with 55% of Democrats stating the same about Republicans. During the 2016 U.S. Presidential election, there were stories of competing political ideologues engaging in physical altercations (Moyer, 2016; Sullivan & Miller, 2016).

Though today’s divisions are not as exclusively regional as they were during the Civil War, there is still a large divide between the more rural states of the South and Great Plains and the more urban areas of the Atlantic and Pacific Coasts. There are quite stark societal and ideological differences between New York or Los Angeles and Oklahoma or Idaho. How do we deal with political and social divisions in our current setting? What would occur if there were a contested presidential election where one side refused to concede? How would we respond to conflicts that put the very structure of the country in jeopardy? Given the tension and instability surrounding the current Trump presidency, these questions are not merely hypothetical anymore. One of Trump’s former advisors, Roger Stone, recently suggested that if Trump were impeached, we could be facing a type of civil war. As he stated, “Try to impeach him. Just try it. You will have a spasm of violence in this country, an insurrection like you’ve never seen” (Lima, 2017). If the only framework the public can look to when dealing with this level of division in the country is the Civil War, we are in a dangerous position. Peace education allows us to avoid a false peace which merely delays inevitable conflict, while pursuing realistic solutions towards both societal tranquility and justice, knowing that the first will not be possible without the second. Peace education also allows for discussion and multiple perspectives to be heard. This approach can allow for the cultivation of respect for differing perspectives and views of history, which is of vital importance in our growingly divided country.

Militarism

Problematizing historical conflicts is also of special importance in a nation like the United States where militaristic ideology is prevalent. For example, studies have found that the U.S. public is more accepting of pre-emptive strikes than other nations. In the 2003 invasion of Iraq, 72% of Americans supported the war compared to only 27% of Germans and 20% of individuals in France (Pew Research Center, 2008; Renshon & Suedfeld, 2007). Regarding torture, 58% of Americans polled believed the practice can be justified if it helps deliver important information about terrorist attacks. The numbers were much lower around the world with only 45% of those in the Middle East, 36% in Europe, and 25% in Latin America holding similar views (Winke, 2016). In relation to targeted attacks on civilians, 49% of Americans believe these attacks are sometimes justified compared to 20% of Sub-Saharan Africans, 19% of Europeans, and 16% of Asians (Gallup Abu Dhabi Center, 2011). The U.S. is also the most powerful military in the world and spends as much on their military as the next 10 nations (China, Russia, UK, Japan, France, Saudi Arabia, India, Germany, Italy, and Brazil) combined (Koba, 2014). Due to the U.S. power and influence, how the American public views war and peace is of vital importance to the future stability of the world community. McCorkle (2017) describes how this historical acceptance of war can help lead to a greater embrace of modern military operations. Perhaps, we should at least consider if our historical narratives on war lead to a more

militaristic outlook today. If the majority of our historical conflicts are portrayed as not only justified but as necessary for the advancement of society, it is easier to use these same frameworks in relation to current conflicts. Peace education, with its history in movements such as nuclear proliferation (Boulding, 1982), asks us to question whether our military build-up is actually making us more secure and whether our wars are actually leading to a more just and sustainable society.

Conclusion

The goal of critiquing the American Civil War through a peace education lens is to lead to a greater deconstruction of war in general. Given the nuance and even redeeming qualities of the war, it makes a beneficial case study for how difficult and complex peaceful solutions can be. Educators can use this same framework with other conflicts, perhaps wars that are also held to be sacrosanct in history. The objective is to create a theoretical framework by which students can view war and conflict. Peace education also allows for students to undertake the important work of critically analyzing multiple perspectives (Soares & Wood, 2010) and through this gain the important skills of civic competence (NCSS 2008); the ultimate goal being to prepare students for their role in participatory democracy and positive social change (Stanley, 2005).

