



An Essay Review of
*Building Students' Historical Literacies: Learning to Read and Reason with
Historical Texts and Evidence*

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Secondary social studies education, along with language arts and the sciences, and even mathematics, takes place in schools increasingly defined by a relentless focus on literacy as defined by the Common Core standards. An immense structure of classroom assessment, teacher evaluation, professional development and new certification requirements, all varying somewhat from state to state, undergird this new educational edifice. In the midst of this turmoil, Jeffrey Nokes released a new book, *Building Students' Historical Literacies*. This timely publication from Routledge provides an opportunity for considering some of the broader issues associated by the implementation of common core standards. In combining a review of Nokes' book with a broader consideration of the way that states are implementing the Common Core and related issues I risk conflating critique of the standards from a critique of this fine work. I trust that readers will distinguish between the difficulties that arise from a rushed implementation of standards without reference to external issues such as poverty or school conditions and the far different case of a text that does what its author intended very well, but doesn't address all issues.

The Common Cores standards, supported in 2009 by 48 states, the District of Columbia and two U.S. territories (King, 2011) emphasized more analysis in literacy than many states required beforehand and more than they assessed (Porter, McMaken, Hwang, & Yang, 2011). Non-profit organizations, chief state schools officers, and local districts are all pushing hard to

assist schools and teachers in reaching the new, detailed standards in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. By 2012 the number of states participating had dropped to 45 (Kober & Rentner, 2012). In 2013, Georgia withdrew from a consortium of 18 states developing a Common Core - aligned assessment to develop its own, cheaper, assessment (Education Week, 2013). The standards are notable for their developmental structure, as what a student accomplishes in first grade builds upon what happened in kindergarten. This creates a dilemma for implementation. If states implement from the “ground up,” the core will not hit high school until 2024. Yet requiring teachers to attain high standards in ninth grade without nine prior years of Common Core instruction also raises issues. Ravitch (2013) speaks for many when she criticizes the implementation efforts for the Core that focus entirely on the classroom instruction, rather than paying attention to poverty, urban or rural challenges, and family crises that interfere with learning.

When teachers face such immediate out of sequence implementation requirements, and are evaluated based upon a “value added” formula applied to scores on newly designed Common Core testing, they cry foul. In my home state of New York, the American Federation of Teachers statewide affiliate New York State United Teachers (NYSUT) voted to withdraw its agreement to the Common Core and passed a highly unusual “no confidence” motion in New York State Commissioner of Education John King (Albany Times Union, 2014). This spring, Massachusetts demonstrated a different danger to social studies from high-stakes testing of literacy: the rumors flew that Boston Public Schools were merging history into Humanities, and evidently history-specific coaches have been fired by the school district (Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies, 2014).

Clearly, teacher education too needs some alignment with the Common Core. For example, newly certified teachers in fields such as social studies should come equipped with strategies for supporting the new literacy standards for close textual readings (Brown & Kappes, 2012). The National Council for the Social Studies has reorganized national social studies standards into a focused framework dubbed “C3” for adding an emphasis on civics to the Common Core’s professed focus on college and career readiness. The new framework focuses on civics, economics, geography and history with distinct sections on alignment with the Common Core and on evaluating evidence with particular attention to historical thinking heuristics (National Council for the Social Studies, 2013). This document will form the basis for national accreditation of social studies teacher education programs through the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP) beginning in 2017-2018. But individual history teachers are left very much in the lurch by the new Common Core requirements.

Building Students' Historical Literacies, Jeffrey Nokes’ new book, will help curriculum planners, teacher educators, teacher candidates, teachers, policy makers, and even parents think more clearly about the place of history teaching in the current literacy-focused world. Nokes synthesizes over twenty years of research about how historians encounter texts in writing a book focusing on student literacies that draw upon current concerns about building student understandings represented most prominently by the Common Core. This book will also provide social studies teacher certification candidates with plenty of research-based disciplinary literacy strategies and goals for deployment on the edTPA (discussed below). While up-to-date, the vision for a history classroom Nokes articulates is not new, but is instead in the tradition of longstanding arguments from scholars and educators in favor of social studies classes where students encounter historical scholarship driven by questions and examine evidence that provokes debates over multiple interpretations of the past (Engle, 1960; Holt, 1990).

