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"The Music is Nothing if the Audience is Deaf": Moving Historical Thinking into the Wider World

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Readers of Historically Speaking are certainly no strangers to practicing and reflecting upon “historical thinking”; witness the 2008 publication of several essays and interviews in the Historians in Conversation series, as well as explicit or implicit references to its nature and process in virtually all recent issues. Still, most academic historians, scholars, and authors of popular works of history rarely connect with what goes on in terms of historical thinking in K 12 classrooms in more than a casual usually parental way. To be sure, ongoing controversies such as those involving the Texas social studies standards, the role assigned to slavery in textbook accounts along with commenatations of the outbreak of the Civil War, the Thomas B. Fordham Institute’s recently issued report card for state standards for U.S. history, and the yearly polls every July 4th that suggest how poorly Americans understand their Revolution process to be a collective beating of breasts followed, in some circles, by ritual finger pointing at K 12 educators. Unfortunately, with the conspicuous exception of collaborative opportunities presented by the U.S. Department of Education’s Teaching America History Grants program, there is little constructive and sustained interaction between those who teach at the university or college level and those who prepare the very students we eventually encounter in our own classrooms. The essays by Fritz Fischer, Bruce Lesh, and Robert Bain each offer compelling reasons for why the larger historical community, if not the general public, should be paying much greater attention to issues involving the training and professional development of K 12 teachers, the effective instruction of U.S. history high school students, and the pedagogical challenges of teaching increasingly popular and state mandated courses in world history.

Fischer brings a wealth of professional experience as a K 12 teacher, college history professor and scholar, and program director for history education to bear in striving to link the world of academic history with the world of history pedagogy. As a “go between,” or “translator,” he emphasizes the process of historical thinking at all levels, drawing upon cognition based studies, such as Sam Wineburg’s path breaking Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts, that explore how students learn history. In many respects, those of us who teach undergraduate and graduate students instinctively practice what Fischer preaches; that is, we blend “content” with “process” in our classrooms. However, he rightly exhorts us, borrowing the words of Ed Ayers, to show the “ropes and pulleys” by doing history in an even more deliberate and transparent manner. The goal is to transcend what Stéphane Lèvesque labels as “memory history” by showing students at all levels how we practice our craft. After all, when was the last time we merely memorized some facts in preparing a college lecture or professional presentation? Rather, just as when we pursue our own research, we teach college students by moving well beyond the collection and compilation of evidence to analyze, contextualize, and interpret sources, culminating with the articulation of arguments about the past. If K 12 students could learn history by thinking historically as opposed to memorizing bits of information, they would be more apt to be college, career, and citizenship ready. When it is their turn to debate his- tory and social studies standards, they would do so with an enhanced appreciation of perspectives and points of view, and thus be able to lift the current level of public discourse above silly squabbling about “your heroes versus mine.” They would have learned to construct and even appreciate well reasoned and informed arguments; in short, they would know how to engage and listen and debate in meaningful, productive ways because they had in ternalized “History’s Habits of the Mind.”

Pie in the sky, you say? Not so, according to Bruce Lesh, who effectively demonstrates how content and process can be taught simultaneously in a sophisticated and demanding manner to public high school students in Maryland (admittedly a state with relatively enlightened standards). Several years ago, this master teacher began his own journey away from memory based history, determined to teach students by moving well beyond the collection and compilation of evidence to analyze, contextualize, and interpret sources, culminating with the articulation of arguments about the past. If K 12 students could learn history by thinking historically as opposed to memorizing bits of information, they would be more apt to be college, career, and citizenship ready. When it is their turn to debate history and social studies standards, they would do so with an enhanced appreciation of perspectives and points of view, and thus be able to lift the current level of public discourse above silly squabbling about “your heroes versus mine.” They would have learned to construct and even appreciate well reasoned and informed arguments; in short, they would know how to engage and listen and debate in meaningful, productive ways because they had internalized “History’s Habits of the Mind.”

A former high school history teacher, Robert Bain is associate professor of both history and education at the University of Michigan and member of the board of trustees at the National Council of History Education. Recent publications include: “They Thought the World Was Flat?” Principles in Teaching High School History” in How Students Learn: History, Math, and Science in the Classroom (National Academy Press, 2005), and “Rounding Up Unusual Suspects: Facing the Authority Hidden in the History Classroom.” Teachers College Record 108 (2006): 2080-2114.