Critiquing the American Civil War from a peace education perspective is powerful precisely because of the complexity involved. Though students may more easily understand the arguments against the War in Vietnam or the Mexican-American War, the alternatives to a conflict like the American Civil War, especially when it led to the end of slavery, are more difficult to examine. In some areas of the country, it may seem taboo to even critique the war as it may be perceived as insensitive. There could also be a fear of appearing to sympathize with the Confederacy. Though these are legitimate and valid concerns, they should not prohibit teachers from re-examining dominant historical narratives which are incomplete and no longer serve a beneficial purpose in modern society. Peace education does not ignore the complexity and moral quandaries involved in war. It is not utopian thinking, but rather a grounded and practical reimagining of the perceptions of war and conflict.

The ultimate purpose of critiquing historic wars is about altering the outlook towards present and future conflicts. The next war almost always seems urgent and necessary when the nation is at the brink of conflict. The justifications for the war often seem clear on the outset and only become more questionable in retrospect. One of the problems is that we have glorified wars as part of the national narrative that portrays armed conflict as the only possible path towards progress, human rights, and justice. By problematizing conflicts such as the American Civil War, these national narratives lose some of their power. The hope is that a larger critique of war can lay the groundwork for a more peaceful society. There will always be many that justify and celebrate past and contemporary wars. It is the role of the peace educator to at least give students the opportunity to reconsider these dominant narratives and perhaps become future advocates for peaceful solutions that are grounded in justice.

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Appendix

Sample Lesson Plan for the Middle School or High School Classroom

“Critiquing the Civil War through a Peace Education Lens”

Standards Addressed:

NCSS-C3 Framework

D2.Civ.14.9-12. Analyze historical, contemporary, and emerging means of changing societies, promoting the common good, and protecting rights.

D4.1.9-12. Construct arguments using precise and knowledgeable claims, with evidence from multiple sources, while acknowledging counterclaims and evidentiary weaknesses.

Objectives:

- Students will be able to understand the process of critically examining historical conflict and national narratives about war and violence through the framework of peace education
- Students will analyze multiple and conflicting primary sources and engage in the process of historical thinking
- Students will create their own alternative solutions to historical decisions and events

Essential Questions:

- What were the changes, both positive and negative, and the aspects that remained the same at the end of the Civil War?
- Was there a possible peaceful solution to the Civil War which also addressed the injustice of slavery?

Background Information:

In order to introduce this lesson, it would be necessary for the teachers to have presented introductory information about the Civil War to the students. To begin to critique the national narratives, students should have a solid grasp on the basic timeline of the Civil War, the issues which led to the conflict, the scope of the war, and the outcomes of the war both in terms of Reconstruction and the emancipation of former slaves.

Class Outline:

- Opening Discussion (7-10 minutes).** Have the students discuss the reasons for the Civil War, with specific emphasis on why the North engaged in the conflict. Use an application such as *Polls Everywhere* to have students text their answers into a word cloud.
- Proceed to discuss reasons that these narratives have emerged.
- Lincoln letter to Greeley (7-10 minutes).** Introduce the letter from Abraham Lincoln to Horace Greeley (1862) and have students discuss what the implications are on the current understandings of the Civil War. Ask students how this letter confirms, undermines, or complicates the common assumptions about the Civil War
- Impact of the War (10 minutes)** Have students split into groups and discuss the positive outcomes of the Civil War, the negative results of the Civil War, and issues that the Civil War left unchanged. Have each group briefly share the results of their discussion with the class.
- Analysis of Primary Sources (20-30 minutes)** Give each group a packet (either on paper or digitally) that show several pictures that detail horror of war for soldiers, a liberated slaves’ narrative (Shaffer & Regosin, 2005), and the narrative of an oppressed

sharecropper in the years after the war (Hall, 1938). With these resources, have the students seek to answer the question of whether they believe the war was justified. Follow up with a group discussion that investigates the conflicting ethical aspects of the Civil War as well as the differing individual experiences and effects of the conflict.

-Alternative to War Activity (15 minutes). Have students create a solution where they come up with a solution for how the war could have been prevented while still addressing the injustice of slavery. Have the students present their ideas to the class and then have a discussion on whether they believe these solutions would have been possible.

-Connection to Modern Era (15 minutes)

Ask the students how the way we view the Civil War relates to current issues. This could be a fairly student led discussion. However, some possible questions that the teachers could use to help promote greater discussion are:

-Why is there still so much tension surrounding this war?