The book makes its arguments in two parts. Part One introduces the reader to the theory and practice of historical thinking and historical literacy over four chapters in a concise sixty-two pages reminiscent of the longer work by Levesque (2008). The next seven chapters briefly develop an approach to one specific aspect of historical literacy (making inferences, developing historical empathy) while featuring a different type of text (artifacts, visual sources, textbooks, film) in each chapter. Readers who have drawn upon classics such as *After the Fact* (Davidson & Lytle, 2009) whose first edition appeared in 1982, or *Discovering the American Past: A Look At the Evidence* (Wheeler, Becker, & Glover, 2012) will be familiar with the design of these latter chapters as they also present a historical approach that exemplifies how to use a particular kind of evidence, although Nokes does it differently. Two final chapters try to sum up the lessons of the book with a final vignette on studying mosques followed by four stages for planning historical literacy lessons and a few tips on getting started teaching in this fashion. Combining these first four theory and practice chapters with the seven specific example chapters is Nokes' distinctive contribution.

Nokes mostly writes in an even-tempered, even anodyne tone, except in rare spots when he express outrage or calls for revolution. He explains research-supported historical literacy as a common sense set of objectives and strategies that can be implemented in any classroom setting simply by changing the teaching approach. On some pages that reserve disappears, replaced by a sentence expressing astonishment that even after thirty years of research arguing against it, classroom instruction remains largely traditional. Readers trained in searching for subtext will detect traces of a second, explosive, Nokes erupting in a line demanding that "history teachers... face the harsh reality that traditional methods and materials do little to build long-term content knowledge or to promote critical thinking skills in students" (13). Nokes also knows that history writing resembles fiction (56), although bounded by evidence, a point the Common Core misses. Readers who notice these sections might suspect that the classroom changes Nokes intends require more sweeping changes than a single teacher can make.

Nokes promotes a maximal understanding of historical literacy: constructing meaning "with multiple genres of print, non-print, visual, aural, audio, and multi-modal historical texts," critically evaluating texts in light of prior findings by historians, using texts as evidence for original interpretations, and creating multiple types of texts that meet disciplinary standards (20). Since students will encounter popularized forms of history including historical novels, films, and museum exhibits, students should be able to critically evaluate such products as well. He rejects the notion that "an encyclopedic knowledge of historical facts" counts as historical literacy and blames popular acceptance of that notion for the unique challenges history teachers face (8). He quotes approvingly an article by VanSledright (2008) that argued that rather than the multiple interpretations and skills involved in grappling with history, most teachers conduct "heritage" instruction that provides students with a single story that makes them feel good about their shared past (9).

Building Students' Historical Literacies is interesting because Nokes moves swiftly through different components of historical literacy in two pages in favor of providing elaborated examples in the second half of the book. Thus, in the first chapter he reviews "sourcing", "corroborating", and "contextualizing" briefly, and includes historical empathy or perspective taking and notes that historians make inferences in little more than a paragraph each. For him the heart of historical literacy is "skillfully using evidence when it is available, employing sourcing, corroboration, and contextualization; and blending logic and imagination to fill in the gaps when the historical record is silent" (24-26). He stresses that these are not simple skills students learn,

but rather are associated with habits of mind for historical study, including a “mature epistemic stance” grasping that history “is not the past but instead the study of the past based on the incomplete and imperfect record that has been left behind” (26). Rather than emphasizing how to always look for a source, his chapter stresses that historians have healthy skepticism about information in texts. Students must learn that they can accept one part of source but still dismiss another portion of a source or an argument if that section is not corroborated. Likewise, they must treat interpretations as provisional, knowing that new ones might be offered. This is a swift introduction to open-ended history.

The next chapter provides an interesting contrast between traditional literacy instruction for “decoding” a text, and historical literacy instruction that is aimed at a much more complicated and skeptical interaction with a text. He reviews general literacy strategies of close reading, metacognition, as well as “before, during, and after” reading strategies. Nokes makes the point that historians “seek meaning that is often different from the meaning intended by the writer” searching out the subtext, not the text itself. A letter describing native cultures might be read “to construct meaning about the effects of Puritan religious doctrines on colonist’s beliefs about Native Americans” (39). The stance of students as people who do not accept texts at face value is the one most at odds with general literacy approaches. To the extent that a literacy specialist provides students with strategies to employ only when comprehension breaks down, the strategy doesn’t mesh with the role of a historian, who is always critical and reading self-consciously. The goal of historical literacy is not straight comprehension, but rather reading the text for reasons quite different from the ones intended when it was created. “Text to self” reading strategies that are normal in literacy instruction might also conflict with the need to “contextualize” a text by considering its creation during a time and place quite foreign to a contemporary self. This chapter will prove extremely useful to anyone involved in conversations about the Common Core, language arts testing, and history education as it sets out potential conflicts between the Core and the way history instructs students to work with texts.