3 Michael Adas, “Biting Ideas and Agency Back In: Representa-

4 Though often quoted by historians, I have never found the place where Ladurie wrote or said this. Recently, J. H. Elliott reported that in a correspondence Ladurie urged Elliott to cite him as the source of these distinctions “with confidence.” See J. H. Elliott, Space, Europe, and the wider World, 1500-1800 (Yale University Press, 2009), xviii.

5 Sam Wineburg makes the compelling argument that the type of thinking to which historians engage needs to be taught; that is, thinking practices such as sourcing, corroborating, contextualizing, or historical empathy are not things people generally just pick up on their own. See Sam Wineburg, Historical Think-

6 Lauren McArthur Harris, “Building Coherence in World His-
tory: A Study of Instructional Tools and Teachers’ Pedagogical Content Knowledge” (Ph.D dissertation, University of Michi-
gan, 2008).

7 Ibid., 183.

8 Mario Carretero, Asunción López-Manjón, and Liliana Jacott, “Explaining Historical Events,” International Journal of Educa-
tional Research 27 (1997): 245-253; Mario Carretero et al., “His-
torical Knowledge: Cognitive and Instructional Implications,” in Mario Carretero and James F. Voss, eds., Cognitive and Instruc-
tional Processes in History and the Social Sciences (Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1994), 357-376.


“THE MUSIC IS NOTHING IF THE AUDIENCE IS DEAF”:
MOVING HISTORICAL THINKING INTO THE WIDER WORLD

Linda K. Salvucci

Even as a K 12 teacher, college history professor and scholar, and program director for history education to bear in striving to link the world of academic history with the world of history pedagogy. As a “go between,” or “translator,” he emphasizes the process of historical thinking at all levels, drawing upon cognition based studies, such as Sam Wineburg’s path breaking Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts, that explore how students learn history. In many respects, those of us who teach undergraduate and graduate students instinctively practice what Fischer preaches; that is, we blend “content” with “process” in our classrooms. However, he rightly exhorts us, borrowing the words of Ed Ayers, to show the “ropes and pulleys” by doing history in an even more deliberate and transparent manner. The goal is to transcend what Stéphane Lèvesque labels as “memory history” by showing students at all levels how we practice our craft. After all, when was the last time we merely memorized some facts in preparing a college lecture or professional presentation? Rather, just as when we pursue our own research, we teach college students by moving well beyond the collection and compilation of evidence to analyze, contextualize, and interpret sources, culminating with the articulation of arguments about the past. If K 12 students could learn history by thinking historically as opposed to memorizing bits of information, they would be more apt to be college, career, and citizenship ready. When it is their turn to debate history and social studies standards, they would do so with an enhanced appreciation of perspectives and points of view, and thus be able to lift the current level of public discourse above silly squabbling about “your heroes versus mine.” They would have learned to construct and even appreciate well reasoned and informed arguments; in short, they would know how to engage and listen and debate in meaningful, productive ways because they had in ternalized “History’s Habits of the Mind.”
As an unintended consequence of the 2000 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, popularly known as No Child Left Behind, instructional time in history continues to decline.
This should be a collective enterprise, although it...mulate cerebral grab to this approach, generating both enga-ment and excitement as audiences are spurred to new levels of musical awareness. This embodies, in short, the process of discovery, as the performers consciously challenge their listeners to stretch themselves a bit. The Boston Symphony Orchestra’s classical offerings are never supplanted or dumbed down; rather, they are supplemented, supported, and expanded in carefully thought out ways, thus enhancing the prospects for new dialogues with the audience and eventual engagement with the fuller repertoire. To paraphrase Walter Lippmann, the music becomes something once the audience learns to hear.