-How does the way we view the Civil War affect the way we view national tension today?

-Do you believe our views on the Civil War have an impact on the way we view war today and the role of our military overall?

Possible ideas for follow up lessons:

-An analysis about how other nations ended slavery without war.

-Applying the same lens of peace education which problematizes war while also taking into account social injustice and apply this to another historical conflict or modern-day tension.

-Have a more in-depth lesson on the current debates regarding Civil War memorials, the role the Civil War plays in modern American society, and how peace education can help inform these debates.

About the Author

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Teachers Need to Start Thinking Like Late Night Television Show Hosts

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Abstract

Social studies teachers have something in common with late night television talk show hosts. On the surface it may not seem that there are any connections but in reality both are putting on a daily performance. This performance is designed to be captivating and engaging with clear expectations full of short segments. The show goes on day after day and both the teacher and television host want the audience to come back for more. Principles of human cognition such as schema theory, attention span, and cognitive load theory are common threads both share. Humor and storytelling also help to captivate the audience. While most teachers are not stand-up comedians we can take some notes on how late night talk show hosts deliver material and how this connects back to cognitive processes related to attention, remembering, and learning.

Keywords: schema theory, cognitive load theory, student engagement, social studies

Do you watch late night television talk shows? If so, why do you watch and what keeps you tuned in night after night? It doesn't matter if your favorite is Fallon, Kimmel, or Conan (to name a few); think about the format of the show and common themes most follow. The jokes, skits, commentary, guests, and videos hold our attention and are memorable. The format used by this genre of television has the ability to engage the audience for an hour each night and keep us coming back year after year. We watch late night talk shows because the host is able to engage us. Short segments hold our attention. We find the material interesting because the host uses humor to connect to current events which, on the surface, may not be humorous. Some of the same principles that keep us engaged in the program can be used in the classroom. Teachers need to start thinking like late night talk show hosts.

Educators and television network executives have something in common. Both strive for a presentation that is memorable and engaging so viewers want to come back for more. In the classroom, students are the audience. A teacher's lesson should have the ability to connect the class material to everyday life all in a setting that is enjoyable and engaging. Obviously, there is no *one size fits* all solution in how to do this as each student, teacher

and class is different. But there are some universals in human cognitive processing that should be considered when designing and delivering effective instruction. The use of humor is often overlooked as a classroom tool but can help stimulate the brain and provide the novelty it craves to stay focused. The teacher must be able to find ways to deliver the instruction by, in essence, giving a performance to the class. This performance (daily classroom instruction) must consider schema theory or the students' background knowledge that they bring to the instruction. Also, it is important to consider how the brain is able to assimilate new information and send it to long term storage. Cognitive load theory helps to explain the capacity of our working memory in context to the schemas we have. Quality instructional design needs to consider these cognitive processes if we want to hold our students' attention and engage them in the classroom. This is not just limited to a social studies classroom. All levels and content areas should consider these cognitive processes. Late night television programs have been doing this for years and it's time we take some notes. Let's be practical about this though and examine some areas that can be used in the classroom.

Don't Smile Until Christmas?

During my first week as a teacher an experienced social studies teacher sat me down and told me sternly that there should be no laughing or humor used until Christmas. Success in the classroom comes by showing the class who's the boss. Joking around would only deteriorate the learning environment and take away control. Not knowing any different and thinking the veteran educator knew best, I gave it a shot. Within a few days (hours maybe) this approach quickly failed. I soon discovered it wasn't my style. At that time I did not know nor could I describe my *style* of teaching. This took many years to figure out. Seventeen years later my style today relies on a combination of humor and storytelling to deliver instruction. My classroom is guided by clear communication and expectations that are set on day one. Students know what to expect on a daily basis; there are no tricks or surprises. There is structure and a set day-to-day routine but there is novelty within the daily instruction. Students know the rules of the road but the instructional path down that road changes each day. No two days of instruction are the same as I try to vary the delivery methods. In class I need students to feel comfortable and secure in the environment. My goal is to make my course enjoyable, a class period students look forward to each day. This would never happen if I waited until Christmas to smile.