Possibly no other book for teachers devotes a chapter to epistemic stance. This elaboration on how students understand what history actually is and how one creates histories covers ground trod by Holt (1990) or earlier by E.H. Carr (1961). Nokes explicates this point through the vignette of a fictional class studying the Crusades. Following this example in some detail provides a taste of his approach.

Nokes stresses that this Crusades lesson is only possible because it has been preceded by similar ones since the first day of the school year, and by structures that make it safe to ask questions. The teacher frames the class with an open-ended question “Were the Crusades primarily motivated by religious factors?” and provides two easy secondary sources that disagree. A variety of primary source documents with easily located quotations and explicit references to the question make it easy for students to develop support for opposing interpretations. She reminds students that they cannot simply count how many quotations support religion versus other factors. Students will have to keep in mind the source, context and subtext of the document, since some contexts will lead writers to mention religious themes even if they also had worldly motivations. She models sourcing by noting that the version of Pope Urban’s speech they had was written down by Fulcher of Charters, not the Pope and wonders when Fulcher wrote it down, and how accurate his version is, before accepting the account of what Pope Urban said as “provisionally accurate” (53).

A later chapter will make a similar critique of a Mongol account of what their enemies said before battle to help a class question the reliability of the Mongol account. In that vignette,

the teacher next leads them to see that their textbook provides less evidence about the Mongols than the amount of evidence the class examined, forcing the students to realize that the textbook must be considered just one more source and not fully reliable either (135-137).

Nokes' goal here is to help teachers develop in their students a "criterialist" stance, seeing multiple answers as possible but to be constrained by evidence, as opposed to objectivists (one right answer) or subjectivists (all answers are equally plausible). In the fictional conversation about the Crusades, a student, "Theresa," is the subjectivist who says that if there cannot be a single right answer "it shouldn't really matter what answer we come up with" and "Ms. Hansen" replies that if so, she should be able to conclude that people went on the Crusades to escape a colder climate in Europe, and Theresa agrees that that conclusion sounds reasonable. When a different student objects that none of the documents mentioned climate, "Hansen" stresses that a criteria for an answer is that it needs to be supported by the evidence, and that the more skillfully the class interprets the documents the better their answers will be (54).

The final section of the book contains a chapter on critical intertextual analysis of multimodal texts and showcases students who have mastered their teachers' earlier lessons. In this classroom, students viewed three websites each for six mosques in different countries and time periods to answer a question about how Islam adapts to different cultures. Students distinguish a travel website extolling a mosque to promote tourism from a site with a Muslim viewpoint condemning that same mosque as ruined because Christians built a church in the courtyard. Working from physical evidence they realize that mosques contain certain common characteristics, while noting that the mosques take on local architectural elements. They have worked inter-textually and contextually, read for subtext, and read written materials but also used buildings (or at least photographs of them) as texts, and end by suggesting that adopting local elements made it easier for people to convert to Islam. Their teacher explains that world religions picking up features of local religions and customs is called syncretism.

Between the first four chapters and the concluding section are seven chapters that combine a facet of historical understanding with a specific type of evidence. These chapters don't delve as deeply into a single approach to a methodology or type of evidence as *Discovering the American Past*, which paired quantitative evidence with an attempt to explore the British plantation system in America and the Caribbean. *After the Fact* used the "historian as detective" metaphor to explore how to analyze different types of evidence, while tracking the US history survey, so that documentary analysis was examined in the context of the American Revolution or the use of oral history was illustrated by Reconstruction. These undergraduate books provide a significant number of sources, all of one type, in investigating a single topic.

Building Students' Historical Literacies focuses instead on strategies, pairing each historical literacy strategy with many samples of a different type of evidence about any and all possible topics. A chapter on historians' heuristics provides a second look at sourcing, corroborating and contextualizing, opening with an extended vignette covering the first period of a two-day lesson on John White, a Native American who attended Harvard. Nokes never presents the actual materials that students would have used to investigate John White because his purpose is to illustrate explicit teaching of the heuristic of corroboration, not how to delve into specific sources on colonial New England.

The only primary source included in this chapter on historians' heuristics is a press-release Eisenhower drafted in case D-day failed. Nokes uses it to illustrate the importance of contextualizing. It is a primary source, but every "fact" in it is wrong. Once the invasion of Normandy succeeded, Eisenhower threw it in a wastebasket. We have the paper only because an

aide retrieved it. Studying the document can help a history class recover a sense of contingency (D-day might have failed), and understand something about Eisenhower, but without knowing the context of the document it would lead students astray. The chapter gives tips on teaching with primary sources, warning that teachers often use primary sources without promoting historical literacies, instead offering one or two line quotations to illustrate a point and convey information rather than letting students work with a wealth of contradictory evidence to semi-independently arrive at interpretations of their own and disagree with their peers(76). Nokes emphasizes that the strategy, in this case teaching with primary sources, provides some sense of the different forms that the evidence might take, and only lightly sketches his examples. This emphasis on strategies distinguishes his book.

