

Literacy in history: Enabling historical thinking

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*The History Summit, UCD,
November 13, 2008*

Today's question

What promise does history education hold for student learning?

What does history, as a school subject, contribute to the development of students as learners?

The "*Literacy in History*" work of the CHSSP

History is a textual construction, so learning history is integrally connected with the development of academic literacy

Linguistic knowledge about what is distinctive in the way language is used in history can inform history teaching and learning

Achievements of the literacy work of the CHSSP

- CHSSP has evidence from 4 randomized trials and 1 quasi-experiment that the programs improve student achievement.
- Measures of discipline-specific literacy developed for the evaluations yielded statistically significant impacts.

(Gargani + Co., 2008)

Why it works

- Content and language are not separate
- Historical thinking is constructed in language
- Talking about language helps make historical thinking visible
- Functional grammar provides tools for meta-cognition

The linguistic technology of history

- *Genre: Texts have different social purposes*
- *Grammar: Language choices construct different content, organization, and interpretation*



Linguistic Analysis of Historical Genres:

Historical writing falls along a spectrum of complexity



Concrete to Abstract

Temporal organization to rhetorical organization

Increasingly complex linguistic resources

Decreasingly common and familiar

Increasingly valued in academic and professional settings

Interpreting events: Actors and actions

Great Britain **had run up** a huge debt ... Parliament **passed** the Stamp Act ... colonists **had to pay** a tax

Americans ... **had never paid** taxes ... **demonstrated** their defiance ... Parliament **gave up** and **repealed** the Stamp Act ...

Adams **organized** a raid ... The raiders **dumped** 342 chests of tea ... George III **ordered** ... British troops **occupied** the city.

representatives ... **gathered** in Philadelphia **protested** ... the king **paid little attention** ... colonies **decided to form** the Continental Congress ... British soldiers and American militiamen **exchanged gunfire**... The fighting **spread** ... news of the fighting **reached** the Second Continental Congress, its members **voted to raise** an army ...

Interpreting points of view: Saying, thinking, feeling,

American colonists still **debated** their attachment to Great Britain. A growing number, however, **avored** independence. They **heard** the persuasive arguments of colonial leaders ... These leaders **used Enlightenment ideas** to justify independence. The colonists **had asked for** the same political rights as people in Britain, they **said**, but the king had stubbornly **refused**. Therefore, the colonists were justified in rebelling against a tyrant who had broken the social contract... The Declaration **reflected these ideas** in its eloquent **argument** for natural rights.

Since Locke **had asserted** that people had the right to rebel against an unjust ruler, the Declaration of Independence **included** a long list of George III's abuses. The document **ended** by breaking the ties between the colonies and Britain. The colonies, the Declaration **said**, "are absolved from all allegiance to the British crown."

Interpreting cause: Constructing relationships

Several reasons **explain** their success. First, the American's motivation for fighting **was** much stronger than that of the British, ... Third, time itself **was** on the side of the Americans... Fighting an overseas war ... **was** terribly expensive. ... French entry into the war in 1778 **was** decisive.

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Analyzing sentences for meaning

Circumstance /Connector	Participant	Process	Participant	Circumstance
To finance Rome's huge armies,	its citizens	had to pay	heavy taxes.	
	These taxes	hurt	the economy	
and		drove	many people	into poverty.

- Questions:
 - Who had to pay taxes and why?
 - What does “these taxes” refer to?
 - How can taxes hurt an economy and what does it mean to ‘drive someone into poverty’?

Analyzing historical agency

Jessica Williams on a text about the Vietnam war

Causal Reasoning in History

The adoption of white culture did not protect the Cherokee after gold was discovered on their land in Georgia. Ignoring the Cherokee's treaty rights, Georgia officials began preparing for the removal. After the Cherokee refused to move, the Georgia militia began attacking Indian towns.

Over the next decade, further events steadily led to war. Some colonial leaders...favored independence....They encouraged conflict with British authorities. At the same time, George III and his ministers made enemies of many moderate colonists by their harsh stands. In 1773, to protest a ... tax on tea, Adams organized a raid against ...British ships ...George III, infuriated by the "Boston Tea Party," ...ordered the British navy to close the port of Boston.

Recognizing interpretation

Claiming that the nation needed protecting from treasonous ideas and actions, *the Federalist-controlled Congress passed the Alien and Sedition Acts in the summer of 1798.*

(Stuckey & Salvucci, 2000: 324)

An alternative perspective

To suppress domestic opposition,
Congress passed a Sedition Act,
*virtually outlawing public criticism of
the federal government.*

(Taylor, 1995: 264)

Recognizing interpretation: Comparing perspectives

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Revealing historical thinking

- Exploring discipline-specific patterns of language
- Helping students recognize how interpretation is constructed
- Stimulating discussion about history in the classroom

Next steps: a research agenda

- How do historical analysis skills develop over the years of schooling?
- What are the best ways for teachers to scaffold this development?
- Can we identify “pathways” into historical thinking skills and give teachers relevant tools for different contexts and levels?