The Power of Story

As a high school psychology teacher, I find students to be more engaged when I can connect specific concepts to real-world stories or examples. For instance, I find that my high school psychology students can easily connect concepts such as conformity or obedience to real life examples seen in school. Or at times some self-deprecating humor over the struggles of raising children during a developmental psychology unit seems to allow students to see a more personal side of me. Sure, content knowledge is important but keeping the students engaged is the real challenge. I am no stand-up comedian but find that a bit of humor can go a long way. From a cognitive standpoint the brain likes novelty and humor can be that novel act that connects the situation to the concept being presented

(Sousa, 2011). Plus, the use of a story can help make connections to real world concepts. A story that is memorable sticks; it can help students relate and think of their own personal perspectives to bring the lesson into context. For instance, when students learn about the neurotransmitter norepinephrine I tell them the story about my first year of teaching psychology. Not only did I mispronounce it: “*nore-phrine-prine*,” I also explained it wrong. One bright student did not hesitate to let me know the error in my description. “Mr. Findley, I think you’re getting this wrong!” My snarky response of “well, how do you know this?” was followed with a detailed explanation of not only how to pronounce the neurotransmitter but also what it does to human behavior. It turns out the student worked part time in a doctor’s office and he knew his stuff. Lesson learned and I never got it wrong again. I know this story connected with students because several months later after the AP Psychology exam one student approached me and said that story helped her recall the role of norepinephrine on behavior. Think about how societies have passed cultural information from generation to generation. It’s through the power of a story.

Too Much Fun?

The use of humor or the thought of laughter occurring in the classroom makes us nervous. A colleague of mine recently designed a hands-on, engaging psychology activity that required students to be outside in the halls interacting with one another. During the activity, the students were on task, engaged but at the same time laughing and having fun. Students were making real world connections to the psychological concept of perception. At the end of the day the two of us were reflecting on the activity and the first thing the teacher brought up was her worry about one assistant principal who had walked by and thought that students were off task. Our debriefing went from discussing what worked and didn’t to a more defensive stance of thinking of ways to justify what was learned. The content could have been taught using a PowerPoint presentation. Doing so would not have raised any eyebrows from the administrator, or students, for that matter.

In my classroom, peppering in some humor helps to engage the students. A chuckle, a smirk, or even *that’s not funny* grimace may just help students make that connection to the material. The humor may also help to serve as a retrieval cue when the student is recalling the information later on. Psychological research tells us that our memories are held in a web of associations. The story or humor serves as a way to help prime and retrieve the stored memory. Either can serve as a retrieval cue that helps pull up and place the information in the proper context (Myers, 2008). The use of humor and connections to everyday life may help to serve as a retrieval cue down the road. Perhaps that may look like the student saying to himself, “oh yeah, my teacher told me this corny joke, now what did that have to do with...” Too much fun is certainly possible, but some fun actually facilitates learning.

Making Connections and Keeping Students Engaged

Merrill (2009) suggests a framework for instruction that should be based on the principles of instructional *demonstration*, *application*, and *integration*. *Demonstration* pertains to the how-tos and what-happens within the lesson. An effective lesson needs direct guidance and scaffolding followed with time for peer discussion and discovery.

Appropriate media such as a short video, picture analysis, or short reading passage could be introduced at this time. Within the *application* principle the learner should have the chance to apply the concept and receive feedback on the how's, what's, and why's. The *integration* principle allows the learner to connect to the material in relevant ways and allows them to apply and demonstrate their new knowledge or skill. In essence, the student learns through discussion, demonstration, and doing.

Compare this to the typical monologue presented by the late night talk show host. The host uses humor to make connections to current events, trends in society, or people in the news. This selected material is typically short in duration and to the point. As the teacher, like the host, it is our job to understand and pick out the key information and present it in a manner that will be sent to a student's long-term storage. A few factors impact this including schema theory, engagement, attention span, and cognitive load theory.