In a chapter on teaching “meta-concepts” through using visual sources, the balance shifts a bit from away from strategy and lingers on the wide range of historical images for classroom use. His vignette concerns a teacher examining a World War One (WWI) propaganda poster with an ape holding a half-naked young woman, in a dialogue that establishes what the images mean, and explains to students that they will be using posters as evidence for what people felt on the homefront during WWI. Evidence means clues. This doesn't seem as necessary or useful an example as the D-Day press release.

In describing meta-concepts, Nokes distinguishes substantive concepts that are inclusive and occur across historical contexts such as democracy or depression, unique concepts such as a place or individual; or colligatory concepts such as Progressive Era or Persian Empire; he highlights meta-concepts such as time, evidence, or significance. This less-satisfying section glosses portions of Peter Lee's chapter in *How Students Learn* (Donovan & Bransford, 2005) or notes an issue without suggesting how one might approach it in a classroom. Thus, one learns students have trouble in conceiving of larger eras. They grasp the relatively short New Deal while struggling to understand that farming was not invented overnight in one generation but emerged over thousands of years. Nokes doesn't have any particular suggestions on how to help students grasp these concepts, although Levstik's work on the concept *chaîne opératoire* with 5th graders tackles this issue (Levstik, Henderson, & Youngdo, 2014).

Nokes wants explicit teaching of meta-concepts, so when students use a specific observation from an image to support an inference, the teacher should remind them that they are using the meta-concept of evidence. This seems like a solution without a problem. Studies don't generally show that students cannot be taught about the category of evidence, or that they arrive in a history classroom without some conception of time (Barton & Levstik, 1996). The difficulty with evidence is getting them to use it in writing essays and formulating arguments (Stahl, Hind, Britton, McNish, & Bosquet 1996; Barton, 1997).

In the balance of the chapter Nokes shifts away from meta-concepts towards working with different types of visual evidence. Unlike the chapter on primary sources, where he simply listed fourteen different types of sources, here he provides a more detailed look at how to work with different visual sources. He makes an important point that visuals need not only include original sources. Later paintings of an event can provide clues to how a later generation understood something that happened earlier. A historian might create a map this year that illustrates the geographic setting of a past event. He warns that students often forget photographs can be as constructed as any text and gives an example from Farm Securities Administration (FSA) photographs. He closes by suggesting that students themselves can create visual texts, such as their own political cartoons.

The next strategy chapter covers empathy and reviews the use of novels. There are chapters on reductionist thinking and audio sources, and building an argument with quantitative evidence. This second part of the book covers extremely broad ground, necessarily in less satisfying ways than part one, which comprehensively summarizes historical thinking and literacy research. Writing about a strategy and about primary sources or visuals makes it impossible for Nokes to provide the most current work on each type of evidence. *History as Art, Art as History* (Desai, Hamlin, & Mattson, 2010) contains a chapter by Rachel Mattson on “Using Visual Historical Methods in K-12 Classrooms” that reviews Wineburg, and provides examples of using sourcing and contextualizing in looking at photographs, paintings and film; I’d expected to find it in this chapter. Despite the many useful articles in the Organization of American Historians *Magazine of History*, written for teachers, including one on using the FSA photographs in the classroom (Stevens & Fogel, 2001), another on propaganda posters (Mahaney, 2002), or a third on advertising and the rise of big business (Canavan & Laird, 2010), he never cites this resource. He doesn’t point teachers towards historical work on 19th century photography (Sandweiss, 2002). When he briefly mentions teaching with film he omits a recent book (Marcus, Metzger, Paxton & Stoddard, 2010) and a classic (O’Connor, 1987). However, these are all extremely specific aspects of research on teaching with visual evidence, and he cannot possibly be expected to cite them all.

This isn’t a failing of his book since he never claims to be doing anything other than illustrating his historical literacy concepts. However, no one should mistake this book for a comprehensive guide that will lead readers to many resources for working with the types of evidence in these chapters. History or methods instructors will need to provide more extensive resources to their students on how historians work with particular evidence, or on using such evidence in the classroom. Instead, Nokes provides a powerful connective tissue for his readers, showing us that different types of evidence are not useful solely to engage multiple intelligences, or English language learners, or to give students a break from the textbook. Instead, different sources of historical evidence can all be used to promote a criterialist understanding of history and deep historical literacy.