So what does all this have to do with the teaching and learning of history? The lesson for historians and history educators, I think, is that we cannot take the audience for granted for any of the history we produce, or alternately write it off or, worse yet, attempt to pander. To the contrary, we need to grab, define, and educate the audience. Courses in music appreciation are offered all the time. Why not make the concerted effort to foster “history appreciation” among the broader public? This should be a collective enterprise, although it does not imply that professional historians must all do the same thing in the same way at the same time. Talented scholars should continue to produce high quality, carefully researched, and well argued monographs and thus create historical knowledge. Other publishing historians may utilize such specialized literature to offer interpretive syntheses or even en lightened textbooks. Such writers convey historical knowledge, as do skilled authors who write for trade rather than academic presses and thus more explicitly address a wider popular audience. When done well, such work hooks readers on history, which can then be appreciated in ever more sophisticated ways. The point is that an intelligent audience can be cultivated, nurtured, and nudged to new levels of historical understanding. But such purposeful engagement needs to be a conscious, collaborative, and continuing effort by us all.

On the morning after the participants in this forum presented their papers at the Historical Society conference, I attended the panel in which Allan Kulikoff offered “A Modest Proposal to Solve the Crisis in History.” Speaking less to the decades long jobs crisis than to: 1) the decline in student enrollment in history courses as well as in numbers of history majors, which peaked in the 1970s; 2) the “antiquated” requirements for the history major, for graduate study, and for tenure; and 3) the fact that at least a segment of the public “craves history” but largely ignores the work that academics produce, Kulikoff blamed institutional inertia (path depend-ence, as he labeled it) and then laid out bold and provocative suggestions to address these problems. What struck me was the extent to which several of them resonated with issues articulated above, even though Kulikoff’s focus was post secondary, not K 12 education. For example, using questions rather than content as the organizational principles of survey courses or stressing themes rather than places and eras to define the history major are essentially strategies taken straight from Lesh’s and Bain’s play books. This suggests once more that a K 16+ coalition is in order. Coincidently, in response to Kulikoff’s exhortation to historians to write “sprightly” books for a wider public, panelist Jon Keljik hit the proverbial nail on the head by responding that the real crisis in history is “the disconnection between us and the public” and that “the general public needs to be better educated before historians can write for them.”

So this, in fact, is the task at hand: to train and engage a broader audience for history. This de mands systematic and sustained collaboration, as Fischer has suggested, between academic historians and K 12 history teachers. University professors need to learn more about what actually goes on in K 12 classrooms, and to be particularly mindful of the sometimes shocking constraints (most often in the form of state and local requirements) that teachers face. Academic historians must become directly involved in the preparation and professional development of teachers, a pressing responsibility since at least half of those currently at work in K 12 history classrooms neither majored nor minored in the subject in college. But it is a two way street: professors might well profit from becoming familiar with some of those cognitive studies and pedagogical techniques that make Lesh and Bain so effective with their own history stu-dents and student teachers. Beyond the classroom, more historians might consider involvement in worthwhile programs like National His-tory Day, whose student participants, including the non gifted, have been found to outperform their peers in standardized tests in all sub jects, to write better, and to demonstrate valuable college and career skills.

There is an important political dimension to all this as well. Unlike those infamously defective social studies stand-ards produced last year by the State Board of Education of Texas, social studies stan-dards created recently in Colorado actually incorporate clear principles of historical thinking. Why? Because the co chair of the committee that wrote them was Fritz Fischer. Professional historians ought not be bashful about volunteering their much needed expertise in the public arena, just as readers of Historically Speaking and lovers of history, be they lawyers, physicians, or accountants by day, also must speak to the value of history education. If Kulikoff is correct in his analysis of trends, then we have to reach not just the children, but also all those people who chose not to major in history since the 1970s and who now (hint hint) make decisions and set policies that affect the teaching, learning, and appreciation of history. Again, the nation faces declining instructional time in history, misguided or mindless standards, inadequate assessments, diminished opportunities for professional development, and increasing disregard for historical studies. In pushing his blueprint for educational reform, President Obama often speaks of “winning the future.” But we are the ones who must not be bashful about questioning policies that put all of us in danger of losing the past.
“Calca and the Latin American Terms of Trade: Old Theories, New Evidence,” Journal of Interdisciplinary History 31 (2000): 197–222, which in 2001 was awarded the Conference on Latin American History Prize for Best Article. She is also author of Call to Freedom, a U.S. history text book for 8th and 9th graders published by McCall, and it writing a book with the working title of “Irronis of Empire The United States Calla Trade in a New Atlantic World, 1762–1868.”

1 Donald A. Yerxa, ed., Recent Themes in Historical Thinking: Histories in Conversation (University of South Carolina Press, 2006).