We find late night talk shows to be interesting because the skits and jokes are relevant to the news and ideas of the day. The jokes are funny because we can make real world connections to the material. One reason this happens is because the viewer has a schema or general understanding of national or world events being presented. This schema helps us to organize our knowledge and guide our behavior by impacting what we are able to recall. Schemas help to make sense of current experiences by connecting them to what we already know. What we know and assimilate into new knowledge is based on these cognitive structures. Prior experience matters. Prior experiences allow us to mentally set up and anticipate what may happen in relation to a specific situation (Bartlett, 1932). From the learner's perspective, a student new to American culture may not have developed an understanding or schema of, let's say, American History. History lessons (and concepts) that a student has been exposed to for years have already been assimilated and do not take as much cognitive or effortful processing until something new is introduced. On the other hand, a student new to American History will struggle to grasp the general concepts, events, or people. The humor, the story, and the context may just help that new student make new connections. This connects back to the idea of cognitive load theory of processing. Without developed schemas, learning occurs at a slower rate and puts a strain on working memory (Sweller, 1988). Even with a developed schema, a learner can still very easily become bored and disengaged with the instruction.

The brain cannot stay focused on one activity for long. Consider a teacher sitting through a long staff development or meeting. After ten or fifteen minutes the mind begins to wander as thoughts about what to make for dinner, soccer practice pick-up, or who will be the guest on the Tonight Show this evening. As the mind wanders it becomes difficult to pick out and select the key information from the class. Students have the average cognitive focus may be around 10-15 minutes. At that point, a short 2-3 minute engagement activity can be used as down-time that the student needs to make those connections and send the material to long-term storage (Sousa, 2011).

Teachers know that telling the students up front what they will be learning can be useful in helping the student pick out the key information in that class period. The learning target or essential questions are the behavioral outcomes the student should be able to demonstrate following instruction. At the beginning of class, it is also useful to recap the content taught yesterday to help serve as the retrieval cue needed to pull the memory out from the web of associations we form in the mind. Finally, at the end of the period the

teacher should recap key concepts or ideas from the lesson. Think about the talk show host. The show starts with a funny monologue to hook the audience. The host then introduces what is coming up in the episode and maybe even the next day. Then the real learning occurs; the interviews with the celebrities, skits, games, etc... These are short and transition to the next segment and the next. At the end of the show the host recaps who performed that evening and what to expect tomorrow. This sounds similar to effective classroom practice.

Conclusion

Understanding how we learn new information should inform how teachers design and deliver instruction. In order for meaningful learning to occur, proper instructional design must be employed. The difficulty lies in the best way to select, organize, and integrate the course content. A general understanding of cognitive processing and how humans learn must be considered. Understanding how schemas work and the prevention of cognitive overload through engaging activities are some of the backbones found in quality instructional design. Humor and novelty can help with the cognitive processing too. It is not necessary to write jokes into lesson plans but there is no reason that all learning must be serious. Even though most teachers are not stand-up comedians, we can take some notes on how late night talk show hosts deliver material. This article is not suggesting you literally set up your daily classroom format and instruction like a late-night show. Rather, look at some of the psychology behind what makes these shows work. Learning may not always be easy (and it shouldn't always be), but there is no reason why a little fun can't be had in the process.

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Young Citizens Rise in Brotherhood

Xiaoying Zhao
University of Georgia

The following “Teacher Feature” is drawn from Ms. Xiaoying Zhao’s recent study of children’s political thinking in a local 4th grade classroom. In this brief descriptive piece, Zhao captures the power of Mr. Oliver’s (the classroom teacher) approach to class community building – one grounded in the notion of Brotherhood.

In an Athens area Title I school, Mr. Oliver’s¹ fourth-grade class is a close-knit community of twenty-two students; girls and boys, Black, Brown, and White, from all walks of life. Inspired by the motivational campaign of the Atlanta Falcons football team, Mr. Oliver invites the students to a classroom culture he calls *Brotherhood*.