I have a more pressing concern about the historical vignettes in this second part of the book, although it might be dismissed as a matter of taste. All of his sketches concern real historical problems, yet I’m concerned that none of them sufficiently shake up the reader. Were the crusaders most motivated by religion, or by other factors? What does the experience of John White tell us about colonial era Native American/English relationships? How do mosques provide evidence for the adaptation of Islam? Did propaganda posters during WWI make people more likely to enlist, and how would we know that? What does the evidence of tree rings in Chaco Canyon building structures tell us about when and why they moved their community? These are all intriguing questions, yet none of them seem forceful to me. I fear that his more neutral examples are similar to the Common Core’s absolute refusal to suggest specific content as a strategy to sidestep the kinds of drawn out arguments over history curriculum that have been debilitating and undercut efforts to improve history instruction in the past (Nash, Crabtree, & Dunn, 2000).

In contrast, Holt (1990) pushes the Letter from Edisto Island in front of readers, and takes them to an area in the South Sea Islands where General Sherman gave slaves land when their owners fled. Now that President Andrew Johnson has pardoned the Confederate rebels and returned the land, General Howard of the Freedman’s Bureau is telling them to give up their farms and sign annual contracts with their former owners. In that letter, the Freedmen write,

You ask us to forgive the land owners of our Island, *You* only lost your right arm. In war and might forgive them. The man who tied me to a tree & gave me 39 lashes & who stripped and flogged my mother & my sister & who will not let me stay In His empty Hut except I will do His planting & be Satisfied with His price & who combines with others to keep away land from me well knowing I would not Have any thing to do with Him If I Had land of my own.—that man, I cannot well forgive. (pp. 24-25)

Building Students' Historical Literacies lacks any text of comparable power. Students grapple with important issues. In one chapter, they consider the death of Emmet Till. Students think about how white racists saw society, and Nokes says that is often uncomfortable for them, and they are much more comfortable seeing the viewpoint of Emmet Till's mother. But he doesn't share a powerful racist document that would jolt a reader and show how students grapple with it. The extent to which crusaders were motivated by religion alone is a central question in crusader historiography, and makes a solid classroom lesson. But listen to Mark Pegg (2008) introduce his book on the Albigensian Crusade, the slaughter of Christians in Toulouse, France who were accused of heresy. "The crusade ushered genocide into the West, changing forever what it meant to be Christian, what it meant to be like Christ" (xiv)." In looking at Islam and cultural adaptation, he gives the example of buildings, since it includes architectural detail. Yet he could just as readily have had students grapple with the role of gender in Islam, how much of current Islamic practice is part of the culture in Pakistan, Indonesia, or Saudi Arabia, and how much is tied to specific religious prescriptions (Klepper, 2014). In *Building Students' Historical Literacies*, the stakes are never that high. I fear that Nokes avoids controversial source examples that might scare teachers away from teaching for historical literacies.

Another limitation of these vignettes is that lessons never run over the period, or take more than two classes. In contrast, VanSledright's (2012) fictional class on the Trail of Tears took over a week, ran over, and forced the teacher to make adjustments as he went. Bain's (2000, 2005, 2006) actual classroom accounts also take much more classroom time for each investigation. Nokes doesn't provide a framework for helping teachers eliminate some topics and conduct deeper investigations into others, a necessary step if teachers choose to have students develop deep historical literacy. Neither does the Common Core in social sciences, leaving that crucial task up to teachers, or local districts.

A related problem throughout the book is that Nokes writes in a neutral, even textbook-like, tone about the research on historical thinking. His presentation of education research markedly contrasts with how he presents history. Quietly, without stressing it, Nokes states that history is not really the past, but a depiction of the past made up of traces, and combined with historical imagination, although bounded by evidence. The past itself is firmly out of reach. Historical knowledge is provisional. Not so with research into historical thinking, whose results are presented without qualification. It is important to Nokes' project that he explicitly treats history as open-ended and claim-based. Educational research produces data that is also interpreted, perhaps without as much imagination as history, but it also faces limits of sample size, representativeness, and experimental protocols. Nokes never explicitly makes this case for readers.