3 Sylépathes Legros, Thinking Historically: Educating Students for the Twenty-First Century (University of Toronto Press, 2008).

4 Bruce Leh, “Why Won’t You Just Tell Us the Answer?” Teaching Historical Thinking in Grades 7–12 (Stenhouse, 2011).

5 See the AP’s “Historical Thinking Skills” at http://advancedap.collegeboard.org/historical-thinking.


9 The full National History Day Program Evaluation is found at www.nhd.org/NHDWork.

10 For the current Colorado Social Studies Standards, see https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdeassess/UAS/AdoptedAcademicStandards/SocialStudies/Adopted_12.10.09.pdf.

GALILEO THEN AND NOW: A REVIEW ESSAY

William R. Shea

The authors of these books about Galileo and the science of his age follow paths that diverge in interesting and striking ways, but they all agree about Galileo’s towering achievement in astronomy and physics. An instrument, the telescope, changed the world and compelled us to rethink our place in the universe. Galileo had eyes that were prepared to see new things and a hand that enabled him to depict what he saw. He was not only a gifted observer, but also an exceptional draftsman, which enabled him to discover what others had failed to see or lacked the ability to record. The telescope, invented around 1590 in Italy, was a crude device that enlarged four or five times and was little more than a plaything. Galileo had the brains to see its potential. He also had the good fortune of having access to the best lenses in Europe, those that were made on the island of Murano, just off Venice and to the present day the capital of glasswork. Without the unknown and unsung craftsmen who made excellent lenses, Galileo would not have been able to improve the telescope and render it capable of magnifying fifteen times, which is required to see the features of the celestial bodies that he recorded. Nor would he have achieved lasting fame as the Columbus of a new heaven. With his new instrument, Galileo made eight discoveries, all of them confirmed except the last, whose correct interpretation was beyond his ken. First, Galileo saw that the Moon has mountains and valleys and, hence, that it resembles the Earth. This was exciting news: if the Moon is like the Earth, then it might be inhabited! Second, innumerable stars popped out of the sky, and untold worlds were suddenly and unexpectedly revealed. Third, the Milky Way, which looks like a white band in the sky, turned out to be a vast number of small stars that are invisible to the naked eye. Fourth, the Moon has “earthshine” for the same reason that we have “moonlight,” only brighter because the Earth is four times as big as the Moon. The fifth discovery was even more sensational, as Galileo loudly proclaimed, for it made him the first person to observe new satellites. They were four in number and they went around Jupiter. Such a discovery had not been anticipated, even in the wildest dreams of philosophers or astronomers. Galileo named them, “Medicean stars,” in honor of the ruling family of Tuscany where he was born and where he soon hoped to be recalled. Sixth, Venus was revealed as having phases, an observation that proved that it orbited around the Sun, not the Earth. Seventh, even the Sun held a surprise: its face is covered with spots. The eighth, and the only problematic of Galileo’s discoveries, was what he took to be two satellites revolving around Saturn. They were troublesome because they changed shape and occasionally even disappeared. Galileo was baffled and made no secret of his embarrassment. What he had observed were what we now know to be the rings of Saturn that are sometimes seen edgewise, when they are hard to detect, and sometimes slanted when they can be identified with a more powerful telescope than the one he had. This was only achieved by Christian Huygens several years later.

The three authors also concur in celebrating Galileo’s achievements in physics and especially his discovery that all bodies fall at the same speed regardless of their weight. This was historically important because it led Newton to realize that new laws of motion were required to explain why this should be the case. The story that Galileo dropped balls from the Leaning Tower of Pisa is probably apocryphal, but he showed great ingenuity in devising experiments with rolling balls along an inclined plane. He carefully measured the distance they traveled and the time it took. The outcome was the law that relates distance to the square of the time (for those whose memory reaches back to high school physics, this will be familiar as: $d = \frac{1}{2}gt^2$, where $d$ stands for distance, $g$ for the acceleration caused by gravity, and $t$ for time). The insight behind Galileo’s reasoning is the surprising fact that the vertical and horizontal components of projectile motion are independent. He illustrated this by showing that when balls are projected horizontally from the same height they go further if impelled with a greater force but regardless of the force, they strike the ground at exactly the same time as a ball dropped vertically from the same height when the balls were projected.

H. Floris Cohen’s How Modern Science Came into