Mr. Oliver has built his teaching philosophy around relationships, something he learned in his studies at the University of Georgia and through his work with a diverse student body. Mr. Oliver believes the connections with and among students makes a difference in their self-knowledge and understandings of one another, which contributes to racial, social cohesion on a larger scale. Furthermore, Mr. Oliver believes that all children need social connection, as it promotes their all-around growth. It is in pairs and groups, he says, that children gain pleasure and learn naturally.

Though Mr. Oliver is not the first educator who realizes the relational nature of education, he is unique in his approach, identifying a role model that embodies the spirit of unity in diversity he wishes to cultivate -- a local sport team he and his students look up to -- the Atlanta Falcons. The team has a motivational campaign of brotherhood; one that inspires Mr. Oliver and helps to define his class culture.

Mr. Oliver summarizes *Brotherhood* class spirit in three key words - cooperation, respect, and high standards. He explains to the students, “Brotherhood is a commitment to being the best version of yourself and helping others find their best version. What makes a brotherhood is how we treat and build each other up.” As a morning routine, the class watches the Falcons’ videos on *Brotherhood*. The students chant along spontaneously, “We come together, we bond as one/ Our bond, unbreakable/ Our spirit, relentless/ It’s in Brotherhood, we trust/ In brotherhood, we fight/ In Brotherhood, we rise.”² They thunder the passion for connection with one voice. Their pride glows on their faces. Mr. Oliver emphasizes the football players’ behavior showing brotherhood. The girls and boys see themselves bond like the football players do.

Mr. Oliver also acknowledges students’ behavior representing brotherhood for each other every day. Praise and prizes are given to honor supportive gestures. With concrete examples, students easily identify ways of helping one another. Gradually, the students

believe that they are capable of achieving excellence with the help from their peers and as helpers themselves. One individual's hurdles can be overcome by the help of the whole class. When Heather had a difficult time with multiplication problems, her neighbors practiced time tables with her over and over again. To boost Martina's self-confidence, the class cheered "Martina is on fire!" whenever she answered questions correctly. When some students were frustrated about the defeat in the dodgeball game, the rest of the class cheered them up. They strive to be better as a team every single day.

The curriculum is infused with *Brotherhood* to serve every student, but Mr. Oliver is particularly concerned with lifting up his working class, African American students. Mr. Oliver creates rap songs about each subject to make learning culturally appealing and to raise the appreciation for African American heritage. He uses children's literature from anti-racist perspectives for Language Arts and asks students to reflect on their daily interactions accordingly. The math problems Mr. Oliver uses reflect children's real-life experience. These problems help the children feel connected to the content, help them to gain perspective, develop awareness, and show respect for the commonalities as well as their differences. He constantly rearranges the classroom seating to allow interpersonal connections and teamwork among students who barely cross paths or get along.

The work Mr. Oliver does in class leads to students' improved academic performance and what appears to be better understandings of and respect for peers from varied backgrounds. The bond children develop was even able to weather the racial tensions outside the schoolyard in the wake of the 2016 presidential election. Harriet, an African American girl, said, "Being around other races is a good thing because you can learn different cultures and the places they come from." The students firmly believe neither skin color, ethnicity, nor language should pull them apart. As Isaac, a Caucasian boy, pointed out, "We are all human." Although Martina's parents were from Mexico and suffered discrimination in their workplace, Martina said she was treated fairly and felt safe in the classroom. Their parents may have held different political beliefs, but the students respected one another anyway. The *Brotherhood* spirit as a civic ideal unites the students in a close-knit community and motivates them to achieve what seems unimaginable for every single person. The students grow to be young citizens who shoulder responsibilities for one another. They are stars, witnesses, listeners, teammates, helpers, and cheerleaders in each other's eyes.

As a passionate teacher, a strong social justice believer, and a huge Falcons fan, Mr. Oliver successfully combines his passion for teaching and sports, creating a unique community with his students. He suggests that fellow teachers prioritize children's civic growth and find authentic ways to build a community, connecting students from diverse households.

Notes:

1. All names are pseudonyms.
2. Transcriptions from <http://www.atlantafalcons.com/media-lounge/videos/In-Brotherhood/a8e9702f-8544-428e-b56d-b4f3170e4b97>

About the Author

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