To take just one instance, Nokes writes that "all historians" demonstrate sourcing, citing Wineburg's 1991 experiment. Indeed, that article reports that historians in his study used the "sourcing" heuristic 98% of the time. But what Nokes neglects to mention is that this experiment consisted of eight historians, and included a decision rule that required anything Wineburg

qualitatively identified as a heuristic (checked with an outside rater) to appear in the “think aloud” protocols of four out of the eight historians he included in his study. He identified a heuristic “consideration of absent evidence” (p. 76) in two historians’ protocols, but it was not widespread enough to make the cut. Had he studied eight different historians, or had twelve historians in his sample, perhaps absent evidence would be a heuristic (Wineburg, 1991b). Baron (2010) replicated Wineburg’s study, but had historians interpret the Old North Church in Boston as a source, and found different heuristics: origination not sourcing, correspondence not corroboration, and two new heuristics, supposition and empathic insight.

Importantly, Wineburg never equated his heuristics with successful historical thinking. Instead he cautioned that, “The use of these heuristics, however, does not guarantee success because there is much personal leeway in deciding when they are appropriate and what conclusions to draw from them” (1991b, p. 77). These heuristics offer powerful insight into historical practice, but are as much a construction from evidence about cognition as history is an imaginative, evidence bound reconstruction from traces of the past.

As a related matter, terms used to describe the thinking behind historical literacies differ from researcher to researcher in ways that might confuse someone who moves from this book to the cited sources. What Nokes calls substantive concepts, VanSledright terms second order concepts, and VanSledright also outlines a category of procedural knowledge of strategic practices (2013). The Canadian Historical Thinking Project relies on six concepts, separating historical perspective taking from understanding ethical dimensions of history (Seixas & Morton, 2012). Nokes approvingly cites Foster on empathy, but VanSledright’s chapter in the same volume is quite skeptical of the concept, while Levstik preferred perspective taking (Davis, Foster, & Yeager, 2001). None of these lively debates make it into Nokes’ description of historical thinking research.

Social studies has a much smaller research base than general literacy or mathematics. There are fewer overall studies and the usual sample sizes are smaller. Significant research funding for careful studies with random assignment generally does not exist. A good deal of the work summarized by Barton and Levstik in *Teaching History for the Common Good* (2004) consists of relatively small study sizes. The Reisman study (2012) that followed 236 11th grade students in five urban San Francisco high schools as they employed heuristics, thought historically, and increased general reading comprehension is one of the largest sample sizes in the research base and the first extended intervention study of historical literacy heuristics in actual classrooms.

Why then, take such a strong stand about what research shows? Perhaps because research in history education repeatedly finds that teachers are indeed doing what Nokes loathes. Teachers are covering many topics and events at top speed, having students manage and memorize the facts that they are given. Students generally loathe history class, do not develop more sophisticated epistemic stances, and forget most of the material. Small scale studies, as well as Reisman’s larger one, or a study that followed over 50 teachers and their students (Saye & SSIRC, 2013), support Nokes in his contention that more authentic historical teaching produces more classroom engagement, discussion, and substantive conversation. Since the research on history education contains a profound consensus on this point, why question it?

Yet urging teachers to take a criterialist stance towards historical knowledge and nurture it in their students while presenting educational research as fixed and flawless asks teachers to live with two contradictory epistemological stances. I advocate an approach to educational research that is at least as open-ended as the approach to history and historiography, because

apart from the consensus about the need to shift away from coverage and heritage teaching, much that matters to teachers in history education, from work with special needs students to assessment, is contested or understudied. More fundamentally, Nokes calls upon teachers to exercise a great deal of professional judgment, and such decisions will always provoke debates.

Finally, Nokes writes about what it means to teach in order to build students' historical literacies and what that teaching looks like, but never writes about why teachers choose not to teach for literacy. The implication is that only ignorance of what historical literacy means in a classroom precludes such instruction. I believe that this stance is one shared by policy-makers implementing the Common Core who act as if they must only show teachers what effective literacy instruction looks like. This is a huge gamble (for educational policy more than the book) and research in history education suggests that it is a losing bet.

A decade ago Barton and Levstik (2003) summarized this body of work for teachers in an article titled "Why Don't More History Teachers Engage Students in Interpretation?" They identified the position that Nokes exemplifies in this book, that differences in teaching stem from differences in knowledge, as the foundation of social studies teacher education (for an example see Bain & Murel, 2006). If teachers know what history is about and how to apply that in the classroom, they will. Yet Barton and Levstik cite studies to the contrary showing that a history teacher who earned a history PhD and knew about social history approaches and post-modern debates still taught a "single story" course, and that education students who developed complex understandings of history in a historiography course and took a methods course that combined imparting history content with pedagogical know-how still aspired to tell good stories and put clear notes on the blackboard.

In general, students graduating from education programs that equip them with the knowledge and skills that Nokes advocates nevertheless don't teach in the manner he desires. Barton and Levstik summarize the research as showing that teachers are still most committed to orderly classrooms, and to covering the (impossibly large) prescribed curriculum, particularly when it is reinforced by high stakes tests. Recent publications have profiled "wise practice" (Yeager & Davis, 2005) or examples of "ambitious teaching" (Grant, 2006) or teaching with "big ideas" (Grant & Gradwell, 2010), but these are exceptional teachers. Current educational research simply doesn't provide a clear answer on how to develop the commitment to teaching for historical literacy that Nokes seeks in teachers.

A great deal of the research Nokes cites rests on foundational studies on historical thinking by Wineburg, but I'd recommend attention to a different line of research by Wilson and Wineburg who reported in 1993 on teacher performance assessments. They wrote in their conclusion:

Setting new standards for teachers is one thing; providing the conditions for their attainment quite another. For teachers on a vast scale to attain such standards, schools as we know them would have to change. Yet we wonder, for example, how many policymakers would consider a school day in which a third of a teacher's time was devoted to reflection and ongoing study of the discipline he or she teaches? A school building that provided teachers with a carrel of their own removed from the hubbub of ringing bells and other demands? An approach to teacher in-service that looked less like an EST seminar and more like the sustained learning activities that characterize true professional development? (p. 764)

As this paragraph suggests, a lot of school structures work against teaching for historical literacy. The lack of community for teachers who instruct classrooms in this manner prevents them from sharing the burden of cutting the curriculum, developing alternative assessments, or crafting lessons similar to those that Nokes describes. The lack of time built into a teaching day for those activities is also unavailable for staying abreast of current historiography or perusing the vast and increasing number of sources that on-line archives have made available, or the latest work on teaching “history as art” or Baron’s revisions to Wineburg’s heuristics. Nokes opens his book with a vignette of a principal who approvingly observes a classroom whose teacher instructs for historical literacy while remaining oblivious to how his instruction differs from the coverage approach of all his colleagues. Clearly he is aware of larger structural issues, such as oblivious principals, even if he does not address them.

To choose one facet of this puzzle, research projects aimed at new methods for assessing historical thinking abound. VanSledright (2013) advocated weighted multiple-choice questions and single document essays minutely calibrated to what occurs in a classroom. He would likely have “Ms. Hansen” ask about the purpose of the Crusades and include as an answer a sentence about climate precisely because that issue arose during discussion, so for that one classroom of students it provides a means of seeing how many of them maintain a “subjectivist” epistemology, and he’d have her include a question testing the “add up the statements” approach to determining the reasons behind the Crusades. Breakstone, Smith, & Wineburg (2013) and Ercikan, Seixas, Lyons-Thomas and Gibson (2012) are working on stand-alone assessments that, independent of individual students’ historical knowledge, can test different components of historical literacy. On the other hand, state testing in history often remains firmly committed to lower order recall, regardless of what aspirations state standards may have towards historical literacy (DeWitt et al., 2013).

Nokes cannot possibly address each of these structural issues in great depth, but he could have devoted a chapter to barriers to implementation. A vignette from the teachers’ lounge might have shown a department chair castigating a teacher for skipping the War of 1812 or getting behind in grading, or having a too-noisy classroom. Hearing how his fictional teacher addressed those criticisms would have aided his readers. Nokes addresses some of these issues in passing. He refers to Wineburg’s new assessment efforts (p. 60). He mentions student-created visual materials as a possible assessment. When discussing teaching historical fiction he acknowledges that this unusual act for history teachers raises issues of student motivation, instruction, and assessment that colleagues from Language Arts can help address (p. 127). But Nokes never confronts the structural barriers to teaching for historical literacy, or directly suggests why so many teachers persist teaching one fact after another.

Nokes’ focus on teacher knowledge to the exclusion of state or local curriculum mandates, building-level “pacing calendars,” high-stakes testing, the challenges of authentic assessment, class size, teaching load, professional development, administrative supervision or other structural issues raises a specter for me, the ghostly image of the Education Teacher Performance Assessment (edTPA). Designed by Stanford faculty (Stanford Center for Assessment Learning and Equity- SCALE), the edTPA is intended to strengthen teacher professionalism by codifying a knowledge-base for teaching, and requiring teacher candidates to demonstrate mastery of that knowledge by reflecting on (in secondary social sciences) 11 classroom artifacts (lesson plans, classroom video, student work) in response to prompts associate with 15 rubrics covering planning (including for the specific classroom context, the social science phenomenon, and general and disciplinary specific literacy goals), instruction and

assessment. Nokes' book summarizes the historical literacy research base and contains many examples of practice that will help teacher candidates pass this assessment. Passing scores are set individually in each state that adopts it, and may have local variations from the national pattern. The edTPA may be a licensure requirement in some states (as it currently is in NYS), making it a "high stakes" assessment, or it may provide external feedback for teacher candidates and teacher education programs and additional information for hiring committees in states where it is used but not a certification requirement.¹

The edTPA measures many valuable aspects of teaching, just as Nokes writes about knowledge that is essential for history teaching. However, it has no predictive validity at this time. Although the edTPA measures teacher reflection about teacher behaviors that are associated with improved student achievement, there is no evidence that obtaining a particular score on an edTPA submission leads to increased student achievement in that teacher candidate's classroom. What the edTPA and Nokes have in common is their relentless focus on the teacher's ability to enact instruction for historical literacy in the classroom to the exclusion of other classroom impacts. The consequences are utterly different. Anyone interested in understanding why teachers do not create classrooms that build historical literacy will simply need to locate other readings since Nokes does not discuss it. The edTPA has more significant consequences: education faculty need to re-align entire sequences of courses to ensure that candidates have the precise experiences that generate the necessary artifacts for edTPA, and cut back on other valuable assignments to allow student teachers to complete the portfolio. Teacher certification candidates must now focus on 15 rubrics that hinge on their ability to supply historical literacy instruction, a positive aspect of edTPA, without addressing the barriers they will face as teachers if they attempt to make this their daily curriculum, and not a special 3-5 lesson interruption in traditional teaching (Education Week, 2013-2014).

In my own program, a candidate who student-taught in a middle school produced an open-ended, source-based lesson on the Salem Witch trials that lasted a week and helped build historical literacy among the students in her honors class. She scored at the "mastery" level in an edTPA submission based upon that material. Sadly, in her spring placement at a high school in a general education (non-honors) course ending in a world history test that covers both 9th grade and 10th grade material (pre-history to the present), she simply covered the low level material her cooperating teacher handed her, and only once allowed 10 minutes for a simulation activity. Her students, in Nokes' words, were to manage and memorize information, but not think themselves. She didn't lack the knowledge or the ability to teach for historical literacy. Given a setting that didn't value that knowledge, one that told her that her students needed to pass the state exam in order to graduate high school, and that covering a lot of information that might be on the test was the only way to prepare them, she abandoned efforts at teaching for historical literacy. The case of this student underscores the limitations of the edTPA, a portfolio that focused on a teachers' ability to teach for historical literacy once, without examining what choices a semester or a year of such instruction requires. Preparing my student for the edTPA consumed the majority of the curriculum course she took with me in the fall without providing a framework that made her an advocate for teaching historical literacy when confronting the state test or a hostile cooperating teacher.

Nokes bears no responsibility for the edTPA or flawed implementation of the Common Core. His book will only assist teachers and teacher candidates facing those mandates. He has

¹ See <http://edtpa.aacte.org/>

produced a book that does a wonderful job describing what it means to teach for historical literacy, and really emphasizing an epistemology of history as open-ended and constrained by evidence but made by imagination too. He provides vignettes that convey his vision of what teaching aspects of historical literacy look like in the classroom, and discusses how a variety of types of evidence can be used in lessons that explicitly teach historical literacy skills. This is a book worth using with history teachers, whether pre-service or teaching now.

Despite occasionally revolutionary rhetoric insisting that teachers confront the failure of traditional history instruction, Nokes does not address the structural barriers that, research shows, explain why most teachers still teach history the way they did fifty years ago or earlier. In a recent article he acknowledges teachers' need to cover the curriculum, and suggests that Common Core mandates may force teachers to include critical analysis of documents and shift back and forth between deep reading and traditional instruction (Nokes, 2014). Failing to address these dilemmas of practice in his book means he doesn't provide teachers with potential solutions, or help them think through strategies to convince administrators that teaching for historical literacy can occur in the face of mandated testing (Reich & Bally, 2010). Although he treats history as open-ended and helps teachers engage their students in seeing it that way too, he treats education research as definitive, with the exception of his qualifications about literacy research. This leaves teachers vulnerable to being told that "research says" some approach to teaching or an assessment such as the edTPA is beneficial. It also leaves his readers unaware that "historical thinking heuristics" are themselves a creation, subject to modification with future studies, or that they might encounter variations such as six concepts of historical thinking if they move to Canada.

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